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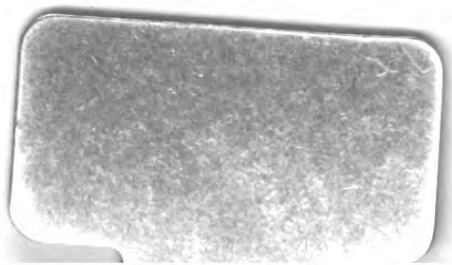
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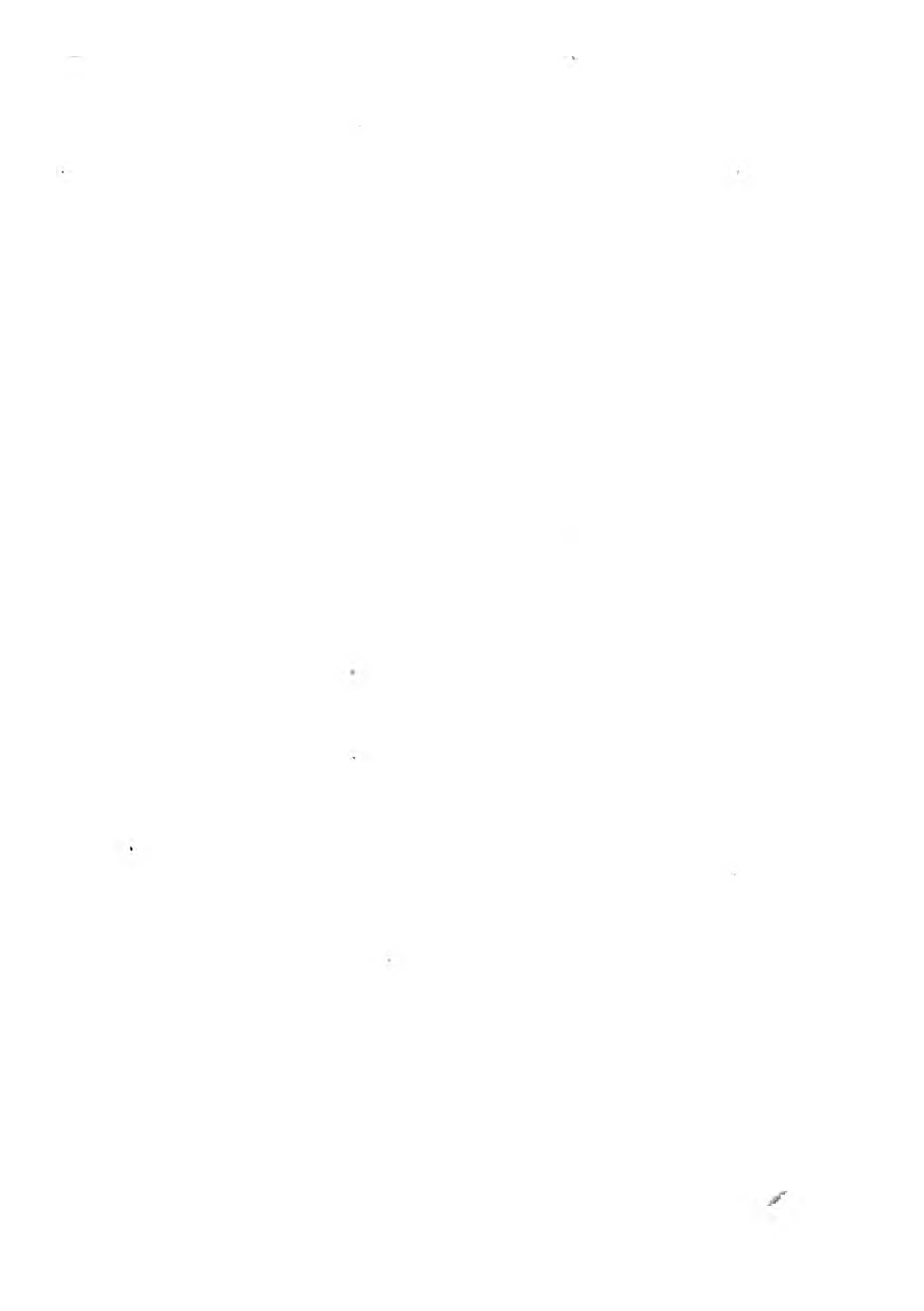


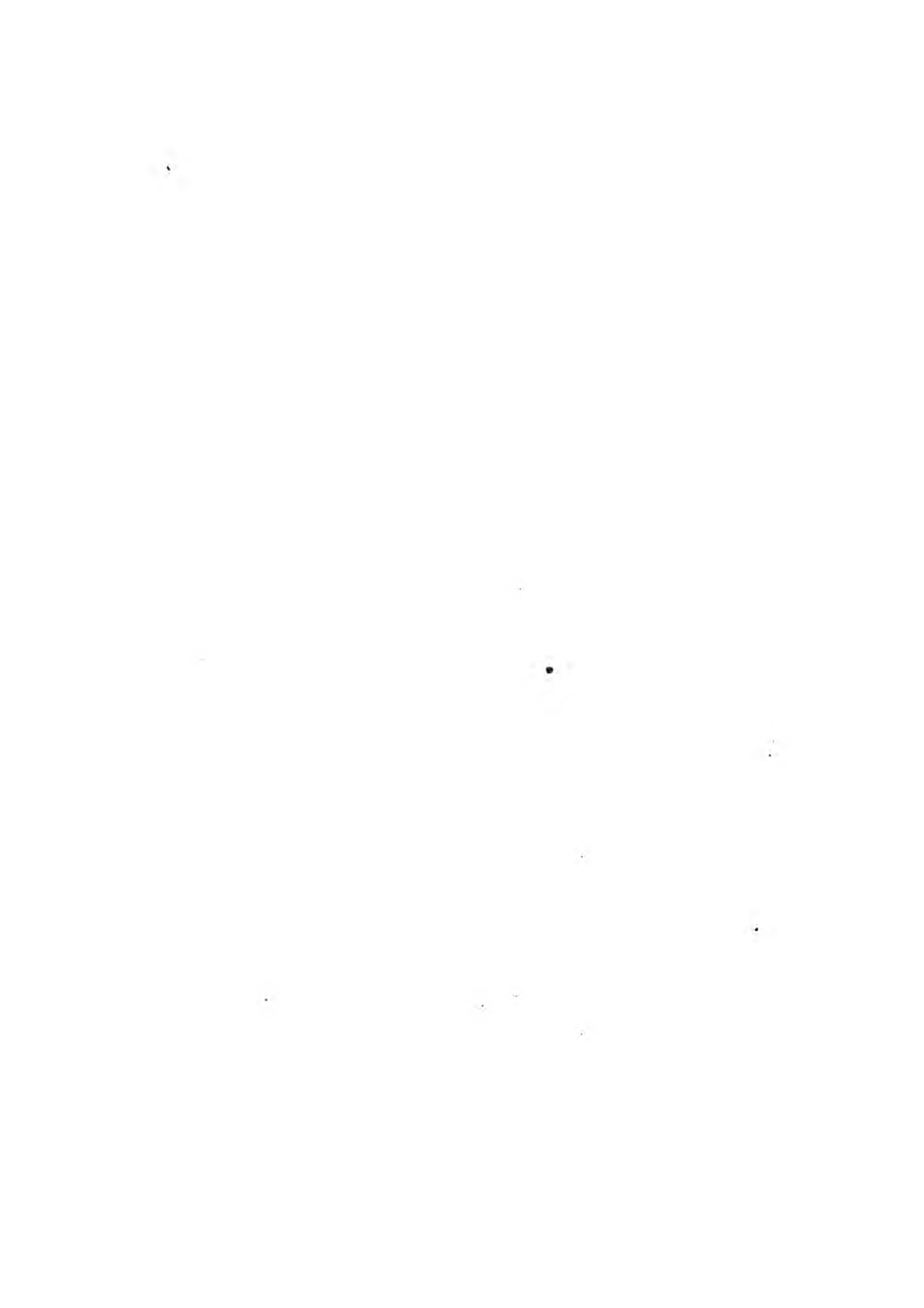
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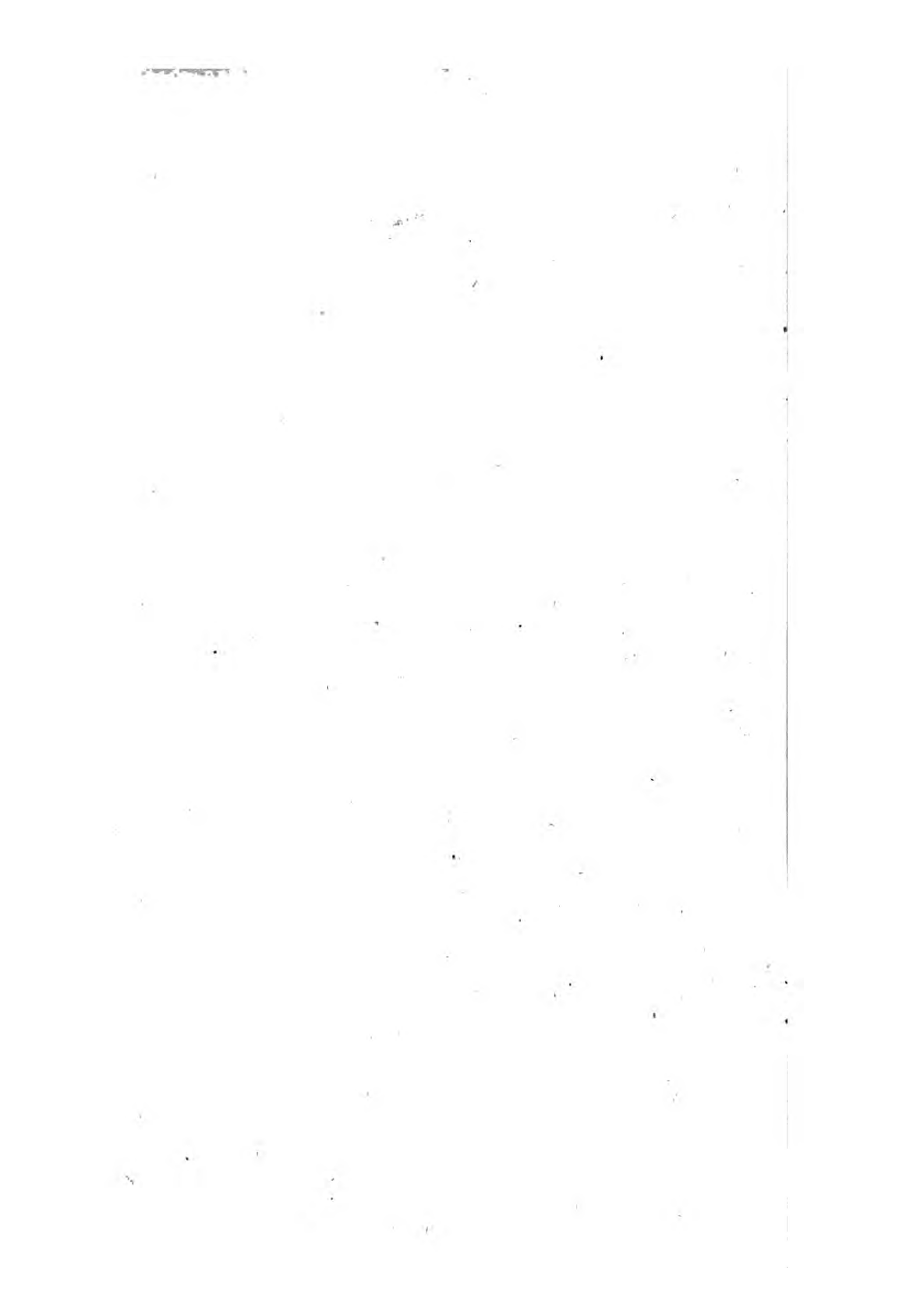


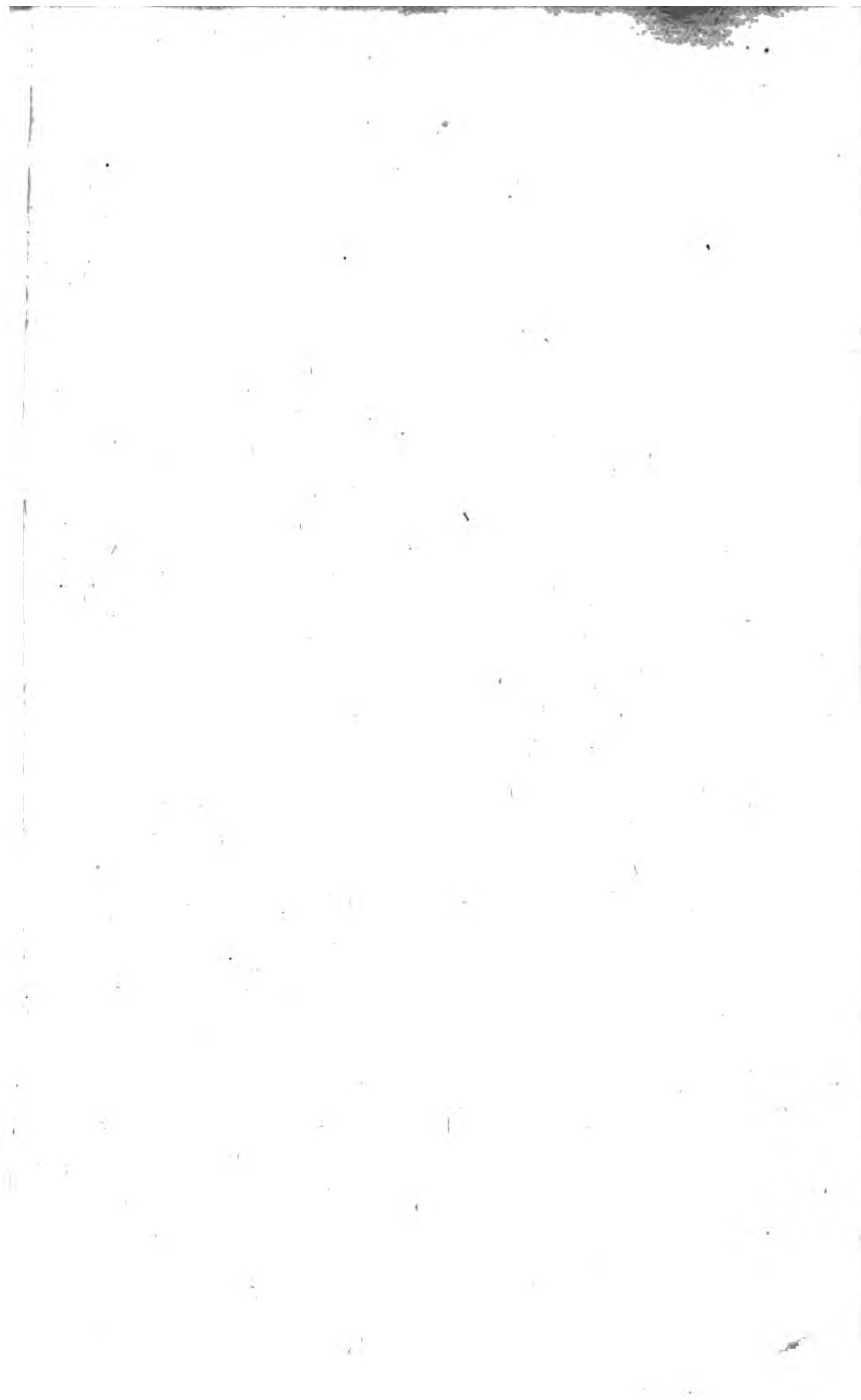


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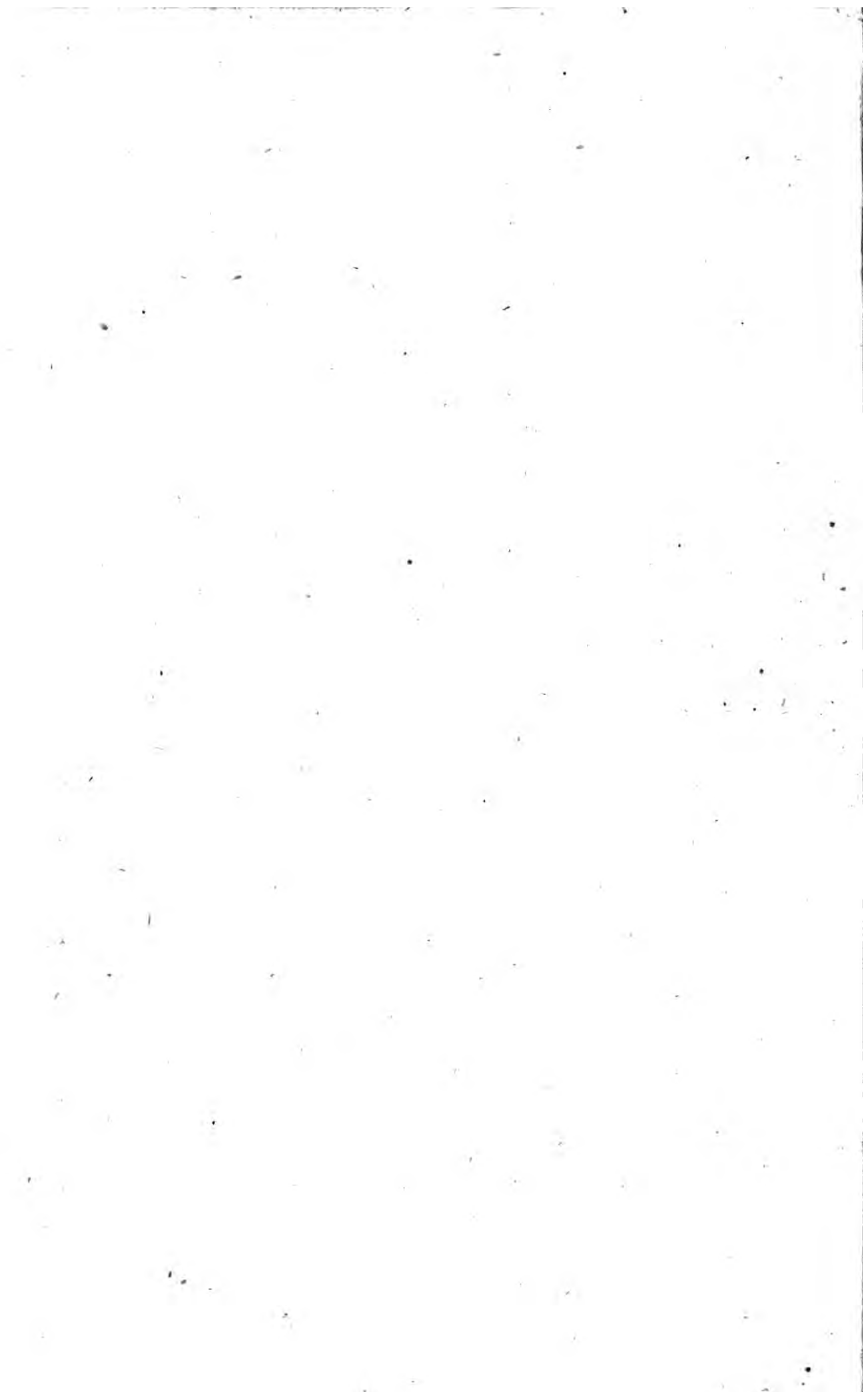
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Ed Trahern

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A  
DISCOURSE  
OF THE  
*Visible and Invisible*  
CHURCH  
OF  
CHRIST.

In which it is shewn,  
That the Powers claim'd by the Officers of the  
*Visible* Church, are not inconsistent with the  
Supremacy of Christ as Head; or with the  
Rights and Liberties of Christians, as Members  
of the *Invisible* Church.

*For lack of diligent observing the difference between the  
Church of God Mystical, and Visible, the Oversight  
are neither few nor light that have been committed.*  
Hooker Eccl. Pol. L. 3.

By JOHN ROGERS, B. D. Rector  
of *Wrington* in *Somersetshire*; late Fellow  
of *C. C. C. Oxon.*

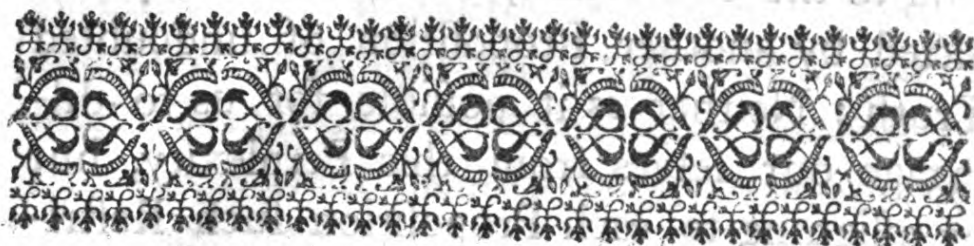
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T H E

# P R E F A C E .



HERE is no Fallacy more dangerous, or by which common Understandings are more apt to be imposed on, than that which the *Logicians* call, *A Dicto secundum Quid ad Dictum simpliciter*; (i. e.) When from a Proposition of acknowledged Truth in a restrain'd Sense, a general and unlimited Conclusion is inferr'd. For in every such Argumentation, it cannot be denied, that there is

A 2

Truth

## iv      The P R E F A C E.

Truth in the Premises, and yet when we attend to the Conclusion, we find That contradicted by another Proposition of undoubted Truth; Neither is it possible for us to disengage our selves from this Perplexity, but by assigning to each Proposition such Restrictions as reconcile them to one another. Now, in Questions where much Abstraction is to be used, the far greater Part of Mankind have neither Application nor Ability to distinguish, with so much Accuracy, as this requires. They generally content themselves with assenting to such Propositions as they find them supported with direct Proofs, without entering into the precise Distinctions and Limitations by which they are bounded. Whence it happens, that whenever they are called upon to reconcile one such Proposition to another, (which is necessary whenever any Thing inconsistent with one is inferr'd from the other,) they are lost and bewilder'd in the Difficulty; their Assent is divided between two apparent Truths, which not being able to reconcile, they can come to no Determination, but by giving up that, which, in their Apprehension, seems to have the less Evidence, and adhering to that which seems to have the greater. And since he who offers this Fallacy, has it in his Power to represent all the Arguments

## The P R E F A C E. V

guments that favour the one, and all the Absurdities that attend the Denial of it, and at the same time to conceal all that might be alledg'd in Proof of the other, 'tis easy for him to perswade them to renounce or approve which he pleases.

I need not go farther for an Example to illustrate these Remarks, than to a Controversy at this time in almost every one's Hands.

That Christ, as Head of the *Invisible Church*, is the sole Ruler, sole Teacher, and sole Lawgiver of his Disciples; and that all Christians, consider'd in that *Internal* Relation to Him, are equal and undistinguished by any Commission or Authority from one another, are acknowledged Truths of Christian Religion.

But it is also as True, and as Evident, that Christ has ordain'd his Church to be a *visible Society*, and appointed certain Officers, with Authority, to Teach, Govern, Correct, and preserve an *External* Polity and Discipline in it: And consequently, that all Christians, as Members of the *Visible Church*, are not equal, but rank'd into Superiors and Inferiors, and placed in a regular Subordination to one another.

Both these Articles, when asserted under their several Limitations, are clearly recon-

## vi The P R E F A C E.

cible to each other ; but from either, affirm'd Universally, and without its proper Restriction, there follow Conclusions manifestly destructive of the other. For if it be universally true, that Christ is the sole Judge in his Church, it cannot also be true, that some Christians have Power of Rule and Jurisdiction in his Church ; and so *vice versa*. And unless the Person, to whom these Propositions are thus indefinitely offer'd, is able to assign to each such Restrictions as leave them consistent, they must appear to him as contradictory Positions, which cannot both be true ; and his Assent will naturally be determined to that which has the fortune to appear best Supported : And yet 'tis certain, neither can be rejected without great Prejudice to Christianity.

I cannot therefore but in general observe, how nearly it concerns every one who would appear to teach these Doctrines with an honest Intention, carefully to express those Restrictions which may defend them from Misapprehensions of so much Danger to Religion.

Whether the unguarded Manner in which the former of these Doctrines has been lately asserted by some Authors, was intended by them

## The P R E F A C E.      vii

them to mislead Men into Conclusions destructive of the *Visible* Order and OEconomy of Christ's Church, God only, who knows their Hearts, is able certainly to determine. But when it is affirmed, That Christ is the sole Lawgiver, sole Judge of his Subjects; *In all Points relating to the Favour or Displeasure of God*; Terms which comprehend all Things relating to Religion, and consequently that no Christian has Authority to be Law-giver or Judge over others in such Points; When in Assertion of these and other Propositions of the same Import, all those Proofs, by which the Powers necessary to the *Visible* Officers of the Church have been usually supported, are exposed as inconclusive, and all those Scriptures on which they are founded, are declared not only to imply no *Internal Absolute Authority over the Conscience*, but to imply no *Authority at all*; When the *Jurisdiction* of the Church, and the Power of *Excommunication*, always exercised in virtue of it, is explained away into a *Right which all Christians have to avoid open and Scandalous Sinners*; And at the same time no express Exception is made in Favour of any one Power claimed by the *Visible* Officers of the Church, and the very Supposition, that there may be any such, so cautiously and



## viii The P R E F A C E.

ambiguously suggested, that it appears rather as a Covert for an Author to retreat to, than a Direction to his Reader ; And lastly, when to all these presumptive Circumstances are added *such* Insinuations of the ~~such~~ Tyranny of the *Clergy*, and their Usurpations upon the Authority of Christ, and the Liberties of their Brethren, as tend to extinguish all Reverence and Respect towards them : A very candid and charitable Man may be permitted, to entertain some Suspicions, That such Authors might Intend those Inferences which their Doctrines so manifestly suggest.

But however we may be inclined to excuse the Intention of the Authors, 'tis certainly a very tender Observation upon their Doctrines ; *That they seem to deny all Authority to the Church, and, under pretence of exalting the Kingdom of Christ, to leave it without any visible human Authority, to Judge, Censure, or Punish Offenders.* We may surely be allowed to apprehend that These Doctrines, thus unwarily and suspiciously deliver'd, may be understood in a Sense which may lead men to such Conclusions as these.

But the Reasonableness of such Apprehensions can no longer be questioned, when it appears that these Doctrines are in Fact so understood ; and that all those Inferences, which

## The P R E F A C E. IX

which it was fear'd they might suggest, are actually deduced, and professedly defended from them. When this is apparently the Case, 'tis to no purpose to tell us, That the Doctrines are true in a very important Sense; That the Authors intended them in that Sense; And that no one has a Right to Censure them in any other: Because, 'tis evident, They are not so clearly limited to their true Sense, but that They are actually understood and argued from in another: And therefore, whatever we may presume of the Intentions of the Author, we are as much concern'd to oppose him, as if these Conclusions were his declared Doctrine, since the Danger is the same, and the Arrow thus directed will do the same Mischief and Execution in its Effects, whether discharged by the Hand of a Friend or an Enemy. It may perhaps be thought that the Conclusions which these Doctrines suggest, even thus mistaken and misapplied, are not so dangerous to Religion as they are represented by those who oppose them. But I think it cannot be denied, that they immediately affect the Peace and Discipline of the Church; and we cannot but apprehend the Advantages they may give to the Enemies of our Religion, when we recollect, that both *Papists* and *Sectaries* have, in their turns, labour'd

## x The P R E F A C E.

bour'd the Subversion of it by these very Principles : And especially when we observe how studiously they have been contended for by Men, who, we are well assured, believe nothing either of the *Visible* or *Invisible* Church of Christ, who could have no other Ends to serve by them but the Destruction of Christianity it self.

Upon the whole, the Danger with which these Doctrines threaten Religion, whenever they are misapplied, is Great and Obvious ; the Probability of their being misapplied cannot be disputed, since they actually are so misapplied ; and therefore, under so just an Apprehension of so great a Danger, the Governours of the Church, to whose Care the Peace, Order, and Edification of It is committed, cannot be thought to make an improper Use of their Authority, If they call upon the Teachers of these Doctrines to give clear and distinct Explications of their Positions : That if they have not intended to favour these evil Consequences, they may professedly disown them, and prevent their Authority from being farther abused to the Support of them : Or if they have intended them, that they no longer may have the Advantage of attacking us in Disguise, but be reduced to open and direct Assertions ; and proper Remedies may be applied

## The P R E F A C E. xi

plied to, to preserve Men from being seduced by their Arguments, or influenced by their Authority. And every private Christian must appear commendably employ'd, who endeavours to assist Them in a Service of so much Charity to his Brethren, and of such Importance to the very Being of the Church of Christ.

The Zeal, with which our Venerable Synod have opposed themselves to the present Apprehension of this Danger, has been seconded by many learned Ornaments of this Church; and I shall esteem my self happy, if any Thing I shall offer in the following Papers, may contribute to the Success and Influence of their Labours.

I shall not concern my self with any particular Authors to whose Works the present Danger is imputed: But since, as I observed, all the Appearances of Reason by which they are either imposed on themselves, or may mislead other Men, are in general reducible to that Fallacy, which from Principles of uncontested Truth in a certain Sense, leads Men to infer universal and unlimited Conclusions which are evidently false; If we can shew that, when the Principles they argue from are restrained to that Sense in which only they are true, these Conclusions cannot be infer'd  
from

xii      The P R E F A C E.

from them, we may hope to apply a general and effectual Preservative against the Illusion of this Fallacy. That the Method observ'd in the following Discourse may appear conducive to this End, I beg leave to represent to the Reader the Process of this Fallacy in the Argument before us, somewhat more distinctly.

The Principles which I imagine have been either taught or understood in too large a Sense, are such as these :

Christ is the sole Ruler, sole Judge, &c. in his Church.

All Members of Christ's Church are perfectly equal, without any Preheminence or Authority in one over another.

These Propositions we acknowledge to be true when restrained to the *Invisible* Church, or to the Church of Christ consider'd under the Idea or Notion of *Invisible*; and from them we truly conclude, That whoever claims any Authority of Rule or Jurisdiction over Christians, as Members of Christ's *Invisible* Church, usurps upon the Authority of Christ, and the Liberties of his Disciples. But if from these Propositions, which are true only when

## The P R E F A C E. xiii

when restrained to the *Invisible* Church, it is infer'd, That whoever exercises any Authority of Rule or Jurisdiction over Christians, as Members of the *Visible* Church, usurps upon the Authority of Christ, &c. the Argument is fallacious and inconclusive: And if the Limitations were clearly and distinctly express'd in each Proposition, the Inconsequence would be so manifest, that no one, who is capable of reasoning at all, could be imposed on by it.

But when these Propositions are either taught by an Author without any Limitation, or the Limitation is so obscurely expressed, that 'tis not observed by the Reader; He is led into the Fallacy above-mention'd: The Propositions which he perceives to be true in some Sense, he is prevailed on to receive as universally true, and from them to infer that the Propositions opposite to these are universally false. This is what we presume to have happen'd in the present Controversy. It either has been, or has appear'd to be, universally affirm'd, that *Christ is the sole Ruler, &c. in his Church; That all Christians are perfectly equal, &c.*; and in this unlimited Sense, these Positons have appear'd to be recommended by the Authority, and supported by the Proofs of the Writer; and so far as any  
one

## xiv The P R E F A C E.

one has been convinced by them, so far he has been induced universally to reject this other great Truth, *That Christ has appointed certain Officers in his Church, with Authority of Rule and Jurisdiction over his Disciples.*

The Distress then into which the Mind is brought by this Fallacy, is the apparent Necessity of abandoning either one Truth or the other; either of denying that Christ has any Authority in his Church, or of Denying the whole external Polity of it. Now this Distress can no way so effectually be relieved, as by assigning to each Proposition the just Limits within which it is true; and then shewing that, within these Limits, they are perfectly consistent with each other. By this it will be evident that it may with equal Truth be affirmed, with respect to the *Invisible Church*, That no Christian hath Authority over another, and with respect to the *Visible*, That Christ has appointed some to Rule over others; and that one of these Propositions, when restrained to its proper Subject, does not in the least clash or interfere with the other.

This is what is intended in the following Discourse; in which I shall distinctly consider the Church of Christ under the two Idea's of *Visible* and *Invisible*; and endeavour to  
shew

## The P R E F A C E. XV

shew what is, and ought to be affirm'd of it under either. And when the Assertions concerning each are reduced within their proper Restrictions, I hope they will appear perfectly consistent and agreeable to each other.

I assure my self, If this Design were executed with a Sufficiency equal to the Importance of it, it would effectually put an end to this Controversy. Men would be delivered from those Perplexities, in which a Confusion of these Idea's have been found to intangle them: The Powers claimed to the *Visible* Officers of Christ's Church would be cleared from those Reproaches with which they have been charged, as inconsistent with the Supremacy of Christ: The Errors, into which many weak Men have been driven by the Terror of this Absurdity, would be corrected; and the Triumphs of those Enemies of our Religion, who have promised themselves so much Advantage from the Success of this Fallacy, be intirely defeated.

A sincere Desire to promote these good Ends, has inclined me to offer these Papers to the Publick. I have the Satisfaction to hope, that nothing is affirm'd in them, but what is agreeable to the Truth of Christianity, as taught by the Church of *England*; But if I shall appear

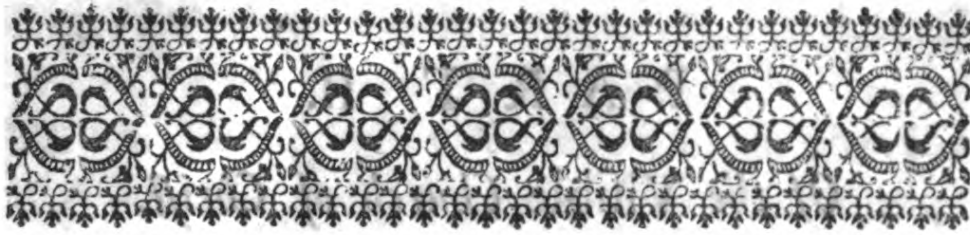


# xvi The P R E F A C E.

pear mistaken in any Notion, that Authority, which I assert to the Governours of the Church, I am prepared to submit to, my self, with the Humility which becomes an Obedient Subject.



# INTRO-



T H E  
C O N T E N T S.

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INTRO-



# INTRODUCTION.



THE Church of Christ in the largest Extent of that Idea, comprehends the whole (a) *Family of God in Heaven and Earth*; as well the (b) *Spirits of just Men made perfect in Heaven*; as the Congregation of those *who are (b) called by his Name on Earth*: But I shall at present consider it in a Sense restrain'd to that Part of this Society which is here Militant on Earth.

This has been distinguished into Christ's *Invisible* and his *Visible* Church. The former is called in Scripture, (b) *The Church of the First-born which are written in Heaven*; (c) *The Church without Spot or Wrinkle, &c.* To the latter belong those Descriptions, (d) *And He hath set some in the Church first Apostles, secondarily Prophets.* And in another Place, *Some (e) Evangelists, some Pastors and Teach-*

(a) Eph. iii. 15.  
(d) 1 Cor. xii. 28.

(bb) Heb. xii. 23.  
(e) Eph. iv. 10, 11.

(c) Eph. v. 27.

## 2 INTRODUCTION.

*ers, for the Perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the Edifying of the Body of Christ.*

Not that these are two Societies, for then, contrary to an Article of our Creed, Christ wou'd have two distinct Churches. They are one Catholick Church, one Society, of which Christ is Head: But the Mind considering this Society in different Respects, distinguishes it under These two Idea's of *Visible* and *Invisible*. With regard to that *inward* Communion which this Society hath with Christ the Head, which cannot be discern'd by Men, it is called his *Invisible Church*. And with regard to it's *External* Profession of Christian Faith, it's Participation in such Ordinances, and Observance of such Discipline as He hath appointed for the outward Order and Government of this Society, it is called his *Visible Church*. And agreeably, the Members of this Society, consider'd as united to Christ by Faith and Love, and to one another by internal Charity, are called Members of his *Invisible Church*: And when consider'd as incorporated in that *External* Polity which He hath ordain'd, The same Persons are called Members of his *Visible Church*.

Not that every one who is a Member of the *Visible Church*, is also a Member of the *Invisible*; neither is every one who is separated from the Communion of the *Visible Church*, cut off from his *Internal* Union with Christ: But it is evident, that the same Persons

# INTRODUCTION. 3

sons may be, and actually are, both *internally* United to Christ, and *externally* incorporated in the *Visible* Society of his Church: And therefore that the same Persons, as consider'd in different Respects, are Members of the *Invisible* and *Visible* Church of Christ.

This Distinction hath in some Disputes been used in another Sense, to signify the Different States of the Church of Christ. When the Church is permitted to Exercise it's publick Offices, and act as a Visible Society, 'tis said to be *Visible*. When by Persecution or Dispersion the Church is made incapable of Assembling it self together, or Administring any external Polity, it is called *Invisible*. But this is a Sense wholly foreign to the Design of these Papers. In the former Sense *these* <sup>71</sup> ~~they~~ are taken in the present Inquiry, in which it is proposed,

I. Distinctly to consider what we affirm of the Church, (*i. e.*) of Christ as Head, or his Disciples as Members of it, under one of these Denominations, and what under the other.

And if, upon the Result of this Inquiry, it shall appear,

II. That these two Ideas, and the Characters form'd by them, are perfectly consistent, and agreeable to each other,



## 4 INTRODUCTION.

It must be acknowledg'd,

III. That no one can, without manifest Absurdity and great Prejudice to Christian Religion, affirm any Thing of Christ as Head, or of Christians as Members of the Church, consider'd under one Idea, which is contrary to their Characters, as consider'd under the other.

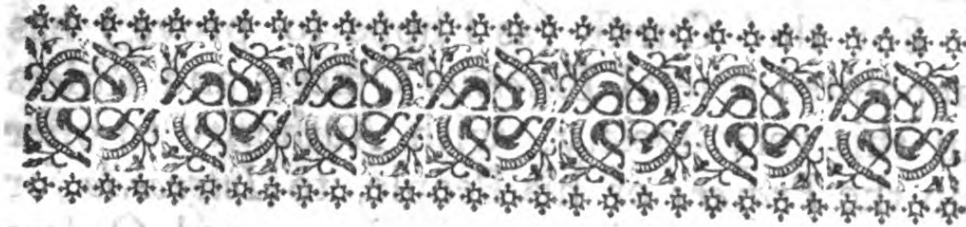
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PART

( 5 )



# PART I.

## Of the *Invisible* CHURCH of CHRIST.



### CHAP. I.

#### *Of Christ as Head of the Invisible Church.*



**W**HAT we affirm of the Church of Christ, as distinguished under this Denomination of *Invisible*, may be consider'd,

*First*, With Relation to Christ the Head,

*Secondly* With Relation to the Members of this Society.

I. Under this Idea we consider Christ alone as *Priest* and *Intercessor*, as *Teacher*, *Law-giver*, or *Judge* of his Church ; which Offices

he executes partly in his own Person, and partly by the Ministry of the Holy Spirit.

For tho' Christ (as I hope to prove,) has appointed several *External* Officers and Rulers in this very Society, with Authority to offer up the *Prayers* of his People, to *Intercede* for them, to prescribe certain *Laws* and Orders to them, and to *Judge* their Behaviour according to those *Laws*; yet when this Society is consider'd under the Idea of the *Invisible Church*, these Officers are not regarded: The Mind has no other Authority or Ministry in view, but of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It neither affirms nor denies any Thing concerning any *External* Teachers, Rulers, &c. but wholly leaves them out of it's Idea. And therefore, in this Sense, it may be truly said, that Christ is *sole* Teacher, *sole* Ruler, &c. of his *Invisible* Church, (*i. e.*) When the Church is imagin'd or spoken of under this Character, the Mind considers Christ *only* as presiding in these Relations over it.

2. In the same Sense it may be affirm'd, That Christ is the *immediate* Judge, and, by his Holy Spirit, the *immediate* Teacher, &c. of his *Invisible* Church. Because in this Idea the Mind considers the Doctrines assented to by the Church, *immediately* as receiv'd from the Authority of Christ, and refers the Behaviour of Christians *immediately* to the Judgment of Christ, without attending to any *Intermediate* Instructions, by which these Doctrines are taught, or any *intermediate* Judgment,

## Church of CHRIST. 7

ment, to which the Actions of Christians, as *Visible*, are Subject. For the same Reasons, indeed, and in the same Sense, that Christ is the *sole* Judge, &c. He must also be the *Immediate* Judge, &c. And,

*Lastly*, Christ, under this Idea, is conceiv'd as intimately united to his Church, as *loving* it, and *cherishing* it, as communicating the Influences of his Grace and Holy Spirit to it, and intitling it to the Promises of his Gospel.

---

### CHAP. II.

#### *Of the Members of the Invisible Church.*

**T**HE *Members* of Christ's Church, under the Denomination of *Invisible*, are consider'd,

*First*, As standing in some special Relations to Christ.

*Secondly*, As discharging the Duties of those Relations, in a manner acceptable to Christ.

I. As Christ, the *Head*, is consider'd as the *sole* Intercessor, *sole* Priest, *sole* Teacher, *sole* Lawgiver, and *sole* Judge of the *Invisible* Church, so his Disciples, as *Members* of the *Invisible* Church, are consider'd *Only* as applying through Him to God, as submitting *Only* to the Authority of his Doctrine, his Laws, and his Judgment. Neither the Persons by

whose *External* Ministry they offer up their *Prayers*, and by whom they are taught the *Doctrines* of Christ, nor the Authority committed to them to *Minister* in the publick Offices of Religion, and to *Teach* the Doctrines of it, nor the Evidence of such Authority are at all attended to: But the Mind considers the Christian, under this Character, *only* as worshipping God through Christ, and as assenting to the Doctrines of the Gospel *only* upon the Authority of Christ.

For the same Reasons also it may be affirm'd, that the Members of the *Invisible* Church, are subject *only* to Christ's *Laws* and *Judgment*. For though the same Persons are obliged to obey others, whom Christ has appointed to be *Rulers* and *Judges* over them; yet, under this Character, they are not consider'd with Relation to *them*, but with Relation to *Christ*; and their Submission to the Orders and Judgment of these Superiors, is not consider'd as an Obedience paid to *them*, but as an Obedience paid to *Christ*.

And this is equally true, with Regard both to Civil and Ecclesiastical Superiors. For though a conscientious Observance of all relative Duties to either of these Powers may be one Reason why we esteem any Person to be a Member of Christ's *Invisible* Church, yet the Mind, in making this Conclusion, perfectly abstracts from these *External* Relations, and attends wholly to the *Internal* Relation between Him and Christ; and affixes this  
Character

## Church of CHRIST. 9

Character to Him, not as he has obey'd Men, but as, in obeying Men, he has obeyed Christ.

From hence it also follows, that the Subjection of Christ's *Invisible* Members is *Immediately* due to Him. For though, in any Instance of Obedience to a Prince or a Bishop, the Action is perform'd *Immediately* in compliance with the Command of such Superior, yet when we consider the Man under this *Invisible* Character, we have no regard to these *intermediate* Relations of the Person or the Action, but intirely pass them over, and consider the Person *immediately* as subject to Christ, and compare the Action *immediately* with his Will.

From what has been observed, then we are obliged to infer these *Corollaries*.

I. That all Christians, as *Members* of the *Invisible* Church, are perfectly *Equal*. For since they are consider'd as *only* and *immediately* subject to Christ, all Political or *External* Characters, by which they are distinguished into Inferiors and Superiors, must be left out of the Idea. None must be considered as greater or less, but all as equally subject, equally accountable.

When indeed we particularly apply this Idea to a Prince, a Prelate, &c. his Behaviour in these Offices may be consider'd by us: But we do not regard the *Powers* of his Office, by which alone he is distinguished as superior to others, but the *Duties* of it, in respect

spect of which he is equally subject to Christ, the Head of his Church, with other Men.

As when 'tis affirmed of any civil subordinate Magistrate, that he is a *good Subject* to his Prince, he is not consider'd as vested with certain *Powers*, but as obliged to certain special *Duties*; and this Character of a *good Subject* is apply'd to him merely under this common Notion, as one who has faithfully obey'd the Laws of his Prince: And though the *good Magistrate* be a Part of this Character, yet 'tis not the *Power*, but his *Obedience* in the Execution of this Power, which the Mind considers.

In like manner, when we affirm of a Bishop, that he is a *Member* of Christ's *Invisible Church*, he is consider'd purely as a *Subject* of Christ; his Conduct indeed is compared with more Laws of Christ, than are conceived to affect other Men; but 'tis merely as we apprehend he has obey'd or transgress'd these Laws, that we affirm or deny this Idea of him; neither his Authority as Superior, nor the Subjection of others as Inferiors, are at all regarded: But, in this Relation to Christ, none is consider'd as Master or Servant, as *Bond or Free* (a), but all as Co-members and Co-equals.

2. The Mind, in this Idea, regards only the *Internal Religious* Character of the Person: It cannot indeed be denied, that by the *Ex-*

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(a) Gal. iii. 28.

## Church of CHRIST. II

ternal Behaviour of the Person, we are led to Judge of his *Internal* Character. But then 'tis not with Respect to this *outward* Conduct, that we affirm him to be a *Member* of Christ's *Invisible* Church, but solely with Respect to that *Internal* Character, of which we conceive his *outward* Behaviour to be an Evidence.

II. The *Members* of Christ's Church, under the Denomination of *Invisible*, are consider'd, as discharging the Duties of those Relations they stand in to him in such a manner, as renders them acceptable to Christ: For if it is included in Christ's Character, as *Head* of the *Invisible* Church, that he *loves it, and cherishes it* (a); it must also be imply'd in the Character of the *Members* of the *Invisible* Church, that they are *loved and cherished* by Christ, and Intitled to his Graces and Promises: And agreeably they are described, as *The Church of the First-born who are written in Heaven* (b), *the few chosen out of the many called* (c); and by some Fathers, as Ἀθεϊσμομα ᾧ ἐκλεκτῶν (d), *Corpus Domini quod cum illo erit in eternum* (e); and generally, as Persons in a State of Grace and Favour with Christ.

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(a) Eph. v. 29. (b) Heb. xii. 23. (c) Matt. xxii. 14. (d) Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. 7. pag. 715. Edit. Paris. A. D. 1629. (e) St. Aug. lib. 3. de Doctr. Christ. vid. eund. contra Cresc. lib. 2. c. 21. Item contr. Pet. lib. 2. cap. ult.

And



And hence appears a manifest Difference between the two Ideas of Christ's *Invisible Kingdom*, and his *Invisible Church*. For when we consider him as a *King*, we ascribe to him *judicial* Authority, equally extended over good and bad Subjects; but when we represent him as *Head* of his *Invisible Church*, we consider him with Relation only to his good Subjects, such whom, as a *Judge*, he acquits, approves, and will reward.

And since Christ cannot be presumed to acquit and approve any Servant, unless he has discharged his Duty to him in such a manner as he has promised to accept, it comes next to be inquired, what Obedience we owe him under the several Characters of Authority we have ascribed to him.

### C H A P. III.

*Of the Obedience due to Christ, as our sole Priest, Teacher, Law-giver, &c. And 1st, Of the Obedience due to him as our and Teacher.*

I. **O**UR Duty to Christ as our *Priest* and *Mediator*, obliges us to rely only on that *Sacrifice* which he has offer'd for our *Sins* to atone for the Guilt of them, and on that *Ransom* which he has paid to the Divine Justice, to deliver us from the *Curse* denounced

ced against them. To present our *Prayers* to God only thro' him, and to expect the Success of them only from his *Merits* and *Intercession*.

II. The Obedience we owe Him as a *Teacher* implies,

1. A careful Attention, to acquaint ourselves with his Doctrines. For he who do's not apply himself to know what this Divine *Master* teacheth him, cannot be presumed to discharge his Duty, as a *faithful Disciple* to him.

2. All that he *Teaches* must be assented to, as an Oracle of God; and no Authority must be hearkned to in Contradiction to him.

3. Every Disciple of Christ, is obliged actually to assent to *some* of his Doctrines; because it cannot be conceived, how he who assents to none of his Doctrines, can be called a Disciple taught by him, much less a Disciple acceptable, and approved by him as his *Teacher*. And since he who do's not assent to a Doctrine of Christ in the same Sense in which he taught it, do's not assent to a Doctrine of Christ, but to a Proposition of his own framing; it follows, that every Christian, as a Disciple of Christ, is bound to assent to some of his Doctrines in the same Sense in which he taught them: And if Christ obliges his Disciples to assent to some of his Doctrines in the same Sense in which he

he taught them, we must conclude, that some of his Doctrines are so plain, that his Disciples, by a due Attention, and the Use of such Assistances as he has put in their Power, may certainly understand them in that true Sense intended in them.

Jesus Christ, a (*a*) *Teacher sent from God*, and who himself knew the Extent of Human Faculties, must be presumed to have exactly adapted his Doctrines to those Faculties. The common Reason and Apprehension of Mankind therefore, are the Standard and Measure to which his Doctrines were suited; and consequently are the Rule by which we are to judge what is the true and plain Sense of them. Those Doctrines which, to the common Reason of Mankind, appear to be *plainly* taught by Christ, are to be esteem'd *Plain*, and such as his Disciples are obliged to assent to: And that Sense in which the common Apprehension of Mankind understands them, is to be esteem'd that *Plain* sense in which they are obliged to receive them: Neither is any one excused, who in opposition to the common Sentiments of Mankind, will take these Doctrines in a private Sense of his own.

Every Author may with reason think himself injur'd, if, when he has express'd himself plainly and clearly to the common Sense of Mankind, any one shall pretend that he has a Right to understand him in his own Sense,

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(a) *J. h. iii. 2.*

## *Church of CHRIST.* 15

and impose what Meaning on his Words he pleases. If this be allowed, if there be no common general Standard of Interpretation to which we may Appeal, no certain Sense in which we have a Right to be understood, 'tis to no purpose to Write or Discourse: All our Conversations will be attended with the Confusion of *Babel*; and Words and Reason be no longer of any Use. Neither is the Case at all different in Doctrines taught us by God. God speaks to us as rational Creatures: He addresses himself to the same Faculties of our Nature that Man doth, and the Words in which he delivers himself, are the same in which we converse with One another; and consequently we are obliged to understand Him according to the same Laws and Rules of Interpretation which we require to be observed in discoursing with one another.

This Obligation, indeed, to understand the Doctrines of Christ in their true and precise Meaning, is not equally extended to all Men; but according to Mens different Capacities, or degrees of Knowledge, more Doctrines are *plain* to some than to others, and consequently some are obliged to understand and assent to more, in the Sense intended by Christ, than others: But all, as rational Creatures, and Disciples of Christ, are thus obliged to understand and receive some.

From hence it may appear how Impertinent that Challenge is, so often made by the *Papists*, to produce our Catalogue of such Doctrines

trines as Christ indispensably requires every one to believe. For this Obligation being more or less extended, according to the different Capacities or Instructions of Men, it is impossible to assign any one common Measure which shall equally serve for a *Rule* or *Standard* to All. Some general Articles may be assign'd, without the Belief of which no one can be intitled to the Name of a Christian: These every Disciple of Christ, even of the lowest Capacities, is bound to understand and assent to: But this cannot be esteem'd all that is required from Persons of greater Capacities; and who are more fully instructed in Christian Religion. Every Doctrine taught in the Scriptures, was certainly intended to be believed by the Disciples of Christ; and all Doctrines, which we know to be there taught and understand, are equally to be believed by us; because All are asserted by the same Authority. But All these Doctrines are not equally required to be *actually* known, understood, or assented to by All. It is indeed Necessary that some common Form or Summary of Faith should be proposed, as a Qualification for Mens admittance into the *External* Society of the Church: And agreeably, we find in the Primitive Church, that Creed which we call the Apostles, or others in Substance the same with that, required to be explicitly profess'd by those who were receiv'd into the Communion of the Church. But the Question is not here, What Doctrines it is fit to require an open Assent

Assent to, as a Qualification for Admittance into the Communion of the *Visible Church*; But what Christ precisely requires every Christian to understand and believe, as *internally* related and accountable to Him. It was fit the Rulers of the *visible Church* should not, in the Summaries they required to be profess'd, descend to the very lowest of human Capacities; but adapt a Form of common Use to the common and ordinary Apprehensions of Mankind. It is fit also, that these Summaries shou'd comprehend such a *Foundation* of the Christian Faith as, if they are understood and attended to, will lead us into a compleat Knowledge of that Religion. But yet, I think, we may safely affirm, that many whose Capacities will not reach to understand some Articles even of the Apostles Creed, may nevertheless know and assent to so much of the Christian Faith, as may render them acceptable Disciples of Christ, and approved by Him: And, on the other side, that many of greater Knowledge and Capacities may be obliged to assent to some Doctrines which are not expressly contain'd in that Creed. 'Tis therefore (I say) impossible to assign any common general Summary of Doctrines, to which, and to no more, Christ precisely requires the *internal* Assent of every one of his Disciples.

But Him we may affirm to discharge his Duty to Christ as his *Teacher* or *Master*, who *actually* assents to all such Doctrines as every Christian, as such, is obliged to understand

and assent to, in the Sense in which Christ deliver'd them; and either to more or fewer Doctrines according to his Capacities and Opportunities of Knowledge: Who assents to all He doth understand, whether He was *precisely* obliged to understand them or not; and who believes no Authority affirming any thing contrary to them.

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#### C H A P. IV.

*Of the Obedience due to Christ as our Lawgiver. And first of the Extent of our Obedience.*

**W**HAT has been observed concerning the Duty of the Disciple to Christ his *Master*, is also applicable to him, as a Subject to Christ his *Lawgiver*: Properly speaking, indeed the Duties that arise from the former relation, are comprehended in those which belong to us in the latter. For Faith, consider'd as a Duty, is an Obedience to a Law requiring us to believe; and is therefore a Debt we owe to Christ as our *Legislator*. I shall therefore treat this more fully, and endeavour to supply what may seem omitted under the former Head.

*Ist*, Then, the same Reasons that oblige our Attention and Assent to Christ's *Doctrine*, require

## *Church of CHRIST.* 19

quire us also diligently to apply our Selves to know and perform his *Commands*.

2dly, For the same Reasons that we are obliged to Assent to some of his Doctrines, in the same Sense which He taught them, we are also obliged to obey some of his Laws in the same Sense in which he prescribed them.

But our Obedience to Christ as our *Law-giver*, may be consider'd more distinctly,

1st, With regard to the *Extent* of it.

2ly, With regard to the *Degree* or *Measure* of it.

With regard to the *Extent* of it, the Obedience which Christ approves, must be presumed to be an Observance of all those Laws which He has indispensably obliged his Servants to Obey.

That an Obedience to some Laws of Christ is indispensably necessary is evident, because it cannot be conceived how any Man can be a Christian, much less a Christian approved by Him, who obeys none of His Laws. And since the Knowledge of a Law is necessary to the Observance of it, it follows, That both the Knowledge and Observance of some Laws of Christ are indispensably required in any Person of whom we affirm, That he is an *acceptable Subject* to Christ his *Law-giver*.



First then, Every Christian as such is supposed to acknowledge his Obligation to every Law of Christ that is known to him ; And since some Laws of Christ, with respect both to Faith and Practice, are so obvious, that He, who is ignorant of them, can hardly be esteem'd a Christian ; and the Observance of them so necessarily required, that He who disobeys them, cannot be reputed a Good Christian ; We cannot affirm of any Person, that He is *a Subject acceptable to Christ his Law-giver*, without presuming both his Knowledge and Observance of such obvious and necessary Laws. But,

Secondly, Because the greater Application, Capacity, or Instructions of some Persons, lead us to consider them as either knowing, or obliged to know, more than others ; when we apply this Idea to Them, we include in it both the Knowledge and Observance of more Laws of Christ, than when we apply it to others, who want these Advantages.

And so likewise because the Stations, Offices, or Relations of some Persons oblige us to consider them as subject to some certain Laws which do not concern other Men, not placed in these Circumstances ; when we affirm this Character of them, beside the common Laws of general Obligation to all Christians, we include in it an Obedience also to those special Laws.

With Regard therefore to the Extent of our Obedience, *A Subject acceptable to Christ as*  
*his*

*his Lawgiver* may be described, as one who obeys all Laws of Christ which he is obliged to know, and all that He actually doth know, whether He was precisely obliged to know them or not. With respect to such Laws of Christ as the Person is not consider'd as obliged to know, in regard to the Equity and Mercy of the Lawgiver, we presume his Ignorance pardonable; and therefore do not, on account of his Transgressing them, exclude Him from the Number of Christ's faithful Servants.

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C H A P. V.

*Of the Kind or Measure of our Obedience.*

LET us then next inquire what *Kind* or *Measure* of Obedience the Mind supposes when it applies this Idea. And,

1. The only *Adequate* and *Proper* Obedience to Christ's Laws is obeying them in the Sense and Meaning Christ intended in them. For whenever we receive an Interpretation of any Law contrary to the Intention of Christ, and act according to it, We do not *properly* perform a Command of *Christ*, but a Command of such *Interpreter*: and this is equally true, whether the Interpretation is our Own, or is given us by some other Person: For we no more Obey the Law of Christ when we act contrary to it in pursuance of

our own Mistake, than when we act contrary to it in pursuance of another's Mistake : It cannot be said, that in either Case the Command of Christ is perform'd. If therefore (as I before proved) we are indispensably bound to obey some Laws of Christ; It must follow, that we are indispensably obliged to obey some Laws of Christ in the Sense and Meaning which he intended in them. As some Laws of Christ are so obvious that no Christian can be excused who is ignorant of them, so some Laws of Christ are so *Plain* and *Perspicuous* to the common Reason of Mankind, that no Christian can be excused who acts contrary to the true Meaning and Import of them. With respect therefore to such *Plain* Laws, The Mind cannot affirm of any Person, that He is *a Subject acceptable to Christ his Law-giver*, who is supposed to act contrary to the Intention of Christ in them.

And as the different Capacities or Instructions of Men oblige us to consider *more* Laws of Christ, as plain to some than to others, so when we apply this Character to them, that They are *approved Subjects of Christ their Law-giver*, we consider them as bound to observe *more* Laws of Christ, according to the true Import of Them, than is precisely requir'd from other Men.

This therefore the Mind in general affirms of every Person to whom it applies *this Character*, That he is one who obeys every Law of Christ, which he is obliged to understand,

in a manner agreeable to the Intention of Christ in that Law; And according as we conceive him bound to understand more or fewer Laws, in applying this Idea to him, we consider him as punctually obeying more or fewer.

Thus, when we affirm of a Clergyman, That he is *an approved Subject to the Legislature of Christ*, we include in that Idea the Knowledge and Understanding of more Laws of Christ; and consequently an *exact Obedience* to more, than when we apply the same Character to other Men. Not that the Laws of Christ oblige him more than any other Man who is enter'd into the Covenant of the Gospel; But, in regard to his particular Office and Profession, he is consider'd as bound to Know and Understand more, and consequently to obey more Laws of Christ, *according to the true Import of them*, than other Men. But whatsoever Laws any Person is supposed not obliged to Understand, he is not conceiv'd bound to Obey according to the strict meaning of them.

2. With regard to the *Degree or Measure* of our Obedience, even to those Laws which are supposed to be Known and Understood, we do not require a *constant undiverted Obedience*; Because if such an Obedience was necessary to every *approved Subject of Christ*, we cou'd never affirm this Character of any Person living. The many Infirmities which are inseparable from our Nature, and the fa-

vourable Declarations of the Gospel concerning them, encourage us to presume that whenever the Action can be accounted for by Surprise, Inadvertency, the sudden ferment of Passion, &c. tho' a Law of Christ be transgressed, yet the Person is not excluded from the Number of those who are united to Christ, as his *Faithful Members*. And,

Lastly, Whatever Offences against the Law of Christ any Person hath been guilty of, yet if we conceive him to be truly *Penitent* for them, The Mercies of the Gospel Covenant oblige us to consider him as restored to a State of Favour, and intitled to the Grace and Promises of the Gospel.

The Degree of Obedience therefore supposed, when we affirm any Person to be a *Subject approved by Christ as his Law-giver*, is That, as far as Human Infirmities will permit, he Obeys all those Laws of Christ to which he is necessarily obliged, according to the true meaning and intention of them; and that wherever he has offended, he is heartily and truly *Penitent* for his Transgression.

But because neither our Obedience in those Duties we perform shall be *rewarded*, nor our Omission of those we neglect *excused*, nor our Repentance for those Sins we have committed be *accepted*, unless in all these Respects we are *Sincere*; therefore *Sincerity* is the principal Quality consider'd in any Person's Obedience of whom we affirm, that he is an *approved Subject*

*Subject of Christ.* For tho' we perform every Action required of us by the Law of Christ, yet if we are consider'd as performing it merely upon temporal Motives of our own Pleasure, Reputation, or Interest, the Action cannot be presumed to intitle us to any Reward from Christ; because it is not perform'd in Obedience to *him*, but to his Enemy. And so if the Will be consider'd as knowingly and deliberately concurring in those Actions which might be imputable to Ignorance or Infirmary, the Man cannot be esteem'd to have any Title to these Excuses. He is no farther a Servant of Christ than he has endeavour'd to obey him, and he is no farther excusable for not actually obeying him than his Endeavours are *sincere*.

For the same Reasons if the Conversion of the Penitent be esteem'd feign'd and superficial, it cannot be conceiv'd to reunite him to Christ, or restore him to a Character approved by him.

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## CHAP. VI.

### *Of Sincerity.*

**B**UT tho' *Sincerity* be consider'd as a necessary, and even the principal Quality, in such an Obedience as will approve us to Christ as *acceptable Subjects of his Legislature*; yet it is to be feared, too much is presumed  
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of this Quality, when it is affirmed that this *alone, and in all Cases*, is sufficient to recommend our Actions to the Approbation of our Judge.

When indeed we are supposed either actually to *perform* all the Duties required from us, or to be under such Circumstances as *excuse* us not performing them, or to be *pardon'd* upon our Repentance for transgressing them; 'tis acknowledg'd, that the *Sincerity* of our Intention in these Particulars is alone sufficient to assure us we are *Obedient, Excused, or Forgiven*.

But much more seems to have been affirmed in this Assertion, *viz.* That though we mistake any, or all the Laws of Christ never so much, and in Consequence of such Mistake shall act even directly contrary to what in the common Apprehension of Mankind is the Meaning of them, yet if we are *fully persuaded* that our Interpretation is agreeable to his Will, we are in all Cases justified in his Sight, and the Action will be approved and rewarded by him as Obedience: A Conclusion which cannot be admitted without taking away the Necessity of any Obedience at all.

I before observ'd, that it was included in the Idea of a Subject to Christ as his *Lawgiver*, That he was obliged to know and obey some Laws of Christ in the Meaning which Christ intended in them; and that when we affirm of any one, that he is approved in this Character by Christ, he must be consider'd as actu-

actually knowing, understanding, and obeying all those Laws of Christ, which every Christian, as such, is bound to know, understand, and obey.

It was observ'd farther, That as some Persons must be consider'd as obliged to know, understand, and obey more Laws of Christ than Others; so the Idea in these Applications is proportionably enlarged, and the Person consider'd as knowing, understanding, and obeying more or fewer Laws, according as we conceive his Obligations to extend.

But if a full Persuasion of Mind, be *Alone*, and in *all Cases* sufficient, then no one is strictly bound to apprehend or obey any Laws of Christ in the Meaning he intended in them: No Plainness is sufficient to oblige us to understand them, and there can be no such Thing as a culpable Mistake. He who Disbelieves the Doctrines, or Disobeys the Precepts of Christ, if he acts upon a *full Persuasion of Mind*, is in as good a Condition, as he who Believes and Obeys. Nay, farther it must hence follow, that he who rejects Christianity because he believes it to be false, is as acceptable to God as he who embraces it, because he believes it to be true. This is certainly a just Consequence, if the Acceptableness of our Faith doth not depend on the Truth, or Evidence of a Thing we assent to, but merely on the Strength of our *Persuasion* concerning it. But with what Justice then could our Saviour denounce those  
(a) *heavy*



(a) *heavy Woes* against the Infidelity of those Cities which rejected him? Was this their Crime, that they knew him to be the *Messiah*, and yet rejected him? Or was it not manifestly this, That notwithstanding the (a) *Mighty Works* he had done among them were so clear a Proof of his Mission that every rational Man was obliged to acknowledge it, yet contrary to this Obligation they refused to receive him? Or can we imagine that when our Lord expressly tells us, (b) *That he who believeth not shall be damned*, he means no more than this, That he shall be damned who knows his Mission and Doctrine to be from God, and yet disbelieves it? Infidelity indeed is very safe under this Interpretation, since, upon this Supposition, the Penalty of it is affixed only to such a Crime as it implies a Contradiction in Terms for any one to be guilty of.

The Case is the same with respect to any particular plain Direction of our Faith, or any other Practical Law of Christ; (for *Faith*, as Obedience to a Law requiring us to believe, is as much a *Practical Duty*, as any other Action.) For if in regulating our Conduct according to any such Law we are not obliged to understand it in such a Sense, as the ordinary Reason of Mankind tells us the Law-giver meant it in, the whole Law will, in the Language of the *Papists*, be only a Number of *unsensed*

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(aa) *Mat. xi. 21.*      (b) *Mar. xvi. 16.*

## Church of CHRIST. 29

*Characters*, without any certain Meaning; since no one could precisely say, what was the Duty required by any Precept of it.

Christ certainly had a *precise Meaning* in every one of his Laws, and in some his Meaning is so plain and obvious, that it requires only a common unprejudiced Attention, and the ordinary Capacities of a reasonable Nature to acknowledge it; and consequently he who doth not understand them is either incapable of any Law, or else he must be guilty of Sin in not performing a Duty, which it was in his Power to perform. And agreeably our Lord asks, (a) *Why do you not of your Selves judge that which is Right?* in which Words he not only asserts a Right of *private Judgment*, but supposes also a Duty to attend us in the exercise of that Power, and that Truth and Right are sometimes so clear and obvious, that it must be Sin in us not to acknowledge them.

With Respect therefore to these plain Laws, both the Knowledge of them, and an exact Obedience to them according to the Intention of Christ, are consider'd as necessary, and consequently are implied in the Idea of a Person approved by Christ as a Subject of his Legislature: Neither can we conceive his acting according to these Laws to be excusable however firmly he may appear persuaded of the

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(a) *Luk. xii. 57.*

Truth of those Mistakes, in Consequence of which he transgresseth them.

In all Human Laws it has always been thought equitable, to require the Persons they are directed to, to understand them in the same Sense in which the Legislature intended them: And accordingly the Penalties of the Law are constantly executed on him who transgresseth them, without any regard to his *Persuasion* concerning the Meaning or Sense of them: And the Equity of this Proceeding is founded on this Presumption, that the Law is such that a reasonable Being, with that Attention which is due to the Authority which enacts it, might and ought to have understood it in its true Sense. And are Christ's Laws only such intricate unintelligible Prescriptions, that no one is bound to understand them, but every one is at liberty to obey them in what Sense he pleases?

It may perhaps be said, that the *Persuasion* to which so much Power and Value is ascribed, is such a *Persuasion* as is the Result of a full and impartial Inquiry, according to the best Use of our Faculties, and in which no Means of Information in our Power have been unapplied to. This indeed must be acknowledged to excuse the Mistake: But then this Excuse cannot be extended farther than to such Laws as either in themselves are of *difficult Interpretation*, or from some natural or unavoidable Incapacity of the Person are *obscure to him*, and thus far we before allowed it. But then

it must also be remember'd, that the Intention of Christ in some Laws is so *plain*, that no Man who mistakes them can be supposed to have duly attended to them. Some of these *plain* Laws every Christian, as a rational Being, is obliged to understand, and either more or fewer according to his Capacities and Opportunities of Information; and all that he is obliged to understand, he is bound to obey according to the true Import of them; and whatever Laws we are bound precisely to obey, no Strength of Persuasion can excuse our not precisely Obeying; and consequently the Strength of our *Persuasion* cannot, *Alone and in all Cases*, be a sufficient Security for us to act upon.

But I would here also farther observe, That when it is affirmed, that a sincere *Persuasion* of Mind is *alone* a secure Principle of Faith and Action, and Men are bid to rely on this *in all Cases*, as a safe Title to the Favour of God, without regarding any other Consideration; These high Expressions cannot be meant of such a *Persuasion* as is the Result of a full and impartial Inquiry; because the *Persuasion* here recommended, is proposed as the ultimate Rule of Faith and Action: A Rule by which if we act we may always be secure that we have done our Duty: Now whatever Christ has appointed to be the ultimate Rule, by which we may always Judge whether we believe or practise agreeably to his Will, is certainly such a Rule as may be applied to the particular  
Oc-

Occasions of Faith or Action: But such a Sincerity of *Persuasion* as this, can never certainly be applied as a Rule to any Part of our Conduct; because we can never be assur'd we have neglected no Opportunity of Information in our Power, that we have read every Book, or consulted every Person, whom we might have had, or may yet have Recourse to, whose Reasons might possibly have alter'd our Judgment, and convinced us of Error. And consequently such a *Persuasion* as this is so far from being the Adequate or only safe Rule of our Faith and Actions, that in consequence of this Principle, we can never believe or practise any Thing with Security as long as we live.

When therefore it is affirmed, *That whenever we Act under a full Persuasion that what we do is Lawful or a Duty, we may depend on the Acceptance of Christ*; no other Assurance can be meant, than a present firm *Persuasion* of Mind however founded: And because this has been very much insisted on, as a sufficient Defence of all Mistakes, in Belief or Practice, I shall beg Leave to consider it a little further.

Now such a *Persuasion*, under some Limitations, is acknowledg'd to be a Rule of human Conduct. Thus far it is an *Absolute Rule*, that whatsoever we are persuaded is contrary to the Will of Christ; how much soever we are mistaken in such *Persuasion*, we cannot *actually* perform without Sin: For to him who believes it to be Sin, to him it is Sin; and whoever commits what he thinks a Crime, has broken through

through all Reverence for the Authority of the Legislator, and would as certainly have committed it, if it had been really one.

But we cannot so far depend on this as a *positive* Rule, as to affirm that whatsoever we do in Consequence of such a *Persuasion* is acceptable to Christ, and Intitles us to the Character of his faithful Subjects; because we are assured, that there are many Errors in Faith and Doctrine which Christ hates †, though the Persons who believe and Teach them, may be fully persuaded it is their Duty so to do. We are also told that Men may be so mistaken in their Expression of their Love to God or Christ, as to think they are (a) *doing him Service*, and shewing their Affection to him, while they are *killing his Servants*: But be their Love for him never so hearty, or their Persuasion never so strong that they are bound to express it in this Manner; yet it cannot be imagin'd that this is such a Love of Christ, or Charity to his Members, as he will approve and Reward.

St. Paul, indeed, who himself had been guilty of this Sin, tells us, that (b) *he found Mercy from God, because he did it ignorantly in Unbelief*: But,

1<sup>st</sup>, The Apostle never mentions this Part of his Life but with the deepest Contitriion; he

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† Rev. ii. 15. (a) Jhn xvi. 2. (b) 1 Tim. i. 13.

acknowledges the Guilt of it, and when he reflects on it, he confesses himself not only a Sinner, but the (a) *Chief of Sinners*; and consequently, notwithstanding the *Strength of his Persuasion*, the Actions were still look'd on by him as Sins; and therefore, unless we admit the Notion of some Sins, being in their Nature venial, these were such as put him under the Displeasure of God, and were not pardonable without his Repentance.

2dly, It is acknowledg'd, that the Guilt of these Sins was very much abated in the Sight of God by this Consideration, that they were not committed in Compliance with Malice, Envy, or any base Passion, but proceeded from a sincere Zeal for the Glory of God, and the Preservation of what he thought the true Religion. The Principle upon which he acted was good and pleasing to God, the same that he commends in the Jews, to whom he bears Testimony, that they had (b) *a Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge*; but as he doth not free the Conduct of the Jews from Sin, tho' it proceeded from a Principle which he approves, but (c) prays for them as Men under God's Displeasure; so neither were his own Actions, proceeding from the same Principle, excused from Sin any more than Theirs.

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(a) 1 Tim. i. 15. (b) Rom. x. 2. (c) *ibid* 1.

## Church of CHRIST. 35

St. Peter offers the same Excuse for the Sin of the Jews who crucified our Lord, (a) *I wot that thro' Ignorance you did it, as did also your Rulers*; but he doth not therefore think them justified in the Sight of God, but immediately exhorts them, (d) *Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out*: They sinn'd in Ignorance and Unbelief as well as St. Paul, but unless they repented, their Sin could not be blotted out. The Sincerity of the Offender alleviated, but did not take away the Guilt: And therefore St. Peter mentions this as a Circumstance that might encourage them to hope for Pardon upon their Repentance, but could not assure them that they were already pardon'd. And so the Sincerity of St. Paul was an Inducement to the divine Compassion, to propose these powerful Motives of Conversion to him; but it was his Compliance with those Motives, and his subsequent Repentance that acquitted him of the Sin. And agreeably Ananias, who attended him presently after his Conversion, Exhorts him to (c) *arise and be baptized, and wash away his Sins, calling on the Name of the Lord Jesus*. Had he resisted the Motives of Conversion offer'd to him, as many of St. Peter's Auditors did those which he offer'd, notwithstanding his

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(a) *Act. iii. 17.*

(b) *ibid. 19.*

(c) *Act. xxii. 16.*



Sincerity, he had remained in the same State of Damnation that they continued under.

It cannot therefore be infer'd from this Instance, that *whenever we act with a full Persuasion of Mind, we are secure from Sin*; since the Blasphemies and Persecutions of *St. Paul* are confessed by him to be Sins, notwithstanding the *Sincerity of Persuasion* under which he committed them: and these Sins were no otherwise forgiven him, but upon the ordinary Condition of Repentance.

If *St. Paul* indeed can be excused from Sin in persecuting the Church, because (a) *he was verily persuaded* he ought to do it; the same Plea will equally excuse all Heathen or Popish Princes who have at any time persecuted the Church of Christ. The Gun-powder Treason, and the Rebellion of Forty one, and all the Villanies that have ever been committed from a Persuasion of Conscience will be defended: For the Actors in these Tragedies have declar'd, that what they did they were persuaded they were bound to do; neither can we convince them of Sin by any other Argument than this, That they acted contrary to such *plain* Laws of God and Christ as they were bound to understand.

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(a) *Act. xxvi. 9.*

## Church of CHRIST. 37

We may therefore resume our Conclusion, that *a full Persuasion of Mind is not alone, and in all Cases, a sufficient Security from Sin*; and that, in some Parts of our Conduct, an exact Conformity to the Rule prescribed by Christ is required from us: Neither can this be restrain'd within narrower Bounds, than an Obedience to all such Laws as Christ has deliver'd with such Plainness, as obliges the Person they are propos'd, to understand them. For if the Strength of our Persuasion will justify us acting contrary to one of these Laws, it will equally excuse us acting contrary to all; and then he who, *keeps none of his Commandments*, will, contrary to our Lord's express Declaration, (a) *be nevertheless in the Number of those who love Him, and are beloved both by Him and his Father.*

From the whole I Infer, that an *actual Obedience* to some Laws of Christ, according to the true Meaning and Import of them, must be consider'd as a necessary Ingredient in his Character, of whom we affirm that he is *an acceptable Subject to Christ as his Lawgiver*: That in these necessary Instances, he must not only sincerely think he Obeys, but sincerely must Obey.

*Lastly*, As to the *Judicature* of Christ, All that is implied in the Character of a faithful Subject to him, with relation to this Office,

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(a) *Job. xiv. 21.*

38 *Of the Invisible, &c.*

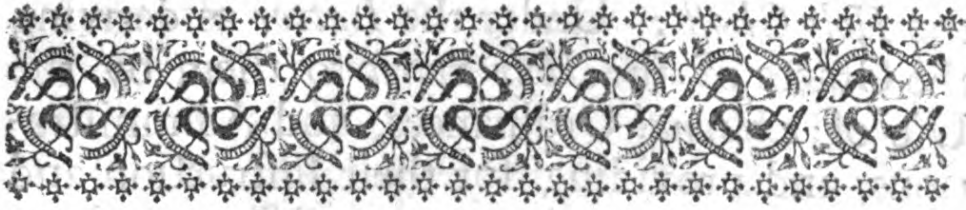
is That the Rewards promised, and the Penalties threatned by Christ, must have the first and governing Influence on all his Actions; and that he must do nothing that may expose him to the Displeasure of Christ, either to procure the Favour, or avoid the Resentments of Men.

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PART



# P A R T II.

## Of the *Visible* CHURCH of CHRIST.



### CH A P. I.

#### *Of the Nature and Constitution of the Visible Church.*



**A**S the Church, with respect to that *Internal* relation which it has to Christ, is call'd his *Invisible* Church, so, with respect to that *External* Polity in which it is incorporated, and impower'd to act as a *Visible* Society, it is call'd his *Visible* Church. Under both these Denominations Christ is consider'd as Head of the Church; under the *Former*, as presiding over the *Hearts* and *Consciences* of his Disciples, and communicating all *spiritual* Gifts

Gifts and Graces to them by the Ministry of the *Holy Ghost* : Under the *Latter* as deriving the Graces of the *Holy Spirit* to them by the Use of *external* Ordinances, and Administrations, and providing for their Instruction and good Government, by certain *Officers*, whom he has appointed, for the *outward* Discipline and Ministry of his Church, to officiate in the publick Ordinances of his Religion, to teach govern and judge his Members, according to his Prescription. For thus the Apostle tells us, *He hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondarily Prophets, --- Helps, Governments, Pastors and Teachers, for the Work of the Ministry for the Edifying the Body of Christ. (a)*

In the *Visible* Church, therefore, Christ is not the *Immediate* and consequently not the *sole* Teacher, Ruler, &c. of his People ; because Others are appointed to preside over them in these Offices to whom their Submission is *immediately* due, tho' *ultimately* to the Authority of Christ by whose Commission they act.

This *Visible* Church is consider'd either as one large collective Body, comprehending all Societies of Christians dispersed over the face of the Earth ; which are therefore call'd one *Catholick* Church, because they profess the same Faith to be saved by the Death and Mediation of Christ, and also because they have

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(a) 1 Cor. xii. 28. compared with Eph. iv. 11.

## *Church of* CHRIST. 41

a Community of Ordinances; so that he who is lawfully baptized in one Church, is acknowledged as a baptized Person in all other: and he who is lawfully ordain'd in one Church, is acknowledged in the same Character by all others; and he who is regularly cut off and separated from one Part of this Society, is cut off from the whole Church.

Or this Church is consider'd as divided into particular Societies, each under their respective Officers and Ministers; which, as Members, compose together the whole Body of Christ's Catholick Church.

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### CHAPTER II.

#### *Of the Members of the Visible Church.*

**T**HIS *Visible* Church being a Society of Christ's appointment, no Man can be esteem'd to discharge his Duty as his Disciple, who is not a Member of it. And agreeably, all the Benefits purchased by Christ for Mankind, are annex'd to our Initiation into this Society. (a) *He that Believeth and is Baptized shall be saved.* And consequently it is not a Thing left to the Choice and Liberty of Men, whether they will belong to this

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(a) *Mar. xvi. 16.*

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Society or not : But we are obliged to be enter'd into it, on pain of forfeiting our Union with Christ, and our Title to all the Privileges of the Gospel. And since our Relation to the *Catholick Church* cannot otherwise appear, than by our communicating with some of those *Particular Churches* of which that *General Society* is composed; It follows, that every Christian is under the same Obligation to be a Member of some *Particular Church*, as to be a Member of the *Catholick Church of Christ*. And since our Communion with any *Particular Church* can no farther unite us to the *Catholick Church*, than as that *particular Society* is it self a Member of the *Catholick Church*; It concerns us well to be assur'd, that the Church, to whose Congregation we belong, is it self a Member of the *Catholick Church of Christ*.

But the Nature and Duty of *Church Communion* I shall leave with the Reader in the Words of a † Right Reverend Prelate of the *Church of England*.

From these Expressions of *St. Cyprian*---  
*There is but one Catholick Church, divided into many Members, thro' the whole World, and one Episcopacy diffused in many Bishops, agreeing with one another. And again, There is one Episcopacy, an intire Part whereof is*

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† Dr. Potter now Lord Bishop of Oxon, Discourse of *Church Government*, pag. 459.

*held by every Bishop.*--- He observes, ' That  
' whoever becomes a Member of any Part of  
' the Catholick Church, is a Member of the  
' whole Church; And on the contrary, Who-  
' ever is separated from any found Part of  
' the Church, by wilfull Schism or just Ex-  
' communication, is by that means separated  
' from the whole Church. Just as we find  
' in Natural Bodies, That in one Body there  
' are many Members, And whatever is uni-  
' ted to any one of these, is thereby united  
' to the whole Body; as on the contrary,  
' whatever is cut off from any Member, do's  
' by that Separation lose its Union with the  
' whole Body. Neither can there be devised  
' any way to be united to any Body, whe-  
' ther Natural or Civil, or of being separated  
' from it, but by adhering to some of its  
' Members, or being cut off from them.  
' Whence appears the Necessity, which eve-  
' ry Christian lies under, of maintaining  
' Communion with the particular Church,  
' wherein he lives, in order to his Commu-  
' nion with the Church Catholick, and with  
' Christ the Head of it.'

The General *Ideas* which we affix to any Person, when we consider him as a Member of the Whole or any Part of Christ's *Visible* Church, are, That He is enter'd into this Society by *Baptism*; Professes the *Faith* of Christian Religion taught in it; Communicates in the *external Ordinances*, and is observant of the *Discipline* of it.



## C H A P. III.

*Of the Superiors or Officers in the Visible Church, and the Powers committed to them.*

THE Members of Christ's *visible* Church are farther consider'd, as distinguish'd into Superiors and Inferiors, Rulers and Subjects; and when to those general Marks of a *Visible Christian* before mention'd, we add what is distinctly imply'd in each of these Characters, we shall comprehend all that can be affirm'd of any Person, as a *Member of Christ's Visible Church*.

That Christ did not leave the Members of his *Visible* Church in a State of perfect Equality, appears from the Scriptures before cited, *Eph. iv. 11.* and *I Cor. xii. 28.* And agreeably, the Apostle, in the preceding part of that Chapter to the *Corinthians*, teaches us, from a Comparison of the Church to a Body and its Members, that tho' Christ be the *sole and supreme Head*, who by the Influx of his Grace moves and animates the whole Body, *v. 12*; Yet among the *Members* some also are to be honour'd with the Title of *Head*: as is evident from *v. 21.* where he tells us, that *The Head cannot say to the Feet I have no need of you*: For that this cannot be meant of Christ is plain; because Christ can say to his Members, *I have no need of you.* As the  
Head

## Church of CHRIST. 45

*Head* is the Source and Fountain of Animal Life to the *Body*, whence all the *Members* derive Spirits and Motion; so also is Christ the Fountain of Internal Spiritual Life to the Church. And the *Head*, consider'd thus as a Principle of Life, exerts these *internal* Powers, without the Assistance of the other *Members*. But when the *Head* is consider'd as a *Member* of the *Body*, to all its *External* Operations it has need of the other *Members*. In this View therefore it must be consider'd by the Apostle, when he tells us, *The Head cannot say to the Feet I have no need of you*, and consequently, to preserve any Analogy in the Similitude, he must mean that some Persons in the Church, though with respect to Christ they are equally *Members* with others; yet with respect to the other Parts of this Society, they have the same Preheminence, that the *Head* has over the other *Members* of the *Body*.

And so when the Church is compared to the Household of an absent Master, some Servants are represented as placed in Superior Trusts over the rest, *To give them Meat in due Season*, &c. And the same will appear in all other Allusions made use of in Scripture.

Of these Powers 'tis in general to be observ'd, That no Authority can belong to any Member of Christ's Church, but what is derived from Christ the Supreme Head of it, either by his own immediate Commission, or by the Ordination of those who had Power from him to appoint others: *No Man taketh this*

*this Honour to himself, but he who is one of these ways call'd of God.*

The particular *Powers* by which these Superiors were distinguished from other Persons, were,

*First*, An Authority to *Preach* the Gospel, and *Teach* others. That this was a Part of the Commission given to the Ministry, is evident: For thus our Lord sent forth the Seventy to *Preach to the Cities of Judea* (a); the Commission of the Apostles was enlarg'd, to *Teach all Nations* (b). St. Paul tells *Timothy*, that he was *ordain'd and appointed a Preacher* (c) and *Teacher of the Gentiles* (d). And not only the Apostles, but the ordinary Officers of the Church were distinguish'd by this Commission: Whence *διδασκάλοι* (d) is commonly apply'd to them; and that they should be *διδάκτικοι* (e), and *ἰκανοί* (f), or *ωρεοδύμοι* (g) *διδάξαι* is required, among the principal Qualifications of those who were ordain'd to the Ministry.

And though all Christians are commanded to *teach and admonish one another* (h), yet, that this Office was committed to the *Ministry* with distinct Powers, appears from St. Paul's Determination, that none could *Preach* as a Minister *except he was sent* (i).

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(a) Luke x. (b) Matt. xxviii. 19. (c) 1 Tim. ii. 7. 2 Tim. i. 11. (d) Eph. iv. 11. (e) 1 Tim. iii. 2. (f) 2 Tim. ii. 2. (g) Rom. i. 15. 1 Pet. v. 2. (h) Col. iii. 16. (i) Rom. x. 15.

*Secondly,*

Secondly, The Ministers of the Church were appointed by Christ to preside in the publick Offices of Religion, to offer up the *Prayers* of the Congregation to God, and interceed with him to send down his Graces and Blessings upon them; and agreeably the twenty-four Elders in the *Revelations*, who are by all Commentators acknowledg'd to signify the Christian Ministry \*, are represented as *having every one of them golden Vials of Incense (a)*, which are explained to be the *Prayers of the Saints*. And that a special Efficacy may be expected from Prayers addressed to God thro' their *Ministry*, is evident from that Direction of St. James, *Is any Man sick among you? Let him call for the Elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with Oil in the Name of the Lord: And the Prayer of Faith shall save the Sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed Sins, they shall be forgiven him (b)*. To the Ministers also of the Church were committed the Office of *Baptism (c)*, and the Consecration of the *Lord's-Supper (d)*.

And that besides this Authority of *Teaching*, and *Ministring* in the publick Offices of Religion, the Superiors of the Church had a Power also of *Rule* and *Government* may be collected, not only from the Apostles Exercise of this Power in their own Persons, but also

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\* Vid. Grot. in *Loc.* and in *Rev.* iv. 10. (a) *Rev.* v. 8. (b) *Jam.* v. 14, 15. (c) *Matt.* xxviii. 19. (d) *1 Cor.* xi. 23.

from the Commissions and Orders given to such Officers as they appointed in the Church. Thus St. Paul directs *Timothy* not only to *teach* certain Duties, but *command them* (a). *Titus* is impower'd to *Rebuke with Authority* (b). The *Angels* or *Bishops* of the Churches in *Asia* are blamed for not exercising *Authority* (c). Among the Elders also, some are distinguish'd as ruling or presiding well, καλῶς προεστῶτες (d). St. Paul commands the *Corinthians*, to *submit themselves to Stephanas, and to every one who helped him, and labour'd in the Ministry of the Saints* (e). He ascribes also a Power of Judgment to the Superiors of that Church, *Do not ye Judge them that are within* (f) ? The Church among the *Hebrews* is commanded, to *remember them who had Rule over them* (g);—To *obey those who were appointed to Rule over them* (g).

I know it has been pretended, that the word ἡγούμενοι, used by the Apostle in the two Places last referr'd to, does not imply any Character of *Authority*, but signifies merely *Guides*, Persons who were to *lead* the Flock by their Doctrine and Example, but without any Power to *command*. It happens indeed, that the Words *Leader* or *Guide* are not proper Appellations of any Office of Power among us, as the Greek Words ἡγούμενοι or

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(a) 1 Tim. iv. 11. (b) Tit. ii. 15. (c) Rev. ii. (d) 1 Tim. v. 17. (e) 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. (f) 1 Cor. v. 12. (gg) H. b. 2. iii. 7, 17.

## Church of CHRIST. 49

ἡγετων, and *Dux* which translates them in *Latin*, were in those Languages. But that ἡγεμενον was commonly used to signify a Person vested with Authority, might be shewn from the best *Greek* Writers. But there is no Occasion to look farther for the Meaning of it here, than to the Text it self. The Apostle commands the *Hebrews* to be *Obedient* and *Subject* to them, *πειθεσθε κ̄ υπετατε*. Now *Subjection* and *Authority* are Correlatives, neither can it be imagin'd, the Apostle would require them to be *subject* to Persons who had no *Authority* over them. And therefore, if we put *Guides* in the place of *Rulers*, the Sense will not be alter'd, since they are such *Guides* as Men are bound to submit to and obey. Suppose then there were less Reason, than appears from the known Use of the Word, to translate it *Rulers*; yet the Translators have led us into no Mistake by calling them so, since such *Authority* as is contended for, is ascribed to these *Guides*; and the earliest Histories of the Church assure us, that this Authority was accordingly exercised by them:

## C H A P. IV.

*Of the Nature and Extent of these Powers committed to the Visible Rulers of the Church : And 1st, Of their Authority to Teach.*

**T**HAT Christ therefore has appointed Superiors in his Church, with Authority not only to *Teach* and *Minister* in it, but also to *Rule* and *Govern* it, is a Conclusion we may venture to resume, and proceed to inquire more distinctly, into the *Nature* and *Extent* of these Powers, and,

*First*, It is evident that their Commission to *Preach* and *Teach* others must give an Authority to their Doctrine, which cannot belong to others not Partakers of the same Commission. Thus our Lord tells the Seventy when he sent them forth to preach the Gospel, *He that heareth you heareth me (a)*. They are *Embassadors* and *Legates of Christ (b)*, and the Message which They deliver demands Reverence and Submission on account of that high Character.

Not that They have an absolute unlimited Authority to declare what They please to be

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(a) Luke x. 16.

(b) 2 Cor. v. 20.

## Church of CHRIST. 51

the Word of God, or to add to or diminish one tittle from their Instructions. This would not be Preaching the Doctrines, or declaring the will of Christ, but *Preaching themselves* (a), and usurping the Supremacy of their Master. What Doctrines are taught and delivered in the Scripture, those and those only have they Authority to Preach and Teach in the Name of Christ; but because They cannot execute this Office without judging from Scripture what Doctrines Christ has commanded them to Teach, and the Extent of their Authority as *Teachers* depends upon the Authority of those *Interpretations* of Scripture, by which they form this Judgment of their Duty, it is necessary to inquire, how far this Office gives them Authority to *interpret* Scripture.

That they have a *Right* to interpret Scripture for their own Direction in the discharge of this Office, must be acknowledged, because in this they act upon a level with other Christians, and as immediate Subjects of Christ. And if every Christian as a Subject of Christ, has a *Right* to consult and interpret Scripture, in order to judge what Duties are required from him in his Station, the Ministers of the Church cannot be excluded from this general *Right* of judging in their Station, what the Scriptures require them to *Teach*, as the Doctrines and Precepts of Christ.

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(a) 2 Cor. iv. 5.



And so far as every private Christian's Interpretation is a just Authority for him to act on, so far is the Interpretation of the Minister an Authority for him to *Teach* what appears to him to be the Doctrine of Christ. The great Question is, How far his Interpretations of Scripture have Authority to oblige others to receive what he teaches as the Doctrine of Christ, and to Believe and Practice according to them. Now,

1. As some Doctrines of Christ are so plain, that no Christian is excused who mistakes and acts contrary to the Meaning of them ; so with respect to these plain Doctrines, no Authority on Earth, nor even an Angel from Heaven can impose a contrary *Interpretation* on us. And when our Pastor teaches these Doctrines in the same Sense in which we understand them, 'tis indeed a great Confirmation to our Judgment, to find it agreeable to his Sentiments, who is commissioned to instruct us. But in this he does not act properly with any *Authority*, he does not *determine* our Belief or Practice, but only inculcates to us, and reminds us of what we acknowledg'd before. But,

2. Some Doctrines of Christ are, to many of his Disciples, of *difficult* or *doubtful* Interpretation, the Knowledge or Understanding of which, though it may not be in general and absolutely necessary, yet the particular Occasions of Action may require such Persons to consult these Precepts, and inform themselves  
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## Church of CHRIST. 53

in the Meaning of them. Now in these Doubts and Difficulties, their proper Recourse is to their Pastors and Teachers, who are appointed for the *Perfecting of the Saints, for the Edifying of the Body of Christ (a)*. And when the Reasons given by the Pastor for his Interpretation, are equal to those suggested by our own Mind for a different Sense, his Judgment ought to be submitted to by us. And that not only for Reasons of Prudence and Discretion, as because of his particular Study and Application, his superiour Knowledge, &c. but from an Obligation of Conscience to his *Commission and Authority*. For in this Case, we do not submit our Reason or our Faith to him, but the Reasons are supposed equal, and the Contest is wholly between our Authority and his, and consequently ought to be determined in Favour of the Superiour.

*Thirdly*, Our Submission to the Judgment of our Pastors is rather more a Duty, when from only equal Reasons produced by any other Persons, we are sollicitated to receive an Interpretation contrary to Theirs, not only because the one is under no particular Obligation to lead us right, and may more reasonably be suspected of an Intention to seduce us than our *Pastor*, who is appointed to *watch for our Souls (b)*, and is particularly *accountable to*

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(a) Eph. iv. 12.

(b) Heb. xiii. 17.

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*God* for the direction he gives us: But because the *Pastor* has a Commission from *Christ* to *Guide* and *Instruct* us, and the other has none; and where other Motives are equal, 'tis certainly our Duty rather to Harken to the Voice of our *proper Shepherd*, than the voice of *Strangers* (a).

The Reasons of *Prudence* which persuade us in all such Cases to submit to the Judgment of our Pastors, are almost innumerable. But in compliance with these, we do not properly submit to the *Authority* of their *Commission*, but act upon the same Motives of Discretion, which in all other Difficulties determine us to follow the direction of Others more capable of Judging than our selves. But where the common Reasons of Assent are equal, the Submission of our Judgment is manifestly paid to their *Authority* and in every such Case is certainly due to it.

More Authority than this we do not claim to the Ministers of the Church as our *Teachers*. Where the Meaning of Scripture is plain and evident, whether we collect this Evidence from our own Reasoning, or from Arguments offer'd by other Men, no Authority must be admitted in Contradiction to it; because no Authority can be an Argument of equal Weight, with the plain Evidence of the thing. But where the Dispute is only between one

(a) *Joh. x. 5.*

Authority and another, between the Authority of our proper Pastor, and the Authority of our own Opinion, or the Opinion of one who would seduce us from him, the Commission of the former ought to give a Preference to his Judgment.

With less Authority than this, 'tis impossible the Ministers of the Church should execute the Duties of their Station as *Teachers*, or fulfil the Ends for which they were ordain'd to that Office. We are assured one great End of their Institution was, *That we should no more be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the slight of Men and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (a)*. But if their Doctrine is of no more Authority than any other Person's Sentiments, we are still as liable to be *carried about with every Wind of Doctrine*, and seduced by Deceivers, as if They had never been appointed. He who *lies in wait to deceive*, is as much to be believ'd as *They* are, and Christians are under no more Obligation to follow *their* Directions than his. What *they* teach is, upon this Supposition, no farther to be regarded than as 'tis supported by their Reasons, and can therefore have no more Weight than what any other Man teaches, and must have had just the same if they had never been ordain'd. And conse-

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(a) Eph. iv. 14.

quently Christians are no more secured from Error by such Appointment, than they were before without it.

If it be said, that this Institution of a Ministry was no otherwise intended to prevent Error and Heresy, than by appointing Persons under particular Obligations to watch and apply the Reasons that support the Truth upon Particular occasions of Danger to any part of the Flock. I wou'd observe, that from this Concession, appears the Wisdom of this Institution, by which even the Weak and the Negligent are in a great measure secured from Danger, and all who are willing to apply for direction, are provided with an easy Recourse to one of superiour Knowledge. But still this Provision wou'd be ineffectual if the *Seducer* had the same *Authority*, and were to be heard with the same *Submission* as the *Pastor*.

There will always be a great Number among the Inferiours of the Church, to whom those Characters given by the Apostle will belong, *Children in understanding (a)*, *Weak in Faith (b)*, *Unlearned (c)*, *Unskilful in the Word of Righteousness (d)*, *Whose senses are not Exercised to discern between Good and Evil (e)*. And 'tis evident to Experience, that the Generality of these Persons who are very little capable of Argument or Deduction, take the Measures of their Duty in much the greater Part of their Belief and

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(a) 1 Cor. xiv. 20. (b) Rom. xiv. 1. (c) 1 Cor. xiv. 18.  
 (d) Heb. xv. 13. (e) Heb. v. 14.

Practice, merely from *Authority*. Nay if we attentively consider the Divisions of Mankind upon any Controversy, past or present, we shall soon be convinced, that the far greater number of Partisans on either side are not engaged by the Truth or Evidence of Argument, but by Motives of Reverence or Aversion to those who appear the Principals in the Debate. Thus it always was with the Bulk of Mankind, and after all our fine Declarations on the Liberty of human Understanding, thus it always will be. Now we allow, 'tis the Duty of every Man, as far as he is able and the direction of the Law reaches, to compare his conduct with the Law of Christ, and to be determin'd in all Questions to adhere to that which appears most agreeable to that Rule. But since in all difficult Questions, a great Part of Mankind are not capable, and a much greater are negligent of making a regular Inquiry, and both these in the Event will always be determin'd by *Authority*: All we contend for is, That in such Cases the Judgment of their *proper and lawful Minister* should be prefer'd before that of any other Person. The Commission of an *appointed Guide* cannot demand from us less Respect than this; thus much must be concluded even from that Interpretation of ἡγεμῶν in the Text before consider'd, which was intended to be least favourable to the Power of the Ministers. For 'tis plain, some *Authority* is there ascribed to them, because others are commanded

manded to *obey* and *submit* to them. If therefore their Office implies no more than *Guiding* or *Leading*, this Authority must be allow'd them as *Guides* and *Leaders*; and if they have any Authority as distinguish'd by these Characters, they cannot have less than we have ascribed to them.

It is indeed absurd to imagin any Person appointed by the *Commission* of a Superior, to be a *Guide* to others without thus much *Authority*. For what signifies his *Commission* to *Guide* us, if we are as much at *Liberty* to follow our own *Sentiments*, or to be guided by any one else as we were before. If indeed this *Guide* shall attempt to lead us a way manifestly contrary to his known *Instructions*, we are obliged not to follow him: Or if we have probable *Reasons* to suspect either that he has mistaken his *Way* himself, or industriously designs to mislead us, we may with *Humility* suggest our *Apprehensions*: And for our greater *Certainty*, inquire of other credible Persons whom we meet. And if a great *Number* of these assure us we are out of our way, and agree in directing us to some other, and support their *Opinion* and *Direction* with good *Reasons*; we may conclude, we are misled, and if our *Guide* will not hearken to these *Reasons*, 'tis our *Duty* to leave him so far as he thus errs, how much soever it may expose us to his *Displeasure*. But if we take upon us to oppose our own mere *Opinion* to his *Judgment*, or follow every idle Person who

who calls us another way, or the bare *Authority* of any other Person, though equally credible with him; we defeat the very End of his Commission, and are guilty of Rebellion against that Superior who appointed him to lead us.

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CHAP. V.

*Of the Authority committed to the Rulers of the Church, to Minister in the publick Offices of Religion.*

THE Authority which we ascribe to the Rulers of the Church under this Branch of their Office, is,

I. That they are set apart and distinguish'd from the rest of the Congregation, as the proper Persons to offer up the *Prayers* and *Supplications* of the People to God.

That in the publick Worship of the Congregation, some Persons should preside over the rest, is not only agreeable to Order and Decency, but required by the Nature of the Action it self. For it cannot be conceived, how an Assembly of Men can unite in their Devotions, any other way than by joining with some one Person who offers up Prayers on the behalf of the whole Assembly. That the *Ministers* of the Church were the Persons appointed to this Office, I before proved.  
And



And since 'tis reasonable to believe that the Prayers of the Faithful are more acceptable to God when offer'd in the Manner which He has prescribed, it must follow that our Prayers will more effectually derive the Blessings of God upon us when offer'd thus according to his Institution by Persons appointed by Him to this Office, than when presented by any other Person not thus appointed. And consequently, They are to be accounted of as the *Ordinary* visible *Intercessors* of the Church; or as some of the Fathers have express'd themselves *μεσῖται* *Mediators* between God and his People.

For tho' Christ be our only *Mediator* in Heaven, the only *Priest* who by the Merits of that *Oblation of himself once offer'd* interceeds for us with God, and prevails for acceptance and success to our Prayers, yet has he ordain'd that these Prayers shou'd be offer'd in his Church by the publick *Ministers* of his Religion; Them has he appointed to *Interceed* for his People in his Name, and to Plead his Merits and Satisfaction in their behalf. All Christians indeed are commanded to pray for one another, and whenever they do so, they are properly *Intercessors* for one another; but this Office private Christians are to perform in the Closet or the Family. In Publick Acts of Worship this Office belongs to the *Minister* as the Mouth of the Congregation. And therefore with the same Propriety that private Christians, who address  
God

God according to their Station for the Happiness of their Brethren, may be said to be *Intercessors* for them, The Ministers may be call'd the Publick *Intercessors* of the Church. The ordinary Officers by whom the Prayers of the Congregation are presented to God, and consequently the Persons by whose Ministry the Blessings pray'd for by the Congregation are ordinarily and regularly to be obtain'd from God.

2. Another Branch of their Authority in the publick Offices of Religion is the *Administration* of the *Sacraments*. That this was specially committed to them is evident from the Scriptures before cited. It is not, I think, pretended by any Christian, that the Consecration of the *Eucharist* belongs to any but the Ministry; much Dispute indeed has been rais'd concerning the Validity of *Baptism* given by private Christians: But without entering into the Merits of that Controversy, 'tis sufficient to my present Purpose to observe, 1. That the Scriptures plainly and expressly commit the Administration of this Sacrament to the *Ministry*. 2. That they nowhere expressly commit it to any other Persons. 3. That they who contend for the Validity of *Lay-Baptism* allow it to be *Irregular*; and that tho' the Act when done is valid, yet the Person had no *Authority* to do it; from which Concession it follows that this Office properly and regularly belongs to the *Ministers* of the Church, and that they  
only

only can act *Authoritatively* in the Administration of it. Which is as much as I am here concern'd to prove.

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C H A P. VI.

*Of the Authority of Legislature committed to the Visible Rulers of the Church.*

**A**Mong the Powers committed to the Superiors of the Church, we are to acknowledge their Authority to *make Laws*; but under these Limitations, that they relate only to *Externals*, and are not contradictory to the *Laws* of Christ.

As to the Internal Behaviour of his Servants Christ has left so full and precise a Rule, that no Authority on Earth can add to or diminish from it. And whatever *External Ordinances* he has appointed to his Church, he has not intrusted any of his Ministers with Authority to reverse or alter. But with regard to the *Visible Action* He has given Authority to the Rulers of his Church to injoyn such a Manner of performing his Commands, as may promote *Decency, Peace* and *Edification*: And as far as may be conducive to the same Ends, to Prescribe or Prohibit such other Actions also as are in their nature Indifferent (*i. e.*) neither commanded nor forbidden by Him.

Thus

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Thus we find the Council at *Jerusalem*, for Reasons of Peace and Expedience, prohibited *Things strangled, and Blood* (a). St. Paul also gave Laws or Rules to the *Corinthians*, for the greater Decency of their Publick Assemblies---That *Women shou'd not speak in them* (b)---That *they shou'd be cover'd* (c), and for the more orderly Celebration of the *Lord's Supper* (d).

It has been objected indeed to this Argument, That the Power of the Apostles was *Extraordinary*; That they were *infallibly* and *immediately* directed by the *Holy Spirit*, and consequently that it cannot be inferr'd from their Practice, that the *Ordinary* Governours of the Church have this Power of prescribing Rules, &c. Before we proceed therefore it concerns us to remove this Objection. Now 'tis acknowledg'd,

1. That all those *Miraculous Powers* that were given to the Apostles for the Conversion of the World were *Extraordinary*, and no Part of that Authority which was deriv'd by their Ordination on their Substitutes and Successors: But that They actually committed to the *Ordinary* Rulers of the Church such Powers as we contend for, has in part been shewn already; and I shall endeavour farther to assert by direct Proofs. From which Proofs it must also appear, that beside those

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(a) *Act.* xv. (b) *1 Cor.* xiv. 24. (c) *1 Cor.* xi. (d) *Ibid.*

*Extraordinary* and *Temporary* Powers which were Personal, the Apostles were also invested with an *Ordinary Communicable* Authority of the same Extent with what we now claim, since they cou'd not transmit to others an Authority which they had not receiv'd themselves.

2. That the Apostles in All, and even in these *Ordinary* Parts of their Office, were assisted with a Measure of the *Divine Spirit* not afterwards continued to the Church, is easily granted; They were the Master-builders, who were first to form and Model this Society: And not only the Pattern according to which it was to be framed; but many of those Rules also, which they prescribed for the external Order and Edification of it, we believe were dictated to them by the *Spirit*. But the same Promise of the *Spirit* is extended also to their Successors *unto the End of the World*; and we are assured is fulfilled to them in such Gifts as are necessary to preserve and continue that Order to the Church in which the Apostles left it.

But let us consider a little more attentively the Weight of this Objection as it affects the *Legislature* of the Church. The *Medium* by which it attempts to disparage our Inference from the Practice of the Apostles, is--- That the Apostles were *immediately directed by the Spirit* to make Laws and Rules for the *outward* Peace and Order of the Church: Therefore (say the Objecters) it cannot be concluded

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concluded from their Precedent, that other Persons, *not so directed*, have Authority to make such Rules, &c.

But I beg leave to observe, That the most obvious Conclusions from the Apostles being *immediately directed by the Spirit* to make such Laws and Rules for the outward Peace and Order of the Church; Are,

1. That the outward Peace and Order of the Church are, in the Judgment of the *Holy Spirit*, Things to be provided for by the Governours of it.

2. That such Kind of Rules and Prescriptions as the Apostle gave, are the best Means to preserve these Blessings to the Church.

Now the *outward* Peace and Order of the Church will always require the Care and Superintendence of some Persons to provide for it. And since the Apostles, the Governours of the Church at that Time, were by the *Holy Spirit* appointed to this Care, this seems a Divine Designation of the Governours of the Church as the proper Persons to whom this shou'd at all times Belong. And if this be allow'd a Part of their Office, by what better and more effectual Provisions can they discharge this Office, than by the same to which the Infallible Wisdom of God directed the Apostles, *viz.* by Prescribing such *Rules* as shall from time to time appear conducive to *Peace* and *Order*.

It may perhaps be said that the Rules prescribed by the Apostles were intended to be a full

and perpetual Provision for these Ends to all Ages of the Church, and that no Person may presume to Prescribe any other without the same *immediate Direction of the Spirit* which they had.

But if the *Rules* prescribed by the Apostles were intended to be a *full and perpetual Provision* for the Peace and Order of the Church in all Ages, then these Rules are to remain of perpetual Use and Obligation to the Church in all Ages : But on the contrary 'tis manifest that a great Part of those Rules were only a *Temporary Provision* adapted to the present State and Exigences of those Churches to which they were directed, as it must appear to any one who observes the Rules given by *St. Paul* to the Church at *Corinth*; the greater Part of which were proper only for the State which that Church was then in, not yet settled under a Regular Ministry, but govern'd and instructed by Persons Occasionally and Extraordinarily inspired; and accordingly the Use and Obligation of those Rules have not been thought by any, except a few Enthusiasts, to extend farther than to the particular Circumstances of that Church to which they were given. And the most natural Inference, from the Apostles being directed by the *Spirit* to provide for the *Peace and Order* of the Church by such *Rules* as were adapted to the particular State and Exigences of it in *their time*, is, That 'tis the Will of God, that their Successors in the Government of the Church shou'd

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shou'd follow their Example, and prescribe such *Rules* as appear conducive to these Ends in the particular State and Circumstances of the Church in *their time*.

So far as any *Rules* given by the Apostles are at any time, and in any Circumstances of the Church, conducive to these Ends; so far they are of Force and Obligation. But when thro' the different Circumstances of the Church, they either obstruct these Ends, or are no longer necessary to promote them, the Divine intention in prescribing them is more effectually comply'd with by their Repeal, than by their Continuance. And agreeably the *Rules* given by St. Paul to the *Corinthians* for *Praying and Prophefying by turns*, &c. which were expedient for that Church in the State it was then under, when a regular Ministry came to be establish'd would have disturb'd that Peace and Order which they were intended to promote. And so the Decree, prohibiting *things strangled and Blood*, when it appear'd no longer necessary to avoid Offence to the *Jews*, was by the succeeding Ages of the Church annull'd, Notwithstanding the Apostle says He wrote the Former by the *Commandment of the Lord* (a), and the Latter is expressly called a *Decree of the Holy Ghost* (b). So that the earliest and best Ages of the Church did not think the *Rules* given by the Apostles perpetually Binding, notwithstanding the Divine direction by which they were prescribed: or indeed

(a) 1 Cor. xiv. 37. (b) Acts xv. 28.



to be of any farther Obligation than as the Reasons for which they were prescrib'd continued to require them; But that when these Reasons ceas'd, the Governours of the Church had Authority, by the *Ordinary* Power committed to Them, to Supersede or Repeat them: And since the same Authority is required to Repeat a Law as to Enact it, 'Tis manifest they thought the same Authority by which the Apostles made these Laws, was transmitted to Them; (*i. e.*) That the Apostles in these Instances acted only by the same *Ordinary* Power which they deliver'd down to them, tho' They (the Apostles) were in a more particular manner assisted and directed by the *Spirit* in the Exercise of it: And that when these *Extraordinary* Assistances ceas'd, the *Ordinary* Power did nevertheless remain: And that it was their Right and their Duty to exercise it, according to the best of their Discretion, as the emergent Exigences of the Church requir'd, without waiting for that *immediate and special Direction of the Spirit* by which the Apostles acted.

From what has been offer'd in reply to this Objection I observe, that supposing the Truth of what is suggested in it, That the Apostles in prescribing these Rules acted always by the *immediate Direction of the Spirit*; and that none but the Apostles, during their Lives, were allow'd to prescribe them, which are as full Concessions as can be desired; yet upon these Concessions, it will not follow that the  
succeeding

succeeding Governours of the Church are excluded from this Power. How weak and inconclusive then must this Objection appear if neither of these Suppositions is true?

As to the *First*, 'tis manifest St. Paul deliver'd Rules which he expressly tells us were not the *Direction of the Spirit*---*To the rest speak I not the Lord, If any Brother hath a Wife that believeth not, and she be pleas'd to dwell with him, let him not put her away* (a). Here we see He speaks in the Style of Authority--*Let Him not put her away*; and to the Woman, *Let Her not leave Him*. But in prescribing these Orders, it must be allow'd that He acted only in Virtue of his General Commission, as a Ruler of Christ's Church, by which He was authoris'd to make any such Laws as He saw convenient, provided they were not contrary to the Laws of Christ. So that 'tis plain, the Apostles prescribed Rules for which They had not the *express Direction of the Spirit*; and since the *Ordinary Governours* of the Church are not denied to have as much Authority as the Apostles in all things in which They were not inspir'd, or which did not relate to their Mission to convert the World, their Precedent must in these Instances be acknowledg'd conclusive for this Power in the *Ordinary Ministry*.

But *Secondly*, The Instances are numerous in Scripture in which this Authority was ex-

(a) 1 Cor. vii. 12.

exercised by Persons who were not Apostles. In the Council at *Jerusalem*, not only the *Apostles*, but the *Elders* concurr'd in the Decrees of that Assembly (a). *St. Paul* sends a general Direction to the Church at *Corinth*, *Let all Things be done decently and in order* (b); but the prescribing such particular Rules as should be necessary to that end, he leaves to the Superiors of that Church. And so he informs *Titus*, that it was a Part of his Commission in *Crete*, to *Set in Order the Things that were wanting* (c), which must imply an Authority to make such Rules as he in his Discretion should think conducive to that Order which was wanting; so that *others* also who were *not Apostles*, exercised this Authority with their Approbation. And consequently, the *ordinary* Governours of the Church have sufficient Ground from Scripture for the Right they claim to prescribe such Rules; though it should be granted, this Power could not be inferr'd from the Practice of the Apostles themselves. And since this Power was given to these Persons by the Apostles, their being immediately *directed by the Spirit*, proves that it was the *Direction of the Spirit*, that they should have this Power.

As to the *Extent* of this Legislative Power of the Church, I before limited it to *Externals*, and to such Actions as are either *commanded* or

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(a) *Acts* xv. 6, 23. (b) *1 Cor.* xiv. 40. (c) *Tit.* i. 5.

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left *undetermin'd* by Christ. It cannot extend to any Action *forbidden* by Christ, or to impose any Law on the *Conscience*, or prescribe any Thing to the Faith or Practice of Men as a *Condition of Salvation*. The Rulers of the Church, therefore, as Legislators, may not concern themselves with the *inward Belief* of the Mind, or the *secret Grace* of the Heart in their Laws, nor affix the Penalty of *Damnation* to the Transgressions of them. These are the peculiars of Christ's Authority, but their Power is limited to the *External Action*, and this *External Performance* is not required by their *Law* as necessary to *Salvation*, but as necessary to Men's Admission or Continuance in the Churches *outward Communion*.

They *Teach* indeed, that the inward Belief of certain Truths, and the inward Obedience of the Soul in moral Duties, are necessary to Salvation. But this is the *Doctrine*, and not the *Law* of the Church. As a *Law*, 'tis refer'd wholly to the *Authority* of Christ: But these Things the Church teaches, and is obliged to Teach, because it believes them to be essential Parts of Christian Religion.

But with Regard to the *External* Observance of all Christ's Commands, and as Terms of *outward Communion*, the Governours of the Church may ordain *Laws* or *Rules*, and injoin such Actions as are agreeable to Christ's Laws, and prohibit such as are contrary to them. They may order the Times of publick Prayers and Fasts, and the Behaviour to be

observed in them ; They may direct the publick Exercise of our Charity, and other moral Duties : And with respect to Faith and Doctrine, since the publick *Profession* and *Teaching* of those are *External* Acts, they properly fall within the Direction of the Church, and accordingly the Rulers of it may injoin the publick *Profession* of such Articles, and the publick *Teaching* of such Doctrines as are agreeable to Scripture, and forbid such as are contrary to it.

To this Branch of their Office indeed it has been objected, that it implies an Authority of *interpreting* Scripture prejudicial to our Rights, as rational Men and Christians, to judge for our selves what we are to believe and profess; and to the Right of every Teacher of the Gospel, to judge for himself what he is to teach. And because the *Legislature* of the Church in these Points has been thought to be very much affected by this Objection, it may be of use to consider it a little more distinctly.

How far the Rulers of the Church, as *Teachers*, have Authority to direct the *inward Assent* of the Mind, has been consider'd and stated in a former Inquiry, The Point here in Question is, how far they have Authority to direct and require our *External Profession*, or *Publick Teaching* of the Doctrines of the Gospel. Now I presume it will not be denied,

1. That all Christians are indispensably obliged to believe some Articles of Faith, on Pain of Damnation; because Christ has expressly declared, *That he who believeth not shall be damned.* And since he who believes these Propositions in a different Sense from what Christ intended in them; does not believe a Doctrine of Christ, but a Proposition of his own framing; it follows, that we are bound to believe these necessary Articles in the same Sense in which Christ meant them: With Respect therefore to *Christ's Laws*, Men are not at full Liberty what to believe, or what not to believe, any farther than they are at Liberty to choose, whether they will be saved or damned.

2. That every Preacher of the Gospel is strictly oblig'd by the *Law of Christ*, to preach those Doctrines only which Christ has taught, and in that Sense in which he taught them.

3. That the Rulers of the Church have Authority to require our *External* Observance of all Christ's Laws, at least of all Laws which he has strictly oblig'd his Disciples in their several Stations to obey. And since the only *External* Observance that can be paid to a Law, requiring us to Believe, or to Teach, is openly *Professing* such Belief, and *Teaching* such Doctrines as are directed by that Law; it follows, that the Rulers of the Church must have Authority to require us openly to profess our Assent to such Articles, and to teach such Doctrines as Christ has

has required us according to our Stations to Believe and Teach.

The Question then to be resolved in order to satisfy this Objection is, whether the Rulers of the Church have Authority, as *Law-givers*, to require such Articles to be *profest*, and such Doctrines to be *taught*, as they from their own *Interpretation* of Scripture think Christ has required us according to our Stations to Profess or Teach?

Now, if the Rulers of the Church are allow'd to have any Authority to require an *open Profession* of Faith, and to prescribe what Doctrines shall be *openly Taught*; it will be found to follow as a necessary Consequence, that they have Authority to require such Profession to be made, and such Doctrines to be taught, as they from their own *Interpretation* of Scripture believe Christ has required to be profest and taught: Because, if this Authority would permit them to direct any Thing contrary to their own Interpretation of Scripture, they would have Authority to direct what they believe contrary to the Law of Christ, and consequently to contradict what to them appears a Law of Christ. Or if they may permit Men to profess or teach any Thing contrary to what they believe Christ has directed, the Absurdity will be the same: For then they may permit Men to commit what they think Christ has forbidden, and to be Partakers of their Sin, and moreover be guilty of a distinct Sin of their own in  
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not executing that Authority which Christ has given them, to prohibit all open Violations of his Laws. Either, therefore, we must deny, that they have *any Authority* to require an open *Profession* of Faith to be made, or to prescribe what *Doctrines* shall be openly *taught*, or else we must allow them to exercise this Authority according to their own *Sense and Interpretation* of Scripture.

Now, that the Rulers of the Church have Authority to injoin a publick *Profession* of Faith, as a Condition of *External Communion*, 'tis evident; because the Power of admitting Men into the Church by *Baptism*, is committed to them. For an open *Profession* of Christian Faith, is a necessary Condition of *Baptism*; and consequently they must have Authority to require this Profession, which is the previous Condition of it.

In the Exercise indeed of this Power, they are confined to require no Article to be *profest*, but what the Scripture plainly requires to be *believ'd*. But since no particular Form is prescribed in Scripture in which this Profession is to be made, it must be left to the Rulers of the Church to extract from Scripture such *plain Articles* as every Person shall *profess* before he is *Baptized*, and so far to *interpret* Scripture as to judge what is plain and fit to be required. And consequently their Obligation to enjoin no Profession, but what is agreeable to Scripture, must in the Execution of their Office be resolv'd into this, that



that They are bound to require no Article to be *profess'd*, but what they in their Conscience think the Scripture plainly requires to be *believ'd*.

But the Rulers of the Church are farther to be consider'd as *Guardians* of the Churches *Peace* and *Edification*, and vested with Authority to make such Laws as are necessary to promote and secure these Ends. And since the Peace and Edification of the Church is no way so much endanger'd as by Men's openly teaching Doctrines contrary to those taught by the Church, which have therefore obtain'd the Name of *Heresies* or *Divisions*; They must also have Authority to prescribe what Doctrines shall be publicly taught: And tho' in the Exercise of this Power also, they are limited by the Laws of Christ to require nothing to be taught, but what is agreeable to Scripture, and prohibit nothing but what is contrary to it; yet the Application of this Rule must be left to their own Judgment and Conscience. What, upon the Result of their Inquiry, appears to them agreeable to Scripture, that they must command to be taught; and what appears repugnant to it, that they must forbid: And if in executing this or the former Part of their Office, they shall prescribe any Thing which happens not to be agreeable to the Intention of Christ's Law, they have a Right to all that can be said in excuse of any other Person, who acts upon a mistaken Sense of Scripture.

In all indeed that they challenge in the Execution of either Office, they claim no other *Right* in their Station, but what is earnestly contended for by all private Christians in their Station. For the Governours of the Church are as much obliged in Conscience to perform the Duties of their Station according to the Rule of God's Word, as any inferiour Christian is to perform the Duties of his Station. And since the Admission of Men into the Church by *Baptism*, and providing for the *Peace* and *Edification* of the Church, are Duties of their Station, no Reason can exclude them from the same Right of *interpreting* Scripture for the Direction, of their Conscience, in the Discharge of these Duties, which every private Christian demands for the Direction of his Conscience, in the ordinary Duties of Life: And since it is impossible for them to perform these Duties with good Conscience, without judging from Scripture what Articles they should require to be profess'd, and what Doctrines they should require or forbid to be taught; They must consequently have a *Right* so far to *interpret* Scripture, as to judge what Articles are to be profess'd, and what Doctrines are to be taught: And since their Commission obliges them also to require such Profession to be made, and such Doctrines to be taught, as they from their own Interpretation of Scripture judge fit and necessary; They must also have Authority by their Commission to injoin such Professions

to be made, and such Doctrines to be taught; because whatever they are bound by their Commission to perform, they have certainly Authority to perform. And lastly, since the Subjection requir'd from the Inferiors, is exactly proportion'd to the Authority intrusted with the Superiors; if the Superiors have Authority to prescribe in these Instances, their Subjects are bound to obey such Prescriptions. All the Difficulty then that remains is, what Degree of Obedience is due to these Laws, which will be consider'd under the Character of a Subject of Christ's Visible Church.

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#### C H A P. VII.

Of the Jurisdiction committed to the Rulers of the Visible Church.

SINCE Laws without Sanctions, would be no more than an Advice; and a Legislative Power, would be of little Use without Authority to execute the Penalties of its Laws on those who transgress them, the Rulers of the Church must be consider'd as vested also with judicial Authority, to censure or punish Offenders.

That this Authority was by our Lord committed to his Apostles; that in Virtue of that Commission, they executed this Authority; that during their Lives, other Persons also were

were by them ordain'd to the same Power, and That the succeeding Ages of the Church did constantly Exercise this Power, has been learnedly and incontestably proved by the *venerable Prelate* (a) before cited. I shall at present presume, that in consequence of his Lordship's Reasons, it will be granted, that the Governours of the Church have a *rightful Claim* to this Power.

If we consider the *Nature* of this Power, 'tis not improperly called a *Spiritual Power*; for though the Spirit, strictly speaking, signifies the *inner Man*, or *hidden Man of the Heart*, who is Subject only to the *Jurisdiction* of Christ; yet this Authority has obtain'd the Name of *Spiritual*, because it is given for *Spiritual Ends* for *Edification* (b), &c. and the Penalties it inflicts are different from those inflicted by the Civil Magistrate, which in opposition to these are call'd *Temporal*. For though 'tis certain, that diverse bodily Diseases, and Death it self, frequently attended the Censures of the Church in the first Ages of the Gospel; yet this was a *miraculous Annexion* to the Ecclesiastical Sentence, and no Part of the *ordinary Power* of the Church, which reaches no farther than to exclude from some or all the *External Privileges* of that Society, or restore the Offender to them again,

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(a) Dr. Potter's *Discourse of Church Government*, chap. 5.

(b) *2 Cor.* xiii. 10.

a Power which fundamentally belongs to every Society.

But it doth not hence follow, that *Temporal Penalties* may not be lawfully, or usefully annex'd to the Censures of the Church; the contrary may rather be presumed, since God himself did miraculously joyn such to the Censures of the first Ages. And the Civil Magistrate to whom the ordinary Power of *Temporal Penalties* belongs, may hence conclude it lawful and proper for him to add the same kind of Penalties to the ordinary Sentences of the Church. That he may inflict temporal Penalties on those Actions which offend the Church, as far as the same endanger the Peace of the State is not disputed; and that he may exert this Power with an immediate Regard to the outward Welfare of the Church, seems also plain, because he is not only the Guardian of the *Civil Peace*, but also the *Nursing Father of the Church* (a); which Character cannot imply less than that he should protect and encourage the Friends and Ornaments of it, and discourage the Enemies and Scandals of it, which how he can effect more than his meanest Subject, any otherwise, than by the Execution of his *Civil Power* is not easily imagin'd.

Neither, is the *Ecclesiastical* Officer any way unqualified for this Delegation of *Civil*

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(a) *I. xlix. 23.*

Power. For if the divine Wisdom thought the Rulers of the Church proper Persons to be intrusted with the Infliction of those *miraculous Penalties*, which attended the Primitive Censures of the Church; no Reason can be given why they should be unfit to be vested with that *Civil Power* which the Magistrate may apply to the Protection of the Church, and which seems to have succeeded in the Place of that former *miraculous Power*; but then neither of these are to be look'd on as properly *Ecclesiastical Powers*, but as the one was the *extraordinary Interposition of God*, so the other is wholly derived from the *Civil Magistrate*; and when both are taken away, the *Ecclesiastical Power* will nevertheless remain intire.

As to the *Extent* of this *Judicial Power*, 'tis under the same Limitations with the *Legislative Authority* of the Church: The Persons who are subject to it are the *visible Members* of Christ's Church, and the Actions that fall within its Cognizance are their *visible and external Behaviour*: Farther than this, either to Persons or Actions it cannot extend, *for those who are without God Judgeth (a)*; and the interior Conduct of any Man can only be discern'd by him who *sees in Secret*. But as far as any Part of our Moral or Religious Behaviour is *visible*, so far it is subject to the

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(a) 1 Cor. v. 13.

*Jurisdiction* of the Church: So far as the Church has Authority to make *Laws*, so far it must have Power to inflict *Punishments*: And since, (as I before observ'd) the Governours of the Church have Authority not only to prescribe such *indifferent* Actions as may promote Peace and Order, but also to direct the *external* Observance of Christ's Laws, and prohibit such Actions as are *visible* Transgressions of them; They must have Power to inflict Penalties, both on Offenders against their Rules of Peace, and on such Persons who *visibly* transgress Christ's Laws.

Not that they pretend to execute the *Laws of Christ*, for then they must inflict the *Penalty* denounced by him (*i. e.*) *Eternal Damnation*: But they execute only *their own Laws* concerning the *external* Observance of Christ's Commands; and accordingly the Penalties which they inflict are only *Suspension* or *Expulsion* from their Communion.

They *teach* indeed, that Men are obliged, in *Conscience* and under the *Pains* of Sin, to obey all their Laws which are not contrary to the Laws of Christ. But then (as I before distinguish'd,) this is not the *Law*, but the *Doctrine* of the Church; neither do they teach that these Penalties attend Men's Actions as they are Transgressions of *their Laws*; but as they are Transgressions of such *Laws of Christ* as require a Submission to those who are *appointed to rule over them*. But to proceed

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That the Church has Authority to forbid and punish open and notorious Violations of Christ's *Moral* Laws is acknowledged: And since it has been already shewn that the *Faith* of Men is not exempt from the *Laws* of the Church, the same Reason must also prove that 'tis not privileged from the *Censures* of it. It is granted, that the *inward* Act of the Mind, by which we affirm or deny the Truth of any Article, is not cognizable by any human Authority; but the *external* Profession of Faith is a *visible* Part of our Behaviour. And since Christ has left as plain Laws concerning our *Faith*, as concerning our *Moral Actions*; there appears no Reason why *notorious* Offences against the one, may not be forbid and punish'd by the Rulers of the Church, as well as *notorious* Offences against the other.

What Christ has not required Men to *believe* that the Church has not Authority to require Men to *profess*; but where Christ has positively demanded our *Faith*, there the Church, as Judge of the external Behaviour of Christ's Members, has Authority to demand our *Profession*: And the Practice of the Church has always been agreeable to this Rule. Both in the Apostolick and the succeeding Ages, an open *Profession* of Christian Faith has always been required as a necessary Condition of *Baptism*: And since the *Profession* of this Faith is the express *Condition* upon which any Person is receiv'd into this Society; it follows, that when he breaks that



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*Condition*, and *professes* a Faith contrary to this, the Rulers of the Church have the same Power to expell him from this Society, as they had before to refuse him Admission into it unless he comply'd with the Terms requir'd.

And since, as *Guardians* of the *Peace* and *Edification* of the Church, they have Power by their *Laws* to prohibit the open *Teaching* such *Doctrines* as tend to divide and seduce the Members of this Society; they must also have Authority to punish such as offend against these *Laws*. And agreeably we find *St. Paul* excommunicated *Hymenæus, Alexander, and Philetus* (a), for teaching *Doctrines* contrary to the Faith of Christ. *Titus* is commanded to *Reject an Heretick after the first and second Admonition* (b). And in the *Vision* of *St. John* Christ reproves the Bishops of *Pergamus* and *Thyatira*, the one, because *He suffer'd those who held the Doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans* (c); the other, because *He suffer'd the Woman Jezabel to seduce his Servants* (d). From whence 'tis evident, not only that they had *Authority* to cast them out, for else it could not have been their Fault that they suffer'd them; but also that these were Crimes for which they ought to have been cast out. We may therefore conclude, that the Church has altogether the same Au-

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(a) 1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 17. (b) Tit. iii. 10. (c) Rev. ii. (d) *Ibid.*

thority to punish those who publickly offend against the *Doctrines of Faith*, as those who publickly offend against the *Morality* of the Gospel.

Consequent to the Power of *censuring* and *punishing* Offenders, is that of *Absolving* or *Releasing* them upon their Repentance.

This Power, as to the *Nature* and *Extent* of it, is exactly proportion'd to the former. The Church cannot *remit* any Penalties, but what it has Authority to *inflict*; and since it cannot inflict the Eternal Penalties of Sin, it cannot absolve the Offender from them.

As the Offence is a Transgression of the *Law* of the Church, the *Absolution* of the Church doth perfectly and intirely restore the Criminal to the Condition of an upright and innocent Man, and re-instate him in all the *External* Privileges of that Society: And as it is a Transgression of the *Law* of Christ, if the *External* Signs and Fruits of Repentance appear in the Penitent, the Rulers of the Church may and ought to *declare* that he is *Absolved*, that his Sin is *Remitted*, and that he is restored to a State of Grace and Favour with Christ. And on the contrary, where these Signs of Repentance do not appear, they are bound to *declare* the Person to be *Impenitent* under the Displeasure of Christ, and the Curse of the Law; and that as by their Censure he is cut off from the *Visible Society* of the Faithful here on Earth, so he is cut off by the Judgment of Christ from his Uni-

on with him and his *Invisible Church*. But this Declaration is not their *Sentence*, but their *Doctrine*. As *Pastors* and *Teachers* they are obliged to remind the *Impenitent* of the apparent Danger of his State, and to comfort the *Penitent* with Assurance of Pardon upon these External Evidences of his Conversion. But this they cannot pronounce as *Judges*, because Christ only can discern whether the Repentance be feign'd or real, and accordingly determine the State of the Man towards God.

That the *Prayers* of the Faithful offer'd in behalf of the Penitent may be Means of great Efficacy to prevail with God to pardon the *Internal Sin*, and remit the *Penalties* threatned to it, cannot, I think, with any appearance of Reason be denied. That the *Absolutions* of the Church were accompanied with solemn *Prayers* to God to receive the Penitent into his Favour, and that the Penitent was bound to intreat these *Intercessions* of the Church as proper Means of reconciling him to God, appears from the earliest *Histories* of the Church, and may be inferr'd from several Passages and Directions of Scripture (a). That the *Pastors* and *Elders* of the Church are appointed by God to preside in all publick Acts of Worship, and that *Prayers* offer'd through their Ministry are in a more especial manner acceptable to God, has been

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(1) *Vid.* Thorndike's *Rights of the Church in a Christian State*, pag. 19. 20. & seq.

already proved. And that their Ministry was particularly required in these Applications to God for Pardon of Sin, and that a special Efficacy is promised to their *Intercession*, is evident from that Direction of St. *James* before cited.

We may therefore affirm, 1. That the Pastors of the Church, as *Teachers* and *Preachers* of the Gospel, have Authority to *declare* to the Penitent, according to the apparent Signs of Repentance in him, that his Sin is either *remitted* or *retain'd* by God. 2. That as they are the *ordinary Visible* Intercessours of the Church appointed by God to bless in his Name, and offer up Supplications to him, their *Prayer* will with a special Efficacy prevail with God to forgive the Sins of his People. But neither these *Declarations* nor these *Prayers* are *judicial* Acts, neither does it appear that the Church has any *judicial* Authority to remit any, but those External Penalties of Sin which it inflicts.

But the Effect both of the Censures and Absolutions of the Church, I shall have Occasion to consider more fully under my next Inquiry, in which I proceed to consider the Character of a *Subject* in Christ's *Visible* Church.

## C H A P. VIII.

*Of the Subjects in Christ's Visible Church,  
and the Obedience they owe to the Au-  
thority of the Rulers.*

FROM what has been ascribed to the *Superiours* and *Governours* in this Society, 'tis easy to Form our Idea of the *Subjects* in it. For this Character is wholly relative to the former, and is comprehended in such an Obedience as the Authority vested in their *Superiours* requires from them. And,

1. With Respect to the Office of the *Superiours* as *Teachers*, a Subject of Christ's Visible Church is consider'd as bound to consult and *advise* with them for the Regulation of his Faith and Practice, to attend with Reverence and Humility to their *Instructions*, and to prefer the *Authority* of their Doctrine and Decisions to the *Authority* of any other Person teaching contrary to them.

2. With Regard to their Commission, to *Minister in the publick Offices of Religion*, the Subject is obliged to attend to and join with them in all Acts of *publick* Worship, to desire their *Prayers* and *Intercession* for him, to receive the publick *Ordinances* of Religion thro' their Ministry, not to *usurp* upon their Office himself, nor to admit any other Person in this Character in opposition to them.

3. With

3. With Regard to their *Legislative Power*, since the Rulers of the Church have Authority to require the *External Practice* of such moral or instituted Duties as Christ has commanded, and to enact Rules or Laws for the Preservation of *External Peace and Order*, the Subject is bound to obey and submit to these Laws and Prescriptions. And,

4. Since they are vested also with Authority of *Jurisdiction* to punish such as offend against these Laws, the Subject is also obliged to acknowledge this Authority, and submit to the Inflictions of it.

The great Question is, what *Kind* or *Degree* of Obedience is due to the several Powers contain'd in this Commission of the Superiours? For so far as the *Superiour* is limited in his *Authority*, so far also is the *Subject* limited in his *Obedience*.

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## CHAPTER IX.

*Of the Obedience due to the Superiours, as Teachers and Ministers.*

THE Authority of the Superiours as *Teachers* was consider'd with so particular a Regard to the Obligations it laid on their Inferiors, that the Restrictions of their Obedience to it must sufficiently appear from what has been already offer'd; and as to such Restrictions as affect this in common with other Parts

Parts of their Character, they will be occasionally consider'd.

With respect to their Authority as commission'd to *Minister in the publick Offices of Religion*, we may consider the Obedience or Submission of the Subject as limited,

I. When any Person *assumes* this Authority to whom it is not committed.

II. When Persons duely ordain'd to this Authority *exceed* their Commission in the Execution of it.

Both these Defects indeed are to be consider'd by the Subject, as either excusing or limiting his Obedience with respect to every Branch of the Superior's Authority : But the Limitations arising from the former of these I wou'd observe more especially with respect to *this Office* and that of *Teaching* : Because these Offices are more frequently usurp'd on, and Men are more easily prevail'd on to admit Impostors in these Characters, than either as *Lawgivers* or *Judges* over them. Now, whoever takes upon him to execute either of these Offices, without being duly call'd and appointed to them according to the Institution of Christ, 'tis certain has no more *Authority* in them than any other private Christian, and consequently no more Regard or Submission is due to him, however he may appear distinguish'd by his *Gifts* and *Abilities*. These Qualifications indeed may recommend him as  
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a fit Person to be admitted into the Ministry; but 'till He is regularly admitted He has no publick Character; his Administrations are null and void as to any *Authority*, and all good Christians ought to detest and oppose him as a *Thief and a Robber*. For it is not a Consideration of so little Importance as some Men imagine, by whose Ministry we offer up our *Prayers* to God, or thro' whose Hands we receive his *Ordinances*. What Allowance may be made for this Defect in the Ministry where 'tis occasion'd by necessary and unavoidable Impediments, is not here in question: But *ordinarily* we are assured the Blessings and Graces which Christianity teaches us to expect from these Ordinances, can only be derived to us by them when administered according to Christ's Institution by Persons regularly call'd as He has directed, and where such may be had, and we may lawfully join with them and use their Ministry, to depart from them is to Rebel against the Authority of Christ who appointed them.

As for *Moral*, or any other *Personal* Defects besides *want of Commission*, tho' they are just Reasons for which the Superiors of the Church may refuse any one Admission into the Ministry, or depose him from the Exercise of it; yet these are not good Reasons for which any private Christian may withdraw himself from their Administrations as we are taught by our Church in the Twenty sixth *Article*.



2. Tho' the Minister is duly Commission'd to these Offices, He may be guilty of such Irregularities or Defects in the *Execution* of them, as may excuse the Subject from joining with him or submitting to him. For instance, He may call upon him to join in unlawful *Prayers*; He may refuse to administer the *Sacraments* according to Christ's Institution, either leaving out some Essential part of the Action, or adding something Impious or Prophane to it: In such Instances, 'tis evident, He acts without Commission from Christ, and therefore without any Authority, and the Subject is not only at liberty, but obliged to withdraw himself from Him. How far the Subject is bound to submit to the *Judgment* or *Opinion* of the Superior, as to the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of such Prayers, or the Regularity of such Administrations, is to be determin'd by the Authority committed to Him as a *Teacher*, which was stated in a former Inquiry: And how far the Subject is obliged to submit to such Prayers and Administrations as directed by the Laws of the Church, depends upon what Obedience he owes to the *Legislative Power* of the Church; which comes next to be consider'd.

CHAPTER X.

Of the Obedience due to the Superiors, as  
Legislators.

THE *Legislative* Power of the Church,  
I observ'd was limited,

- I. To direct only the *External* Action.
- II. To prescribe only such *External* Actions  
as are agreeable to the *Laws* of Christ.

The Former of these Limitations proceeds from a natural Defect in the Subjects of this Authority, whose Power cannot extend to the Cognifance of Mens *Interior* Conduct; and may therefore more properly be call'd an Exclusion or Nullity of their Power than a Limitation of it: For tho' they are Authoris'd to propose and inculcate the *Laws* of Christ with respect to the *internal* behaviour of his Subjects, yet in this They do not act as *Law-givers* but as *Teachers*, and the Obligations of the Subject to submit to them in the Exercise of this Power have been already consider'd.

But the *Latter* Limitation of their Power, to Prescribe only such Actions as are agreeable to the *Laws* of Christ, do's not proceed from a Natural Incapacity to prescribe any other Actions, but from the Institution and Appointment of Christ who has thus restrain'd them.

them. These Bounds 'tis evident the Ruler may transgress either thro' Design or Mistake; and consequently 'tis of great Concern to the Subject to know how far he is obliged to obey Him in the Exercise of this Power.

It is supposed then, that the Authority of the Rulers is limited to require nothing by their Laws, but what is agreeable to the Laws of Christ; whenever therefore they take upon them to prescribe any Action forbidden by Christ's Law, they act without any Commission, and the Subject cannot *Actively* comply with their Commands, because he is under a prior Obligation to *obey God rather than Man.*

And as it is allowed to the Governors of the Church to judge of the Sense of Scripture in the enacting these Laws, so it must also be allow'd to the Subject to judge of the Sense of Scripture, and of the Agreeableness of these Laws to it, in order to determine how far he may *actively* obey them.

In forming this Judgment indeed neither the Ruler nor the Subject act properly as Members of the *Visible* Church, but as Members of the *Invisible*. The Ruler in prescribing the Law compares his Conduct immediately with the Will of Christ, and the Subject in determining whether he may actively obey this Law compares it immediately with the Laws of Christ. This is an *Internal* Action, in which He is immediately and only Subject to Christ; and consequently whenever  
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He believes that the Law of his visible Superiors is contrary to the Law of Christ, He is bound to decline an *active* Compliance with it.

Not that He is always free from Sin when he refuses his Obedience to such Laws as appear to him contrary to the Laws of Christ; Because He is indispensably obliged to obey some Laws of Christ in the same Sense in which Christ intended them: When therefore his Superior prescribes to him an *External* Observance agreeable to that Sense and Intention of the Law of Christ in which He is bound to understand and obey it; It is not his Persuasion will excuse him from Sin in not Obeying it, because He is obliged by the Law of Christ to obey it in the same Sense in which his Ruler proposes it to his *External* Observance: But so far as his Mistake of the Meaning of Christ's Law is excusable, so far is He excused for not *actively* obeying such Prescriptions of his Superiors as He thinks contrary to Christ's Law.

Where He only *Doubts* whether the Action required be contrary to Christ's Law, or not; (*i. e.*) where the Appearances of Reason are so equal that he cannot resolve on either Side; There, I think, the Authority of his lawful Governours ought to turn the Scale and determine for an *Active* Compliance: Because by Obeying his Superiors He only runs the Hazard of Offending against some unknown Law, some Law which by his doubting He  
confesses

confesses He do's not know whether Christ has injoyn'd or not, and consequently do's not know whether the Action commanded be contrary to a Law of Christ or not: But by Disobeying his Superiors he breaks a clear and undoubted Law of Christ,

Neither has St. Paul taught any thing contrary to this Resolution, in the Rules which he gives the *Corinthians* concerning *Doubtful things*; Because the Things he speaks of are such as were uncommanded by any Authority, Human or Divine: Whereas in the Case before us, the Action is supposed to be commanded by the Authority of the Church; an Authority which we are bound to obey in all things not contrary to the Laws of Christ.

To such Rules as the Governours of the Church claim Authority to prescribe for *Decency, Order, and Edification*; when the Action, or Circumstance of Action which they direct, is acknowledg'd in its nature indifferent, an *Active* Obedience is undoubtedly due. For these Actions cannot be contrary to Christ's Laws, because 'tis supposed that Christ has neither commanded nor forbid them, but left them undetermin'd. Neither is the Subject at liberty to judge whether what is prescribed be expedient or conducive to these Ends: This is left wholly to the discretion of the Superiors, and whoever refuses to obey them upon pretence of Inexpediency, usurps upon their Office, and is no longer a *Subject*, but a *Judge*. Nothing farther is to be inquired by Him, but whether

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whether the Action is in its nature lawful: If it appears contrary to the Law of Christ, He cannot with good Conscience *actively* obey the Command which prescribes it: If Indifferent or Doubtful, 'tis his Duty to perform it, for the Reasons already suggested.

But all these Laws of the Church, whatever our Opinion may be of their Inconsistency with the Laws of Christ, or however we may be excused from an *Active* compliance with them, we are certainly obliged *Passively* to obey; Because we are obliged to obey our lawful Superiors as far as we can do it without Sin; and submitting to the Penalties of these Laws is not a Sin against any Command of Christ. Neither can this be esteem'd an unreasonable hardship upon the Subject; for no more is imposed on the Subject in his Station, than obliges the Ruler in his. As the Ruler is obliged to submit to any present Inconveniences that may attend the Performance of his Duty, so is the Subject obliged to submit to any that may attend the Performance of his. And since Christ has appointed Rulers in his Visible Church, with Authority to prescribe to Mens *External* Observance such Rules as shall appear to Them agreeable to Christ's Laws, whenever they act according to this Commission, they do their Duty, and obey a Law of Christ: And whatever Law they have Authority to enact, They have also Authority to Execute in the Punishment of those who offend against it: And in what-

ever case They have Authority to Punish, their Subjects are obliged to submit to their Inflictions, since (as I observ'd) the Subjection required from the Inferiors is always exactly proportion'd to the Authority of the Superiors.

This Submission is indeed necessary to the very Being of the Church, as a *Visible Society*; For if the Laws of the Church are null and void as to all *External Obligation* as often as any Person thinks them not agreeable to the Laws of Christ, They can never be executed upon any Offender at all; for 'tis but his saying, he thinks them repugnant to Christ's Laws, and upon this Supposition he is intirely exempted from their Power. And in this his Word is always to be taken, since no human Scrutiny can judge whether his Persuasion be real or pretended: So that in the Event here will be *Rulers* without any *Authority*, and *Laws* without any *Obligation* (i. e.) there will be neither Rulers nor Laws, but all will be equal, and every one left to do what is right in his own Eyes, and consequently there will be no *visible Society* at all, since a *visible Society* cannot be conceived, without an Obligation to some *Social Laws*, and a Magistracy to enforce and execute these Laws. If therefore the Church be a *visible Society*, the Magistrates and Officers of this Society must have Authority to require an *External Obedience* to the Laws of it, and the Subjects must be obliged *externally* to obey these Laws: either to perform  
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the Action requir'd, or submit to the Penalties imposed ; since this Society cannot subsist without either an *Active* or *Passive* Obedience to the *Laws* of it. Either therefore we must say that the Church is not a *visible* Society instituted by Christ, but an arbitrary Combination of Men to be dissolved at Pleasure ; or else, we must acknowledge that every Christian is bound in Conscience to pay this Submission to the Governours of it, which is so necessary to the very Being of such a Society.

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### CHAP. XI.

*Of the Obedience due to the Jurisdiction of the Church, and of the external Effect of the Penalties inflicted by it.*

WITH respect to the *Jurisdiction* of the Church, the *Limitation* of the Subjects Obedience is also to be determin'd by the *Extent* of that *Judicial Authority* committed to the Rulers of it. Two Points seem especially to offer themselves to us in this Inquiry.

- I. How far the Subject is obliged to *submit* to the *Sentence* of his Superiors.
- II. How far he is *affected* by the *Penalties* which they inflict.



As to the *First*, where the Superiors take upon them to censure Actions which are not submitted to their Cognifance, or to inflict fuch kind of Penalties as they have no Authority to inflict ; the Subject cannot properly be bound by their Sentence.

Thus for instance shou'd the *Ecclesiastical* Ruler take cognifance of an Offence purely *Civil*, or inflict *Civil* Penalties on an Offence purely *Ecclesiastical*, unless he has received a Delegation of fuch Power from the Civil Magistrate ; The Inquiry is *coram non Judice*, and the whole Procefs upon it is null and illegal : And the Subject without breach of any Duty he owes to his *Ecclesiastical* Superiors may appeal for Relief to the *Secular* Power, to whom the Cognifance of his Cause properly belongs, and to whom both he and his *Ecclesiastical* Superiors are in this respect equally subject.

But where the Action falls properly within the Cognifance of the Rulers, and the Penalties which they adjudge are of fuch a Nature as, by their Original Power and by the Direction of their Law, They have Authority to inflict ; tho' the Person may be really Innocent of the Crime alledg'd againft him, yet if the publick Evidence of his Guilt appears greater than the Proof of his Innocence, The Judge, who is obliged to proceed *fecundum allegata & probata*, do's him no Injury in inflicting the Penalties of the Law upon him : He has had the advantage of the utmost Provision that  
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## Church of CHRIST. 101

can be made for Innocence in any human Judicatory, and is obliged to submit to the Sentence. He has indeed a Right to all farther Appeals for the Re-examination of his Cause, which the Subordinations of Power in that Society will admit : But if in the ultimate Resort of Inquiry, the Sentence against him is affirm'd, He is obliged to acquiesce in it ; Because without this Submission, 'tis impossible any Government can subsist, or any Laws be executed.

And this is no more than must be asserted, with respect to all Judicature, as well *Civil* as *Ecclesiastical*. If, upon the last Result of Inquiry, the Innocence of the Person arraign'd do's not Appear, the Judge is obliged to proceed to Sentence, and the Person to submit to it. For if the inward Conscioufness of Innocence were allow'd in either Judicature to Arrest the Sentence, no one cou'd ever be condemn'd, and consequently no Government administer'd, And since the Evil is less that a Person really Innocent, tho' he cannot be proved so, shou'd suffer, than that all the Ends of Government shou'd be defeated, It must be concluded that he is bound to submit and undergo the Penalty denounced.

It remains to be inquired, *Secondly*, How far He is *affected* by these *Penalties*.

It is to be observ'd, That since we here consider the Person only under the Character of

a Member of the *Visible* Church, we are concern'd only to inquire how far the Sentence of his Ecclesiastical Judges affects him under that Character; or in other Words, How far their Excommunication cuts him off from his Relation to that Society.

That he who obstinately refuses to submit to the Just Authority of the Church, or is unreclaim'd by the Censures of it, is by Excommunication effectually cut off from that Society, is evident from our Lord's Determination, *If He hear not the Church let him be an Heathen Man and a Publican.* For in this Case He is not only an Offender against the Laws of this Community, but a Rebel against the Government of it, and sets up another Authority in opposition to it, and is in the same condition with One who voluntarily departs from this Society and renounces the Authority of it, and consequently can no longer be reputed a Subject of it.

But He who for any real or apparent Offence against the Laws of the Church stands Excommunicated by the Censure of it, If He do's not join himself to any Society opposite to this, but quietly submits to the Censure, and still acknowledges the Authority of his proper Governours and Pastors, and desires their Absolution; This Man is not effectually cut off from the Society, but only excluded from a present Participation of the Rights and Privileges of it: And the Reasons of this Assertion must appear from what I before  
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observ'd, That He who *submits* to the Penalties of the Law do's in some Sense *obey* it, at least acknowledges himself Subject to the Authority that Enacts and Executes it; and consequently is not cut off from all Relation to the Society to which that Authority belongs. And agreeably *St. Paul* commands us *not to count such a Person as an Enemy but admonish him as a Brother* (a). As a wither'd Member is still a Part of the Body, tho' under a present Incapacity to partake of the Spirits and active Influences that used to be derived to it; So is He still a Member of the Visible Church, tho' at present suspended from the Privileges of it: And the Discipline of the Church when apply'd to such a Person, is intended principally to *restore* and *recover* him: But when applied to an obstinate incorrigible Offender, who refuses to submit to its Authority and puts himself in Rebellion against it; 'tis an intire *Amputation*, and not so much design'd to be a Benefit to the Offender, as to preserve the other Members from Contagion. That the Person *Absolv'd* by the Church is restored to its Communion in the same proportion as by the Sentence of the Church he is excluded from it, I may leave as a Conclusion that wants no Proof.

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(a) 2 *Thess.* iii. 5.

## C H A P. XII.

## Of the Internal Effect of the Censures or Absolution of the Church.

**T**H O' our Inquiry into the Character of a Member of Christ's Visible Church, with respect to the Jurisdiction vested in the Rulers of it, do's not oblige us to consider any other Effect of their Sentence or Absolution than the Exclusion of the Offender from the external Communion and Privileges of that Society, or his Re-admittance to them; yet because great Part of the Disputes on this Subject of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction have been about the internal Effects of the Censures or Absolution of the Church, It will be expected we shou'd consider them with relation to these Effects.

Now when the Governours of the Church extend their Censures to Actions that do not fall within their Cognisance, or mistake in the Application of their Power, and Excommunicate a Person really Innocent, or grant Absolution to one who is not truly Penitent, or refuse it to one who truly is, That the Internal state of the Man is not at all affected by such Exercise of their Power, I shall look upon as a Conclusion agreed to by all Parties concern'd in this Dispute. For 'tis I think universally acknowledged, that He who is  
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thus Excommunicated, or to whom Absolution is thus refused, if no other guilt hinder, is nevertheless an upright Person in the Sight of God and a faithful Member of Christ: And that He who is thus unduly Absolv'd is nevertheless a Sinner.

The Questions then to be resolv'd are, Whether the Absolutions of the Church *properly applied* convey God's Pardon, or are either necessary or effectual Means to obtain it? and Whether the Censures of the Church *rightly applied* do retain our *inward* Guilt, and expose us to the *eternal* Penalties of Sin? I shall treat these without Distinction, because the Censures and Absolutions of the Church, both as to their Extent and Effects, are exactly proportion'd to each other; and whatever is an Answer to one Question, will be found applicable to the other. Now,

The Actions censured by the Church may be consider'd as Sins against *God*,

- I. As They are Offences against those Laws of Christ which require Obedience to the Just *Authority* of the Church.
- II. As They are Offences against some *Special* Law of Christ concerning Faith or Morality.

1. That He who disobeys the *Rulers* of the Church in the just Exercise of their Authority offends against a *Law* of Christ and is guilty of Sin before him, has I hope been already

already proved, and therefore beside the *special* Crime for which He is censured, this is a distinct Sin, and must be atoned for by a particular Repentance; and since this is not only an Offence against God, but also an Injury to the just Rights of his lawful Superiors, his Repentance cannot be sincere unless he endeavours to reconcile himself to *them*; and consequently he will not be forgiven by God, unless he obtains, or by all due Humiliations endeavours to obtain the Forgiveness and Absolution of the Church, whom he has offended. For if in any *private* Injury it is a necessary Part of our Repentance, and therefore a Condition of God's Forgiveness, to sue for the Pardon of him whom we have offended; no Reason can be given why it should not be equally necessary, in order to obtain God's Absolution from our Tresspasses against the Rulers of his Church, to apply for, and desire their Absolution. The Absolution therefore of the Church, or a sincere Desire of it, and Application for it, is necessary to obtain from God the Remission of all our Offences against the *Authority of the Church*. And since all *external* and *visible* Violations of God's Laws are Offences against the *Authority of the Church*, by whose Laws they are forbid, and by whose Discipline, whenever it is duly executed, they are censured; these Reasons oblige every one who is guilty of *external visible* Violations of God's Laws, to consider himself

as a Debtor or Trespasser against the Church, and consequently to desire and apply for her Forgiveness as a Part of his Repentance necessary to obtain the Forgiveness of God. But

2dly, I conceive the Disputes upon this Question have usually turn'd upon another view of it, and that the Thing principally inquir'd is not whether the Remission of the Church or Application for it be necessary to obtain the Forgiveness of God for Injuries done to the *Rights* and *Authority* of the Church; But whether the Absolution of the Church is a Means or Condition of our Reconciliation to God for the special Offence committed against *him*: Or in other Words, Whether the *Censure* of the Church puts us any more under God's Displeasure, than the *special Sin* we have committed and not repented does without her Censure; or the *Absolution* of the Church from such Sin restores us more to his Favour, than our sincere Repentance would do without her Absolution.

As to the *Censures* of the Church, I before observed, That the Authority of the visible Rulers, with respect to the *eternal* Penalties of Sin, was declaratory, but not *judicial* or *executive*; and consequently tho' they may and ought to *declare*, that if the Person be really as guilty of those Sins for which They censure him as he appears to be, He is in a State of Damnation, and that their Sentence  
upon



upon him here, will be follow'd by a much heavier Infliction in the World to come; yet he is not put in that State by *virtue* of that *Sentence*, but by the *Guilt* of his *unrepented Sin*, which would render him obnoxious to Damnation without that *Sentence*.

So likewise, though the *Absolution* of the Church be a full Release and Acknowledgment of Satisfaction for the Injury offered to the *Church*, and the Penitent be obliged to apply for it as a necessary Part of his Repentance for that Injury; and though it be farther confessed, that the *Prayers* and *Intercessions* which are joined with the Absolution of the Church, and the *Ordinances* to which it restores us, are properly Means of Grace and Reconciliation to God; yet it does not appear that the *judicial* Act of the Churches Absolution, does by any *Efficacy* of its own remit the Sentence of God against the *special Sin* committed: In short, neither, that 'tis a *necessary Condition*, or it self an *effectual Means* of obtaining God's Pardon for such Sin.

1<sup>st</sup>, That it is neither when administred or withheld *Clave Errante*, is not disputed: And that even when the Power is rightly exercised, It was not in the Opinion of the Primitive Church a *necessary Condition* of God's Pardon, appears from the Answer of *Acesius* the *Novatian* Bishop before *Constantine* in Defence of their Tenet; that Apostates, who they presumed had sinned the *Sin unto Death*, were not to be restored, *viz.* " That they did not intend  
" this

## Church of CHRIST. 109

“ this in Prejudice to their Salvation: No, they  
“ left them to God, though they did not  
“ think them fit to be reconciled to the  
“ Church (a).” For though this be a Decla-  
tation of Hereticks, yet since 'tis given by  
them as a Defence of their Opinion from a  
Charge of Heterodoxy, it proves rather more  
strongly than the Assertion of any one Or-  
thodox could do, that it was the known  
Doctrine of the Church, that every one who  
was excluded from the *Absolution of the*  
*Church*, was not therefore excluded from the  
*Mercy of God*. For they could not be so  
absurd as to attempt to excuse one Error,  
by shewing, that it was agreeable to another:  
And the learned *Grotius* affirms this to have  
been the Doctrine of the earliest Ages of the  
Church. *Vetustissimi Christianorum in Idolo-*  
*latriam Homicidium aut Adulterium lapsos*  
*Dei quidem misericordiae commendabant non*  
*tamen ut ad Communionem admitterent (a)*.  
We may therefore conclude, that the Absolu-  
tion of the Church is not a *necessary Condition*  
of God's Pardon. Neither,

2dly, Is it an *effectual Means* of obtaining  
it. That it is not a *natural Means* needs no  
Proof; and if it be an *instituted Means*, that  
Institution must clearly appear in Scripture.  
The Places which are presum'd to imply this,

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(a) *Socrat. Eccl. Hist. i. 10. Sozom. i. 22. In Mat. xviii. 22.*

(b) *Grot. Com.*

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are *Mat. 18. 19. Whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven; and John 20. 23. Whose soever Sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.* Now supposing the former Passage not to relate to the *Legislature* of the Church, as it probably did, but to the *Jurisdiction*; and that the Sense of *St. John*, as explain'd by *St. Matthew*, may be express'd thus, *Whose soever Sins ye remit on Earth, they are remitted in Heaven*; it is not pretended that these Words are to be understood *absolutely*, or without this *Limitation*, that the Person be *truly penitent* for his Sins; and the Import of them even as placed in this View, seems to be fully express'd in this Paraphrase; "Whomsoever you absolve from the external Offence he has committed, and from the Injury he has offer'd to that Authority I have committed to you; If his Repentance be as sincere and perfect, as from outward Signs it appears to you; You are hereby Authorized to declare, that he is pardon'd by God, and his Sin against him is remitted in Heaven." This Exposition seems to comprehend the full Import of the Words, as restrain'd by a *Limitation* which all Parties acknowledge necessary, and the Doctrine which results from it is free from Exception: Whereas the other Interpretation, which makes the Forgiveness of God to follow as an *Effect* of the Absolution of the Church, is attended with Difficulties to me at least inextricable. For if the Absolution  
of

## Church of CHRIST. III

of the Church, which is an *external Act*, be thus *effectual* to procure God's Pardon; It will come within the Definition of a *Sacrament* given by our Church: It will be an *Outward and visible Sign of an inward and spiritual Grace, ordained by Christ himself, as a Means whereby we receive the same, and a Pledge to assure us thereof.* It is not denied that God may make an *outward Act* and the *Ministration of Men* effectual Means of Grace, Pardon, and Regeneration; for such are the *Sacraments, instituted Means of Grace, outward Acts* to which the *Ministration of Men* is necessary, and yet by the *Appointment of God* effectual Means of Grace. But we say, that if the *external Act* of the Churches *Absolution* is *effectual*, in the manner sometimes contended for, to convey or assure the Pardon and Remission of God; It is a *sacramental Act*, and will come within the Definition of a *Sacrament* given by our Church: And since our Church acknowledges but *two Sacraments*, this is a *Doctrine* which she cannot own.

That the *Prayers* offer'd to God in behalf of the Penitent, by the *Ministers* of his Church, will prevail with a special Efficacy for the Remission of his Sin against God; and that 'tis the Duty of the Penitent to desire their *Prayers*, are evident Conclusions from that Passage of *St. James* before cited: But in offering these *Prayers*, the *Ministers* do not act as *Judges*, but as *Intercessours*. And the *Obscurity* that has usually attended Disputes

on this Subject, seems principally to have been occasioned by Men's not distinguishing the several Branches of the *sacerdotal* Office, which are exercised together with the *judicial* Authority of the Church. The publick Officers of the Church as *Teachers*, Declare, according to the external Signs of Repentance that appear in the Offender, that his Sin is either *retained* or *forgiven* by God. As *Priests* and *Intercessours*, they offer up *Prayers* to God for the Penitent, and to these Prayers a special Efficacy is promised: But as *Judges* they only inflict, or remit those *external* Penalties, which attend the Action as an Offence against the Laws of the Church.

Upon the whole, since it appears, by the former Argument taken from the Consideration of the Injury offer'd to the *Rights* and *Authority* of the Church by every *external* Transgression of God's Laws, that 'tis a necessary Part of our *Repentance* for every *outward* Sin to apply to the Church for her Pardon and Reconciliation; this one Argument proves the Duty of the Subject to sue for the Churches *Absolution*, and the Importance of it to his Salvation: And if the Practice be acknowledg'd necessary, it seems not very material to dispute upon what Reasons it should be confess'd to be so. And as to the Comfort and Satisfaction of the Penitent, he who receives the Absolution of the Church from a Persuasion, that 'tis *necessary* to his *Repentance*, will find the same spiri-  
tual

## Church of CHRIST. 113

tual Consolation, and the same Confidence towards God from it, as if he believed it *effectual to his Pardon*; since under either Hypothesis the Hopes of the Penitent from the Absolution of the Church can be assured only by the *internal Sincerity of his Repentance*: The former represents it as an *effectual Means* to convey God's Pardon, if it be accompanied with *Repentance*: The latter confesses ~~the Absolution of the Church as a necessary condition of obtaining it~~ <sup>the Absolution of the Church as a desire of it, to be a necessary condition of obtaining God's Pardon</sup> as a Part of his *Repentance*. And so far as the Offender is sincere in the discharge of that Duty, so far and no farther does either Persuasion encourage him to rely on the Favour and Reconciliation of God.

I hope nothing that has been offered on this Subject will appear to dissuade Men from a due Reverence for the *Jurisdiction* of the Church. The Censures of our lawful Superiors ought to be terrible to every good Christian, as Convictions of our Offence against an Authority derived from Christ: As a *Declaration* of our Guides and Pastors, *who watch for our Souls* and are the proper Judges of our outward Behaviour, That they see no Signs of true Repentance in us; That they think us in a State of Guilt and Sin against God; and as they exclude us from the most comfortable Participation of Christ's Ordinances: And their *Absolution* ought to be sued for with Prayers and Tears as a necessary Expression of our Repentance, and received with a spiritual Joy as an Evidence

of their Reconciliation to us, and that in their Judgment the Signs of a true penitent Charity appear in us. And though the *sacerdotal Absolution* be not it self, or as a *judicial Act*, an *effectual* Conveyance of God's Pardon to us, or a Remission of any but those *external* Penalties inflicted by the Church: Yet the *Prayers* that accompany it, and the Use of those *Ordinances* to which it restores us, are Means of great Efficacy with God, for procuring his Forgiveness of the Sin against him, and Remission of the eternal Penalties due to it; and with respect to these Attendants on it the Absolution it self may, in a remote and improper Sense, be said to be a Means of conveying to us God's Pardon.

I shall only observe here farther, that these Notions of the sacerdotal Absolution are agreeable to the Determinations of some of the best Heads among the Schoolmen themselves.

So *Alex. ab Hales. Potestas clavium extendit se ad culpam delendam; sed per modum Deprecantis & Impetrantis absolutionem, non per modum Impertientis (a)*. And again---*Secundum primum modum potest (sacerdos) Gratiam impetrare, & ad hoc est Idoneus; secundum secundum modum potest Ecclesie reconciliare (b)*. And in another Place, *Pœna æterna a Deo*

(a) *Alex. ab Hales. Par. 4. Q. 21. Mem. 1.*

(b) *Ibid.*

*tantum,*

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*tantum, qui Infinitæ est virtutis, quiq; solus culpam delet, remitti potest, & nullatenus a sacerdote vel Clavibus (a). And so Scotus; Aper-te ostenditur quod Deus ipse Pœnitentem absol-vit a debito pœnæ. Non ergo per sacerdotem, cui confitetur, ab irâ eternâ liberatur, sed per Dominum. And, Solus ergo Deus hominem in-terius mundat a peccati macula, et a debito æternæ pœnæ solvit (b). And Bonaventure (c), though he expresses himself somewhat differently, yet in effect he asserts the same Thing: he affirms, indeed, that the Priest re-leases the Penitent from the Penalties affixed by God to Sin. But when he comes to ex-plain himself he determines, that this Remif-sion cannot extend to any future Pains of Sin, but only to temporal Inflictions of the Church; which, in support of his former Assertion, he makes to be a Part of God's Sentence, and the Execution of his Law a-gainst Sin.*

From this Mistake indeed, That the vi-sible Rulers of the Church are impowered to execute God's Laws against Sin, that Opini-on seems to have taken its Rise, that the Cen-sures of the Church put the Criminal in a State of Damnation. For the Penalty of transgres-sing God's Laws being expressly declared to be Damnation, it appear'd to follow as a

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(a) *Ibid.* Q. 21. Memb. 2. (b) Scot. in L. 4. Sentent. Distinct. 18.  
(c) Bonav in Lib. 4. Sentent. Distinct. 18.



necessary Consequence, that if the Rulers of the Church were impower'd to *execute* God's Laws, they could adjudge the Offender to the *Penalty* of them, *viz.* Damnation; but the Penalties inflicted by the Rulers of the Church, are not (as I before observ'd) inflicted in Execution of God's Laws, but their own. The Authority to make these Laws, and to inflict these Penalties, they receiv'd from God; but when they inflict these Penalties, they do not *execute*, but *obey* a Law of God.

As when the Magistrate of a subordinate Corporation in any Civil State executes any *By-Law* of that Corporation on those who transgress it; the Authority to make such *By-Laws*, and to inflict such certain *Penalties* on those who offend against them, is derived from the Prince or Supreme Power in that State; but when he inflicts these Penalties, he does not execute a Law of the *Prince*, but *his own* or the *Corporation's* Law.

And the Rise of that Opinion, *That the Sacerdotal Absolution cleanses the inward Guilt, and remits the eternal Penalties of Sin*, is very probably accounted for by Dr. Field (a). He affirms from good Authority, that Absolution in the Primitive Church was nothing else but restoring Men under the Displeasure of the Church to the

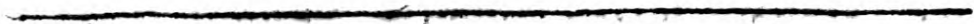
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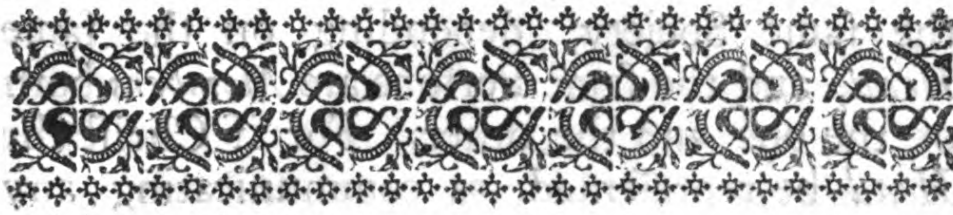
(a) Dr. Field of the Church, p. 338. Edit. 3.

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Churches Peace again, and that *Absolution* was not given in those Times 'till *Penance* was first perform'd. But in Times of Persecution or Pestilence, or when the Person was in any other imminent Danger of suddain Death, the Priests were permitted to reconcile all who were under the Censures of the Church, upon a Promise, that if they lived they should give the Church Satisfaction by open Penance. For in such Circumstances they were consider'd, *tanquam in Articulo mortis*, in which Case an Indulgence was insert'd in the greater Part of the Sentences of the Church for immediate Absolution. Hence, as he observes, it came in time to be an ordinary Custom to give Absolution first, and impose Penance to be perform'd afterwards. Now, because it could not be conceiv'd from what this Absolution freed Men not subject to any Censure of the Church, some began to think, that it freed them from the Stain of Sin, and from the Eternal Punishments due to it.







P A R T III.  
Of the *Harmony and Agreement*  
Between the  
*Visible and Invisible* CHURCH.



C H A P. I.

*Of this Agreement in General.*



THAT the Idea we form of the Church of Christ when we consider it under the Denomination of *Visible*, or with respect to its external Constitution as an *outward* Society, ought not to include in it any thing inconsistent with the Idea we form of it under the Denomination of *Invisible*, or as *Internally* united with and depending on Christ, is most certain; because these Ideas are

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are supposed to represent to us but one and the same Society, depending on the same *Head*, and the same Persons are *Members* both of the one and the other. For if Christ the *Head* be represented, as communicating any Powers to his *Visible* Church, which are inconsistent with that Supremacy with which he is acknowledged to preside over the *Invisible*, He must appear as *dividing his Kingdom against it self*; and these two Terms will express, not only two distinct, but two opposite Societies. And so, if any Duty be required of the Subject under one Character, which is contrary to the Obligations he is under from the other, These Characters are render'd inconsistent; and He who is a Member of the *Visible* Church, cannot also be a Member of the *Invisible*; since no Man can discharge the Duties of two inconsistent Relations. But on the contrary, The Scripture has represented these two Ideas under which we conceive this Society, as agreeing in a perfect Harmony with each other. With respect to *Christ the Head*, as by the Influence of his *Holy Spirit*, He solely and immediately presides over his *Invisible* Church; so we are assured that the same (a) *Spirit* attends the *external* Ordinances and Administrations of the *Visible* Church, and is derived to the faithful by the Participation of them. By which

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(a) 1 Cor. xii. 13. 1 Tim. iv. 16. 2 Tim. i. 6.

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Intercourse, as by a common Bond, the *Visible* and *Invisible* Church are connected to each other. And with respect to the *Members* of this Society Christ hath expressly told us, That the Initiation into his *Visible* Church by the *external* Rite of *Baptism*; a Participation of the *Lord's Supper*; and a publick *Profession of the Christian Faith*, are necessary Conditions of our *internal* Union with Him, and our Title to all the Privileges of the Gospel. Of the *First* He assures us, (a) *That he who believeth and is Baptized shall be saved.* Of the *Second*, That (b) *Except we eat his Flesh, and drink his Blood, we have no life in us.* Of the *Last*, (c) *That by the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation*; and it is plain that the *Belief*, which in the Scripture before refer'd to He requires as necessary to *Baptism*, and of which He affirms, that *He who believeth not shall be damned*, implies, not only an Inward Assent of the Mind, but also an oral and verbal Profession of Faith; because it is such a Faith as the *Ministers* of the Church, to whom the *Baptism* to be given upon this Faith is committed, cou'd be Judges of; and consequently it must be an open and verbal Declaration of Faith. Thus far therefore the Duties required from us as Members of the *Visible* Church, are not only consistent with, but necessary Conditions of our being

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(a) *Mar. xvi. 16.* (b) *Joh. vi. 53.* (c) *Rom. x. 10.*

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admitted or continuing Members of the *Invisible*.

If we consider the *Members* of the Church in their relative Characters, as distinguished into *Superiors* and *Inferiors*; all the *Powers* which are claim'd to the one, and the *Duties* which are assign'd to the other, as Members of the *Visible* Church, will be found consistent with their Duty to Christ as *Head*, and the *Liberties* they are intitled to as *Members* of the *Invisible*: But because this has been principally disputed, this is what I think my self more especially concern'd to prove.

Now the same Scriptures which plainly teach us, That as we are *internally* related and united to Christ, we are to regard Him as our sole *Teacher* and sole *Law-giver*, &c; with equal clearness affirm, That Christ has ordained his Church to be a *Visible* Society, and has placed certain Officers in it, with *Authority* of *Doctrine*, *Rule*, &c. and required his Disciples, according to their Stations, either to exercise or submit to such an *Authority*. We cannot therefore doubt but that these Relations, and the Duties which flow from them, are consistent with each other; Because we are assured, that the Scripture hath not assign'd us any *Powers*, or injoyn'd us any *Duties* in one Precept, which it hath absolutely forbidden in another: And consequently that we may perform our Duty as *good Subjects* to Christ, and as *internally* related to him, and yet submit our selves to those  
whom

## Church of CHRIST. 123

whom He hath appointed to Rule over us, as Members of his *Visible* Church, Nay since our Submission to these Rulers is required by a Command of Christ, we are bound, as his Immediate Subjects, to obey this Command: And if we will approve our selves as acceptable Subjects of his *Invisible* Church, to be dutiful Members of his *Visible*.

In themselves therefore, and according to the Institution of Christ, these two Characters and the Duties founded on them, are as reconcileable to one another, as it is to obey the *King as Supreme*, and *Magistrates as those who are sent by him*, and act by his Commission. All the Question is, Whether the Powers *ordinarily* claim'd by the *visible* Officers of the Church, do not exceed the Boundaries prescribed to them by Christ. For if the *Subordinate* Powers claim an Independency on the *Supreme*, or pretend the Authority of his Commission for injoyning Actions which He hath expressly forbidden, These Powers become then Inconsistent; and he who will obey the one, cannot also obey the other. Or if the *Subordinate* Magistrate takes upon him to command Actions which he hath no Authority to command, or to prohibit what he hath no Authority to prohibit, He is guilty of Usurpation upon the *Liberties* of the Subject. This is what is objected against the *visible* Officers of Christ's Church. It is pretended, that the Powers claim'd by them are so *extended*, as to be inconsistent with the *Supremacy* of Christ,



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Christ, and the *Rights* and *Liberties* of his Disciples.

Now in the preceeding Parts of this Discourse, I have endeavour'd to shew what are the Powers reserved to himself by Christ, as the *Supreme Invisible Head of his Church*; and what Authority he hath delegated to his *Ministers*, for the Order and OEconomy of his *Visible Church*: And accordingly, what Duties He requires from us, as we are *immediately subject* to Him; and what Obedience we owe to his *Officers* and *Ministers*, as Members of that *Visible Society* which He hath appointed. In stating the Supremacy of Christ as *Head*, and the Rights or Duties of his Disciples as *Members* of the *Invisible Church*, I have allowed all that hath been asserted by those whose Conclusions I oppose, one Proposition only excepted; Viz. *That whatsoever we do from a full Persuasion of Mind is acceptable to Christ*: As to the main Points of this Inquiry,---The sole and immediate Authority of Christ as *Teacher, Law-giver, &c.* The Equality of all Christians as *Members* of the *Invisible Church, &c.* I will suppose we are pretty well agreed. I then consider'd the Powers vested in the *Rulers* of the *Visible Church*, which I hope will appear the same that are claim'd to them, by the Doctrine and Constitution of the *Church of England*: And if it can be shewn, that these *Powers* are not inconsistent with the *Supremacy* of Christ; nor the *Obedience* demanded  
to

to them, any Abridgment of the *Rights* and *Liberties* of his Disciples, we may hope to come to some Agreement in this Point also.

Now since I have endeavour'd to prove, that all the Authority ascribed to the *visible Rulers* of the Church, is either derived to them by the express Institution of Christ and his Apostles, or evidently implied in the Nature of those Powers which are vested in them by that Institution; I might presume, that in consequence of what has been already offer'd, it must appear, that the Authority asserted to the *visible Rulers* of the Church, cannot be inconsistent with the *Authority* reserved to himself by Christ, or the *Liberties* which He hath left his Disciples. All that can be objected in bar to this Inference, is that the Scriptures whence we argue are not truly interpreted. It is not I think pretended that these Scriptures are not, in an obvious Construction, capable of the Meaning we assign them; For it is well known that thus they have been understood in all Ages of the Church; but our Interpretation is therefore objected to, because the *Powers* we ascribe to the *Rulers* of the Church in consequence of it, are inconsistent with that *Supremacy* of Christ, and those *Liberties* of his Disciples, which we acknowledge to be clearly asserted in other Scriptures. It will not therefore be necessary to re-consider the several Places we have alledg'd, but our Interpretation, and the Doctrine rais'd from it, will stand free from

Obje-

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Objection, If it can be shewn, that all the *Authority* placed in the *visible* Officers of the Church is perfectly consistent with the *Supremacy* of Christ: And that the *Submission* claim'd to this *Authority*, may very well consist with the *Rights* and *Liberties* of Christians. That this may more fully appear, it will be of use to place these Powers and Duties in a nearer View to each other, and consider particularly whether they are so irreconcilable as has been pretended: And I must desire the Reader, to pardon such necessary Repetitions as this Review will oblige me to.

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### C H A P. II.

*That the Powers assign'd to the Rulers of the Visible Church are consistent with the Supremacy of Christ.*

**A**ND *First*, Let us consider whether the Powers claim'd to the *Visible* Rulers of Christ's Church, are inconsistent with that *Authority* which He hath reserved to himself.

That Christ did not leave his Disciples in a State of perfect Equality, but appointed some to be Superiors over others, I shall look upon as already proved: And I presume it will not be denied, that whatever Power Christ hath

hath actually delegated to them is, in general, consistent with that Authority which He hath reserv'd to Himself. The Objection therefore must lie against the *Extent* ascribed to their Commission. Now the Powers assign'd Them were,

- I. An Authority to *Teach* and Exhort Men to believe the Truths, and Practise the Duties of the Gospel.
- II. An Authority to minister in the Public Offices and Ordinances of Religion.
- III. An Authority to make *Laws* for the External behaviour of Christians. And,
- IV. To *Punish* Offenders against those Laws.

But in the Exercise of all these Powers, They are limited to *Teach* or *Prescribe* nothing that is contrary to the Doctrines, or the Laws of Christ; To administer no *Ordinances* but what He has Instituted; and to Inflict no *Penalties* but Suspension, or Exclusion from the *external* Privileges of the Church.

On the other side the Authority reserv'd to Christ, is the sole Power of prescribing an adequate Rule to the Faith or Practice of his Servants; The sole Power of instituting Ordinances in his Church, The sole Power of obliging the *conscience* and *Internal* obedience of Men by his Laws; And of inflicting the *Spiritual* and *Eternal* Penalties of Sin on the Transgressors of them. And one wou'd think there needs no more, than barely to set these Powers the  
one

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one by the other, to shew not only the Consistency, but the perfect Agreement and Subserviency of the one to the other. The same Rule, and no other, which Christ hath prescribed to the Faith and Actions of his Disciples, doth the Church claim Authority to Preach and inculcate. The same Ordinances, and no other, that Christ has instituted do's the Church claim Authority to administer. What the Laws of Christ have injoyn'd on the *Conscience*, That and nothing else do's the Church require to be *Externally* perform'd, as a necessary Duty. And what Christ hath declared He will *Eternally* punish, on that are the Governours of the Church allowed to shew their Resentment in *Temporary* Inflictions. And so far as an Obligation to the *External* performance leads Men to a Sense of their *Internal* Duty, so far do the Laws of the Church further and promote Mens Obedience to the Laws of Christ. But let us consider these Powers more distinctly.

1. That the Commission given by Christ to the Rulers of his Church, to *Teach* and *Instruct* others, implies some Authority cannot be denied by any who own Them to be at all distinguish'd from other Christians by their Commission. And since in the Exercise of this *Authority* we acknowledge them restrain'd to Preach no other Doctrines but those taught by Christ and his Apostles, it is evident we ascribe to them no *Power* but what is consistent with the *Supremacy* of Christ.

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So far as They exceed this *Commission*, They are confest to have no *Authority*: And while They act within the Limits of It, They can no more be said to usurp upon the Authority of Christ, than an Embassador, who punctually delivers his Message, usurps upon the Authority of the Prince who sent him. What weight there may be in that Objection, form'd against the Authority of this Office, from the Power of *Interpretation* implied in it, since it equally affects the Legislature of the Church, shall be consider'd under that Head.

2. That Christ is our only *Priest*, who cou'd offer up a sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction for our Sin to God, the sole *Mediator* and *Intercessor*, who can effectually intercede for us with his Father and prevail for Success and Acceptance to our Prayers, we readily own. But this is no way inconsistent with the Acknowledgment of an *External Visible* Priesthood, appointed to minister in his Name in such *external Ordinances* as He has prescribed to his Church on Earth, to offer up the *Prayers* of his Servants to God in his Name, and in his Name to *Intercede* for them: Because tho' the ultimate Success of our Prayers with God, and the Efficacy of these Ordinances to derive on us the Graces promised in them depends on the Mediation and Intercession of Christ, yet we may reasonably believe and teach that He will be especially prevail'd on to intercede for this Success to our Prayers when they are offer'd in the manner He has directed,

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directed, and by the Ministry of these Persons whom He has appointed to offer them ; That without any disrespect to Christ, we may in all our Exigences desire their Prayers and Intercessions for us, because He has by his Apostle directed us to *call for these Elders to pray for us*, and promised a special Regard to their Intercessions ; and that the Ordinances He has prescribed will more effectually procure us the Graces annex'd to them when administer'd by Persons appointed to that Office, tho' 'tis acknowledged that Christ alone can confer these Graces. And I beg leave to observe, That tho' the internal Qualifications of the *Receiver* are more usually insisted on as necessary Conditions of rendring the Ordinances of Religion effectual Means of Grace ; yet the Authority of the *Person* who *administers* them, is not a mere *Nicety* and *Trifle* : For as *King James the First* judiciously determin'd in the *Hampton-Court Conference*, tho' the Call of the Minister be not of the Essence of the *Sacrament*, yet 'tis of the Essence of the *Administration*. And 'tis certain any Person may, with just the same Authority, take upon him to Institute new Sacraments in the Christian Church, and pretend to convey Graces by them, as He can take upon Him to administer those instituted by Christ without a regular Commission to do it. And therefore with respect to the Point before us the *Usurpation on Christ's Authority*, He only usurps upon the Supremacy of Christ who assumes  
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a Power of either instituting new Sacraments in his Church, or administering those instituted without being call'd to it according to his Appointment. But He who only Administers those which Christ has instituted according to his Prescription, and in Obedience to a regular Commission which He has receiv'd for this Office, do's not oppose the Authority of Christ but obey it:

3. In the Legislative Authority ascribed to the Church was included a Power to prescribe such Actions, or such *Modes* or *Circumstances* of Actions as are left *Indifferent*, (i. e.) neither commanded nor forbidden by Christ. That this Power belongs to Them, I have endeavour'd to prove, from the general Commissions given them to provide for *Decency*, *Order*, and *Edification*, by prescribing such external indifferent Observances, as they shall judge conducive to these Ends. That, in the *Matter* of such Rules, they do not contradict any Law of Christ it is plain; because the Things which they prescribe are supposed to be neither commanded nor forbidden by his Law. It must also be confest, That in judging of the Fitness and Expediency of such Prescriptions to these Ends, They do not usurp upon any Authority which Christ hath reserv'd to himself; because Christ hath not reserv'd this Judgment to Himself, but left it to their Discretion: And since whatever promotes Decency, Order, and Edification, tends also to quicken and diffuse *internal Religion*,



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thro' the Assembly; This Power, thus applied, is not only consistent with the Authority of Christ, but very much promotes the Influence of it.

Farther it was affirm'd, That whatever *external* Ordinances or Actions Christ hath positively injoin'd on the Observance of his Disciples, to Those the Governours of the Church have Authority to demand a publick Compliance. Now this Power cannot contradict the Authority of Christ; because, as to the *external* Action, it is supposed to require precisely the same Things which Christ commands.

It was also affirm'd, that They had Authority to prescribe a *Visible* Obedience to all Christ's Laws concerning either Faith or Morality. But in no Instance of their *Legislative* Authority is any Power claim'd to them, which can be charged with any *Diminution* of Christ's Authority, or any *Incroachment* upon it. They are not allowed to alter, or reverse any one of his Laws, or withdraw the Obedience of his Subjects from them; and therefore, while they act within these Limitations, They cannot *lessen* His Authority: Neither can they *Incroach* upon it, because it is not pretended that their Laws are of the same *Extent*, have the same *Obligation*, or are enforced with the same *Penalties* that His are.

The Subject of Christ's Laws is principally the *Inner Man*, of whom they do not assume any Cognisance in their Laws; and the A-  
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ctions which He commands, are Principally *Internal*. But the Laws of the Church regard only the *External* Conduct : They do not require the *Inward* Belief of the Mind in Articles of Faith ; or the *secret Grace* of the Heart in Moral Duties. These things the Ministers of Christ *Teach* and *Exhort*, but do not *Command*. But the Actions which They prescribe by their *Laws*, are such *external* Performances, as are the *visible* Signs, the natural and proper Expressions of such *Inward* Acts and Dispositions of the Soul as Christ has commanded. And these Laws They do not affirm to have any farther Obligation on the *Conscience*, than as the Performance directed by them is a proper Sign and Expression of such an inward Disposition of the Heart as Christ requires ; and consequently is agreeable and subservient to his Law ; and even when the Action is thus qualified, They do not pretend that the *Conscience* is obliged to it by Their Law, but by Christ's. And,

Lastly ; They do not Prescribe these *External* Observances as necessary Conditions of the secret Union of the Soul with Christ ; but as Terms of Communion with the *Visible* Church. Neither do they pretend to inflict the *Eternal* Penalties of Sin upon the Breach of their Laws, but only Suspension from the Privileges, or Exclusion from the Society of that *Visible* Church, of which Christ hath ordain'd them Magistrates.

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Now in these Powers there appears such a wise Connection, and Subserviency of the *Ministerial* to the *Sovereign* Authority, as we might expect in a Constitution framed by a Divine Law-giver; but not the least Jarring or Interference of the one with the other.

To this it hath been Objected, That the Power claim'd by the *Visible* Rulers of the Church, of requiring such publick Professions of Faith, or obliging Men to the open Practice of such Duties, as They think Christ has commanded, supposes an Authority to *interpret* Christ's Laws, and propose such *Interpretation* to the Conscience as his Law: And since whoever has a Power of *interpreting* a Law, and declaring the *Conscience* obliged to that *Interpretation*, has in effect the Power of making the Law, and obliging the Conscience to his own Law; It follows that the Rulers of the Church, by assuming this Authority, manifestly usurp upon the *Legislative* Authority of Christ.

Now the Principle, from which this Objection argues, we acknowledge to be true; *viz.* That an Absolute Power of *Interpretation* obliging the *Conscience*, and of Enacting Laws in consequence of it, with the same Obligation, is Equivalent to the Legislative Authority of Christ: And whoever Claims it, we agree is justly charg'd with usurping upon the Authority of Christ. But that we have asserted no such Power to the Rulers  
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of the Church, we may appeal to any one who observes the Limitations of that Authority ascribed to them. But because this is an Objection much insisted on; and from which the Adversaries of the Church promise themselves the greatest Triumphs both over its Doctrines and its Laws, I shall consider it here distinctly, as it affects,

1. The Authority of the *Interpretation*;
2. The Authority of the *Law* framed and enacted upon that Interpretation.

As to the *Interpretation*; That the Rulers of the Church have a *Right of Interpreting* Christ's Laws, so far as is necessary to a Conscientious Discharge of the Duties of their Station, was before proved, and cannot be denied by those who contend for this as a common Right belonging to all Christians. For Instance; They are obliged by the Law of Christ, to require a Publick Profession of Faith from every Person whom they admit into the Church by *Baptism*. In order to obey this Law with good Conscience, They consult the Scripture; and what it appears to Them Christ has required Men to believe, as a Condition of entering into this Covenant with him, That they require them to Profess: Now, so far as They interpret thus for their own direction, it is evident They do not act with any *Authority* at all, but as upon a Level with other Christians, who search the

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Scriptures for the Rule and Measure of their Duty; and consequently cannot usurp upon the Authority of Christ. When They come to propose this *Interpretation* as the Foundation of a Law which they enact upon it, and a Reason for Mens Submission to that Law; They then indeed exercise *Authority* as *Guides* and *Teachers*, but not yet as *Law-givers*; But such an *Authority* as is perfectly consistent with the *Supremacy* of Christ. For they do not propose this *Interpretation* as obliging the *Conscience*, any farther than it is the true Sense and Meaning of Christ. The *Interpretation*, indeed, tho' mistaken, binds their *own Conscience*, and obliges them to prescribe their Law according to it; because it is to Them the Law of Christ. But they do not propose it as obliging the *Conscience* of other Men, any farther than it is agreeable to the Intention of Christ. And that it is thus agreeable to the Intention of Christ, They do not teach that any one is required to believe in contradiction to his own, or others *plain Reasons* against it; But only where no such *Reasons* appear, They presume their *Authority* ought to be submitted to: Because with less Authority than this, Their Commission (as has been said) can signify nothing, nor any way distinguish Them from other Men who have no Commission. It is plain therefore,

1. That the *Authority* claim'd to the *Interpretation* of our Superiors is not an *Absolute*

*lute* Authority, obliging the *Conscience*: because it is confest to have no Authority over the *Conscience*, any farther than it is agreeable to the Meaning and Intention of Christ.

2. If by *Conscience* we mean a *Rational* Conscience, a Conviction of Duty formed upon *Reasons*, it is manifest, Here is no Authority exercis'd over the *Conscience* at all: Because it is submitted to every Man's Reason to Judge, whether the Interpretation be agreeable to Christ's Will or not, before he is oblig'd to receive it: And it is hard to imagine how the *Conscience* can be said to be forced, where no rational Conviction is pretended to be over-ruled. And even in that case, where we contend that the *Authority* of the Superior ought to be submitted to; *Viz.* when no good Reasons appear against his Interpretation; the Submission is therefore paid to his Opinion, because the Opinion of one commission'd by Christ to Instruct us is, in those Circumstances, the best Reason that can be given for our Assent. We are oblig'd in Conscience to receive his *Interpretation* in this case, for the same Reasons that in others we may be oblig'd to reject it; *Viz.* Because we are oblig'd to act according to the best Light we can get into the Import of Christ's Will. Where the Precept s *Plain*, that Sense which to the common Reason of Mankind appears intended in it is the immediate Rule of our Actions:

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**Actions:** Where the Precept is of difficult or doubtful Interpretation, the Sentiments of our appointed *Guides* are our proper Rule. But the Obligation on the *Conscience* to be directed by their Judgment, is not derived from *Them*, but from the *Law of Christ*, which, in this Case, requires us to submit to their Opinion. And the practical Obedience paid to the Precept, whose Sense we receive from their Interpretation, is not paid to *Them*, but to Christ the Author of the Precept.

Christ has commanded us to follow our own Reason, as far as that serves clearly to inform us in his Will, where that doth not determine us, He has appointed *Guides* and *Instructors* to lead and direct us. Our Obligations to follow our own *Reason* in the one Case, and their *Instructions* in the other, are equally derived from the *Law of Christ*: And whatsoever, by either of these Ways, we come to know is the Will of Christ, we are obliged in *Conscience* as Christians to perform; not because it is commanded by our *Reason* or our *Instructors*; but because it is the *Law of Christ*. It is evident, therefore, that notwithstanding the Authority of *Interpretation* which we have ascribed to the Rulers of the Church, the sole Power of obliging the *Conscience* is reserv'd to Christ; and consequently no part of that Authority reserv'd to himself by Christ is inroach'd upon by It.

II. Then

II. Then as to the *Legislative* Authority of the Church, the Answer to this Objection may be presumed to be already given. For since the *Medium*, by which it attempts to prove the *Legislative* Power claim'd to the Church an *Ufurpation* upon Christ's Authority, is that it implies a Power of *Interpretation* which is inconsistent with the Supremacy of Christ; If the Authority of Christ be no way infringed by the *Interpretation*, the *Legislative* Power of the Church, or the Power of prescribing *External* Observances agreeable to that *Interpretation*, is intirely unaffected by this Objection: And we are at Liberty to re-assume, that the *Legislative* Power asserted to the Church, is not inconsistent with the *Authority* reserved to himself by Christ.

I can recollect nothing that I have affirm'd of the *Jurisdiction* of the Church, which can with the least Appearance of Reason be thought inconsistent with the Supremacy of Christ; unless it be, that whenever the Authority of the Church is duly exercised, if the Offender be really Guilty of the Crimes for which he is censured, and doth not atone for them by Repentance, the Sentence of the Church upon him *Here*, will be follow'd by a much heavier Sentence from Christ in the *World to come*: And accordingly, that he who is *Absolved* from his Offence by the Church, if his Repentance be really as sincere as it appears to be, is *Absolved* also by Christ from his Offence against his Law. And this the Rulers  
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of the Church, as faithful Ministers of Christian Religion, are certainly bound to *Teach*; because Christ has expressly declared, that he will thus forgive the *Penitent*, and thus avenge himself on the *impenitent* Sinner. But at the same time it is confess'd, That the Authority of the Ecclesiastical Rulers, as *Judges*, reaches no farther than to punish the Overt-Action, as a Breach of their Law, requiring the External Observance of Christ's Commands: And agreeably their Absolution is given upon the *external* and apparent Signs of Repentance. Now, though these *outward* Signs of Guilt or Repentance are not an *infallible Evidence* of the *inward* State of the Man, yet are they *Legal* Presumptions of it, and the only Marks by which a human Judgment can be form'd. And therefore the Rulers of the Church, as *Teachers* of the Gospel, commission'd by Christ to *watch over the Souls* of the Flock, are bound, when these External Signs of Guilt appear, to declare the Man in an *impenitent* State, and obnoxious to the Penalties of Christ's Laws; and where the *External* Signs of Repentance appear, to declare him *absolved* and forgiven.

But it is not pretended, that by any *judicial* Act of their own they can adjudge the Criminal to these *future* Penalties, or absolve him from them; Or that Christ will inflict them in Execution of *their* Sentence, or remit them in Consequence of *their* Absolution: Or that their *Censure* fixes the Man in that State

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State of *inward* Guilt, which they teach will be attended with these Penalties, or that their *Absolution* restores him to a State of *internal* Innocence: But his *inward* Guilt or Innocence they leave solely to be determin'd by Christ; and these Penalties they leave solely to be inflicted or remitted by him, in consequence of *his own Sentence* or *Absolution*, and not of *Theirs*. And consequently they do not *usurp* upon the proper *Authority* of Christ; to whom it is intirely left to judge of the *internal* Sin or Contrition of the Person, and either to inflict or remit the *future* Punishment.

It is indeed affirmed, and cannot, I think, without Impiety and direct Contradiction to Scripture be denied, that the *Prayers* of the faithful, and more particularly of those who are appointed by Christ to minister in the Offices of Religion, to intercede for his People, and bless in his Name, are a Means of great Efficacy to prevail with God to remit the Eternal Penalties of Sin, and restore the Penitent to his Grace and Favour. But these *Prayers* (as was observ'd) are not *judicial* Acts, and consequently no Incroachment on the *Jurisdiction* of Christ.

## C H A P. III.

*That the Powers assign'd to the Rulers, and the Submission requir'd from the Subjects of the Visible Church, are consistent with Christian Liberty.*

**B**UT it is objected farther, that the Authority ascribed to the Rulers of the Church is inconsistent with that *Liberty*, which Christ has left to all his Disciples: And if this Imputation is just, it must be acknowledg'd conclusive against such Authority.

As to that Branch of their Authority by which they are commission'd to *Minister in the publick Offices of Religion*, since it has been prov'd, that Christ has instituted an Order of Men in his Church, with a special Appointment to attend on this Ministry; This Institution it self excludes all others from this Power, and consequently by the mere Claim of this Authority they cannot usurp upon any Right or Liberty belonging to other Christians. And the only Instances in which they can usurp upon our Liberty in the Exercise of this Authority, are either when they require us to believe certain Ordinances or Administrations to be lawful or necessary, which are not so; Or when they oblige under  
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some Penalties to conform to such Ordinances or Administrations. But in these Instances they act not as *Ministers* but in quite different Characters; in the former as *Teachers*, in the latter as *Law-givers* or *Judges*. If therefore it can be shewn, that the Powers assign'd to them under these Characters are no Abridgment of our Liberty, we may presume that every Branch of their Authority will be acquitted from this Charge. In order to this it will be of use to observe what that *Liberty* is which Christ has left to all his Disciples. And this, if we examine all the Variety of Cases in which this *Liberty* can be pleaded, will be found fully comprehended in these Exemptions :

1. That no Person has *Authority* to oblige us to *Believe* any *Doctrine*, which Christ has not obliged us to *Believe*.
2. That no Person has *Authority* to oblige us to *perform* any *Action*, which Christ has *forbidden*.
3. That no Person has *Authority* to *impose* on us any *indifferent* Action, which Christ has not *impower'd* him to *impose*.

If then we have ascribed no Authority to the Rulers of the Church, by which they can usurp upon our Liberty in any of these Instances, we are safe from this Objection.

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As to the *first* of these Exemptions, which guards us against any Inroad, of our Superiours as *Guides* and *Teachers*; I must observe, that the Authority ascribed to them under this Character was restrain'd within such Limits, as leave the Subject the free Exercise of his Reason to judge, whether the Doctrines which they teach are agreeable to those taught by Christ or not. The only Instance in which Submission was claim'd to their *mere* Authority, was when no good Reasons appear against their Assertions: And whoever will pretend that this is inconsistent with his *Liberty*, must not object against the *Extent* assign'd to their Commission, but must deny that they have any Commission at all.

Neither, *Secondly*, is any Authority ascribed to the Rulers of the Church as *Legislators*, by which they can oblige us to any Action forbidden by Christ. This indeed must follow from what was before offer'd to prove the Authority of the Rulers consistent with the Supremacy of Christ. For if no Authority is given to the Rulers to prescribe any Thing contrary to what Christ commands, it is plain no Obligation is laid on the Subject to perform any Thing in Obedience to them which Christ has forbidden: And the same Arguments that prove their Authority of Prescribing what, according to their *Interpretation* of Scripture, is agreeable to Christ's Will, to be consistent with the *Supremacy* of Christ, equally prove, that it is consistent with that  
*Liberty*

*Liberty* which he has left his Disciples. For the Liberty claim'd by this Exemption is founded on, and exactly proportion'd to the reserved Authority of Christ; and is in other Words nothing else but the Plea of a Prior and Superiour Obligation to the Authority of Christ. But though this Authority of prescribing Laws according to their *Interpretation* of Scripture, has been already consider'd, and I hope pretty clearly Establish'd; yet, because this seems to be the Point of Distress in all the Controversies that have been rais'd concerning Ecclesiastical Power, I am willing to take every Opportunity of inforcing what I have suggested concerning it.

It will I presume be allowed, that there are some Laws of Christ so *plain*, that every Christian, as such, is obliged to obey them according to the true Sense intended in them. The Governours of the Church therefore do not abridge out *Christian Liberty*, when they require a Visible and External Compliance with such plain and necessary Laws. Neither are they without a Rule, by which they are warranted to Judge what Laws are thus plain and necessary, *viz.* the common Reason and Apprehension of Mankind. For we are assured Christ adapted his Laws to the common Capacities of Man, as a reasonable Being: The common Reason of Mankind, therefore, is a Measure or Standard, by which they are authorized to judge what Laws of Christ are plain and necessary, and in what Sense  
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they are so; and consequently they do no Injury to any one, when, without regarding any particular Man's Opinion, they require a Visible and External Compliance with such Laws of Christ as to the common Reason of Mankind appear plain and necessary, and in that Sense in which they appear to be so. And as no Strength of Persuasion will excuse any Person to Christ, acting contrary to a Law which he was obliged to understand and obey; so neither will it excuse him acting contrary to the Law of his Superiours, requiring him *Externally* to obey it in the same Sense. The Rulers of the Church, therefore, do not abridge us of any Part of that *Liberty* Christ has left us, in requiring an External Observance of these *plain* Laws, because, in these Instances, they require or forbid the same Actions that are required or forbidden by Christ.

If indeed the Superiours prescribe an Action which Christ has manifestly forbidden, they prescribe without Authority; and the Subject is under no Obligation to perform it. But then the Subject is bound to judge by the same Rule what Christ has forbidden, by which the Superiours are to judge what he has commanded; *viz.* the common Reason and Apprehensions of Mankind. As the *Superiours* may not prescribe any Action as required by the Law of Christ, which only in their own mere Opinion, and in *Contradiction* to the common Reason and Apprehensions  
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## Church of CHRIST. 147

of Mankind, appears to be so requir'd; so neither may the *Subject* refuse to perform any Action as forbidden by Christ, which only in his own mere Opinion, and in Contradiction to the common Reason and Apprehensions of Mankind appears to be forbidden. In whatever Instance our Opinion contradicts the common Reason and Apprehensions of Mankind, the Action must be esteem'd, at least, *doubtful*, and cannot be presumed to be either plainly commanded or plainly forbidden.

But neither doth the Power ascribed to the Rulers of the Church, of *interpreting* such Laws of Christ as are of difficult or doubtful Interpretation, and injoining an External Observance according to such *Interpretation*, imply any Authority of obliging Men to perform what is forbidden them by Christ: Because he cannot be said to be obliged to perform an Action forbidden by Christ, who is only required to perform an Action, concerning which he is not determin'd whether it be commanded or forbidden.

To the *Rulers* it appears plainly commanded by the Law of Christ, and therefore they, by their Office, are obliged to injoin the External Observance of it. To the *Subject* it doth not appear either plainly commanded or plainly forbidden, and therefore by disobeying his Rulers, he runs an equal Hazard of acting contrary to the Law of Christ, as by obeying them. At the same time he is bound by another plain Law of Christ, to obey his



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Rulers in all Things lawful; and consequently, by disobeying in such an Instance, he runs the hazard of offending against a *plain Law*, for fear he should offend against some *unknown Law*, some Law which, by his *doubting*, he confesses he doth not know whether Christ has injoin'd or not.

3. As to Actions in their Nature *indifferent*, (*i. e.*) neither commanded nor forbidden by Christ; since the Power of prescribing such indifferent Actions, whenever they are conducive to *Decency, Order, and Edification*, is expressly left by Christ to the Rulers of the Church; the Subject is not at Liberty whether he will obey these Prescriptions, so directed, or not; and consequently by being required to obey them, he is not deprived of any Liberty left him by Christ. The Action, before it is commanded, he is at Liberty to perform or let alone: But after it is commanded, though the *Action* be, in its Nature, or with Respect to the Law of Christ, indifferent; yet the *Obedience* is not so, but expressly injoin'd by Christ.

Neither is it left to the Subject to determine whether these Actions are *expedient* or conducive to *Decency, Order, &c.* or not; but this is left wholly to the Judgment and Discretion of the Rulers. When therefore the Subject refuses to obey such Prescriptions, upon pretence of *Unfitness* or *Inexpediency*, he exceeds the Bounds of that Liberty which belongs

belongs to him, and usurps upon the proper Authority of his Superiours.

If the Action indeed appears to him plainly *Unlawful*, (*i. e.*) forbidden by Christ, tho' it may be in its Nature indifferent, yet he is bound not to perform it. But the Ruler, nevertheless, doth him no Injury in prescribing it, because it appears to him in its Nature *indifferent*, and in its Use *expedient*; and therefore such, as he is not only impow'rd, but commanded by Christ to prescribe: And consequently in prescribing it, he only executes a Commission which he has receiv'd from Christ. And by whatever Act of Authority he only performs his own Duty, he cannot usurp upon another's Liberty; because we are assured Christ has not left any Liberties to some of his Subjects, which are inconsistent with those Duties which he has required from others.

But whatever the *Persuasion* of the Subject may be concerning either the Sense of Christ's Laws, or the Nature of the Actions injoin'd, or how much soever the command of his Rulers may either in Appearance or Reality be contrary to the Law of Christ; yet the *Liberty* of the Subject is perfectly secured to him by that Limitation of his Obedience, which allows him to refuse his *active* Compliance with any Command, which he has Reason to believe inconsistent with his Duty to Christ. If his Objections are supported with good Reasons, or such as appear plainly

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conclusive to him, Authority is submitted to them, and he is excused from Sin, in not *actively* obeying it. And if he has no good Reasons against it, the Command of a just Authority is certainly it self a good Reason for an *active* Obedience.

If the Power of *Jurisdiction* ascribed to the Rulers, be thought an injurious Abridgment of the Subjects Liberty, in Obedience to which we have obliged him to submit to the *Penalties* of his Refusal, when his Persuasion will not suffer him *actively* to comply with the Command, we need only repeat,

1. That the Submission of the Subject to these Penalties is not forbidden by Christ; and consequently, by obliging him to submit to these Penalties, we do not oblige him to any thing forbidden by Christ.

2. That the Rulers are empowered by Christ to inflict these Penalties. For if they are empowered to prescribe such Laws to the external Behaviour of such Christians, as, according to their Interpretation of Scripture, are agreeable to the Laws of Christ, they must also be empower'd to inflict the Penalties of such Laws on those who offend against them. And whatever Penalties the Rulers are empower'd to inflict, the Subject is bound to submit to; and consequently, by such Submission, he gives up no Liberty, which belongs to him as a Christian.

Neither can it with Reason be objected, That the *Censures* of the Church, by excluding

cluding the Offender from the Ordinances of it, deprive him of any Privilege which he has a Right to. Because he was, at his *Baptism*, admitted to these external Privileges, on certain Conditions; *viz.* a Profession of certain Articles, and a Promise to observe certain Duties. Whenever, therefore, he acts contrary to these Promises and Professions, he forfeits the Advantages to which he was intitled, in vertue of them; and consequently no Injury is done him, when, upon such Transgressions, he is excluded from them. The same Reasons also prove, that no Person is injured, when he is suspended or deposed from any Station or Office in the Church, for breaking the Conditions upon which he was admitted to them.

It has been argued, indeed, by a late Author (*a*), with an affected Ayre of Religious Compassion, That by excluding a Sinner from the Ordinances of the Church, we uncharitably deprive him of those Graces which flow from the Participation of them, and consequently injure him in a Property, in such Circumstances the most valuable to him, the very Means whereby he might be recovered. But if this Author, who seems to intend all this only as a grave Ridicule on the Offices of Religion, deserves a serious Reply, I answer,

1<sup>st</sup>. That the Efficacy of these Means of Grace depends on a proper *Disposition* in the Person to whom they are applied. *St. Paul*

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(*a*) *Rights of the Christian Church*, Chap. 3.

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has determined, That he who partakes of the Lord's Table *unworthily, eats and drinks Damnation to himself* (a). If therefore, the Rulers of the Church believe any Person unqualify'd for a due Participation of those Mysteries, by forbidding his Approach to them, they do not exclude him from a Means of Grace to *Him*, but with great Charity restrain him from doing himself a farther Prejudice, by the additional Guilt of prophaning those Holy Mysteries.

2dly. The Discipline of the Church is for this very Reason apply'd to Offenders, because it is an effectual Means of Grace to them; the most probable Method to convert and recover them, by awakening them to a just Sense of their Danger, and disposing them to such an Humility and Contrition of Soul, as may (b) *save the Spirit in the Day of the Lord Jesus*. And therefore the Censures of the Church are Acts of Compassion, as well as Justice; and are equally excused from Invasion on the Rights, and Cruelty to the Soul of the Criminal.

Upon the whole; Since all the *Authority* which we ascribe to the Rulers of the Church, is no more than is derived to them from the *Commission* of Christ, it must be consistent with the *Liberty* which he has left to the rest of his Subjects. For in whatever Instan-

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(a) 1 Cor. xi. 27.

(b) 1 Cor. v. 5.

ees he has given another Person Power to preside over us, to direct or command us, in those he has not left us free; and consequently, whatever *Liberty* they take from us, while they act within the Limits of that *Commission*, can be no Part of that *Liberty* which Christ has left us. And if the Complaint be carried farther than this, and the Authority given them by this *Commission* be objected to, as an Injury to *Human Liberty*, the Dispute is no longer against the Persons who exercise this Authority, but against Christ who gave it. But to follow this Objection would lead us into a Question foreign to the Subject which I am engaged on; which obliges me only to shew That the *Ecclesiastical Authority*, with the Limitations under which I have asserted it, is no Abridgment of our Christian *Liberty*.

If in defending the Authority of the Church from This, or the Former Reproach, I have omitted the Consideration of any Objection, which may be thought of Weight in this Controversy, I am inclined to hope it will not be difficult to find an Answer to it, either from the Restrictions under which I stated the several Powers of the Church, in the *preceeding* part of this Discourse, or from what I have added in farther Explication or Support of my Assertions in *this*; and that from the Whole it will appear, that nothing has been affirmed of the Powers of some, or the Duties of others, as  
Members

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Members of the *Visible* Church, but what is reconcileable to the *Authority* reserv'd to Christ as *Head*, and the *Liberties* that belong to all Christians as *Members* of the *Invisible*.

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### C H A P. IV.

*That the Powers assigned to the Rulers, and the Submission required from the Subjects, are agreeable to those Images under which the Visible Church is represented in Scripture.*

**T**HE Visible Church of Christ is represented to us, in Scripture, under several *Emblems* or *Images*, which have been generally referr'd to in this Controversy; and it may, perhaps, be a farther Proof or Illustration of what I have asserted, to observe, in one Instance, which will comprehend all that can be inferred from the rest, That these *Images* represent to us the Frame and Oeconomy of this Society, in a manner agreeable to what has been taught concerning it.

Let us then consider it as the *Family* of an absent *Master*, who has left his Will for the general Recourse and Direction of all his *Servants*; by which *Will*, nevertheless, he has

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has placed some in Stations of Superiority over others, with a particular Designation to certain Offices, and a special Appointment to *Instruct* the Inferiors according to the best of their Understanding, in the true Meaning and Import of his Will; and has also given them *Authority*, not only to *Teach*, but *Command* such Performances as appear to them agreeable to his *Will*; and to make such farther *Rules* or *Orders*, as shall from time to time appear conducive to the Peace and good *Discipline* of the Family; provided they injoin nothing contrary to what he has prescribed: And has, at the same time, vested them with *Power* to *correct* and *punish* such as visibly offend against the *Laws* ordained by the Master, or such *Orders* as they are impower'd to make, either by *Suspension* from certain *Privileges* of the Family, or, if they continue obstinate and unreclaimed, by a total *Exclusion* from the *Society* of it: And in the same *Will* has commanded all the *Inferior* Servants to submit themselves to their *Superiors*, in the just Exercises of these *Powers* and *Offices*, which he has committed to them; not, indeed, to do any thing in *Obedience* to them, which is apparently contrary to his *Will*; but to consult them in all *Difficulties*, and to receive their *Direction*, and obey their *Commands*, in all Things not manifestly forbidden by his *Will*. And even where they cannot comply with the *Direction*, patiently to submit to the *Penalties* of their *Refusal*. In



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In this Image of a *Family*, thus constituted, we have an exact Representation of the *Church* of Christ, and of the *Authority* assigned to some, and the *Duties* and Submission required from others of the Members of it. And if in such a *Family* the *Supremacy* of the Master, and all *Rights* of the Subject, consistent with Peace and good Government, are preserved, notwithstanding the Powers vested in the *superior* Servants of it, It will be difficult to assign any Reason, why the same Powers may not be exercised by the Governours of the *Church*, without invading the *Authority* of Christ, or the just *Liberty* of any Christian.

It is impossible, indeed, by the wisest Constitution, to prevent all Irregularities in a Society, where the Administration must be placed in the Hands of free, and yet weak and passionate Agents: The Superiors will sometimes *mistake* in the Exercise of their Power, and sometimes, perhaps, designedly *pervert* it. But since the secret Malice and Intention of the Heart can be judged of by none but God, whenever the Administration of the Rulers appears irregular, Charity obliges us to consider it only as *mistaken*.

Let the Case then be supposed, That the Superiors in such a *Family* mistake their Master's Direction, and either *Teach* or *Command* any thing not agreeable to it: It cannot be said that they are guilty of a design'd Usurpation upon the Authority of their

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their Master; because they think in their Conscience that they are obeying it; and that what they do is a Duty which their Station requires from them. The Question is, How the Inferior is to behave himself with respect to such a Command? Now if he perceives, and is persuaded in his Conscience, that the Action required is contrary to the Will of the Master, it is his Duty not to perform it: But if he is not forbid by the *Will* to submit to the *Penalties* of his Incompliance, he is certainly bound to submit; because he is, by the plain Direction of the *Will*, bound to submit to the Authority of these Superiors, as far as he can do it without acting contrary to the *Will*.

An Exemption, indeed, from all Penalties, in such a Case, wou'd in its Effects vacate the whole Constitution of the Family, and put an end to the very Being of it, as a Society. For it must be remembered, that the *Subject* is also passionate and fallible, as well as the *Ruler*; and may either imagine an Action to be contrary to the Will of the Master which is precisely directed by it, or, from a Spirit of Mutiny and Opposition, may pretend a Persuasion of Conscience when he is not really so persuaded. But we will allow him the Favour of the same charitable Supposition that was claimed for the Ruler, and consider him only as *mistaken*. By this mutual Allowance the State of the Case is reduced to this; That  
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the Superior thinks the Action *commanded* by the *Master*, and the Inferior thinks it *forbidden*. Here then is the Reason or Opinion of the Inferior opposed to the Reason or Opinion of the Superior: And if one cannot convince the other, which must take place? Shall the Superior act against his Conscience, and omit the Duty of his Station, because the Inferior conceives it not to be his Duty? Whose Conviction is he to be governed by, *his own*, or his *Inferior's*? If by his *own*, he must proceed to command the Action, and, upon Refusal of Obedience, to inflict the Penalty, as his Duty appears to require him. If by his *Inferior's*, here is the Conscience of one Man subjected and over-ruled by the Sentiments of another; with this additional Absurdity, that this Power is given to the Inferior over the Superior. He who has a Commission to *Teach* and *Govern*, is to receive his Directions how to execute this Commission from him who is to be *taught* and *governed* by it. The Result, in short, will be this, That there will be no Commission or Superiority at all; but every one will be equal and independent; and consequently, the Family will be dissolved, and the Parts of it have no more Connection with one another, than any other Persons who are no way related. We cannot therefore suppose, that a wise Master wou'd leave such a Degree of *Liberty* or Exemption of the Inferiors from the Authority  
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of the Superiors, as wou'd, in its Consequences, destroy the very Being of that Society which he intended should subsist till his coming again. Whereas, admit but this one Obligation on the Subject to submit to the *Penalties* of his Refusal, when he cannot in *Conscience* perform the Action required, and Peace and Order are provided for; and yet no Violence is offer'd to the Conscience of any, The Ruler is not obliged to do any thing contrary to his Conscience, nor the Subject any Thing contrary to his; and both may be intitled to the Approbation of the Master.

The Parallel between this Image and the Church is so obvious, that I need not detain the Reader with a particular Application of it.

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### CHAP. V.

*That the Idea given of the Visible Church is not inconsistent with the Principles of our Reformation.*

**B**UT I am obliged to take notice of one Objection which has been made to the Doctrine I have asserted, which is, That the Authority placed in the *Rulers* of the Church, and the Submission required from the

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the Subjects to it, lay the *Reformation* of *this* Church under the Charge of a *Rebellion* against its spiritual Pastors: But the Answer to this I think is very obvious; *viz.*

That the *Reformation* of this Church was not an Opposition to any just *Authority*, but a *Vindication* of its own Rights from the usurped *Tyranny* of another Church, and consequently no *Rebellion*.

Had the Church of *Rome* received a Commission from Christ to prescribe Laws, and extend its Censures to all other Churches, tho' we might and ought to have refused our Compliance with any Impositions which we were convinced were contrary to the Laws of Christ; yet we cou'd not, without *Rebellion* against the Commission of Christ, have totally rejected the Authority which He had given that Church over us. But the Case was quite otherwise; we only resumed the just Authority of which they had robb'd us: And as a Church equally independent on Them, as they on Us, we, by our own proper Power reform'd the Corruptions which they had introduced among us.

If the Objection be farther urged, That our *Reformation* was begun and carried on in opposition to the then *Lawful Pastors* and *Rulers* of this Church, the Assertion will be found contradicted by *History*; from whence it may be proved that the *Reformation*, now *Establish'd* among us, and which alone I am concern'd to defend, was begun and derived down

to us by the hands of a proper *Ecclesiastical Authority*\* : And consequently it cannot, from the Principles I have laid down, be charged with *Rebellion* against those whose *Authority* I am obliged to admit.

As for the Methods, by which the *Reformation* was introduced into any other Churches; They are to answer for themselves. Only I desire the Reader to observe, from the few Citations refer'd to in the Margin (a),

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\* Vide *Archbishop Laud against Fisher*, p. 100, 101.

*Dr. Baſier, Liberty of the Britannick Church*, pag. 45.  
*Fuller, Church Hiſt.* pag. 188. 194.

(a) *Calvin Ep. ad Farell.*

Semper hoc in Ecclesiâ valuit, quod veteribus synodis fuit decretum; ut qui subijci communis *Disciplinæ* legibus noluerit, munere abdicetur.

*Idem Ep. ad Proteſt. Angliæ.*

Expedit quidem prospicere defultoriis Ingeniis quæ sibi nimium licere volunt. ----Ratio autem expedita ad eam Rem una est, si extet quædam summa *Doctrinæ* ab omnibus recepta, quam inter *Prædicandum* omnes sequantur, & ad quam observandam omnes *Episcopi & Parochi* astringantur. *And afterwards, in the same Epistle*, ----*Cerebroſi* Quidam qui sub *Evangelii* Nomine *ἀλαξία* inveſtam volunt, ultore gladio coerceri---

*Id. Com. in 1 Cor. 14. 10.*

Non potest haberi quod *Paulus* hic exigit, nisi additis constitutionibus, tanquam vinculis, quibus ordo & decorum ſervetur.

*Melancthon Loc. Com. Cap. de Polit. Eccles.*

-----Nec regi nec Coerceri Homines possunt, itaque sciamus dissipatis *Ordinationibus* *Ecclesiasticis* periclitari etiam *Ecclesiam*.

*Confess. Bohem. C. 8. Sect. 10. p. 12.*

Abſque *Ordinis* constitutione & *Administratione* externa non potest bono esse loco (*ecclesia*) aut bene cum ipsâ agi, sicut nec cum alia, vel minima, communitate.

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out of Multitudes which might be produced, That the most considerable of the Reformers abroad assert the Necessity of an *External Discipline*, and the *Authority* belonging to the *Rulers* of the Church in every Instance of Power which I have ascribed to Them. And it cannot be imagin'd They cou'd be so inconsistent with Themselves, as to assert Principles with which their own *Reformation* cou'd not be reconciled.

From the whole that has been offer'd, I hope, it will appear that the *Powers* which I have ascribed to the *Rulers* of the Church, are duly subordinate to, and consistent with the *Supremacy* of Christ as Head of it; and that the *Subjection* which I have required from the *Inferiors* to these Powers, as Members of the *Visible* Church, is perfectly consistent with those *Duties* which are injoyn'd them, and those *Liberties* which are reserv'd to them by Christ as Members of the *Invisible*.



PART



# PART IV.

*Of the Absurd and Destructive Consequences that follow from affirming any thing of the Church under the Idea of INVISIBLE, which is contrary to its Constitution as a Visible Society.*



## CHAPTER I.

*The Reasons of this Inquiry.*



FROM the View which has been taken of this Subject in the foregoing Reflections, I hope it will appear that the Church of Christ may be consider'd under the Distinction of *Visible* and *Invisible* and yet remain a *City at Unity in its self, built upon the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets; Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone:*



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That Christ has actually given those Powers to the Ministers and Officers of his Church, which we have asserted as Necessary to its Polity under the *former* Idea, and that these are perfectly consistent with his own Supremacy, and those Rights and Immunities which belong to the Members of his Church consider'd under the *latter*.

And whoever reflects with any attention on this Subject, cannot but observe with what admirable Wisdom and OEconomy the Divine Author of this Society has adapted every Part of its *Visible* and *External* Constitution to promote the *Internal* Influence of his own Laws and Authority on the Conscience of his Subjects; and on the other side, how naturally we are led by a just Reverence for the Master to honour and obey the Commission He has given his Servants. And since the only Objections that have been offer'd against the Powers ascribed to the *visible Officers* of the Church have been Suggestions of their Inconsistency with the *Supremacy* of Christ, or the *Rights* and *Liberties* of his Disciples; Having shewn that this Charge is without Foundation, and that the Powers claim'd to the *Visible* Church are consistent with what the Objecters themselves affirm of Christ, or his Members, under the Idea of the *Invisible*, I might now presume my self excused from following this Subject any farther.

But it cannot but be observed, That the Persons who have lately revived this Dispute  
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concerning *Ecclesiastical Authority*, have taken a great deal of Pains to load the Powers asserted to the Officers of the Church, with a long Train of the most invidious *Absurdities*, and to expose all who appear in Defence of them to the Jealousy or Aversion of Men, as Abettors of *spiritual Tyranny* and inclined to *Popery*. Now, tho' I have the Satisfaction to hope that some Answer may be found to every one of these Reproaches in the foregoing Pages; yet because a considerable Part will be always found among Mankind more capable of influence from Addresses to their Passions, than from Reasoning and Argument; and a much greater, who, without entering into the true State and Merits of a Question are determined against that Side which is charg'd with the most odious Consequences, 'tis to be fear'd that many may receive such Impressions from these Declamations deliver'd under the insinuating Disguise of a Zeal for Publick Liberties, as may prejudice them against all that can be offer'd on the other Side. It may therefore be farther necessary, in order to procure an impartial hearing, To shew that the Principles and Doctrines asserted by the Authors of these Reproaches are attended with *Absurdities*, at least equal to those which they impute to their Adversaries.

It is indeed a general, and perhaps a just Complaint, that in Controversies each Side is apt to charge the other with *Absurdities* which they disown; and for which therefore they

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ought not to be accountable. If They, who in the present Dispute have defended the visible Economy of the Church, have committed any Offence of this kind, their Adversaries have very liberally repaid it. But I assure my self this Difference will be observ'd between them, that the Absurdities charged on the *Former* are such as few (I believe none) have been actually led into by any Doctrine they have taught in assertion of their Principles. But 'tis notorious that the Principles and Doctrines advanced by the *Latter* are daily understood, and publickly defended, as unanswerable Proofs of those very *Absurdities* which are charged upon them: And therefore, tho' we shou'd suppose the Intention of the Authors on both Sides equally innocent; yet the Danger we are perswaded to fear from the One, cannot with reason be so much apprehended as what we actually feel from the Other.

The Errors indeed of either Extreme equally alter that wise Temperament and Subordination in which the *Supremacy of Christ* and the *Authority of his Ministers* are adjusted to each other, and are equally destructive of Christian Religion. Nay, we are farther ready to own, that whoever ascribes an exorbitant Power to the *Visible Officers* of the Church, who teaches that their Determinations are the *ultimate* Rule of Mens Faith and Actions, that they have an *absolute* Power of withholding or denying the Graces of the Go-

*spel,*

*spel*, &c. strikes at the very Foundations of Christianity. These are Acts of incommunicable Supremacy, and the Reverence and Allegiance of Men will terminate in those Persons in whom these Powers are placed, and consequently Christ will be left only a Name in his Church without Power or Authority. These Consequences we acknowledge, and these Doctrines we detest; and whenever they have appear'd among us, neither the Governours, nor the Members of *This* Church, have wanted Vigilance to guard against them, or Zeal to oppose them. But with respect to the present Controversy, since we have no just Reason to believe that the Principles asserted by those who defend the *Ecclesiastical Authority* have led, or can lead any one into these *Absurdities*; And the destructive Consequences charg'd on the Doctrines of those who appear against them, are not only actually inferr'd from them, but contended for with warmth, applauded and encouraged; Prudence and Duty will oblige us first to guard against these latter Adversaries, and not suffer our selves to be amused with the Pursuit of an imaginary Enemy, while a real and present Danger is entring in at our Doors.

## C H A P. II.

*Of the Absurdities that follow from denying  
the Church to be a Visible Society.*

THE general *Absurdity* with which I have charged that levelling Scheme of Religion which denies the Officers of the Church those *Ministerial* Powers which I have ascribed to them is, That upon these Principles 'tis impossible the Church of Christ can subsist a *visible Society*.

That this is a necessary Consequence from these Principles, is evident, because a *visible Society*, in the very Notion of it, is a Number of Persons whose External Behaviour is govern'd by the same System of stated Laws: Now *Laws* for external Behaviour without external *Penalties* affix'd to the Breach of them, and *Penalties* without some Persons authorized to inflict them, are useless and ineffectual Provisions for that Order and Union which is the very Essence of every Society. If, therefore, Christ has left all his Disciples in a State of perfect Equality and Independence on one another, if none is distinguish'd by any *Commission* or *Authority* from another, the Church of Christ must, upon these Principles, be a Number of loose unconnected Persons, without the least Appearance of being form'd into a *visible Society*. IF

If it be thought no Absurdity to affirm, that the Church of Christ is not a *visible Society*, it might be sufficient to shew, that this Assertion is contradicted by the clearest Proofs from Scripture and Antiquity, by which it appears, that the Church of Christ was at first instituted, and in all succeeding Ages govern'd as a *visible Society*, some of which have been offer'd to the Reader in the preceding Reflections. But I wou'd here only observe the *Inconveniencies* that must follow from this Position. And,

1. If all Christians are *equal* and undistinguish'd, by any *Commission*, from one another, as they must be if the Church is not a *visible Society*; Then the *Sacraments* appointed by Christ cannot be *administer'd*, nor the *Word preach'd* among them; for who shall officiate in these Ordinances?

If it be said that *all the Lord's People are Holy*, all equally *Priests*, and may officiate in these Instances to one another: It may be sufficient, I think, to observe that, among all the wild Schemes of Religion advanced in these latter Ages, and all the Experiments that have been made to Divide and Dissipate the Church of Christ, tho' this has been offer'd in Theory, yct this alone cou'd never yet be reduced to Practice: And therefore they who contrived the Sect of the *Quakers*, which comes the nearest to this Scheme, found themselves obliged to reject the *Sacraments* as useles and unnecessary, from a Conviction that it was impossible

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possible to retain these Ordinances without selecting some Persons from others to officiate in them. But even these Enthusiasts themselves are manifestly form'd into a *visible Society*, tho' of their own devising, and without any Affinity to the Church instituted by Christ; and, without such *Combination*, They had long since disappear'd and come to nothing.

It has been farther offer'd by some, That any Number of Christians may agree together, and choose one or more Persons to *Expound the Scriptures, Baptize, &c.* But I must observe, that this destroys the Supposition contended for: For the Authors of this Scheme agree with us so far, that the Church is a *visible Society*, and that *visible Officers* are necessary for the Administration of Religion in it; only in this we differ, That we affirm that this Society was at first Instituted and the Officers of it appointed by Christ and his Apostles; and that this Authority was derived down by a regular *Ordination* to their Successors. They on the contrary affirm, That Christ left it to the whole Multitude of his Subjects, to form themselves into a *visible Society*, and choose Officers for the Administration of it, and that no other *Ordination* is necessary to these Offices but the choice of the People. Now it might easily be shewn that this Hypothesis is not only contrary to the plain Evidence of Fact, but attended with the greatest *Absurdities*, and inconsistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of Christ, the Founder  
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der of this Society. But what I am here principally concern'd to observe is, That this Scheme of Christianity equally supposes the Church to be a *visible Society* with the former, and that not only when actually constituted under Officers so chosen, but as soon as ever the Members of it agree together, either to choose such Officers, or observe any common Rule, They act as a *Body*, and become a *visible Society*. And therefore,

2. Unless we suppose the Church to be a *visible Society*, 'tis impossible that any Number of Christians shou'd Assemble together in a Congregation for the *Worship of God*; for this cannot be done without agreeing upon some *Rules* to be observ'd in it. And the first moment Men consent to act by the same *social Laws*, they become a *visible Society*. And if no publick Offices of Religion can be administer'd, and no Congregation assembled for Divine Worship unless we admit the Church to be a *visible Society*; I may be allow'd without enlarging farther in the Proof of it, to Infer a

3d Conclusion; *viz.* That supposing the Church to be no *visible Society*, the very Profession of Christianity must soon be extinguish'd.

It cannot but be observ'd that all the Sects and Denominations of Religion, whose Names have been ever heard of in the World, have appear'd under the Form of *visible Societies*; and if any particular Enthusiasts have pursued



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sued any Chimerical Scheme of an invisible Church, their Project has perish'd with them: And if Christ had left his Church without any Obligation to external Union, as a *visible Society*, his Religion had had the same Fate, and been long since forgotten.

It has been pretended that the Laws of *Charity* and *Benevolence*, are sufficient Provisions for all the Union that Christ ever intended among his Disciples: But These unite us only as *Men*, and not as *Christians*: These Duties are indeed prescribed to us by the Gospel with greater Accuracy and Refinement than by any other Institution; but still they are but a more correct Edition of the common Rules of *Humanity*: Something more is required to Unite and Distinguish us as *Christians*, viz. Such a Profession of *Faith*, a Participation in such *Ordinances*, and the Observation of those *Laws* which embody us as a *visible Society*, and without these I resume that the Church of Christ will quickly become *Invisible*, in a Sense that will imply its utter Destruction.

It is evident that all the Designs which have been form'd against Christianity, since its first Institution, have endeavour'd its Subversion as a *visible Society*; And that the present Enemies of the Gospel among us pursue the same Maxims, appears from the Applause and Triumph with which they receive all Notions which tend to dissolve the *External Polity* of the Church, and withdraw Mens respect from  
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those *Offices* and *Administrations* without which it cannot subsist. They are contented that the Duties which flow from our *internal* Relation to Christ, and belong to us as Members of his *Invisible* Church, shou'd be press'd and recommended, provided the Submission we owe to those *whom He has appointed to Rule over us*, be left out of the Catalogue, and all those Laws, Duties, and Offices, which incorporate and unite us as a *visible Society* be exposed as *Priest-craft* and *Imposture*: Because They see plainly that these Principles will so effectually assist them in Subverting the Church as a *visible Society*, that not even a single Congregation can be form'd upon them: And they are very well satisfied, that if They can once dissolve those Ties which unite us together as a *Visible* Church, our *Invisible* Church will give them no trouble, but Expire of it self.

It deserves our Observation, That tho' these Principles were very much preach'd and inculcated in the late Times of Confusion, and proved of excellent Use for perfecting the *Root and Branch-work* then in Hand; yet when this was accomplish'd, it was soon found that the same Tools which had been so successively employ'd in pulling down the *Establish'd Religion*, wou'd not serve to build up any thing else in the place of it: And accordingly all the various Schemes of Religion which were then offer'd to the World, however different in other respects, yet agreed All

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in proposing some Form of a *visible Society*. Among Others, indeed, we have a Project of a Church which the Author (a) pretends to form upon these Principles. He lays down for his Foundation, (b) *That the Church is not an Outward or visible Society, but a Spiritual and invisible fellowship wholly hid from carnal Eyes, not govern'd by Outward and visible Officers, according to outward visible Forms and Orders-- That Christ, and the Holy Spirit, are the only Officers in it (c), That there is no Distinction of Clergy and Laity, (d) but all are Priests alike, have Power alike, &c.* But when He comes to tell us how Religion is to be exercised and Administer'd in this Church, He is forced to allow it Power to *gather it self together to appoint Officers to Judge all Doctrines (e)*, and in short describes as very a *visible Society*, with Officers, *Legislative Authority*, and *Jurisdiction*, as any of those which He had before opposed and reviled as Churches of *Men* and of *Antichrist*, with this only Difference, that whereas They were either *Monarchical*, *Aristocratical*, or *mix'd* of both, His is form'd upon the Model of a *Democracy*.

From what has been observ'd it appears, that the Practice and Judgment of all Ages, past and present, and of all Men, Friends, and Enemies concur in affirming this Propo-

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(a) *Dell's Way of Peace and Unity, Printed 1649.* (b) *P. g. 6.*  
(c) *P. 11.* (d) *P. 94.* (e) *P. 55, 56, & seq.*

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fition; *That the Profession and Exercise of Christian Religion cannot be preserv'd, nor the Church of Christ subsist, unless we allow It to act as a visible Society.* And if this be acknowledg'd a true Proposition, It necessarily follows, That all Doctrines which tend to subvert the Church as a *visible Society* equally tend to extirpate Christianity from the Earth. And since the Church of Christ cannot subsist as a *visible Society*, without some Persons distinguish'd by such Powers and Offices as are necessary for the Administration of its Polity; Whoever teaches that no Christian has these Powers, or is distinguish'd by any Office or Commission from another, advances a Doctrine which if it were universally receiv'd wou'd abolish the Christian Religion.

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C H A P. III.

*Of the Advantage given to Popery by these Principles.*

**A**S a sufficient Ballance for these *Absurdities*, it is objected against the Principles and Doctrines of those who assert the external Polity of the Church, That they necessarily lead us to *Popery*. It may therefore be worth our while to consider in a few Pages which Side, in the conduct of this Dispute, have given the greatest Advantages to that Religion.

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ligion. I assure my self it will appear from a Comparison, that the Powers, which either the preceeding Discourse, or, so far as I know, any other Author of this Church who has engaged in this Controversy ascribe to the *visible* Officers of the Christian Church, are no other than the *Church of England* claims to her Ministers; and consequently this Charge is in Effect laid against the Doctrines and Constitution of *this Church*, and can be look'd on as nothing else but a Revival of the old Clamours against *Popery* and *Prelacy*.

It might indeed have been hoped that *this Church* shou'd for one Age at least have been secure from this Calumny, and that none who remember'd with how resolute a Zeal she oppos'd *Popery* in a late Reign shou'd suspect Her of any Inclination to return to that Communion. But because this is a Slander under which she has often *labour'd*, and by which she has been once *destroy'd*, it more particularly concerns us to defend her Doctrines or Discipline from this Imputation.

In order to this, I beg leave to observe, that *Popery* is a Word of very ambiguous and uncertain Application: If we look with Attention into that confus'd Multitude who join in this Out-cry against us, we shall find that the Mutiny is led on by a Sett of *Deists*, *Arians*, *Socinians* and other *Hereticks*, and the Rear of it is brought up by a Rabble of *Se-ctaries*; and, I think, I need not trouble my self with proving that by *Popery* the Former  
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of these mean *Christianity*, and the Latter the *Church of England*; and with these many honest and good Christians, are prevail'd on to joyn, deceiv'd by an Equivocal Word, who by *Popery* mean the same thing that we do, the Tyranny and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*. Now we readily acknowledge, that after the Way which the *two former* of these call *Popery*, so worship we the God of our Fathers, and his Son Jesus Christ. And the *Last*, we hope, will be persuaded to separate themselves from the Counsels of these wicked Men, who by suggesting Fears of *Popery*, where no such fear is, wou'd drive them into Conclusions destructive of this Protestant Church, and of Christianity it self. To rescue them from this Delusion I desire them to recollect.

*First*, That *Popery* has never been so unanswerably baffled as by the *Clergy* of this Church, who have not found themselves obliged by their Defence of it, to depart from any of those Doctrines which are now represented as favouring their Adversaries (a).

*Secondly*, That all the Powers we claim to the Ministers of the Church are clearly

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(a) *Vid.* The two Answers to the Bishop of Meath's Exposition of the Doctrine of the Catholick Church, *S: 20.* Both Printed in 1686.

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proved to have been deliver'd down to them by Christ and his Apostles, who we presume will not be suspected of Inclinations to *Popery*. But,

*Thirdly*, I must especially observe, That this very Charge of *promoting Popery*, may with much greater Justice be return'd on the Authors of it, than it can be imputed to those on whom they labour to fix it. We cannot give *Popery* a greater Advantage than by reckoning any of the Primitive Truths of Christianity among the Corruptions of the Church :

*Hoc Itbacus velit & magno mercentur Atridae.*

For these Articles being capable of clear and incontestable Proofs, 'tis easy for the *Missionaries* of that Religion, by shewing how much it is injured in these Imputations to persuade Men that they are equally abused in all other : And that all the Doctrines objected to, will, upon Examination, be found as well supported, as these.

And so again, when 'tis declared, that the *Reformation cannot be defended* but upon such *Principles* as are apparently destructive of all Order and Polity in the Church of Christ, since it may be proved to any reasonable Man, that an External Order and Polity were instituted in the Church by Christ and his Apostles, and that with-  
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out them it could not subsist; This Conclusion must appear unavoidable to him, that the *Reformation* cannot be defended but upon such Principles as contradict an Institution of Christ and his Apostles, and are in their Consequences subversive of the Christian Religion; and what his next Inference must be need not be suggested.

It certainly deserves a serious Consideration from every *good Protestant*, that our Enemies of the Church of *Rome* have labour'd for the Proof of no Point with more Application than that which is here in effect granted them, *viz.* That the *Principles* upon which the *Reformation* was founded, are inconsistent with all Order, Discipline, and OEconomy in the *Visible Church*. Whoever looks into the *Christian Moderator* (a), *Fiat Lux* (b), *Pax vobis*, the *Protestant's Plea for a Socinian* (c), and many other Authors of the *Romish Church* in our own Language, will presently see that the sole aim and drift of those Books is to expose the *Reformation* as form'd upon these Positions as its Principles, ---*That no Christian has Authority to be Ruler or Guide to another in Matters of Religion*---*That every one has a Right to interpret Scripture as He pleases, to believe what He pleases, and to worship God in what way or manner He pleases*---

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(a) Printed Ann. 1652. (b) Printed Ann. 1662. (c) Printed Ann. 1686.



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And upon this *Supposition* they proceed to shew, That no Heresy can be convinced, no Order, no Ministry, no Discipline, no Form or Appearance of a *Visible* Society be preserv'd in the Church upon the Principles of the *Reformation*. And if the *Supposition* be allowed, I am afraid it will be difficult to avoid the Consequences they deduce from it. And therefore those worthy Persons who have Undertaken to answer any of these insidious Treatises deny the *Supposition*, and prove contrary to it; That the Principles of the *Reformation* acknowledge an *Authority* of Rule, Doctrine, and Jurisdiction in some Christians over others; That they do not allow every one to *Interpret* as he pleases, to *Believe* as he pleases, or to *worship God* as he pleases. That the Scripture is a *plain Rule* in all Things necessary, which every one is obliged to understand in its *plain* Sense. That in all difficult and doubtful Cases, the Determinations of our appointed Guides are a *Rule* which we are bound to receive, and act by, and that whoever professes or acts contrary to plain Scripture, in one Case, or the Direction of his proper Guides in the other, is justly punishable by the *Censures* and *Authority* of the Church.

But with what Triumph will their Adversaries now reply to these Answers, and appeal in proof of their *Supposition* to the Concessions of those who profess themselves  
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the greatest Champions of the *Protestant Cause*? How will they insult us with an *Ex ore tuo*, when they can produce not a few Enthusiasts, but the *Reverend* and *Right Reverend* of our Church declaring in Terms, that These are in Truth the *Principles* of the *Reformation*; and that it cannot be defended upon any other? One would imagine these Persons must prevaricate in the Cause they pretend to appear for, That the hand of the *Jesuit* was with them, and that they only pursued the Design of the Authors abovementioned. For I think 'tis impossible to serve the Interests of the Church of *Rome* more effectually, than by representing the *Reformation* as founded on such Principles as the *Rights of the Church*, and other late Authors, who seem to Copy after the Sentiments of that Book have asserted. And whoever is convinced that the *Reformation* cannot be defended but upon such *Principles* as These, will easily be prevail'd on to make this Inference, That Salvation can only be had in the Church of *Rome*.

I do not know whether it may be thought an Objection against these Doctrines, that they Expose the Church of *England* to the Malice and Scorn of every petulant *Sectary*; That they throw down all her Inclosures, trample her Articles, Orders, and Discipline under Foot, and leave her naked and defenceless, without Authority to Correct,  
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or even Rebuke her Enemies. But it cannot but raise the concern of her true Sons to see Those who *eat of her Bread*, and are nourished in her Bosom, lift up the same Weapons against her, by which all her Adversaries labour her Destruction, and by which, as I observ'd, they once accomplish'd it. He must be a Stranger to the History of *Forty One*, who has not observ'd that the Church of *England* was not destroy'd by opposing any stated Scheme of Religion against it, but by general Declamations against the Tyranny of *Impositions*, and by Pretences of restoring Christ to his *Kingdom*, and his Subjects to their *Liberty*; in short, by the very same licentious Principles, almost word for word that are now contend- ed for.

The *Presbyterians*, indeed, tho' they join'd at first in this common Cry of the *Enthusiasts* of those times, which They saw was of such excellent Use in pulling down and demolishing, that nothing could stand before it, presumed They should be able to serve themselves out of the Effects of it, and establish their own Project of Religion upon the Ruins. But alas! They found themselves miserably deceived in the Event: For the same Engines which they made use of in battering down the Church, were immediately turn'd against them; and tho' they struggled hard against the Stream, and preach- ed loudly for the Necessity of Church Dis-  
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cipline, yet they were forc'd to submit, and were carried down by the same Torrent of Anarchy which had swept away the *Episcopal* Church before; while the *Papists* stood by and laugh'd at the Confusion, telling us, that these were the necessary and unavoidable Fruits of the Principles of the *Reformation*, *press'd home to their Consequences* (a). That these were the Doctrines by which we supplanted them, and which wou'd Supplant and Overturn every Church that should pretend to Act as a *Visible* Society to the End of the World. But blessed be God we are able to defend our *Reformation* upon better Principles than these, such as are consistent with that Order and Polity which Christ instituted in his Church; and such as will equally preserve it from the *Tyranny* of their *Usurpations* on the one hand, and the confusion of *Fanatick Anarchy* on the other.

And, in the *Bowels* of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, let me intreat those Authors who have put the Issue of the Protestant Cause upon such Principles, as are destructive of all Order and Discipline in the Church of Christ, to consider what Advantages they give to the Enemies of the *Reformation*, of the *Church of England*, and of our common *Christianity*.

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(a) *Fiat Lux*, p. 188, 189, 191, 255. R. T. Answer to Dr. Boughen's *Account of the Church Catholick*, p. 110.

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The *Papists*, we may reasonably fear, will be the greatest Gainers from the Confusion which this Scheme tends to introduce. For the Perplexity and Distress which is brought upon the Mind by these Principles, arises from their apparent Inconsistency with the being of the Church as a *visible Society*. Now, whoever is convinced that the Church of Christ is a *visible Society*, and at the same time believes what these Authors so confidently affirm, that the *Reformation cannot be defended but upon these Principles*, will want very little Persuasion to conclude, that this Reform'd Church cannot be the true Church of Christ. All the Adversaries indeed of our Church concur in advancing this Scheme, which in its immediate Consequences tends to dissolve its Union, and destroy its external Constitution, and each have their several Views of Advantage from the Success of it. For if once the Sheep can be deprived of their Shepherds; or which is all one, the Shepherds can be deprived of all Authority over them; every Sect has its Prospect of gathering up the dispersed and scatter'd Flock, and uniting them to themselves, whilst the common Enemies of Christianity hope, that the same Arguments will, with equal Success, be applied to one after another, and in the End subvert them All. In few words; He, who by these Doctrines is convinced that the Church of Christ is not  
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a *Visible* Society, will probably in a little time fall to the *Infidels* share, and He who concludes no farther from them than that the Reform'd Church cannot subsist as a *Visible* Society, will naturally fall a Prey to the *Papists*. And since it may be presumed, that the greater Part of those whom these Doctrines may unsettle in their Religion, may be unwilling totally to depart from Christianity; the *Latter* have the fairest Prospect of being served by them.

That they hope for uncommon Advantages from the Distractions to which these Doctrines lead, appears from their lately Reprinting *Fiat Lux*, and other Treatises, whose whole drift is to expose the *Reformation* as founded on these very Doctrines as its Principles; and I am assured, that Instances may be produced of Persons who merely from reading some late celebrated Defences of the *Reformation* upon these Principles, have immediately, and without any Application from the Missionaries of *Rome*, come out of their Closets profess *Papists*.

It may perhaps be said, and I hope truly, that these Authors did not intend that any of these Inferences should be made from their Doctrines; That what they assert of the *Equality of all Christians*, &c. They meant only of the *Invisible* Church; in which Application we acknowledge it to be true. Let all this be granted; yet 'tis evident, that this *Limitation* of their Doctrines does not appear

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pear to their Readers, both Friends and Adversaries understand them otherwise, and believe it to be expressly taught in their Writings, that the Church of Christ is not a *Visible Society*; and that the Powers ordinarily claim'd to the Ministers of the Church, are *Priestcraft* and *Usurpation*. Let these Authors but fairly and explicitly declare themselves to agree with us in these *Points*, and we have no farther any Controversy with them; Let them but renounce those Consequences, which the Weakness of Some, and the Malice of Others, has drawn from their Assertions, and assure us, that They themselves believe those Principles by which the Visible Society of Christ's Church subsists, and we shall no longer apprehend any Danger from their Writings: But when nothing of this is done; when They are daily understood in a Sense from which Conclusions are inferr'd destructive of Christianity, we think our selves equally obliged to oppose these Conclusions, and prevent the Mischiefs with which They threaten us, whether these Authors *intended* them or not.

In the precedeing Discourse, I have endeavour'd to shew, that without any Inconsistency we may affirm of Christians, That as *Members of the Invisible Church, They are immediately and only Subject to Christ*: And that as *Members of the Visible, They are Subject to certain Officers whom Christ has appointed*

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pointed for the external Government of his Church. And if the Authors abovemention'd did not design to represent these two Characters as inconsistent with each other, I may hope to receive their Thanks for restraining their Doctrines within such Limitations as leave them without Objection: But if they have really intended by general and unrestrain'd Assertions concerning the Rights or Duties of Christians to cast a Mist before the Eyes of Men, and lead them into Conclusions destructive of the external Constitution of the Church; I hope what has been here suggested, will in some measure lay open the *Fallacy*, and prevent Mens being farther imposed on by it.

I am sensible that this Discourse cannot presume to call it self a *complete Account* of the Church of Christ, as distinguish'd by these two Ideas of *Visible* and *Invisible*; a Subject of such Extent and Importance, that any one Man's Life would be very fully and usefully employ'd in the Consideration of it. But my Design oblig'd me to consider it only so far as appear'd necessary to infer this Conclusion, That what is affirm'd of the Church under *One* Idea, is not irreconcilable with what is affirm'd of it under the *Other*.

That a great Part of the Dangers and Distractions have either befallen or threaten'd *this Church* for some Ages past, and which particularly alarm our Apprehensions at present,  
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may be ascribed principally to the Confusion of these two *Ideas*, will appear to any one who will trace the several Attempts that have been made upon our Peace and Constitution back to their Principles. The judicious Mr. *Hooker* saw plainly how dangerously this *Stumbling-block* lay in the Way of Mens Inquiries into the Nature and Constitution of the Church. But many other even among the Ornaments and Defenders of our Church, tho' they had the good Fortune to pass by it, yet seem not to have perceiv'd it. None, however, have apply'd themselves either to remove or caution Men of the Danger; it has still lain in the Way, and Multitudes have fallen upon it.

If any thing that has been suggested in this Discourse may place so much Light upon this *Rock of Offence*, that for the future it may more easily be avoided, or may assist any other Hand more equal to the Work in wholly removing it, I shall esteem my self to have been happily employ'd.

F I N I S.



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### E R R A T A.

**P**Ref. p. viii. l. 5. r. *such Insinuations of the Tyranny*, p. 3. l. 18. for *they* r. *these Terms*, p. 37. l. 10. after *proposed* add *to*, p. 113. l. 10, 11. r. *confesses the Absolution of the Church, or a desire of it to be a necessary condition of obtaining God's Pardon as a part, &c.*

