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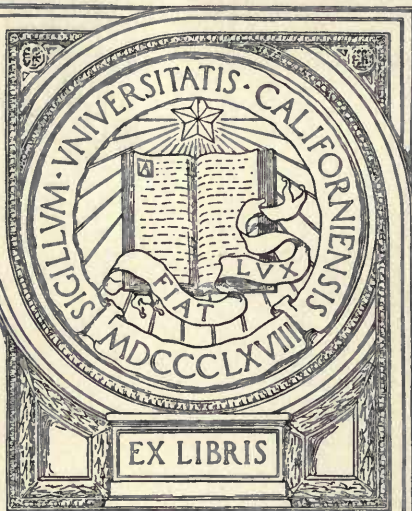


Discourse Concerning Conscience

By

John Sharp

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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This is the famous Discourse by Dr. Benj. Calamy which pleased & displeas'd so many

*An Answer was published by Thomas D. Laune
See in the third pamph. after this.*

DISCOURSE

CONCERNING

Conscience;

WHEREIN

An Account is given of the Nature, and Rule, and Obligation, of it.

AND

The Case of those who Separate from the Communion of the Church of England as by Law Established, upon this Pretence, that it is Against their Conscience to joyn in it, is stated and discussed.

L O N D O N,

Printed for Walter Kettilby at the Bishops Head in
St. Pauls Church-Yard. 1684.

Dedicated to the ⁱⁿfamous ^{of}Jaffries

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Printed for Walter Kettilby at the Broom Field in St Pauls Church-Yard. 1707.

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DISCOURSE

OF

CONSCIENCE:

With Respect to those that Separate from the *Communion* of the *Church of England* upon the Pretence of it, &c.

HISTORY

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THERE is nothing more in our Mouths than *Conscience*; and yet there are few things we have generally taken less Pains to understand. We sit down too often with this, that it is something *within us*, we do not know what, which we are to Obey in all that it Suggests to us, and we trouble our selves no further about it.

By which means, it frequently comes to pass; that though we have espoused; very dangerous Errors, or happen to be engaged in very Sinful Practices; yet believing, and Acting, as we say, according to our Conscience; we do not only think our selves perfectly Right and Safe, while we continue in this State; but are Effectually Armed against all sorts of Arguments, and Endeavours that can be used for the bringing us to a better Mind.

This is too Visible in many Cases; but in none more than in the Case of those that at this Day Sepa-

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rate from the *Communion of the Church* as it is Establish'd among us. Though the *Laws of the Land* both *Ecclesiastical, and Civil*, do oblige them to joyn in our *Communion*; though many *Arguments* are offer'd to convince them, not only that they *Lawfully* may, but that they are bound to do it: though they themselves are sensible, that many-fold, and grievous mischiefs, and dangers, do ensue from this breach of *Communion*, and these unnatural *Divisions*, both to the *Christian Religion* in General, and to our *Reformed Religion* in particular, yet if to all these things, a Man can reply, that he is *Satisfied* in his *Conscience* that he doth well in refusing his *Obedience* to the *Laws*; or that he is *not satisfied* in his *Conscience* that he ought to joyn with us upon such *Terms* as are required; this single pretence shall be often thought a sufficient Answer, both to *Laws*, and *Arguments*.

A strange thing this is; that *Conscience*, which among other ends, was given to Mankind for a Preservative, and Security of the Publick Peace; for the more Effectually Obliging Men to *Unity*, and *Obedience* to *Laws*; yet should often be a means of setting them at distance, and prove a Shelter for *Disobedience*, and *Disorder*: That God should Command us to Obey our Governours in all *Lawful* things for *Conscience* sake; and yet that we should *Disobey* them in *Lawful* things for *Conscience* sake too.

It is the Design of this Discourse to examine what there is in this Plea, that is so often made by our *Disfenters* for their not complying with the *Laws*, viz. That it is against their *Conscience* so to do; and to shew in what *Cases* this Plea is justly made, and in what *Cases* not; and where it is Justly made, how far it will Justify any Mans Separation, and how far it will not. And all this in order to the possessing those who
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are concerned, with a Sense of the great Necessity that lyes upon them, of using their most serious endeavours to inform their Conscience aright in these matters, before they presume to think they can Separate from us with a *good Conscience*, which is all we desire of them; for it is not our business to perswade any Man to conform against his Conscience; but to convince every Man how Dangerous it may be to follow a *misinformed Conscience*.

But before I enter upon this disquisition, it will be necessary in the first Place, to prepare my way by laying down the Grounds, and Principles, I mean to proceed upon. And here that I may take in all things, that are needful to be known before-hand, about this matter, I shall treat distinctly of these Five Heads.

1. Of the *Nature of Conscience*.
2. Of the *Rule of Conscience*. And under that,
3. Of the *Power of Humane Laws to Oblige the Conscience*.
4. And particularly in the instance of *Church Communion*.
5. Of the *Authority of Conscience*; or how far a Man is Obliged to be guided by his Conscience in his Actions.

I. And first, as for the *Nature of Conscience*, the truest way to find out that will be, not so much to enquire into the Signification of the word *Conscience*; or the several *Scholastical* Definitions of it; as to consider what every Man doth really mean by that word when he has occasion to make use of it; for if it do appear that all Men do agree in their Notions, and Sense, about this matter; That without doubt, which they all thus agree in, is the true Notion, and Sense of *Conscience*.

Now as to this, we may observe in the first Place, that a Man never speaks of his *Conscience*, but with

respect to *his own Actions*, or to something that hath the Nature of an Action which is done or omitted by him, or is to be done or omitted, Matters of *meer Knowledge*, and Speculation, we do not concern our Conscience with ; as neither with those things in which we are *purely Passive* ; as neither with *Actions*, if they be not *our-own*. We do not for instance, make it a Point of Conscience one way or other, whether a thing be true or false ; or whether this or the other Accident that befalls us, be prosperous or unfortunate ; or whether another Man hath done good or bad Actions, in which we are no way concerned. These kind of things may indeed prove matters of great Satisfaction or Disquiet ; of Joy or Grief to us : But we do not take our *Conscience* to be affected with them. That word never comes in, but with respect to something willingly done or left undone by us ; or which we may do or may forbear.

Secondly, we may observe that in Common Speech, we do not neither use this word Conscience about our Actions, but only, so far as those Actions fall under a *Moral* consideration ; that is, as they have the Nature of *Duties* or *Sins*, or as they are *Lawful* or *Unlawful*. Always when we speak of Conscience in our Actions, we have respect to some *Law* or *Rule*, by which those Actions are to be directed, and govern'd, and by their agreeableness or disagreeableness with which they become morally *Good* or *Evil*.

Thirdly, this being so ; the only thing remaining to be enquired into for the finding out what Conscience is, is, what can be reasonably thought to be our Sense, and meaning, when we use the word *Conscience*, with such Application to our *Actions* as we have now said. Now for that I desire it may be considered ; that when we talk of our *Actions* as we concern our Conscience

in them, they can but fall under these two Heads of Distinction, that is to say, in the first place, we either consider our Actions as *already done or omitted* : or we consider them as *yet not done, but as we are deliberating about them*. And then Secondly, whether we consider them as done or not done ; as past, or future ; yet we Rank them under one of these three Notions.

We either look upon them as *Commanded by God*, and so to be *Duties* ; or as *forbidden by God*, and so to be *Sins* ; or as *neither Commanded nor forbidden*, and so to be *indifferent Actions*. (With these last Actions indeed Conscience is not properly or directly concerned, but only by accident, to wit, as those indifferent *Actions* do approach to the Nature of Duties or Sins :) Our Actions, I say, do not touch our Conscience, but as they fall under some of these Heads.

Now in all these Respects we have indeed different ways of bringing in Conscience but yet as it will appear, we mean the same thing by it in them all. First of all when we are considering an Action *as yet not done* ; if we look upon it as *Commanded by God* ; we say we are *bound in Conscience* to do it ; if we look upon it as a *Sinful Action*, we say it is *against our Conscience* to do it ; if we look upon it as an *indifferent thing*, we say we may do it or not do it with a *Safe Conscience*. Now I pray, what do we mean by these expressions ? I desire that every one would consult his own Mind, and deny if he can, that this is the Sense of his words. If he saith he is *bound in Conscience* to do this or the other thing, whether he doth not mean this ? that he verily thinks it is his Duty to do that Action. If he saith that it is *against his Conscience* to do such an Action ; whether he means any more than this ? that he is perswaded in his Judgment that to do such an Action is an Offence against God. If he saith
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that he can do it with a *Safe Conscience* whether he hath any other meaning than this? that to the best of his Knowledge, and Judgment, the Action may be done without Transgressing any Law of God. This is now undeniably, the Sense that every Man in the World hath, when he makes mention of Conscience as to Actions that are not yet done, but only proposed to his Consideration. So that taking Conscience as it respects our *Actions* to be done or omitted, and as it is to Govern, and Conduct them (in which Sense we call Conscience a Guide or a Monitor, and sometimes, though very improperly, a *Rule* of our Actions) it can be nothing else in the Sense of all Men that use that word, but a Mans Judgment concerning the goodness or badness; the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of Actions in order to the Conduct of his own Life.

But Secondly if we speak of our Actions that are done and past, and consider Conscience with Reference to them; here indeed we do a little vary the Expression about Conscience, but the Notion of it is the same we have now given. As for instance, when we talk of *Peace of Conscience*, or *Trouble of Conscience*, with Reference to some Action we have done or omitted; when we say *My Conscience bears me Witness*, that I have Acted rightly, and honestly in this Affair; or my Conscience acquits me from blame, as to this or the other Action; or I am troubled in Conscience for doing what I have done: If we turn these Phrases into other words, we shall find that there is nothing more at the bottom of them than this; that reflecting upon our own Actions, we find that in this or the other instance, we have either Acted or omitted, as we are convinced in our Judgment we ought to do; and the remembrance of this is some Pleasure, and Satisfaction to us: or we have done or forborn something

contrary to what we take to be our Duty ; and the remembrance of this affects us with grief and trouble. But still, in both these instances of Expression, that which we mean by Conscience is the same thing, as in the former Cases, *viz.* *It is our Judgment and Persuasion concerning what we ought to do, or ought not to do, or Lawfully may do*; only here we add to it this Consideration, that the Action which we are persuaded to be good, or bad, or indifferent, is now done or omitted by us, and we do remember it. In the Former Case, Conscience was considered as the Guide of our Actions. (In the latter Case it is considered as the Witness of our Actions.) But in both Cases, Conscience is the Judge, and consequently in both Cases the Notion of it is the same, only with this difference, that in the former it was a Mans mind, making a Judgment what he ought to do or not to do; in the latter it is a Mans mind reflecting upon what he hath done or not done, and Judging whether he be Innocent or Culpable in the matter he reflects upon.

I do not know how to give a clearer account of the Nature of Conscience in general than this I have now given. This I believe is the Natural Notion that all Men have of it, and there is no Expression in Scripture about it but what doth confirm this Notion. If indeed we put Epithites to Conscience, and talk of a Good Conscience or an Evil Conscience; A Tender Conscience or a Seared Conscience or the like. Then it includes more, both in Scripture, and in Common Language, than I have now mentioned. But to give an account of those things I am not now concerned, as being without the Limits of our present enquiry.

II. And now we are sufficiently prepared for our Second general Point which is touching the *Rule of Conscience*;

science; if indeed after what we have already said it be not superfluous to insist upon that.

It appears plainly by what I have represented, that Conscience must always have a *Rule* which it is to follow, and by which it is to be Govern'd. For since Conscience is nothing else but a Mans *Judgment* concerning *Actions, as good, or bad, or Indifferent*; it is certain that a Man must have some measures to proceed by in order to the framing such a Judgment about Actions; that is to say, there must be something distinct from the Man himself that makes Actions to be good, or bad, or indifferent; and from which, by applying particular Actions to it, or comparing them with it, a Man may be able to Judge whether they be of the one sort or the other. Now this, whatever it be, is that which we call the Rule of Conscience; and so much it is its Rule, that *Conscience* can be no farther a safe guide than as it follows that Rule.

If now it be asked what this Rule of Conscience is, or what that is which makes a difference between Actions, as to the Moral goodness or badness of them; the Answer to it is Obvious to every Body: That it can be nothing else but the *Law of God*. For nothing can be a *Duty* but what Gods Law hath made so; and nothing can be a *Sin* but what Gods Law hath forbidden (the very Notion of Sin being, that it is a Transgression of the Law;) and lastly we call a thing *Lawful* or *Indifferent* upon this very account, that there is no Law of God either Commanding or Forbidding it; and where there is no Law, there is no Transgression. So that undeniably the great, nay I say, the only Rule by which Conscience is to be Governed is the *Law of God, considered either as it Commands Actions, or Forbids them, or as it neither Commands them nor Forbids them.*

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But in order to the giving a more distinct account, of this *Rule of Conscience*, there is this needful to be enquired into, *viz.* In what Sense we take, or what we mean by the *Law of God*; when we say it is the *Rule of Conscience*.

Now to this our Answer is, That by the *Law of God*, we here understand Gods Will, for the Government of Mens Actions, in what way soever that Will is declared to them.

Now the will of God is declared to Men two ways; either by *Nature*, or by *Revelation*; so that the just, and, adequate Rule of Conscience is made up of two parts the *Law of Nature*, and *Gods Revealed Law*.

By the *Law of Nature*, we mean those Principles of Good and Evil, Just and Unjust, which God hath Stamp'd upon the Minds of all Men, in the very Constitution of their Natures. There are some things Eternally good in themselves; Such as to Worship God, to Honour our Parents, to stand to our Covenants, to Live Peaceably in the Government, from which we receive Protection; and the contrary to these will be Eternally Evil; the Heads of all which things thus good in themselves, are writ so plainly, and *Legibly*, in the Minds of Mankind, that there is no Man who is come to the use of his Reason, but must of necessity be convinced, that to Practice these things will always be his Duty, and not to Practice them, will always be Evil, and a Sin. Now all these Heads, and Principles put together, is that we call the *Law of Nature*, and this is all the Rule of Conscience, that Mankind had, before God was pleas'd to discover his Will by more particular *Revelation*. And this is that Law, which the Apostle speaks of when he saith that the *Gentiles, who had not the Law of Moses yet had a Law written in their Hearts*; by their Acting according to
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which, or contrary to which *their Conscience did bear Witness to them*, and did either *Accuse* them, or *Excuse* them.

But then Secondly, to us *Christians*, God to this *Law of Nature* hath superadded a *Revealed Law*, which is contained in the Books of *Holy Scriptures*. Which *Revealed Law* yet, is not wholly of a different kind from the former, nor doth it at all void the *Obligation* of it. But only thus; God hath in his *Revealed Law*, declared the *Precepts* of the *Law of Nature*, more certainly, and accurately than before; He hath given greater *Force*, and *Strength* to them, than they had before, by the *Sanctions* of greater *Rewards*, and *Punishments*: He hath likewise herein perfected the *Law of Nature*, and hath *Obliged* us, in point of *Duty*, to more and higher *Instances* of *Vertue*, than *Nature* did strictly *Oblige* us to: And *Lastly*, He hath added some *Positive Laws* for us to observe which were not at all contained in the *Law of Nature*, as for instance, to believe in *Jesus Christ*, in order to *Salvation*; to make all our *Applications* to God, in the *Name* of that *Mediatour Christ Jesus*; to enter into a *Christian Society*, by *Baptism*, and to *Exercise Communion* with that *Society*, by partaking of the *Lords Supper*.

And this is that *Law*, which we *Christians* are *Obliged* to, as well as to the *Law of our Natures*, and which as it is a *Summary* of all the *Laws of Nature*, so indeed is it a *Summary* of all our *Duty*. So that if any *Man* will call it the *great*, or only *Rule of Christian Conscience*, I shall not much oppose him, provided that this be always *Remembered*, that,

In the *Third Place*, when we say that the *Natural* and *Revealed Law* of God, is the *just Rule*, by which we are to *Govern* our *Conscience*, or when we say that the *Law of God*, as *Revealed*, and contained in the *Bible*, is to us *Christians*, the *just Rule*. We are so

to understand this Proposition as to take into it, not only all that is directly, and expressly Commanded, or Forbidden by either of those Laws : But also all that by plain Collection of Right Reason in Applying Generals to Particulars, or comparing one thing with another doth appear to be Commanded or Forbidden by them.

So that by the *Law of Nature*, as it is a Rule of Conscience, we are not only to understand the prime Heads, and most general Dictates of it, (which are but a few) but also all the necessary Deductions from those Heads. And by the *Law of Scripture*, as it is the Rule of Conscience, we are not only to understand the express Commands, and Prohibitions, we meet with there, in the letter of the Text ; but all the things likewise, that by unavoidable Consequence do follow from those Commands, or Prohibitions. In a word, when we are deliberating with our selves, concerning the goodness, or badness ; the Lawfulness, or Unlawfulness of this, or the other particular Action : We are not only to look upon the letter of the Law, but to attend further to what that Law may be supposed by a Rational Man to contain in it. And if we be convinced, that the Action we are deliberating about, is Commanded, or Forbidden, by direct *Inference*, or by *Parity of Reason* ; we ought to look upon it as a Duty, or a Sin, though it be not expressly *Commanded*, or *Forbidden*, by the Law, in the letter of it. And if neither by the letter of the Law ; nor by Consequence from it ; nor by Parity of Reason ; the Action before us, appear either to be Commanded, or Forbidden : In that Case, we are to look upon it, as an indifferent Action ; which we may do, or let alone, with a safe Conscience ; or, to express the thing more properly, we are to look upon it as an Action in which our *Conscience* is not so much concerned as our *Prudence*.

III. Having thus given an account of the *Rule of Conscience*, that which Naturally follows next to be considered, with Reference to our present design, is, *what share Humane Laws have in this Rule of Conscience?* whether they be a part of this Rule, and do really bind a Mans Conscience to the Observance of them or no? which is our Third general Head.

Now as to this, our Answer is, that though the *Laws of God* be the great, and indeed the only Rule of Conscience, yet the *Laws of Men*, generally speaking, do also bind the Conscience, and are a part of its Rule in a *Secondary* Sense, that is, by Vertue of, and in Subordination to the *Laws of God*.

I shall briefly explain the meaning of this, in the Four following Propositions.

First, there is nothing more certain than that the *Law of God*, as it is declared both by Nature, and Scripture doth Command us, to Obey the *Laws of Men*.

There is no one Dictate of Nature, more Obvious to us, than this, that we are to Obey the Government we Live under, in all honest, and Just things. For this is indeed the Principal Law, and Foundation of all Society. And it would be impossible, either for Kingdoms, or States; for Citys, or Families to subsist; or at least to maintain themselves in any Tolerable degree of Peace, and Happiness, if this be not acknowledged a Duty.

And then, as for the *Laws of God* in Scripture, there is nothing more plainly declared there, than, that it is Gods Will, and our Duty to Obey them that have the Rule over us; and to Submit our selves to every Ordinance of Man, for the Lords sake, and to be Subject not only for Wrath but for Conscience sake. So that no Man can doubt that he is really bound in Duty to Obey the *Laws of Men* that are made by Just, and Sufficient Authority. And Consequently no Man can doubt that

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Humane Laws do really bind the Conscience, and are one part of the Rule by which it is to be directed, and Governed.

But then having said this, we add this farther in the Second Place, that *Humane Laws do not bind the Conscience, by any Vertue in themselves; but meerly by Vertue of Gods Law, who has Commanded that we should in all things be Subject to our Lawful Governours, not only for Wrath, but for Conscience sake.* Conscience is not properly concerned with any Being in the World, save God alone, it hath no Superiour but him: For the very Notion of it, as I have often said, is no other than *our Judgment, of what things we are bound to do by Gods Law; & what things we are Forbidden to do by Gods Law.*

So that all the Men in the World, cannot bind any Mans Conscience, by Vertue of any Power, or Authority, that is in them: But now God having made it an everlasting Law, both by *Nature, and Scripture,* that we should Obey those who are set over us, whether they be our *Parents, or our Masters;* and much more our *Princes, and the Sovereign Legislative Power,* under whom we Live; by Vertue of this Command of God, and this only; we are for ever bound in Conscience, to Govern our Actions, by the Commands, that they impose upon us; and those Commands of theirs are a Rule, (though a *Consequential, or a Secondary Rule,*) by which we are to Govern our Conscience, because they are the Instances of our Obedience to the Laws of God.

But then in the Third Place, this is also to be remembered; that *Humane Laws do no farther bind the Conscience, and are a Rule of it, than as they are agreeable to the Laws of God.* If any Law, or Command of Man, do Clash with any Law of God; that is, if it be either Evil in it self, or Contradictory to the Duty
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of *Christians*, as laid down in the Scriptures; in that Case, that Law or Command, by what Humane Authority soever it was made or given, doth not bind our Conscience, nor is any Rule of our Actions. On the contrary we are not at any Rate to yield Obedience to it; but we are here reduced to the Apostles Case, and must Act as they did; that is, we *must Obey God, rather than Men*, and we Sin, if we do not. For since God only hath proper, and direct Authority over our Conscience, and Humane Power, only, by Delegation from him: And since God hath not given any Commission to the most Sovereign Princes upon Earth, to alter his Laws, or to impose any thing upon his Subjects, that is inconsistent with them. It follows by necessary Consequence, that no Man can be Obligated to Obey any Laws of Men, farther than they are agreeable to, and consistent with the Laws of God.

There is yet a Fourth thing, necessary to be taken in for the clearing the Point we are upon, and that is this, That though Humane Laws, generally speaking, may be said to bind the Conscience, and to be a part of its Rule: Yet we do not Assert that every *Humane Law*, (though it doth not interfere with any of Gods Laws) *doth at all times, and in all Cases, Oblige Every Mans Conscience to Active Obedience to it*; so as that he Sins against God, if he Transgress it. No, it would be a very hard thing to affirm this; and I do not know what Man among us, upon these Terms, would be Innocent.

Thus much I believe we may safely lay down as a Truth; That where either the *Matter* of the Law is of such a Nature; that the Publick, or some private Person shall Suffer Damage, or Inconvenience, by our not Observing it. Or Secondly, Though the Law, as to the *matter* of it be never so Trifling; nay, though per-
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haps all things considered, it be an inconvenient Law; yet if the *Manner* of our not Obeying it, be such, as gives *Offence* to our Superiours, or to any others; that is, either Argues a *Contempt* of Authority, or sets an ill *Example* before our fellow Subjects: I say in either of these Cases, the Transgression of a Humane Law, renders a Man guilty of a *Fault*, as well as Obnoxious to the *Penalty* of that Law. But out of these two Cases, I must confess, I do not see, how a purely Humane Law doth Oblige the Conscience; or how the Transgression of it, doth make a Man guilty of Sin, before God. For it is certain if we secure these two Points; that is to say, the good of the Publick, and of private Persons; and with all the sacredness, and respect, which is due to Authority, (which is likewise in Order to the Publick good:) We Answer all the Ends, for which the Power of making Laws, or laying Commands upon Inferiours, was Committed by God to Mankind.

So that though it be true, that Humane Laws do Oblige the Conscience, yet it is also true that a great many Cases may, and do happen, in which a Man may Act contrary to a purely Humane Law, and yet not be a Sinner before God. Always supposing (as I said,) there be no *Contempt*, or *Refractoryness* expressed towards the Governours: Nor, no *Scandal*, or ill Example given to others, by *the Action*. For if there be either of these in the Case; I dare not acquit the Man, from being a Transgressor of Gods Law, in the instance, wherein he Transgresseth the Laws of *Men*.

For this is that which we insist upon; that the Authority of our Governours ought to be held, and esteemed very sacred, both because the Laws of *God*, and the Publick good require it should be so. And herefore, wherever they do peremptorily lay their Com-

Commands upon us, we are bound in Conscience so far to comply, as not to *contest* the matter with them; nor to *seem* to do it. And though their Commands, as to the *matter* of them, be never so slight; nay, though they should prove really inconvenient, either to our selves, or the Publick. Yet if they *stand* upon them, if they persist in requiring our Obedience to them; we must yield, we must Obey; always supposing they be not against Gods Laws. For we are at no hand either to affront their Authority our selves; or to encourage others, by our Example, to do it. For to do either of these things is a greater Evil to the Publick, than our Obedience to an inconvenient Law can easily be.

IV. And now it is time for us to apply what hath been said in General, concerning the *Rule of Conscience*, and the *Obligation of Humane Laws*; to the particular Matter here before us; that is, the business of *Church Communion*; The *Obligation of Conscience*, to which, in such manner as the *Laws* have appointed, is the Fourth general Head we are to consider.

This point of the *Obligation to Communion with the Church, as by Law Established*, hath been largely handled by several Learned Men of our Church, and particularly it is the Argument of one of those Discourses which have lately been writ for the sake of our Dissenters. Thither therefore I refer the Reader for full Satisfaction about this Matter being only just to touch upon it here, as one of the Principles we take for granted, and shall proceed upon in the following Discourse.

And here the Proposition we lay down is this, *That it is every Mans Duty, and consequently every Man is bound in Conscience to joyn in Communion with that Church, which is Established by Law in the place where he lives;*

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so long as that Church is a true, sound part of the Catholick Church, and there is nothing imposed or required as a Condition of Communicating with it, that is Repugnant to the Laws of God, or the Appointments of Jesus Christ.

This Proposition is Evident, not only because it Necessarily follows from the foregoing Principle; which was, that every Man is bound in Conscience to Obey the Laws of Men that are not contrary to the Laws of God; and therefore consequently a Man is bound to Obey in Ecclesiastical matters, as well as Civil; (unless it can be shew'd that Christ hath forbid all Humane Authority, whether Ecclesiastical or Civil, to make any Laws or Orders about Religion; which I believe never was or can be shew'd:)

But it is Evident upon another Account, which I desire may be considered. We are all really bound by the Laws of Jesus Christ, and the Nature of his Religion to preserve as much as in us lyes the Unity of the Church: Which Unity doth consist not only in professing the same Faith, but joyning together with our Brethren under Common Governours in the same Religious Communion of Worship, and Sacraments. And therefore whoever breaks this Unity of the Church, by withdrawing his Obedience from those Church Governours, which God hath set over him in the place where he Lives; and Separating from the Established Religious Assemblies of Christians under those Governours; doth really transgress the Laws of Jesus Christ, and is Guilty of that Sin of Schism, which is so very much cautioned against, and so highly Condemned in the Scriptures of the New Testament: Unless in the mean time it doth appear to the Man, who thus withdraws, and Separates, that there is something required of him in those Assemblies, and by those Governours, and that as a Term, and Condition of holding

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But is the very root of the Dissension
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Did Christ say that
To give all sufficient Laws

Communion with them, which he cannot Submit to without Sin.

And this Point I do heartily wish was well considered by our dissenting Brethren. They do seem often to look upon this business of coming to Church, and joyning with us in Prayers and Sacraments, no otherwise to bind their Conscience than other purely Humane Laws. They think they owe no Obedience to the Laws in these matters, different from that which they yield to any common Act of Parliament. And therefore no wonder they often make so slight a business of them.

But this is a great mistake, there is much more in these things than this comes to. The withdrawing our Communion from the Church carrys a far greater guilt in it, than the Violating any Law, that is purely Humane. For though we do readily grant that all the Circumstances of Publick Worship enjoyned in the Church, as for Instance, the Times, the Gestures, the Forms of Prayer, the Methods of Reading the Scripture, and Administring the Sacraments; as also the Habits of the Ministers that are to Officiate; be all of *Humane* Institution, and may be altered, and varied at the discretion of our Governours: Yet the Publick Worship it self under Publick Lawful Governours is of Divine Appointment, and no Man can Renounce it without Sinning against *Jesus Christ*, as well as Offending against the *Ecclesiastical* Laws.

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A *Humane* Law grounded upon a *Divine*, or to speak more properly, a *Divine* Law modify'd or Clothed with several Circumstances of Mans Appointment, doth Create another kind of Obligation upon every Subject, than a Law that is purely *Humane*; that is to say a Law, the matter of which is neither Good nor Evil in it self, but perfectly indifferent. In the former
Case

Case, we must yield Obedience to the Law, as to the Law of God; however it comes Clothed with Circumstances of Mans Appointment. In the other Case we only yield Obedience, as to the Command of Man; and for no other reason, than that God in general hath Obliged us to Obey our Superiors.

To make this a little plainer, let us for Instance take the business of Paying *Tribute*, and *Custom* in this Nation, in which Case there is a Complication of a Divine Law, with a Humane, as it is in the Case we are now upon. That every Subject should Pay *Tribute* to whom *Tribute* is due; *Custom* to whom *Custom* is due; is a Law of God; as being a branch both of Natural and Christian Justice. But out of what goods we should Pay *Tribute* or *Custom*, or what Proportion of those Goods should be Paid, this is not defined either by the Law of Nature or the Law of the Gospel, but is left to the Determination of the Municipal Laws of every Kingdom. But now, because Humane Authority doth interpose in this *Affair*, and settles what every Man is to Pay to the King, and out of what Commodities; doth it therefore follow, that if a Man can by Fraud or Concealment detain the Kings Right from him, that he incurs no other guilt for this, but only the Transgressing of an Act of Parliament, and the being Obnoxious to the Penalties, in Case he be detected? No certainly; for all that the Customs in that manner, and form be settled upon the King by Humane Law only; yet the matter of that Law being a point of Natural Justice between Man and Man; the Man that is thus Guilty, ought to look upon himself as an Offender against the Divine Law; as an unjust Person before God. And his willingness to Submit to the Forfeiture of his Goods, will not render him less unjust, or more excusable.

The Case is much the same as to the matter we have now before us. It is not a meer Humane Law,

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or Act of Parliament that Obligeth us to keep the Unity of the Church ; to bring our Children to be made Christians by Baptisme ; to meet together at Solemn times for the Profession of our Faith, for the Worshipping God, for the Commemorating the Death of our Saviour in the Sacrament of his Supper. All this is tyed upon us by the Laws of *Christ*. These things are as much required of us by God, as *Christians* ; as it is required that we should Pay the King, and every Man, what is due to them, if we would not be dishonest & unjust. It is true that the particular Forms, and Modes, and Circumstances of doing these things, are not Comanded, nor Prescribed, by the Laws of *Christ*, in this Instance of Church Communion, no more than they are prescribed by the Laws of God in the other Instance I gave : But they are left intirely to the Prudence, and Discretion of the Governours that God hath set over us in Ecclesiastical matters ; just as they are in the other. But in the mean time these things thus Clothed by Humane Authority, as to their *Circumstances* : Yet being for the *Matter* of them bound upon us by *Christ* himself, we can no more deny our Obedience to the Publick Laws about them, than we can in the other Instance I have named. And that Man may as well for Instance, purge himself from the Imputation of *Knavery* before God, that will contrive a way of his own, for the Paying his just Debts contrary to what the Law of the Land hath declared to be Just and Honest : As any Man can acquit himself from the Sin of Schism before God, that will chuse a way of his own for the Publick Worship, different from, and in Opposition to what the Laws of the Church have prescribed ; always supposing, that the Worship Established be Comanded by just Authority, and there be nothing required in it as a Condition.

dition of Communion that is against the Laws of Je-
sus Christ.

The Sum of all this is, that it is every Mans Duty
by the Laws of Christ, as well as the Laws of Man,
to Worship God in the way of the Church; so long
as there is nothing required in that Worship, that can
justly offend the Conscience of a Wise and Good Chri-
stian. And therefore there is more in departing from
the Communion of the Church, when we can Law-
fully hold it, than meerly the Violation of a *Statute*,
or a *Humane Law*, for we cannot do it without break-
ing the Law of God. Nay so much is it against the
Law of God to do this, that I think no Authority up-
on Earth can warrant it. So that even if there was
a Law made, which should Ordain that wilful, causeless
Separation from the Established Church should be al-
lowed and tolerated, and no Man should be called
to an Account for it: Yet nevertheless such a Separa-
tion would still be a *Schism*, would still be a Sin a-
gainst God; for no Humane Law can make that Law-
ful which Gods Law hath forbidden.

There now only remains our last general Head about
Conscience to be spoken to, and then we have done
with our *Preliminary Points*: And that is concerning
the *Authority of Conscience*, or *how far a Man is Obliged*
to follow or be guided by his Conscience in his Actions.

When we speak of the Obligation of Conscience;
or of being bound in Conscience to do or not to do an
Action, it sufficiently appears from what hath been
said, that we can mean no more by these Phrases than
this, that we are convinced in our Judgment that it is
our Duty to do this or the other Action, because we
believe that God hath Commanded it. Or we are
perswaded in our Judgment that we ought to forbear
this,

this or the other Action, because we believe that God hath forbidden it.

This now being that which we mean by the *Obligation* of *Conscience*, here we come to inquire how far this *Perswasion* or *Judgment* of ours, concerning what is our *Duty*, and what is *Sinful*, hath *Authority* over us; how far it doth *Oblige* us to *Act* or not *Act*, according to it.

Now in Order to the resolving of this we must take Notice, that our *Judgment* concerning what God hath *Commanded*, or *Forbidden*, or left *Indifferent*, is either true or false. We either make a right *Judgment* of our *Duty*, or we make a wrong one. In the former Case we call our *Judgment* a *Right Conscience*; in the latter we call it an *Erroneous Conscience*. As for those Cases where we doubt and hesitate, and know not well how to make any *Judgment* at all (which is that we call a *Doubting Conscience*, but indeed is properly no *Conscience*, unless by *Accident*,) we have nothing here to do with them, but shall reserve them to another place. Here we suppose, that we do make a *Judgment* of the thing; that is, we are *perswaded* in our *Minds*, concerning the *goodness*, or *badness* of this, or the other *Action*: And that which we are to inquire into, is, how far that *Judgment* binds us to *Act* according to it.

Now if our *Conscience* be a *Right Conscience*; that is, if we have truly informed our *Judgment* according to the *Rule* of *Gods Law*: It is beyond all *Question*, and acknowledged by all the *World*, that we are in that Case perpetually bound to *Act* according to our *Judgment*. It is for ever our *Duty* so to do; and there can no *blame*, no *guilt* fall upon us, for so doing, let the *Consequence* of our *Acting*, or not *Acting*, be what it will. So that as to a *Right Conscience*, or a
well

well informed Judgment, there is no dispute among any sort of Men.

But the great thing to be inquired into, is, what Obligation a Man is under to Act according to his Judgment, supposing it be false, supposing he hath not rightly informed his Conscience, but hath taken up false measures of what God hath Commanded, or Forbidden.

Now for the Resolution of this, I lay down these Three Propositions, which I think will take in all that is needful, for the giving Satisfaction to every one, concerning this point.

First, *Where a Man is mistaken in his Judgment, even in that Case it is always a Sin to Act against it.* Be our Conscience never so ill instructed, as to what is *Good*, or *Evil*, though we should take that for a *Duty*, which is really a *Sin*; and on the contrary, that for a *Sin* which is really a *Duty*: Yet so long as we are thus persuaded, it will be highly Criminal in us, to Act in contradiction to this persuasion; and the reason of this is evident, because, by so doing, we wilfully Act against the best light, which at present we have, for the direction of our Actions; and consequently our *Will* is as faulty, and as wicked, in consenting to such Actions, as if we had had truer Notions of things.

We are to remember, that the *Rule* of our Duty, whatever it be in it self, cannot touch or affect our Actions, but by the Mediation of our *Conscience*; that is, no farther than as it is apprehended by us, or as we do understand and remember it. So that when all is done, the *immediate Guide* of our Actions, can be nothing but our *Conscience*; our Judgment and Persuasion, concerning the Goodness, or Badness, or Indifference, of things.

It is true, in all those Instances where we are mistaken,

ken, our Conscience proves but a very bad and unsafe *Guide*; because it hath it self lost its way, in not following its *Rule* as it should have done: But however our *Guide* still it is, and we have no other guide of our *Actions* but that. And if we may lawfully refuse to be guided by it in one Instance, we may with as much reason reject its *Guidance* in all.

What is the Notion that any of us hath of a *Wilful Sin*, or a *Sin* against *Knowledge*, but this? That we have done otherwise than we were convinced to be our *Duty*, at the same time that we did so. And what other measures have we of any Mans *Sincerity* or *Hypocrisie*? But only this; that he *Acts* according to the best of his *Judgment*, or that he doth not *Act* according to what he pretends to *Believe*.

We do not indeed say, that every one is a *good Man*, that *Acts* according to his *Judgment*; or that he is to be commended for all *Actions* that are done in pursuance of his *Perswasion*: No, we measure *Virtue* and *Vice* by the *Rule*, according to which, a *Man* ought to *Act*; as well as by the Mans *intention* in *Acting*. But however we all agree that that *Man* is a *Knave*, that in any instance *Acts* contrary to that which he took to be his *duty*. And in passing this *Sentence* we have no regard to this; whether the *Man* was *Right* or mistaken in his *Judgment*, for be his *Judgment* *Right* or *Wrong*, *True* or *False*; it is all one as to his *Honesty*, in *Acting* or not *Acting* according to it.

He that hath a false *perswasion* of things; so long as that *perswasion* continues, is often as well satisfied that he is in the *Right*, as if his *Perswasion* was true. That is, he is oftentimes as *Confident* when he is in an *Error*, as when he is in the *Right*. And therefore we cannot but conclude, that he, who being under a *mistake*, will be tempted to *Act* contrary to his *Judgment*;
would

would certainly upon the same Temptation Act contrary to it, was his Judgment never so well informed And therefore his *Will* being as bad in the one Case, as in the other, he is equally a Sinner as to the *Wilfulness* of the Crime, tho indeed in other respects there will be a great difference in the Cases.

This I believe is the Sense of all Men in this matter. If a Man for instance, should of a *Jew* become a *Christian*; while yet in his Heart he believeth that the *Messiah* is not yet come, and that our Lord *Jesus* was an Impostor. Or if a *Papist* should to serve some private ends, Renounce the Communion of the *Roman Church*, and joyn with ours; while yet he is perswaded that the *Roman Church* is the *only Catholick Church*; and that our Reformed Churches are *Heretical* or *Schismatical*: Though now there is none of us will deny that the Men in both these Cases have made a good change; as having changed a *false Religion* for a *true one*: yet for all that, I dare say, we should all agree, they were both of them great *Villains* and *Hypocrites*, for making that change; because they made it not upon Honest Principles, and in pursuance of their Judgment, but in direct Contradiction to both. Nay I dare say we should all of us think better of an ignorant well meaning *Protestant*; that being seduced by the persuasions and Artifices of a cunning *Popish Factor*, did really out of Conscience, abandon our Communion, and go over to the *Romanists*; as thinking theirs to be the safest: I say we should all of us entertain a more favourable Opinion of such a Man in such a Case; Though really here the change is made from a true Religion to a false one; than we should of either of the other Men I have before named. All this put together is abundantly sufficient to shew that no Man

can in any Case Act against his Judgment or Perswasion, but he is Guilty of Sin in so doing,

But then, our Second Proposition is this, *The mistake of a Mans Judgment may be of such a Nature, that as it will be a Sin to Act against his Judgment, so it will likewise be a Sin to Act according to it.*

For what Authority soever a Mans Conscience has over him, it can never bear him out, if he do an Evil thing in compliance with it. My Judgment is (as we have said) the guide of my Actions; but it may through my negligence be so far misguided it self; as that if I follow it, it will lead me into the most horrid Crimes in the World. And will it be a sufficient Excuse or Justification of my Action in such a Case to say; that indeed herein I did but Act according to my Perswasion? No verily; I may as certainly be damn'd without Repentance, for Acting according to my Judgment, in some Cases, where it is mistaken, as I shall be, for Acting contrary to it in other Cases where it is rightly informed.

And the Reason of this is very plain. It is not my Judgment or Perswasion that makes Good or Evil, Right or Wrong, Justice or Injustice, Vertue or Vice. But it is the Nature of things themselves; and the Law of God, (and of Men under that) Commanding or Forbidding things, that makes them so. If the Moral Goodness, or badness of Actions was to be measured by Mens Opinions, and Perswasions; then Good and Evil, Duty and Sin, would be the most various, uncertain things in the World. They would change their Natures as often as Men change their Opinions; and that which to Day is a Vertue, to Morrow would be a Crime; and that which in one Man, would be a Heroically good Action, would in another Man be a Prodigious Piece of Villany; though yet there was no differ-

difference in the Action it self, or in the Circumstances of the Man that did it, save only the difference of Opinion.

But such consequences as these are intolerable, nor indeed do Men either talk or think after this manner. Every Man when he speaks of Good or Evil, Lawful or Unlawful, means some certain fixed thing which it is not in his Power to alter the Nature and Property of. That Action is good, and a Duty, which is either so in it self, or made so by some positive Law of God. And that Action is Evil, and a Sin, that is Forbid by God in either of these Ways. So that unless it was in our Power to change the Nature of things, or to alter the Laws of God: It will unavoidably follow; that we shall be for ever Obliged to do some Actions, and to forbear others, whatever our Judgment concerning them, is: And consequently we may be Guilty of Sin, if in these instances we Act contrary to this Obligation; though at the same time it should happen that we are firmly perswaded that we ought so to do.

And thus is our Proposition fully proved; but then for the further clearing of it, I desire it may be taken notice of: that we do not thus lay it down, that every mistake of Judgment about Good or Evil, doth involve a Man in Sin, if he Act according to that mistake; But only thus, the mistake of a Mans Judgment may be of such a Nature, that as it will be a Sin in him to Act against it, so it will likewise be Sin to Act according to it. It is not every Error in Morals that brings a Man under the necessity of Sinning, if he pursues it in his Actions. A Mans Conscience may mistake its Rule in a Hundred instances, and yet he may safely enough Act according to it. And the Reason is because a Man may entertain a great many mistakes,

mistakes, and false Notions of his Duty; and Act according to them too; and yet in such Actions he shall not Transgress any Law of God.

Now this that I say, holds chiefly in these two instances. For example in the first place, if a Man believe a thing to be Commanded by God which yet indeed is not; but neither is it Forbidden: As if a Man should think himself Obliged to retire himself from his business, *Seven* times or *Three* times a Day, for the purpose of Devotion; or to give half of his Yearly Income to Pious, and Charitable uses, if he can do it without Prejudice to his family. Now in this Case he is certainly mistaken in his Duty; for the Law of God hath not bound him up to such measures in either of these instances: But yet because God hath not on the other hand laid any Commands upon him to the contrary; it is certain he may in both these instances Act according to this mistake, without any Guilt in the World; Nay, so long as that mistake continues, he is bound to Act accordingly.

Again in the second place, if a Man believe a thing to be Forbidden by Gods Law, which yet is not; but neither is it Commanded: As for instance, if a Man think that he ought by Vertue of a Divine Command to abstain from all Meats that are strangled or have Bloud in them; or if he believe it unlawful to Play at Cards or Dice; or that it is Forbidden by Gods word to let out Money at Interest: Why in all these Cases he may follow his Opinion, though it be a false one, without Sin; Nay, he is bound to follow it, because it is the dictate of his Conscience, however his Conscience be mistaken. And the reason is plain, because though he be mistaken in his Judgment about these matters, yet since God hath not by any Law, Forbid these

these things ; there is no Transgression follows upon Acting according to such a mistake.

But then in other Cases where a Mans mistake happens to be of such a Nature, as that he cannot Act according to his Conscience, but he Transgresseth some Law of God ; by which Conscience ought to be Governed : As for instance, when a Man looks upon that as a Lawful Action, or as a Duty, which God hath Forbidden ; or looks upon that as a Sin, or at least an indifferent Action, which God hath Commanded ; here it is that the mistake becomes dangerous. And in such Cases the Man is brought into that sad *Dilemma* we have been representing, *viz.* That if he Act according to his persuasion he Transgresseth Gods Law, and so is a Sinner upon that Account : If he Acts against his persuasion, then he is self condemned, and very guilty before God upon that Account.

Well, but is there no avoiding of this ? Must it be laid down as a constant Universal Truth ; that in all Cases where a Mans Judgment happens to be contrary to the Rule of his Duty, Commanding, or Forbidding an Action ; he must of necessity Sin ; whether he Act, or not Act, according to that Judgment ? If indeed he Act against his Conscience, it is readily granted he Sins ; But it seems very hard, that he should be under a necessity of Sinning when he Acts according to it ; especially when he is perfectly ignorant of, or mistaken in the Law against which he Offends.

This is indeed the great difficulty that occurs in this matter ; and for the untying it, I lay down this third general Proposition, *viz.* *That the great thing to be attended to in this Case of a Mans following a mistaken Judgment, is the Culpableness or Inculpableness ; the Faultiness or Innocence of the mistake, upon which he Acts ;*

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for according as this is; so will his Guilt in Acting according to it be either greater, or less, or none at all.

We do not say that a Man is always Guilty of a Sin before God, when upon a main information of Judgment he Omits that which Gods Law hath Commanded; or doth that which Gods Law hath Forbidden. No though these Omissions or Actions may be said to be Sins in themselves; that is, as to the *Matter* of them; as being Transgressions of Gods Law: Yet before we affirm that they will be imputed to a Man as such; that is prove *formally* Sins to him; we first consider the Nature of the Action, and the Circumstances of the Man. If we find upon Examination that the instance wherein Gods Law is Transgressed, is such an instance as even an Honest minded Man may well be supposed to mistake in: And if we find likewise that the Man had not sufficient means for the informing himself aright as to this matter; and that he hath done all that he could do in his Circumstances to understand his Duty: If in such a Case as this he be mistaken in his Duty; and Act upon that mistake; yet we do not say that the Man is properly Guilty of any Sin in that Action, however that Action is indeed contrary to the Law of God. On the contrary we believe him to be Innocent as to this matter; nor will God ever call him to an Account for what he hath done or omitted in these Circumstances.

And the Reasons and Grounds upon which we affirm this are plain, and Evident at the first hearing. No Man can be Obligated to do more then what is in his Power to do. And what ever a Man is not Obligated to do, it is no Sin in him if he do it not. So that if a Man do all that one in his Circumstances can, or should do; for the right understanding of his Duty: If he happens to be mistaken, that mistake cannot be imputed

to him as a Sin; because he was not Obliged to understand better. And if his mistake be no Sin, it is certain to Act according to that mistake can be no Sin neither.

So that the whole point of Sinning, or not Sinning, in following an *Erroneous Conscience*, lies here. Whether the Man that is thus mispersuaded, is to be blamed, or not blamed, for his Mispersuasion. If the Error he hath taken up do not proceed from his own Fault and Negligence; but was the pure unavoidable Effects of the Circumstances, in which he is placed; (which Circumstances we suppose he contributed nothing to, but he was put into them by the disposition of Divine Providence;) Then of what Nature soever the Error be; he doth not contract any guilt by any Action which he doth in pursuance of that Error. But if it was in his power to Rectifie that Error; if he had Means and Opportunities to inform his Conscience better; and the nature of the Action was such, that it was his Duty so to do: So that he must be accounted guilty of a Gross and Criminal Neglect in not doing it: In this Case the Man is a Transgressor, and accountable unto God, as such, for all the Actions that he doth, or omits, contrary to Gods Law; while he Acts under that mistake, or in pursuance of it. And accordingly as this Neglect or Carelessness is greater or less; so is the Sinfulness of the Action which he doth in pursuance of it, greater or less likewise.

And this is a plain account of this matter. So that we see there is no Fatal unavoidable necessity laid upon any Man to commit a Sin by Acting according to his Conscience. But if at any time he be brought under those sad Circumstances, he brings that necessity upon himself. God never put any Man into such a Condition, but that he might do that Duty which was requir-
 ed

red of him; and be able to give a good account of his Actions. But here is the thing; Men by their Vice and Wickedness; by neglecting the Means of Instruction, that are afforded them; and not using their Reason and Understanding as they should do; may suffer themselves to be brought under the Bondage of such False and Evil Principles; that they shall so long as they hold those Principles, fall into Sin, whether they Act according to their Conscience, or Act against it.

I have done with the general Points concerning *Conscience*, which I thought needful to be premised, as the Grounds and Principles of our following Discourse. I now come to that which I at first propos'd; and for the sake of which all this is intended; that is, to speak to the Case of those that *Separate from the Communion of the Church of England, upon this pretence; That it is against their Conscience to join with us in it.*

Now all that I conceive needful to be done, in order to a full discussion of this Case, and giving satisfaction about it, are these Two things,

First, To *Separate the pretences of Conscience that are truly and justly made, in this matter, from the false ones:* Or to shew who those are that can rightly plead Conscience for their Nonconformity; and who those are that cannot.

Secondly, To inquire how far this *Plea of Conscience*, when it is *truly made*, will *Justifie any Dissenter that continues in Separation from the Church, as Established among us;* and what is to be done by such a Person, in order to his Acting with a safe and good Conscience in this affair.

Our first inquiry is what is required in order to any Mans truly pleading Conscience for his refusing to joyn in Communion with the Established Church. Or who

who those Persons are that can with justice make that Plea for themselves.

I think it very convenient to begin my Disquisition here, because by removing all the false Pretences to Conscience; the Controversy will be brought into a much less compass; and the difficulties that arise will be more easily untyed. The truth is, if the thing be examined, I believe it will be found, that the pretence to Conscience in the matter we are talking of, is, as in many other Cases, extended much farther than it ought to be. My meaning is, that of all those who think fit to withdraw from our Communion, and to live in Disobedience to the known Laws of the Church, and pretend Conscience for so doing; in a great many of them it is not Conscience, but some other thing mistaken for Conscience, which is the Principle they Act upon. So that if the true Plea of Conscience be separated from those counterfeit ones, which usually usurp that Name; we shall not find either the Persons to be so many that refuse Communion with us, upon the Account of Conscience truly so called; nor the Cases to be so many in which they do refuse it upon that Account.

Now in Order to the making such a Separation or Distinction between Conscience *truly* so called, and the several *Pretences* to it, in this business of not conforming to the Established Worship, I lay down this general Proposition; That, if the Principles I have laid down about Conscience be admitted; then it is certainly true, that no Man among us can justly plead Conscience for his Separation from the Church of *England*; or can say that it is against his Conscience to joyn in Communion with it; but only such a one, as is perswaded in his own mind, that he cannot Communicate with us without Sinning against God in so doing.

Forſince, as we have ſaid, Conſcience is nothing elſe but a Mans Judgment concerning Actions, whether they be Duties, or Sins, or Indifferent: And ſince the Law of God Commanding, or Forbidding Actions; or neither Commanding them, nor Forbidding them; is the only Rule by which a Man can Judge what Actions are Duties, and what are Sins, and what are Indifferent: It plainly follows; that as a Man cannot be *bound in Conſcience* to do any Action which it doth not appear to him that Gods Law hath ſome way or other Commanded, and made a Duty: So neither can it *go againſt a Mans Conſcience*, to do any Action which he is not convinced that Gods Law hath ſome way or other Forbidden, and ſo made a Sin. And therefore in our preſent Caſe. That Man only can juſtly plead Conſcience for his Nonconformity that can truly ſay he is perſwaded in his Judgment that Conformity is Forbidden by ſome Law of God: Or which is the ſame thing; No Man can ſay, it is againſt his Conſcience to joyn in our Communion, but only ſuch a one as really believes he ſhall Sin againſt ſome Law of God, if he do joyn with us,

If againſt this it be excepted; that it is very poſſible for a Man to be well ſatisfied that there is nothing directly Sinful in our Worſhip; but yet for all that it may be againſt his Conſcience to joyn with us in it: As for inſtance; in the Caſe where a Man takes it really to be his Duty to hold conſtant Communion with ſome other Congregation, where he believes he can be more Edified, or to which he is related by ſome Church Covenant: To this I anſwer, that in this Caſe, I grant, Conſcience is rightly pleaded for Separation (though how juſtifiably I do not now Examine:) But then I ſay this Plea proceeds upon the ſame grounds I juſt now laid down. For if the Man (as is ſuppoſed

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A great point given here!

in the Case) be convinced that it is his Duty by Gods Law, (as there is no other measure of Dury) to hold Communion with others, and not with us ; then he must at the same time be convinced that he cannot without Transgression of Gods Law, (that is, without Sin,) joyn with us ; And that is the same Account which we give, of its being against any Mans Conscience to hold Communion with us.

Further, If it be urged against our Proposition, that not only in the Case where a Man is perswaded of the Unlawfulness of our Communion, but also in the Case where he only doubts of the Lawfulness of it, a Man may justly plead Conscience for his Nonconformity ; so long as those doubts remain : And therefore it is not truly said of us, that in Order to the Pleading Conscience for Nonconformity, one must be perswaded in his own mind, that Conformity is Forbidden by some Law of God. I Answer, that if the Man who thus doubts of the Lawfulness of Conformity, hath really entertain'd this Principle, that it is a Sin to do any thing with a doubting Conscience ; I grant that it must go against his Conscience to conform so long as he doubts. But then, this is but the same thing we are contending for ; for therefore it goes against his Conscience to Communicate with us, doubting as he doth ; because he believes he shall Sin against God if he should. But if the Man we are speaking of, do not think it a breach of Gods Law, to Act with a doubting Conscience ; then I do not see how it can in the least go against his Conscience to Communicate with us upon that pretence. So that notwithstanding these two Exceptions ; which are all I can think of ; it will still remain true, that no Man can justly Plead Conscience for his Separation from the Church, but he that is perswaded that

if he doubts - he must refrain

he cannot joyn with it without Sinning against God.

Now if this Proposition be true, as certainly it is ; then how many Mens pretences to Conscience for their Separating from us, are hereby cut off : And indeed how few (in Comparifon of the multitude of Dissenters among us) will be left, that can be able with Truth to say that it is against their Conscience to Communicate with us in our Prayers, and in our Sacraments.

certainly
 In the first Place, it is Evident that all those who Separate from us upon Account of any *private grudge* or *pique* ; because they have been disoblged, or have received some disappointment in the way of our Church, or by the Men that are favourers of it ; and therefore out of a Pet will joyn themselves to another Communion. All those that think they can serve their own turns more effectually, by being of another way ; as for instance, they can thereby better *please a Relation* from whom they have expectances ; they can better advance their Trade, or increase their Fortunes ; they can better *procure a Reputation*, or *regain* one that is *Sunk*. In a word, all those that to serve any ends of *Pride*, or *Interest*, or *Passion* ; or out of any other worldly Consideration, do refuse us their Company in the Worship of God : I say, all such are certainly excluded from Pleading Conscience for their Separation.

In the second Place, all those Lay People who refuse our Communion upon Account that the *Pastors*, and *Teachers*, whom they most Love, and Réverence, are not permitted to Exercise their Function among us ; whose Pretence it is, that if these good Men were allowed to Teach in our Churches, they would come to our Congregations ; but so long as that is refused, they will hear them where they can ; I say, all these are likewise excluded from Pleading Conscience for their Separation.

It is not a great Ill!

paration. For, however it may really and truly be against the Conscience of their *Ministers* to conform, (there being other things required of them, than of ordinary People,) yet it is not against *their* Conscience so to do; for they know no ill in Conformity, but only that so many good Men are silenced.

In the third Place, all those that refuse our Communion upon a *meer dislike* of several things in our Church Offices: They do not for instance, like a *Form of Prayer* in general, and they have several things to Object against our *Form* in particular; they do not like our *Ceremonies*; they do not like the *Surplice*, or the *Cross* in Baptism; and sundry other things they find fault with: Not that they have any thing to say against the Lawfulness of these things; but only they have an Aversion to them: All these Men likewise are cut off from Pleading Conscience for their Separation. For they do not pretend that it is unlawful, or a Sin against God to joyn with us in our Service (which is the only thing wherein their Conscience can be concerned;) but only they are not *pleased* with many things in our Service; as fancying them not to be so decent, or convenient, or not to be so prudently Order'd as they would have them. But what of all this? Admit the things to be so as they fancy them; yet still so long as they do not think there is any Sin in them, it cannot go against their Conscience to joyn with any Assembly in which they are Practised. Because Conscience as we have often said is not touched, is not affected where no Law of God is Transgressed.

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In the fourth Place, all those that are kept from our Communion, purely upon the Account of *Education*, or acquaintance with Persons that are of another persuasion. Those that have nothing to say against our Worship; but only that they were bred in another way;

we are more instructed by the *Ministers* whom we "most love"

or those that would joyn with us in it, but that they know a great many Religious Godly Persons that do Condemn it, and therefore they dare not come at us. These now may be very well meaning Men, but yet they cannot reasonably Plead Conscience upon this Account for their Separation. For it is not a Mans Education, or the Example, or Opinion of other Men, that makes any Action to be a Duty, or a Sin, but the Law of God Commanding or Forbidding that Action. And therefore before I can say that this, or the other Action, is against my Conscience, I must believe that Gods Law hath either in general, or in particular; either directly, or by Consequence, made that Action unlawful. I grant the Opinions of other Men, especially those that are Learned, and Pious are always to be listned to in doubtful Cases. But then, no Mans Opinion can be the Rule of my Conscience; nor am I at all concerned in Conscience to follow it, any farther than I am convinced that it declares Gods Law to me. And therefore sure in this Case of Church Communion, I can be but very little concerned to follow any Mans Opinion; when, both there are so many Persons, and those as Learned and as Pious as any others, that are of another Opinion; and when also the Publick Law, which has much more Authority than any private Opinion, hath determined what I am to do in the Case. So that it is great weakness, & sillyness; & not Conscience, that prevails with these Men I am speaking of, to live in disobedience to the Laws. If indeed they be really perswaded in their own Minds, that our way of Worshipping God, is in any part or instance of it Unlawful or Forbidden, (let that Perswasion be upon what grounds it will,) then they may truly say it is against their Conscience to joyn with us. But if they be not convinced of this; I do not see how

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the Example, or the advice of their Friends and Acquaintance, can in the least give them a Title to Plead Conscience for their refusing our Communion.

Fifthly, those that withdraw from the Church upon this Account, that our Governours in their Laws and Prescriptions about Gods Worship, have not rightly used the Power which they are intrusted with, but have exceeded their bounds; have made perhaps too great Encroachments upon *Christian Liberty*; or laid more stress than was meet upon *Indifferent things*: These likewise are excluded by the former Rule from Pleading Conscience for their Separation. For admit the Law-givers have been to blame in the Exercise of their Power in these matters, (which yet is sooner said then proved,) and have really done more then they can answer to God for; yet what is this to them? The Conscience of the Governours is indeed deeply concerned about these things; and they must give an Account to God for the abuse of their Authority if there be any, But how this doth concern the Conscience of the Subject, is not easily understood: So long as what is Comanded or Enjoyed, doth not appear to interfere with any Law of God. But having said this; I fear there is too much reason to add; that those who so much stand up for *Christian Liberty*, and would be thought the great Patrons of it; do by their endless scruples about Indifferent things, and refusing to Obey Authority in such matters, in all appearance, take the most Effectuall Course to destroy all *Christian Liberty*, in the true Notion of it; and to bring in a Religion that shall consist of *Touch not, Taste not, Handle not*; and such other Uncommanded things.

Sixthly, and lastly, (to name no more instances) All those that can Communicate *Occasionally* with us, in our Prayers and Sacraments: As for instance, those
that

that when they have a turn to be served, when there is an Office or some such thing in the Case; can come to Church, and receive the Communion, but at other times they do not afford us their Presence: These are also excluded from pretending to Conscience, for their not *constantly* joyning in Communion with us. For if indeed they did believe, it was a Sin in them to joyne with us in our Prayers and Sacraments; with what Conscience dare they do it at all? They ought not for any worldly good, to venture upon such an Action as they do believe to be forbidden by Gods Laws; But if they do not believe that to joyne in our Communion is a Sinful thing, (as I dare say none of these Persons do) then I will be bold to make the Inference; that it cannot be more against their Conscience to do it *Thrice*, than to do it *Once*; and do it *constantly* than to do it *Thrice*.

But let us leave the false Pretenders to Conscience, and come to the Case of those who can justly Plead Conscience for their Separation; or that can truly say it is against their Conscience to joyne in our Communion.

Of this sort are all such, and none but such, as do really believe that our Communion is unlawful, or that they cannot Communicate with us without Sin, as I have before proved.

As for those that only doubt of the Lawfulness of our Communion, but are not perswaded that it is unlawful; I do not here consider them; because they cannot say that it is *against their Conscience* to Communicate with us; any more than they can say, that they are *bound in Conscience* to Communicate with us: For they are uncertain as to both these things, and are not determined either way. But however because these men may justly Plead Conscience upon this Account; that they think it is a Sin to joyne with us

so long as they doubt of the Lawfulness of our Communion: I shall consider their Case afterwards in a particular Discourse upon that Argument. vii.

Those that I am now concerned with, are such, as do believe, or are perswaded, that there is something in our Worship which they cannot comply with without Sinning against God.

And my business is to Examine whether such a Belief or Perswasion of the Unlawfulness of our Communion will justify any Mans Separation from us? Or how far it will do it? And what is to be done by such Persons, in order, either to their Communicating, or not Communicating with us, with a safe Conscience? This is our second Point, and I apply my self to it.

There are a great many among us, that would with all their Hearts (as they say) Obey the Laws of the Church, and joyn in our Worship and Sacraments; but they are really perswaded that they cannot do it without Sin: For there are some things required of them as Conditions of Communicating with us, which are Forbidden by the Laws of God.

As for Instance, it is against the Commands of Christ to appoint, or to use any thing in the Worship of God, which God himself hath not appointed. For this is to add to the word of God, and to Teach for Doctrines the Commandments and Traditions of Men. n. 6

It is against the Commands of Jesus Christ to Stint the Spirit in Prayer; which all those that use a Form of Prayer, must necessarily do.

It is against the Commands of Jesus Christ to use any Significant Ceremony in Religion: As for Instance, the Cross in Baptism, for that is to make new Sacraments.

It is against the Commands of Jesus Christ to kneel at the Lords Supper, for that is directly to contradict

our Saviours Example in his Institution of that Sacrament, and Savours besides of *Popish Idolatry*.

Since therefore there are these Sinful things in our Worship; and those too imposed as Terms of Communion; how can we blame them, if they withdraw themselves from us? Would we have them joyn with us in these Practices which they verily believe to be Sins? Where then was their Conscience? They might perhaps by this means shew how much they were *the Servants of Men*: But what would become of their Fidelity to *Jesus Christ*.

What now shall we say to this? They themselves are so well satisf'd with their own doings in these matters, that they do not think they are in the least to be blamed for refusing us their Communion, so long as things stand thus with them. They are sure they herein follow their own Conscience; and therefore they cannot doubt but they are in a safe Condition; and may justify their Proceedings to God, and to all the World; let us say what we please.

This is the Case. Now in Answer to it, we must grant them these two things.

First of all, that if indeed they be right in their Judgment; and those things which they except against in our Communion be really Unlawful, and Forbidden by *Jesus Christ*; then they are not at all to be blamed for their not Communicating with us. For in that Case, Separation is not a *Sin* but a *Duty*: We being for ever bound to *Obey God rather than Men*.

And Secondly, supposing they be mistaken in their Judgment, and think that to be unlawful, and Forbidden by God which is not really so: Yet so long as this perswasion continues (though it be a false one) we think they cannot without Sin joyn in our Communion.

For

For even an Erroneous Conscience (as we have shew-
ed) binds thus far, that a Man cannot without Sin
Act in Contradiction to it. These two things I say
we grant them, and let them make the best advantage
of them.

But then this is the point we stand upon, and which
if it be true, will render this whole Plea for Noncon-
formity upon account of Conscience, as I have now o-
pened it, wholly insufficient, *viz.* If it should prove
that our Dissenters are mistaken in their Judgment;
and that our Governours do indeed require nothing of
them in the matter of Church Communion, but what
they may comply with, without breach of Gods Law:
Then I say it will not acquit them from being Guilty of
Sin before God in withdrawing from our Communi-
on; to say, that they really believed our Communion
to be unlawful; and upon that Account they durst not
joyn with us.

It is not my Province here to Answer all their Ob-
jections against our Forms of Prayer, our Ceremonies,
our Orders and Rules, in Administring Sacraments,
and other things that concern our Communion: This
hath been done several times; and of late by several
Persons which have treated of all these particular mat-
ters; and who have shewed with great clearness and
strength, that there is nothing required in our Church
Appointments, which is in the least inconsistent with,
or Forbidden by any Law of *Jesus Christ*: But on the
contrary, the Establishments of our Church, are for
Gravity, Decency, Purity, and agreeableness with the
Primitive Christianity; the most approvable, and the
least Exceptionable of any Church Constitutions at
this day in the World.

These things therefore I meddle not with, but this is
the point I am concerned in: Whether, supposing it be

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+ it is your duty to answer - to your
reader else - all is for nothing -

* This is begging the very principle itself.

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every Mans Duty to joyn in Communion with the Established Church; and there be nothing required in that Communion, but what may be Lawfully Practised? I say, supposing these two things; whether it will be sufficient to acquit any Man from Sin, that withdraws from that Communion, upon this Account, that through his mistake, he believes he cannot joyn with us without Sin? Or thus, whether will any mans persuasion that there are Sinful Terms required in our Communion (when yet there are not any) justify his Separation from us.

This is the general Question truly put; And this I give as the Answer to it: That in general speaking a Mans Erroneous Perswasion doth not dissolve the Obligation of Gods Law, or justify any Mans Transgression of his Duty. So that if Gods Law doth Command me to hold Communion with the Church where I have no just cause to break it: And I have no just cause to break it in this particular Case, but only I think I have: My misperswasion in this matter doth not discharge me from my Obligation to keep the Communion of the Church; or acquit me from Sin before God if I break it.

The Truth and Reason of this I have fully shewed before, in what I have said about the Authority of Conscience. I shall now only by way of further Confirmation ask this Question: Was St. Paul guilty of Sin or no, when he Persecuted the Christians; being verily perswaded in his own mind that he ought so to do, and that he Sinned if he did not? If any will say that St. Paul did not Sin in this, because he did but Act according to his Conscience; they contradict his own express words. For he acknowledgeth himself to be *the greatest of Sinners*, and that for this very reason *because he persecuted the Church of Christ*. If they say that

that he did Sin in doing this : Then they must at the same time acknowledg, that a Mans perswasion that a thing is a Duty, will not excuse him from guilt in practising it ; if really and indeed it be against Gods Law : And on the other side, by the same reason, that a Mans perswasion that a thing is unlawfull, will not excuse him from guilt in not Practising it ; if indeed Gods Law hath made it a Duty.

So that it infinitely concerns all our Dissenting Brethren to consider very well what they do, when they withdraw from our Communion. *Schism* undoubtedly is a great and crying Sin. A Sin, against which, there are as many hard things said in the Discourses of our Lord and his Apostles ; and in the Writings of the Ancient Christians ; as against any other Sin whatsoever. And therefore let those that forsake our Communion ; and set up, or joyne with other Assemblies in Opposition to ours : I say, let them look to it that they be not involved in the Guilt of this dreadful Sin. They must be sure that their Separation proceeds upon good grounds, if they would free themselves from the imputation of it. It is not always enough to excuse them ; that they do believe there are Sinful Conditions imposed in our Communion, and consequently it is their Duty to withdraw. For unless the thing be so indeed ; their believing so will not cancel their Obligation to our Church Communion ; or make it cease to be *Schism* to withdraw themselves from it.

This may perhaps at the first hearing seem very strange Doctrine to many, but yet it is true for all that ; and will appear a little more Evident, if we put the Case in another instance, wherein we are not so nearly concerned.

Here is one of the *Roman-Catholick* perswasion,

? This contradicts a former principle — (as)
yet they may have a good conscience

(as they call it,) that hath been trained up in Popery ; and heartily believes it to be true Religion, and the Only one, wherein Salvation is to be had ; and therefore in Obedience to the Laws and Customs of that Church, doth pay Religious Worship to Images ; doth pray to Saints and Angels ; doth give Divine Adoration to the Consecrated Bread in the Sacrament ; as really believing it to be turned into the Body of Christ, to which his Soul, and Deity is personally United.

Is now such a Person as this Guilty of Idolatry in these Practices or is he not ? He doth verily believe that he is not. He would abhor these Practices, if he did in the least believe, that God had Forbid them as Idolatrous. Nay he is so far from believing that they are Forbid, that on the contrary he hath been taught to believe that they are necessary Duties ; and he cannot be a good Catholick, unless he thus Worship Images, and Saints, and the Bread of the Host. Well, now the point is, Whether such a Man, believing as he doth, be upon that Account acquitted from the Sin of Idolatry ? We all grant, that if he had such clear Information about these things as we Protestants have ; he would certainly be an *Idolater* if he should continue in these Practices ; But whether his belief, and Opinion, and persuasion concerning these things, do not excuse him ; and make that cease to be *Idolatry*, that would otherwise be so ; This I say is the question. But yet none of us make any great question of it. For we do charge the *Papists* indiscriminately, with Idolatry in their Worship ; notwithstanding their disclaiming it ; notwithstanding their Profession to Worship God, no otherwise than according to his own Will ; notwithstanding they do really take themselves Obligated in Conscience to give Divine Worship to the Consecrated

secrated Elements, and those other Objects. And we charge them rightly in this. For if it be really Idolatry by Gods word, to do these things; then it will be Idolatry in any Man to do them, let his Opinion about them be what it Will. A Mans Ignorance, or mistake, or false Opinion doth not alter the nature of things; it can neither make that cease to be a Duty, which God hath Commanded, nor that cease to be a Sin which God hath Forbidden. All that it will do, is, that according to the Nature and Circumstances of it, it may more or less Extenuate the Transgression that is committed upon the Account thereof.

And the Case is just the same in the matter before us. For any Man to withdraw his Communion from that Church, with which he ought, and with which he may Lawfully Communicate; That is as properly the Sin of *Schism*, as it is the Sin of *Idolatry* to give Divine Worship to that which is not God. For any Man, therefore, to break the Unity of the Church; though it be upon this very Account, that he doth believe it is his Duty so to do; or that he cannot Communicate with that Church without Sin: Yet if this persuasion of his be false, and Erroneous; he is no less a *Schismatick* for all this; than the other Man is an *Idolater* that thinks it his Duty to adore Images, and those other undue Objects of Divine Worship among the *Romanists*. It is true, the Mans Ignorance or Misperwasion will according to the greater or less *Culpability* of it; more or less excuse the Mans Person before God, as it doth in the other Case. But it cannot in the least make that which God hath made to be *Schism* to be no *Schism*; no more than in the other Case, it makes that to be no *Idolatry* which Gods word hath declared to be *Idolatry*.

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Well now admitting all this; here comes the pinch of the thing. It will be said, What, would you have a Man

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 Man do in this Case? He cannot conform with a safe Conscience; and yet he is a Transgressor if he do not. If he comply against his Conscience, you grant he is guilty of Sin in so doing: If he doth not Comply; then you say he is a *Schismatick*; and so is a Sinner upon that Account. Why to this I say, that both these things are often true; and here is that *Dilemma*, which Men by Suffering their minds to be abused with Evil Principles, and Perswasions, do frequently run themselves into. They are reduced to that Extremity that they can neither Act, nor forbear Acting: They can neither Obey, nor Disobey without Sin.

But what is to be done in this Case? I know nothing but this: That all Imaginable Care is to be taken that the Error and false Principles which misled the Man be deposed; and that his Judgment be better informed; and then he may both do his Duty which Gods Law requireth of him, and avoid Sinning against his Conscience.

But how is this to be done? Why no other way, but by using Conscientiously all those means which common Prudence will Recommend to a Man, for the gaining Instruction and Information to himself about any point that he desires throughly to understand: That is to say, Freeing his Mind from all Pride, and Passion, and Interest, and all other carnal Prepossessions; and applying himself seriously and impartially to the getting right Notions and Sentiments about his Duty in these matters: Considering without prejudice what can be said on both sides: Calling in the best assistance of the ablest and wisest Men that he can come by: And above all things seriously endeavouring to understand the Nature and Spirit of the *Christian Religion*; and to practice all that he is undoubtedly con-

Well now extracting all this; here comes the pinch
 It will be said, What would you have
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vinced to be his Duty : And for the matters in question, most earnestly imploring the Assistance of Gods Spirit to guide and direct him.

Well, but supposing a Man has endeavoured to inform his Judgment as well as he can, and hath used all those Prudent means that were in his Power, to satisfie himself of the Lawfulness of our Communion ; But yet after all, he is of the same perswasion that he was, *viz.* That he cannot joyn in our Worship without Sin : what will we say to such a Man as this ? Will we still say that this Man must either Conform, though against his Conscience ; or he is a *Schismatick* before God ? This is the great difficulty, and I have two things to say to it.

In the first place, we do heartily wish that this was the Case of all, or of the most of our Dissenters, (*viz.* that they had done what they can, to satisfie themselves about our Communion.) For if it was, I do verily perswade my self that there would presently be an end of all those much to be lamented *Schisms*, and *Divisions*, which do now give so much Scandal to all good Men, and threaten the Ruin of our Reformed Religion ; And this poor Church of *England*, which hath so long Laboured and Groaned, under the furious Attacques that have been made upon her, by Enemies without, and Enemies within her own Bowels, would in a little time, be perfectly set free from all apprehension of Danger, at the least from the one sort of her Adversaries.

If all our Brethren of the Separation would most seriously follow after the things that make for Peace, and walk by the same Rule as far as they were able, and in things where they were otherwise minded, would Religiously apply themselves to God for direction ; and to the use of Prudent means for Satisfaction : I doubt

not but the Face of things would presently be changed among us; and we should hear no more of any Division or *Schism* in our Nation, that was either dangerous to the Church, or to the Salvation of the Men that were concerned in it.

But alas, we fear we have too great reason to say, that the generality of our Dissenting Brethren, even those of them that Plead Conscience for their Separation; have not done their Duty in this matter; have not heartily endeavoured to satisfy their Minds about the Lawfulness of *Conformity* in those Points which they stick at.

If they had; one would think that after all their endeavours they should, before they pronounced *Conformity* to be unlawful, be able to produce some one plain Text of Scripture for the proving it so, either in the whole or in any part of it; but this they are not able to do. They do indeed produce some Texts of Scripture which they think do make for them: But really they are such, that if they had not supinely taken up their meaning upon trust; but would have been at the pains of carefully examining them; and using such helps as they have every where at hand for the understanding them: It would have been somewhat difficult for them, to have expounded those Texts in such a sense as would infer the unlawfulness of our Communion.

But further I say, it is not probable that the generality of our Dissenters, who condemn our Communion as unlawful, have ever anxiously applied themselves to the considering the Point, or gaining Satisfaction about it; because they do not seem to have much consulted their own Teachers in this affair, and much less those of our way. If they had, they would have been disposed to think better of our Communion; than they do: For not to mention what the Churchmen do teach & press in this matter; the most Eminent of their own Ministers, are ready thus far to give their Testimony

simony to our Communion. That there is nothing required in it, but what a *Lay-Person* may Honestly and Lawfully comply with; though there may be some things inconvenient, and which they wish were amended. Nay they themselves are ready upon occasion to afford us their Company, in all the instances of *Lay-Communion*.

But I desire not to enlarge upon this Argument, because it is an Invidious one. All that I say is, that we wish it was not too apparent by many Evidences, that most of those who separate from us, are so far from having done all they can to bring themselves to a compliance with our Church Constitutions; that they have done little or nothing at all towards it: But have taken up their Opinions, hand over head, without much thinking or enquiring, and having once taken up an Opinion, they adhere to it, without scarce so much as once thinking, that it is possible for them to be in the wrong.

If you speak of a Man that may with reason be said to have done his endeavour to satisfy himself about the Points of his Duty in this matter: Give us such a one; as hath no end, no interest to serve by his Religion, but only to Please God, and to go to Heaven; and who in the choice of the way that leads thither, hath the Indifference of a Traveller; to whom it is all one, whether his way light on the right Hand, or on the left; being only concerned that it be the way which leads to his Journeys end.

Give us a Man, that concerns himself as little as you please, in the Speculative Disputes, and Controversies of Religion: But yet is wonderfully Solicitous about the Practice of his Duty; and therefore will refuse no pains or trouble that may give him a right understanding of that.

Give us a Man, that in the midst of the great Heats, and Divisions, and different Communions of

the Church ; is yet modest, and humble, and docible : That believes he may be mistaken, and that his private Friends may be mistaken too, and hath such an Esteem and Reverence for the Wisdom of his Governours in Church or State ; as to admit that it is probable they may see farther into matters of State and Religion, than he doth : And that therefore every Tenent, and Opinion that was inbided in his Education ; that was infused by private Men of his acquaintance ; or that was espoused upon a very few thoughts, and little Consideration ; ought not to be so flusly maintained ; as to control, or to be set in Opposition to the Publick Establishments of Authority.

Lastly, give us a Man, that where the Publick Laws do run counter to his private Sentiments ; and he is at a loss to reconcile his Duty to Men, with his Duty to God : Yet doth not presently upon this, set up a Flag of Defiance to Authority ; but rather applies himself with all the Indifference, and Honesty he can, to get a true Information of these matters : And to that end he Prays to God continually for his assistance, he calls in the best helps, and consults the best guides he can ; his Ears are open to what both sides can say for themselves ; and he is as willing to read a Book which is writ against his Opinion, as one that defends it : In a word if he be prejudiced, or biassed any way ; it is on the side of Authority ; being rather desirous to find himself mistaken, and his Governours in the Right ; than himself in the Right, and his Governours mistaken. I say shew us such a Man as this ; and we readily grant, you have produced a Person ; that doth sincerely use his endeavours to satisfie himself about the Lawfulness of our Communion. But then we must say this also ; that as the Case stands between the Church of *England*, and the Dissenters ;

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we can hardly believe, that such a Man will long continue in Separation from the Church; but will in a little time gain the Satisfaction of seeing, not only that he may Lawfully joyn with us, but also that it is his Duty so to do.

But let us admit, that a Man may have endeavoured to Inform his Judgment as well as he can; and yet be so far from being convinced that it is his Duty to joyn with us in our Worship; that he is still of Opinion that it is his Duty to Separate from us: What will we say of such a Man? Will we still brand him for a *Schismatick*; notwithstanding he hath done all he can, to bring himself over to us; but cannot?

To this I answer in the second Place, according to the Principles I have before laid down, that if such a Case do ever happen; though the Man cannot be excused from *Schism*, as to the *matter* of it (because wherever there is an Actual Separation from a Church, with which we ought, and with which we may, Lawfully Communicate; there is an Actual Schism Comenced; let the pretence for the Separation be what it will :) yet I trust he shall not be charged before God, with the *Formal* guilt of the *Schism*; any farther than the *Error* that led him into it, was contracted by his own fault.

Though *Schism* in it self (as we have said) be a great Sin: yet we do not say that all those who are engaged in the same *Schism*, are *equally* Guilty before God.

In the first place, those that separate from the Church, to serve any private secular turn; these are most horribly guilty of *Schism*; and there is nothing to be said in their excuse.

In the second Place, those who separate from the Church, through misperswasions, and mistakes of
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Judgment, which they groundlessly, and foolishly took up; and might have avoided; and would yet still certainly correct in themselves, if they were but so Careful, and Conscientious about their Duty as they ought to be: These Men, have indeed far more to say for themselves, than the former; but yet they are very blameable, and are bound as they Love their Souls, to take more Care of Informing their Conscience aright; that so they may leave that Sin they are engaged in.

But Thirdly, those that separate from the Church of God, because they know no better, nor never had means to know better: Or those that have sincerely endeavoured to understand their Duty as much as could be expected from one in their Circumstances; yet through weakness of understanding, or want of Opportunity, light into wrong Paths: In a word, those that are unhappily engaged in a *Schism*, but God Almighty who searcheth the Hearts, knoweth, that it is not through the Fault of their Wills, but the misfortune of their Circumstances: I say, if there be any Man among us that is in this Condition; though he be a *Schismatick Materially*; yet he is *Innocently*, at least, *Pitiably* so. And if he be as free from blame in the other parts of his Life; he may be a good Christian for all that. And God Almighty we hope who Judgeth of Men by their inward Sincerity, and not by their outward Circumstances; will impute that *Schism* (which in others perhaps is a *wilful Crime*) to this Man, no otherwise then as a pure *Sin of Ignorance*, which shall not (upon a general Repentance for all Sins known and unknown,) be accounted for at the last day. Especially if this Innocently mistaken Man we speak of, do to the other Regularities of his Life, add a diligent Care in these four following Points.

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First, that he be not *Obstinate*, and *Pertinacious* in his way, but that he keep his mind readily prepared and disposed to receive any Conviction, which God by any Means or Instruments shall offer to him.

Secondly, That he Separate no farther from the Church, of which he ought to be a Member, than he needs must; but do chearfully comply with the Publick Laws, and Establishments in all those Instances, where he is Satisfied he may do it with a safe Conscience.

Thirdly, that where he cannot give *Active* Obedience to the Laws; he do in those Instances *Patiently*, and *Christianly*, submit to the Penalties, which those Laws inflict: Neither exclaiming against his Governours, or the Magistrates, as Persecutors; for enacting, or Executing those Laws: Nor using any undue, Illegal means to get himself more ease and Liberty: But in all things behaving himself as a quiet and peaceable Subject to the Government he lives under.

And Fourthly, and lastly, that he shew himself a good *Neighbour* as well as a good *Subject*; in avoiding all peevish and bitter Censures of those that differ in Opinion, and persuasion from him; and Exercising Humanity, and Friendliness, and Charity to all his Fellow Christians.

Whosoever I say, of our Brethren, of the Separation make good these Points: That is to say, are in the first place, very sincere in their endeavours, to inform their Conscience aright in the matter of our Communion: And in the next place, when they cannot Satisfie their Conscience about our way; do yet in their Dissent from us, Observe the four Particulars I have now named: I should be loth for my part to Censure them either as ill *Men*, or ill *Subjects*, or ill *Christians*.

But then all that I have said in this matter, doth no
more

more justify the Sin of *Schism*, or Extenuate the hainousness of it in its own Nature; Than it would serve to justify or Extenuate the Sin of Idolatry; if all that I have now said, was applied to the Case of an Ignorant, well meaning, devout Papist. For I do verily believe that what I have now represented by way of Apology for an innocent mistaken *Separatist*; will hold true, *mutatis mutandis*, in the Case of a deluded *Romanist*, who is invincibly, and without any fault of his, intangled in the Practice of their *Idolatries*. But I believe for all that, the Sin of *Idolatry* is in it self a most grievous Sin, and so I believe is the Sin of *Schism* and therefore notwithstanding all that may be said; concerning the Innocence, or Excuseableness of some Mens mistakes about these matters; yet nevertheless, it infinitely concerns every Person, to have a care how he be engaged, either in the one, or the other.

To come to a conclusion; that which I would most seriously press from what hath been said is this. It appears from the foregoing Discourse, how absolutely necessary it is; that every Man should endeavour to inform his Judgment aright in the matters that offend his Conscience; before he withdraw his Obedience from his Lawful Governours, and his Communion from those that Worship God in Publick under them. It appears likewise that it is not enough to justify a Mans Separation; that this or the other thing in our Worship, is really against his Conscience; for he may be a great Sinner notwithstanding that, for leaving our Assemblies, if it should prove at last that he is mistaken in his Notions.

What therefore should every Dissenter among us do, that hath any regard to his Duty, and would preserve a good Conscience? I say, what is there that more concerns him to do? than presently to set about
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the true informing of his Judgment in the points where he is now dissatisfi'd; for Fear he be found to live in a grievous Sin all the time he Separates from us.

And therefore, let no Man that Lives out of our Communion, satisfie himself with such frivolous pretences as these: That as for all the *Substantials* of Religion, the matters of *Faith* and *Good Life*, they do agree with us; and that as for the other matters which concern *Ceremonies* and *Discipline*; these are Nice, Controverted Points; Points disputed *pro* and *contra* amongst the Divines: And therefore why should they trouble their Heads about them; nay perhaps if they should, they have neither Abilities nor Opportunities to understand them.

It must be confessed that something of this is true; But yet it is nothing to their purpose. It is very well, that we all agree in the *Rule of Faith*, and *Manners*; and it would be happy if all the Christian World did so too. But still Schism is a dreadful Sin: And a Man may as certainly, without Repentance, be damned for that, as for being an *Heretick* in his *Opinion*, or a *Drunkard*, for instance, in his *Manners*. Sure I am, the Ancient Christian Fathers thought so.

It is true likewise, that the business of *Church Government* and *Discipline*, and other Points of *Ecclesiastical Conformity*, is a matter of *Dispute*, and *Controversy* among us: But who is it that made it so? The Church of *England* without doubt, would have been very well pleased, if there had been no dust raised, no dispute or contentions moved in these matters; but that every Member would have done his Duty peaceably, and quietly in his Station: Or that if any Controversy had arose, it should have been debated among Learn-

ed Men; and never have proceeded to Separation from the Communion.

We do not pretend to lay any Stress upon Skill, and Knowledge about these matters, in Order to a Mans Salvation. We believe, and teach, that a Man may be a very good *Christian*, and go to Heaven; that never understood how to justify the *Cross* in *Baptism*, or to defend the *Common Prayer Book* against all the Exceptions that are made against it. All that we say is, that if any Man will scruple, and except against the use of these things; it lyes upon him, nay he is bound as he would keep a good Conscience, to use the best means he possibly can, to get Satisfaction about them. Or if he do not; at his own Peril be it, nay even at the Peril of his Salvation, if he breaks the Churches *Peace*, and *Communion* upon that Account.

And as for those that pretend, that these are *Subtil* Points, and above their Reach, and Capacity; and they have not *understanding*, and *Wit* enough to dive into them: Why, in Gods Name, who desires them? We say that they might Innocently enough, and with a good Conscience, comply with their Governours in these Points, as they do in a hundred others, without ever diving into them; But since, it seems, they have *Wit*, and *Understanding* enough, to cavil and find fault with these things, and upon that Account, to deny their Obedience to those Lawful Powers, which God hath set over them: One would think they should at the same time have so much *Honesty*, as seriously to endeavour to give themselves Satisfaction as to those things they find fault with: And this is all we desire of them: And it is for their own sakes too; as well as ours, that we desire it. For otherwise they will never be able to answer either to God or Man, for the horrible Inconveniencies, and mischiefs, that arise to the

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the Church of Christ, by the Division, and Separation which they are engaged in.

To conclude, if in any Instance, that Famous Precept of the Apostle, of *proving all things, and holding fast that which is good*, do Oblige Christians ; it doth especially in this. If ever it be a Mans Duty to satisfie himself, about the goodnes, and Lawfulness of a thing, that he is apt to doubt of ; it is certainly in the Case, where his Superiours have laid their Commands upon him: For there he cannot disobey without Sin ; unless he can assure himself that he hath done all that he can, to reconcile their Commands with his Duty to God ; but upon the best means he hath used , he finds them irreconcilable. For a Man to disobey till he has done this, is an unwarrantable thing, and in the Case that I now speak of, it is no less than the Sin of *Formal Criminal Schism*.

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the same of which the world is full
 which they are obliged to
 to consider it in any instance, that famous Pro-
 cept of the Apostle of wisdom, *Wise men will not
 be troubled with the law of men; but will be troubled
 with the law of God, do Oblige Christians; it
 is especially in this. It ever it be a Law that is
 laid upon them, about the Goodness, and I understand of
 a thing, that he is apt to doubt of; it is certainly in
 the Case, where his Superiors have laid their Com-
 mands upon him: For there he cannot disobey with-
 out Sin; unless he can assure himself that he hath done
 all that he can, to reconcile their Commands with his
 Duty to God; but upon the best means he hath used,
 he finds them irreconcilable. For a Man to disobey
 till he has done this, is an unwarrantable thing, and in
 the Case that I now speak of, it is no less than the Sin
 of Formal Criminal Disobedience.*

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