



# **SPECIAL NOTE**

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THE  
TRUE NATURE  
OF A  
Gospel Church  
AND ITS  
GOVERNMENT:

WHEREIN

These following particulars are distinctly handled.

- I. *The subject Matter of the Church.*
- II. *The formal Cause of a particular Church.*
- III. *Of the Polity, Rule or Discipline of the Church in general.*
- IV. *The Officers of the Church.*
- V. *The Duty of Pastors of Churches.*
- VI. *The Office of Teachers in the Church.*
- VII. *Of the Rule of the Church, or of Ruling Elders.*
- VIII. *The nature of Church Polity or Rule, with the Duty of Elders.*
- IX. *Of Deacons.*
- X. *Of Excommunication.*
- XI. *Of the Communion of Churches.*

The Publishing whereof was mentioned by the Author in his  
*Answer to the Unreasonableness of Separation.*

By the late Pious and Learned Minister of the Gospel,  
JOHN OWEN, D.D.

LICENSED, June 10. 1688.

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in Newgate-street, MDC LXXXIX.

THE  
PREFACE  
TO THE  
READER.

**T**HE Church of Christ, according as it is represented unto us, or described by the holy Spirit of God, in the Old and New Testament, hath but a twofold Consideration, as Catholick and Mystical; or as Visible and Organized in particular Congregations. The Catholick Church is the whole Mystical Body of Christ, consisting of all the Elect which are purchased and redeemed by his Blood, whether already called or uncalled, Militant or Triumphant; and this is the Church that God gave him to be head unto, which is his Body and his Fullness, and by union with him Christ Mystical, Ephes. 1. 22, 23. and this is that *ἐκκλησία* (the only word most fully expressing the Catholick Church, used in Scripture) the general Assembly, the Church of the First-born, whose Names are written in Heaven, Heb. 12. 23. i. e. in the Lamb's Book of Life, and shall all appear one Day gathered together to their Head, in the perfection and fullness of the New Jerusalem-state;

## The PREFACE

where they will make a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle or any such thing; but Holy and without Blemish. The day of Grace which the Saints have passed in the respective Ages of the Church was but the days of its Espousals, wherein the Bride hath made her self ready; but then will be her full married state unto Christ, then will be the perfection not only of every particular Member of Christ, but of the whole Body of Christ, called a perfect Man, and the measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ, to which we are called, Edifying and building up, by the Ministry and Ordinances of Christ, whilst we are in Via, in our passage unto this Country, a City with a more durable fixed Foundation which we seek.

In order therefore unto the compleating this great and mystical Body, Christ hath his particular Visible Churches and Assemblies in this World, wherein he hath ordained Ordinances, and appointed Officers, for the glorious fore-mentioned Ends and Purposes.

There is no other sort of Visible Church of Christ Organized, the subject of the aforesaid Institutions spoken of, but a particular Church or Congregation (either in the Old or New Testament) where all the Members thereof do ordinarily meet together in one place to hold Communion one with another, in some one or more great Ordinances of Christ. The first Churches were Oeconomick when the Worship of God was solemnly performed in the large Families of the Antidiluvian and Postdiluvian Patriarchs, where, no doubt, all frequently assembled to the Sacrifices as then offered, and other parts of Worship then in use.

After the descent of a numerous Progeny from Abraham's  
Loins,

## to the READER.

*Loins, God takes them to himself in one Visible Body, a National but Congregational Church, to which he forms them Four hundred and thirty Years after the Promise in the Wilderness; and although all Abraham's Natural Posterity, according to the External part of the Promise made to him, were taken into visible Church-Fellowship, so that it became a National Church; yet it was such a National Church always, in the Wilderness, and in the Holy Land, as was Congregational; for it was but one Congregation during the Tabernacle, or Temple-state, first or second; they were always bound to assemble to the Tabernacle, or Temple, thrice at least every Year; hence the Tabernacle was still called the Tabernacle of the Congregation. They were to have but one Altar for Burnt-Offerings and Sacrifices; what others were at any time elsewhere called High-Places, were condemn'd by God as Sin.*

*Lastly, when Christ had Divorced this People, Abolish'd their Mosaical Constitution, by breaking their Staff of Beauty and their Staff of Bonds, he erects his Gospel Church, calls in Disciples by his Ministry, forms them into a Body, furnisheth them with Officers and Ordinances; and after he had suffered, rose again, and continued here Forty days; in which time he frequently appeared to them, and acquainted them with his Will, ascends unto his Father, sends his Spirit in a plentiful manner at Pentecost, whereby most of them were furnished with all necessary miraculous Gifts, to the promoting the Glory and Interest of Christ among Jews and Gentiles.*

*Hence the whole Evangelical Ministry was first placed in the Church of Jerusalem (so far as extraordinary, or such a part*

## The PREFACE

part of it as was to descend to Churches of after Ages) but the Apostles were not placed as abiding or standing Officers in any other Church as we find. In this Church they acted as the Elders thereof, and from this Church they were, it's very likely, solemnly sent by Fasting and Prayer to the Exercise of their Apostolick Function, in Preaching, Healing and working Miracles, gathering Churches, and setting Officers in them; even so as Barnabas and Paul were sent forth by the Church of Antioch.

Their distinguishing Apostolick Office and Charge (from which the Evangelists differed but little) was to take care of all the Churches, not to sit down as standing Pastors to all, or any particular Congregation, but at the first planting, to gather, to direct, and confirm them, in practice of their Doctrine, Fellowship, breaking Bread, and in Prayer. Wherefore, this Apostolick Care committed to them proves nothing either of the Catholick Authority, claimed by an Occumenick Pastor; or that charge of many Congregations, claimed by Diocesan Bishops at this Day.

Whence it's most evident, That all Church Officers, so far as they had any Pastoral or Episcopal Office, was given to a particular Congregation, as the *αποστολική λειτουργία*. We read of no Pastors of many Congregations, nor of no Church made up of many Congregations, to which Officers were annexed, nor of any representative Church, as some would have.

That Apostolick Power did descend to Successors we utterly deny, it being not derivable; for none after them could say, They had been EyeWitnesses of our Lord, before or after his Resurrection; none since so qualified by an extraordinary

The PREFACE  
to the READER.

ordinary measure of the Spirit for Preaching and working Miracles; and none but the Pope challenges such an extensive Care for, and Power over all Churches. That which descends from them to the ordinary Ministry, is a Commission to Preach and Baptize; and why not to Heal? (it being always in the Commission that Christ gave) a Pastoral Relation, or Presbytership which was included in their Apostleship, and Exercised toward the Church of Jerusalem. Such Presbyter-ship John and Peter both had. Hence there remains no other Successors jure to the Apostles, but ordinary Pastors and Teachers.

These are relative Officers, and are always in, or to some particular Congregations; we know of no Catholick visible Church that any Pastors are ordained to. 1. The Scripture speaks of no Church as Catholick visible. 2. The thing it self is but a Chimera of some Men's Brains; it's not in rerum naturâ; for if a Catholick visible Church be all the Churches that I see at a time, I am not capable of seeing together more than can Assemble in one place. And if it be meant of all the Churches actually in being, how are they visible to me? where can they be seen in one place? I may as well call all the Cities and Corporations in the World the Catholick visible City or Corporation; which all rational Men would call Nonsense. Besides, if all Organized Churches could be got together, it's not Catholick in respect of Saints Militant, much less of Triumphant; for many are no Church Members that are Christs Members, and many visible Members are no true Members of Christ Jesus. Where is any such Church capable of Communion in all Ordinances in one place? and the



## The PREFACE

*the Scripture speaks of no other Organized visible Church.*

*Again, to a Catholick visible Church constituted, should be a Catholick visible Pastor or Pastors; for as the Church is, such is the Pastor and Officers; to the Mystical Church Christ is the mystical Head and Pastor; he is called the chief Bishop and Shepherd of our Souls, 1 Pet. 2. 25. hence the uncalled are his Sheep, as John 10. 16. but to all visible Churches Christ hath appointed a visible Pastor or Pastors; and where is the Pastor of the Catholick visible Church? he is not to be found, unless it please us to take him from Rome. To say that all individual Pastors are Pastors to the Catholick Church, is either to say that they are invested with as much Pastoral Power and Charge in one Church as in another, and then they are indefinite Pastors; and therefore all Pastors have mutual Power in each others Churches; and so John may come into Thomas his Church, and exercise all parts of Jurisdiction there, and Thomas into John's; or a Minister to the Catholick Church hath an universal Catholick Power over the Catholick Church; if so, the Power and Charge which every ordinary Pastor hath, is Apostolick. Or, lastly, he is invested with an Arbitrary Power, at least, as to the taking up a particular Charge where he pleaseth, with a non obstante to the Suffrages of the People; for if he hath an Office whereby he is equally and indisputably related to all Churches, it's at his liberty, by virtue of this Office, to take where he pleaseth.*

*But every Church-Officer, under Christ, is a visible relate, and the correlate must be such, whence the Church must be visible to which he is an Officer. It's absurd to say a Man is*

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## to the READER.

a visible Husband to an invisible Wife, the relate and correlate must be ejusdem naturæ. It's true, Christ is related to the Church as mystical Head, but it's in respect of the Church in its mystical Nature, for Christ hath substituted no mystical Officers in his Church.

There is a great deal of difference between the mystical and external visible Church, though the latter is founded upon it, and for the sake of it. It's founded upon it as taking its true spiritual Original from it, deriving vital Spirits from it by a mystical Union to, and Communion with Christ and his Members; and it's for the Sake of it, all external visible Assemblies, Ministers, Ordinances are for the sake of the mystical Body of Christ, for calling in the Elect, and the Edifying of them to that full measure of Stature they are designed unto.

But the different consideration lies in these Things,

1. That the mystical Church doth never fail, neither is diminished by any Shocks of Temptation or Suffering, that in their visible Profession any of them undergo, whereas visible Churches are often broken, scattered, yea unchurched, and many Members fail of the Grace of God by final Apostasy. Likewise Christ's mystical Church is many times preserved in that State only, or mostly, when Christ hath not a visible organized Church according to Institution to be found on the Face of the Earth, so it was with his Church often under the Old Testament-Dispensation, as in Ægypt, in the Days of the Judges when the Ark was carried away by the Philistins, in the Days of Manasseh, and other wicked Kings, and especially in Babylon. In such times the Faithful Ones were preserved with-

## The PREFACE

out the true Sacrifices, the teaching Priest, and the Law. So hath it been in the days of the New Testament, in divers places; under the Draconick Heathen Persecutions, and afterward in the Wilderness-state of the Church, under the Anti-Christian Usurpations, and false Worship. Which mystical State is the place prepared of God to hide the Seed of the Woman in, from the Dragons Rage, for the space of One thousand two hundred and sixty Days.

Again, Unto this Mystical Church is only essentially necessary, a mystical Union unto the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Gift of the Father, Acceptation, and Covenant-undertaking of the Son, the powerful and efficacious Work of the Spirit of the Father, and the Son, working true saving Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and sincere Love to him and all his True Members. Whereby as they have a firm and unshaken Union, so they have a spiritual Communion, though without those desirable Enjoyments of external Church Privileges, and means of Grace, which they are providentially often hindered from. Visible Churches being but Christ's Tents and Tabernacles, which he sometimes setteth up, and sometimes takes down and removes at his Pleasure, as he sees best for his Glory in the World.

But of these he hath a special regard as to their Foundation, Matter, Constitution and Order, he gives forth an exact pattern from Mount Zion, as of that Typical Tabernacle from Mount Sinai of Old.

The Foundation part of a visible Church is the credible Profession of Faith and Holiness, wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is the Corner Stone, Eph. ij. 20. Matth. xvi. 18. This Profession is the Foundation, but not the Church it self. It's  
not

## to the READER.

not Articles of Faith, or Profession of them in particular individual Persons that make an organized visible Church. We are the Household of Faith built upon the Foundation, &c. 2. It's Men and Women, not Doctrine, that are the Matter of a Church; and these professing the Faith, and practising Holiness. The Members of Churches are always called in the New Testament, Saints, Faithful, Believers: They was such that were added to the Churches; neither is every Believer so as such, but as a professing Believer, for a Man must appear to be fit Matter of a visible Church before he can challenge Church Privileges, or they can be allowed him. 3. It's not many professing Believers that make a particular Church. For though they are fit Matter for a Church, yet they have not the Form of a Church, without a mutual Agreement and Combination ( explicite, or, at least, implicate ) whereby they become, by vertue of Christs Charter, a spiritual Corporation, and are called a City, Household, House, being united together by Joints and Bands, not only by internal Bonds of the Spirit, but external; the Bonds of Union must be visible as the House is, by profession.

This is a Society that Christ hath given Power to, to choose a Pastor, and other Officers of Christ's Institution, and enjoy all Ordinances: The Word, Sacrament, and Prayer, as Christ hath appointed.

Hence a visible Church must needs be a separate Congregation; Separation is a proper and inseparable adjunct thereof; the Apostle speaks of Church Membership, 2 Cor. vi. 14. Be not unequally yoked together [ ἑτεροζυγῆτες, yoked with those of another kind, the Plowing with an Ox and Ass together, being forbidden under the Law ] with Unbelievers,

## The PREFACE

*believers, ἀπίστοις, i. e. Visible Unbelievers of any sort or kind; for what participation, μετοχή, hath Righteousness with Unrighteousness? what κοινωνία, Communion or Fellowship hath Light with Darkness? Verſ. 13. τίς ὁ συμφώνους, what harmony hath Christ with Belial, Men of corrupt Lives and Conversation, or what part, μερίς μετ' ἄπιστου, hath a Believer, i. e. a visible Believer with an Unbeliever? it ought not to be rendred Infidel; but it was done by our Translators, to put a blind upon this place, as to its true intention, and to countenance Parish Communion; for why did they not here, Verſ. 14. and every where else render, ἀπίστος, an Infidel? Verſ. 16. τίς ὁ συγκοινωνῶν τῷ Θεῷ μετὰ εἰδώλων, what consistency hath the Temple of God (i. e. the Gospel Church) with Idols? &c. I take this place to be a full Proof of what is before spoken, That a Gospel Church is a Company of Faithful professing People, walking together by mutual Consent, or Confederation to the Lord Jesus Christ and one to another, in Subjection to and Practise of all his Gospel-Precepts and Commands, whereby they are separate from all Persons and Things manifestly contrary or disagreeing thereunto.*

*Hence as it's separate from all such impurities that are without, so Christ hath furnished it with sufficient Power and means to keep it self Pure; and therefore hath provided Ordinances and Ministers for that end and purpose; for the great end of Church-Edification cannot be obtained without Purity be also maintained in Doctrine and Fellowship.*

*Purity cannot be maintained without Order; a disorderly Society will corrupt within it self; for by Disorder*

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## to the READER.

it's divided, by divisions the joints and bands are broken, not only of Love and Affection, but of visible Conjunction; so that roots of bitterness, and sensual Separation arising, many are defiled.

It's true, there may be a kind of Peace and Agreement in a Society that is a stranger to Gospel-Order; when Men agree together, to walk according to a false Rule, or in a supine and negligent Observation of the True Rule. There may be a common Connivance at each one to walk as he list, but this is not Order but Disorder by Consent: Besides a Church may, for the most part, walk in Order, when there is Breaches and Divisions. Some do agree to walk according to the Rule, when others will deviate from it. It's orderly to endeavour to reduce those that walk not orderly; though such just Undertakings seem sometimes grounds of Disturbance, and causes of Convulsion in the whole Body, threatening even its breaking in pieces; but yet this must be done to preserve the whole.

The Word Translated Order, Colos. ij. 5. *τάξις*, is a Military Word; it's the Order of Souldiers in a Band, keeping Rank and File, where every one keeps his place, follows his Leader, observes the Word of Command, and his Right-hand Man. Hence the Apostle joys to see their close Order, and Stedfastness in the Faith, their Firmness, Valour, and Resolution in fighting the good Fight of Faith, and the Order in so doing; not only in watching as single Professors, but in Marching Orderly together as an Army with Banners. There is nothing more comly than a Church walking in Order when every one keeps his place, knows and practiseth his Duty according to the Rule,  
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## The PREFACE

*each submitting to the other in the performance of Duty. When the Elders know their places, and the People theirs. Christ hath been more Faithful than Moses, and therefore hath not left his Churches without sufficient Rules to walk by.*

*That Order may be in a Church of Christ, the Rules of the Gospel must be known, and that by Officers and People. They that are altogether Ignorant of the Rule, or negligent in attending it, or doubtful, and therefore always contending about it, will never walk according to it. Hence it's the great Duty of Ministers to study Order well, and acquaint the People with it. It's greatly to be bewailed, that so few Divines bend their Studies that way. They content themselves only with Studying and Preaching the Truths that concern Faith in the Lord Jesus, and the meer Moral part of Holiness; but as to Gospel-Churches or Instituted Worship, they generally in their Doctrines and Practice let it alone, and administer Sacraments as indefinitely as they Preach; care not to stand related to one People more than another, any further than Maintained by them. Likewise many good People are as great Strangers to Gospel Churches and Order, and (as their Ministers) have a great Aversness to both, and look upon it as Schism and Faction; and this is the great reason of the readines of both to comply with Rules of Men for making Churches, (Canons established by humane Laws, (being carried away (if they would speak the Truth) by corrupt Erastian Principles, That Christ hath left the Church to be altogether Guided and Governed by Laws of Magistratick Sanction. Reformation from the gross Idolatrous part of Antichristianism was engaged in with some Heroick Courage*

## to the READER.

rage and Resolution, but the coldness and indifference of Protestants to any further progress, almost ever since is not a little to be lamented. Many think it enough that the Foundation of the House is laid in Purity of Doctrine, ( and it's well if that were not rather written in the Books than preached in Pulpits at this Day ) but how little do they care to set their Hands to Building the House. Sure a great matter is from that Spiritual Sloathfulness that many are fallen under, as likewise being ready to sink under the great Discouragements laid before them by the Adversaries of Judah, when they find the Children of the Spiritual Captivity are about to Build a Gospel Church unto the Lord. And how long hath this great Work ceased? And will the Lord's Ministers and People yet say, The Time is not come, the Time that the Lord's House should be Built? Is it time to Build our own Houses, and not the House of the Lord? Surely it's time to Build, for we understand by Books the number of Years whereof the Word of the Lord came to Daniel the Prophet, and to John the beloved Disciple, and New Testament Prophet, that he would accomplish 1260. Years in the Desolation of our Jerusalem, and the Court which is without the Temple, viz. The generality of Visible Professors, and the external part of Worship, which hath been so long trod down by Gentilism. Wherefore consider your Ways, Go up to the Mountain, and bring Wood, build the House, saith the Lord, and I will take pleasure in it, ( Hag. i. 8. ) and I will be glorified. Men, it may be, have thought they have got, or, at least, saved by not troubling themselves with the Care, Charge, and Trouble of gathering Churches, and walking  
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## The PREFACE

in Gospel Order ; but God saith, Ye looked for much and lo it came to little, and when ye brought it Home I did blow upon it. Why, saith the Lord, because of my House that is waste, and ye run every Man to his own House. I doubt not but the time is nigh at Hand that the Gospel-Temple must be built with greater Splendor and Glory than ever Solomon's or Zerubbabel's was ; and though it seems to be a great Mountain of Difficulties, yet it shall become a Plain before him that is exalted far above all Principalities and Powers, and as he hath laid the Foundation thereof in the Oppressed state of his People, so his Hands shall finish it, and bring forth the Head-stone thereof with shouting in the New Jerusalem-State, crying, now Grace, Grace, but then Glory, Glory to it.

This hastening Glory we should endeavour to meet, and fetch in by earnest Prayers and faithful Endeavours, to promote the great Work of our Day. The Pattern is of late Years given forth with much clearness, by Models, such as God hath set up in this latter Age in the Wilderness, and sheltered by Cloud and Smoke by Day, and the shining of a flaming Fire by Night ; for upon all its Glory hath been a Defence, yea, and it hath been a Tabernacle for a Shadow in the Day time from the Heat, and for a place of Refuge and Covert from the Storm and from the Rain. Neither have we been left to Act by the Examples or Traditions of Men, we have had a full Manifestation of the revealed Mind and Will of Christ, with the greatest Evidence and Conviction ; God having in these latter Times raised up many most Eminent Instruments for Direction and Encouragement unto his People, which he furnished accordingly with  
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## to the READER.

great Qualifications to this End and Purpose, That the true Original, Nature, Institution and Order of Evangelical Churches might be known, distinguished, prized and adhered to, by all that know the Name of Christ, and would be followers of him as his Disciples, in Obedience to all his revealed Mind and Will. Amongst which faithful and renowned Servants of Christ, the late Author of this most useful and practical Treatise, hath approved himself to be one of the chief. I need say nothing of his stedfast Piety, universal Learning, indefatigable Labours in incessant Vindication of the Doctrines of the Gospel (of greatest weight) against all Opposition made thereto, by Men of corrupt Minds. His surviving Works will always be bespeaking his honourable Remembrance, amongst all impartial Lovers of the Truth. They that were acquainted with him, knew how much the state and standing of the Churches of Christ, under the late Sufferings and Strugglings for Reformation, was laid to heart by him. And therefore how he put forth his utmost strength to Assist, Aid, Comfort and Support the sinking Spirits of the poor Saints and People of God, even wearied out with long and repeated Persecutions. It is to be observed, That this ensuing Treatise was occasioned by one of the last and most vigorous Assaults made upon Separate and Congregational-Churches, by a Pen dipt in the Gall of that persecuting Spirit, under which God's People groaned throughout this Land. He then wrote an elaborate account of Evangelical Churches, their Original, Institution, &c. with a Vindication of them from the Charges laid in against them, by the Author of The Unreasonableness of Separation. This he lived to Print, and

## The PREFACE

promised to handle the Subject more particularly, which is here performed. He lived to finish it under his great bodily Infirmities; whereby he saw himself hastening to the end of his Race; yet so great was his Love to Christ, that whilst he had Life and Breath he drew not back his Hand from his Service. This Work he finished (with others) through the gracious support and assistance of Divine Power, and Corrected the Copy before his departure. So that, Reader, thou maist be assured, That what thou hast here, was his, (Errata's of the Press only excepted) and likewise that it ought to be esteemed as his Legacy to the Church of Christ, being a great part of his dying Labours; and therefore it's most uncharitable to suppose, That the things here wrote, were penned with any other Design, than to advance the Glory and Interest of Christ in the World; and that they were not matters of great weight on his own Spirit. And upon the perusal that I have had of these Papers, I cannot but recommend them to all diligent Enquirers after the true Nature, Way, Order and Practice of Evangelical Churches, as a true and faithful Account, according to what Understanding the Professors thereof, for the most part have had and practised. Who ever is otherwise Minded, he hath the liberty of his own Light and Conscience. Lastly, whereas many serious Professors of the Faith of the Lord Jesus (it may be) well grounded in the main saving Truths of the Gospel, are yet much to seek of these necessary Truths, for want of good Information therein, and therefore walk not up to all the revealed Mind of Christ, as they sincerely desire. Let such, with unprejudiced

to the READER.

judiced Minds, Read, and Consider what is here offered to them, and receive nothing upon humane Authority; follow no Man in Judgment or Practice any further than he is a follower of Christ. And this is all the Request of him that is a lover of all them that Love the Lord Jesus Christ.

J. C.

There is lately Published, by the same Author, *A Treatise of the Dominion of Sin and Grace*. Wherein Sin's Reign is discovered, in whom it is, and in whom it is not: how the Law supports it, and how Grace delivers from it, by setting up its Dominion in the Heart. *Price bound 1 s.*

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C H A P. I.

*The Subject Matter of the Church.*

**T**H E Church may be considered either as unto its *Essence*, Constitution and Being; or as unto its *Power* and *Order*, when it is *Organized*. As unto its *Essence* and Being, its constituent parts are its *Matter* and *Form*. These we must enquire into.

By the *Matter* of the Church, we understand the persons whereof the Church doth consist, with their Qualifications: And by its *Form*, the reason, cause and way of that kind of Relation among them, which gives them the Being of a Church, and therewithal an Interest in all that belongs unto a Church, either privilege, or power, as such.

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*Psal.* 15. 1,  
2, 3, 4, 5.  
*Psal.* 24.  
3, 4.  
*Psal.* 93. 5.  
*2 Cor.* 8.  
23.  
*Ephes.* 5.  
27.

*2 Tim.* 3. 1.  
2, 3, 4, 5.

Our first Enquiry being concerning *what sort of Persons* our Lord Jesus Christ requireth and admitteth to be the *visible Subjects* of his Kingdom, we are to be regulated in our Determination by respect unto his Honour, Glory, and the Holiness of his Rule. To reckon such persons to be Subjects of Christ, Members of his Body, such as he requires and owns, (for others are not so) who would not be tolerated, at least not approved, in a well Governed *Kingdom* or *Commonwealth* of the World, is highly dishonourable unto him. But it is so come to pass; that let Men be never so notoriously and flagitiously wicked, until they become pests of the earth, yet are they esteemed to belong to the Church of Christ. And not only so, but it is thought little less than *Schism* to forbid them the Communion of the Church in all its sacred Privileges. Howbeit, the Scripture doth in general represent the Kingdom or Church of Christ, to consist of persons called *Saints*, separated from the World, with many other things of an alike nature, as we shall see immediately. And if the *Honour of Christ* were of such weight with us as it ought to be; if we understood aright the nature and ends of his Kingdom, and that the peculiar Glory of it, above all the Kingdoms in the World, consists in the *Holiness of its Subjects*, such an Holiness as the World in its wisdom knoweth not, we would duly consider whom we avow to belong thereunto. Those who know ought of these things, will not profess that persons openly profane, vicious, sensual, wicked and ignorant, are approved and owned of Christ as the Subjects of his Kingdom, or that it is his will that we should receive them into the Communion of the Church. But an old *opinion* of the unlawfulness of separation from a Church, on the account of the *mixture of wicked men* in it, is made a scare-crow to frighten men from attempting the Reformation of the greatest Evils, and a covert for the composing Churches of such Members only.

Some things therefore are to be premised unto what shall be offered unto the right stating of this Enquiry: As,

1. That if there be no more required of any as unto *Personal Qualifications* in a visible uncontrollable profession, to constitute them

them Subjects of Christs Kingdom, and Members of his Church, but what is required by the most righteous and severe *Laws of Men* to constitute a good *Subject* or *Citizen*, the distinction between his visible Kingdom and the Kingdoms of the World, as unto the principal causes of it, is utterly lost. Now all negative Qualifications, as that Men are not Oppressors, Drunkards, Revilers, Swearers, Adulterers, &c. are required hereunto. But yet it is so fallen out, that generally more is required to constitute such a *Citizen* as shall represent the righteous Laws he liveth under, than to constitute a Member of the Church of Christ.

Ezek 22-26.

2. That whereas *Regeneration* is expressly required in the Gospel, to give a Right and Privilege unto an entrance into the Church or Kingdom of Christ, whereby that Kingdom of his is distinguished from all other Kingdoms in and of the World, unto an Interest wherein never any such thing was required; it must of necessity be something *better*, more *excellent* and *sublime* than any thing the Laws and Politics of Men pretend unto or prescribe. Wherefore it cannot consist in any outward *Rites*, easie to be observed by the worst and vilest of Men; besides the Scripture gives us a description of it, in opposition unto its consisting in any such *Rite*, 1 *Pet.* 3. 21. And many things required unto good Citizens, are far better than the meer observation of such a *Rite*.

Joh. 3. 3.  
Tit. 3. 3.  
4. 5.

Of this *Regeneration* *Baptism* is the *Symbol*, the Sign, Expression and Representation. Wherefore unto those who are in a due manner partakers of it, it giveth all the external Rights and Privileges which belong unto them that are *Regenerate*, until they come unto such Seasons, wherein the *personal* performance of those Duties whereon the continuation of the estate of visible *Regeneration* doth depend, is required of them. Herein if they fail, they lose all privilege and benefit by their *Baptism*.

Joh. 3. 5.  
Act. 2. 38.  
1 *Pet.* 3. 21.

So speaks the Apostle in the case of *Circumcision* under the Law, *Rom.* 2. 25. *For Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the Law; but if thou be a breaker of the Law, thy Circumcision is made uncircumcision.* It is so in the case of *Baptism*. Verily it

profiteth,



The Subject Matter of the Church.

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profiteth, if a Man stand unto the Terms of the Covenant which is tendered therein between God and his Soul; for it will give him Right unto all the outward Privileges of a *Regenerate State*; but if he do not, as in the sight of God his *Baptism* is *no Baptism*, as unto the real communication of Grace and acceptance with him; so in the sight of the Church, it is *no Baptism*, as unto a participation of the external Rights and Privileges of a *Regenerate State*.

Phil. 3. 18, 19.  
Tit. 1. 15, 16.

Act. 15. 8.  
Revel. 2. 23.

Act. 8. 13.

4. God alone is judge concerning this *Regeneration*, as unto its *internal, real principle and state in the Souls of Men*, whereon the participation of all the spiritual advantages of the Covenant of Grace doth depend: The Church is judge of its *evidences and fruits* in their external Demonstration, as unto a participation of the *outward Privileges* of a *Regenerate State*, and no farther. And we shall hereon briefly declare what belongs unto the forming of a right judgment herein, and who are to be esteemed fit Members of any Gospel Church State, or have a Right so to be.

1 Cor. 6. 9, 10, 11.  
Phil. 3. 18, 19.  
2 Thes. 3. 6.  
2 Tim. 3. 5.  
Rom. 9. 6, 7.  
Tit. 1. 16.

1. Such as from whom we are obliged to *withdraw* or *withhold Communion*, can be no part of the matter *constituent* of a Church, or are not meet Members for the first constitution of it. But such are all *Habitual Sinners*; those who having prevalent habits and inclinations unto Sins of any kind unmortified, do walk according unto them. Such are profane Swearers, Drunkards, Fornicators, Covetous, Oppressors, and the like, *who shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*. 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10, 11. Phil. 3. 18, 19. 2 Thess. 3. 6. 2 Tim. 3. 5. as a Man living and dying in *any known Sin*, that is *habitually*, without Repentance cannot be saved; so a Man known to live in Sin, cannot regularly be received into any Church. To compose Churches of *Habitual Sinners*, and that either as unto Sins of Commission, or Sins of Omission, is not to erect Temples to Christ; but Chapels unto the Devil.

Mat. 18. 16, 17, 18.

2. Such as being in the fellowship of the Church, are to be *admonished of any scandalous Sin*, which if they repent not of, they are to be *cast out of the Church*, are not meet Members for the *Original Constitution* of a Church. This is the state of them

them who abide *Obstinate in any known Sin*, whereby they have given *offence* unto others, without a professed Repentance thereof, although they have not lived in it *habitually*. 1 Cor. 5.  
11.

3. They are to be such as *visibly answer* the Description given of Gospel Churches in the Scripture, so as the *Titles* assigned therein unto the Members of such Churches, may on good grounds be appropriated unto them. To compose Churches of such persons as do not visibly answer the character given of what they were of old, and what they were always to be by virtue of the Law of Christ or Gospel-constitution, is not Church *Edification* but *Destruction*. And those who look on the things spoken of all Church Members of old, as that they were *Saints by calling*, *lively stones* in the house of God, *justified* and *sanctified*, *separate from the World*, &c. as those which were in them, and did indeed belong unto them, but even deride the necessity of the same things in present Church Members, or the Application of them unto those who are so, are themselves no small part of that woful *Degeneracy* which Christian Religion is fallen under. Let it then be considered what is spoken of the Church of the *Jews* in their Dedication unto God, as unto their *Typical Holiness*, with the Application of it unto Christian Churches in *real Holiness*, 1 Pet. 2. 5, 9. with the Description given of them constantly in the Scripture, as *Faithful*, *Holy*, *Believing*, as the *House of God*, as his *Temple* wherein he dwells by his Spirit, as the *Body of Christ* united and compacted by the communication of the Spirit unto them; as also what is said concerning their ways, walkings and duties; and it will be uncontrolably evident of what sort our *Church Members* ought to be; nor are those of any other sort able to discharge the *Duties* which are incumbent on all Church Members, nor to use the *Privileges* they are intrusted withal. Wherefore, I say, to suppose Churches regularly to consist of such persons for the greater part of them, as no way answer the *Description given of Church Members* in their Original Institution, nor capable to discharge the Duties prescribed unto them, but giving evidence of Habits and actions inconsistent therewithal, is not only to disturb all Church Order, but utterly to *overthrow* the Ends  
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and Being of Churches. Nor is there any thing more scandalous unto Christian Religion, than what *Bellarmino* affirms to be the judgment of the *Papists* in opposition unto all others; namely, that *no internal Vertue or Grace is required unto the Constitution of a Church in its Members.* Lib. 3. de Eccles. cap. 2.

Rom. 10.

10.

2 Cor. 8. 5.

Chap. 9.

13.

Matth. 10.

32, 33.

Luke 9. 16.

2 Tim. 2.

12.

Rom. 15. 9.

Job. 12. 42.

1 Job. 4.

2, 3, 15.

4. They must be such as do *make an open profession of the subjection of their Souls and Consciences unto the Authority of Christ in the Gospel, and their readines to yield Obedience unto all his Commands.* This I suppose will not be denied; for not only doth the Scripture make this *Profession* necessary unto the participation of any benefit or privilege of the Gospel; but the nature of the things themselves requires indispensably that so it should be. For nothing can be more unreasonable than, that Men should be taken into the privileges attending *Obedience* unto the Laws and Commands of Christ, without avowing or professing that *Obedience.* Wherefore, our Enquiry is only what is required unto *such a Profession*, as may render Men meet to be Members of a Church, and give them a Right thereunto. For to suppose such a confession of Christian Religion to be compliant with the Gospel, which is made by many who openly *live in Sin*, being *disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate,* is to renounce the Gospel it self. Christ is not the High-Priest of such a *Profession.* I shall therefore declare briefly what is necessary unto this *Profession*, that all may know what it is which is required unto the Entrance of any into our Churches, wherein our *Practice* hath been sufficiently traduced.

1. There is required unto it a *competent knowledge* of the Doctrines and Mystery of the Gospel, especially concerning the *Person and Offices of Christ.* The Confession hereof, was the ground whereon he granted the *Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*, or all Church Power unto Believers, *Matth. 16. 17, 18, 19.* The first Instruction which he gave unto his Apostles, was, That they should *teach Men* by the Preaching of the Gospel, in the knowledge of the Truth revealed by him. The knowledge required in the Members of the *Judaical Church*, that they might be Translated into the *Christian*, was principally, if not solely, that of his *Person*, and the acknowledgment of him to be

be the true *Messiah*, the Son of God. For as on their unbelief thereof their Eternal ruine did depend, as he told them, *if you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins*; so the confession of him was sufficient on their part unto their Admission into the Gospel Church State. And the Reasons of it are apparent. With others, an Instruction in all the Mysteries of Religion, especially in those that are *fundamental*, is necessary unto the Profession we enquire after. So *Justin Martyr* tells us what pains they took in those Primitive Times, to instruct those in the Mysteries of Religion, who upon a *general Conviction of its Truth*, were willing to adhere unto the Profession of it. And what was their judgment herein, is sufficiently known, from the keeping a multitude in the state of *Catechumens*, before they would admit them into the Fellowship of the Church. They are not therefore to be blamed, they do but discharge their Duty, who refuse to receive into Church-Communion such as are *ignorant* of the fundamental Doctrines and Mysteries of the Gospel; or if they have learned any thing of them from a form of words, yet really *understand nothing* of them. The promiscuous driving of all sorts of persons who have been Baptized in their Infancy, unto a participation of all Church privileges, is a *profanation* of the holy Institutions of Christ. This knowledge therefore belonging unto profession is it self to be professed.

2. There is required unto it a *professed subjection of Soul and Conscience unto the Authority of Christ in the Church*. This in general is performed by all that are *Baptized* when they are *Adult*, as being by their own actual consent *Baptized in the Name of Christ*. And it is required of all them who are Baptized in their Infancy, when they are able with Faith and Understanding to profess their consent unto, and abiding in that Covenant whereinto they were initiated.

3. An Instruction in, and consent unto the *Doctrine of Self-denial and bearing of the Cross*, in a particular manner: For this is made indispensably necessary by our Saviour himself, unto all that will be his Disciples. And it hath been a great disadvantage unto the Glory of Christian Religion, that Men have

Matth. 28.  
18, 19, 20.  
2 Cor. 8. 5.

Matth. 10.  
37, 38, 39.  
Mar. 8. 34.  
38.  
Luke 9. 23.

Phil. 3.18. have not been more and better instructed therein. It is  
 Act. 4. 10, commonly thought, that who ever will, may be a Christian  
 11, 20. at an *easy rate*, it will cost him nothing. But the Gospel gives  
 Act. 24. 14. us another account of these things. For it not only warns us,  
 that Reproaches, Hatred, Sufferings of all sorts, oft-times to  
 Death it self, are the common lot of all its Professors, *who will*  
*live Godly in Christ Jesus*; but also requires, that at our initia-  
 tion into the Profession of it, we consider aright the dread of  
 them all, and engage cheerfully to undergo them. Hence, in  
 the *Primitive Times*, whilst all sorts of miseries were conti-  
 nually presented unto them who Embraced the Christian Reli-  
 gion, their willing engagement to undergo them, who were  
 Converted, was a firm Evidence of the sincerity of their Faith, as  
 it ought to be unto us also in times of Difficulty and Persecution.  
 Some may suppose that the Faith and Confession of this Do-  
 ctine of *Self-denial* and *readiness for the Cross*, is of use only in  
 time of *Persecution*, and so doth not belong unto them who have  
 continually the countenance and favour of publick Authority.  
 I say, it is, at least as they judge, well for them; with others  
 it is not so, whose outward state makes the publick avowing of  
 this Duty indispensably necessary unto them: And I may add it  
 as my own thoughts, (though they are not my own alone) That  
 notwithstanding all the Countenance that is given unto any  
 Church by the *publick Magistracy*, yet whilst we are in this  
 World, those who will faithfully discharge their Duty, as Mini-  
 sters of the Gospel especially, shall have need to be prepared  
 for sufferings. To escape sufferings, and enjoy worldly advan-  
 tages by sinful compliances, or bearing with Men in their Sins,  
 is no Gospel Direction.

4. *Conviction and Confession of Sin, with the way of deli-  
 verance by Jesus Christ, is that answer of a good Conscience,*  
 that is required in the Baptism of them that are Adult.  
 1 Pet. 3.

5. Unto this Profession is required the *constant performance of*  
 all known Duties of Religion, both of *Piety* in the publick and  
 private Worship of God, as also of *Charity* with respect unto  
 others. *Shew me thy Faith by thy Works.*

Matth. 28.  
 19, 20.

6. A careful *Abstinence from all known Sins*, giving scandal or offence, either unto the World, or unto the Church of God. And the Gospel requires, that this Confession be made (*with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation*) against (1.) *Fear*, (2.) *Shame*, (3.) *The Course of the World*, (4.) *The Opposition* of all Enemies whatever.

1 Cor. 10.  
32.  
Phil 1. 10

Hence it appears, that there are none excluded from an Entrance into the Church State, but such as are either, (1.) *grossly Ignorant*, or, (2.) *Persecutors*, or reproachers of those that are Good, or of the ways of God wherein they walk; or, (3.) *Idolaters*; or, (4.) *Men scandalous in their Lives* in the Commission of Sins, or Omission of Duties, through vitious Habits or Inclinations; or, (5.) such as would partake of Gospel-Privileges and Ordinances, yet openly avow that they *will not submit unto the Law and Commands of Christ in the Gospel*, concerning whom, and the like, the Scripture Rule is peremptory; *From such turn away.*

And herein we are remote from exceeding the example and care of the Primitive Churches. Yea, there are but few, if any, that arrive unto it. Their endeavour was to Preach unto all they could, and rejoiced in the *multitudes that came to hear the Word*. But if any did essay to join themselves unto the Church, their diligence in their Examination and Instruction, their severe Enquiries into their Conversation, their disposing of them for a long time into a state of *Expectation* for their Trial, before their Admittance, were remarkable. And some of the Ancients complain, that their *promiscuous Admittance* of all sorts of persons that would profess the Christian Religion, into Church Membership, which took place afterwards, ruined all the Beauty, Order and Discipline of the Church.

The things ascribed unto those who are to be esteemed the proper *Subject Matter of a Visible Church*, are such as in the *judgment of Charity* entitle them unto all the Appellations of *Saints*; *Called, Sanctified*, that is *Visibly* and by *Profession*, which are given unto the Members of all the Churches in the New Testament, and which must be answered in those who

are admitted into that Privilege, if we do not wholly neglect our only Patterns. By these things, although they should any of them not be *real living Members* of the Mystical Body of Christ, unto whom he is an Head of spiritual and vital influence; yet are they meet Members of that Body of Christ unto which he is an *Head of Rule and Government*; as also meet to be esteemed Subjects of his Kingdom. And none are excluded but such, as concerning whom Rules are given, either to withdraw from them, or to cast them out of Church Society, or are expressly excluded by God himself from any share in the *Privileges of his Covenant*, *Psal. 50. 16, 17.*

*Divines*, of all sorts, do dispute from the Scripture and the Testimonies of the *Ancients*, that *Hypocrites*, and persons *unregenerate* may be true Members of Visible Churches. And it is a matter very easie to be proved; nor do I know any by whom it is denied. But the only Question is, That whereas undoubtedly, *Profession* is necessary unto all Church Communion; whether, if Men do *profess themselves Hypocrites in State*, and *Unregenerate in Mind*, that *Profession* do sufficiently qualify them for Church Communion. And whereas there is a double *Profession*, one by *Words*, the other by *Works*, as the Apostle declares, *Tit. 1. 16.* Whether the latter be not as *interpretative* of the Mind and state of Men as the former; other contest we have with none, in this matter.

*Belarmine de Eccles. lib. 3. cap. 2.* gives an account out of *Augustine*, and that truly, from *Brevec. Collat. Col. 3.* of the state of the Church. "It doth, *saith he*, consist of a Soul and "Body. The Soul is the internal Graces of the Spirit; The "Body is the Profession of them, with the Sacraments. All "true Believers making Profession, belong to the Soul and "Body of the Church. Some, (as believing *Catechumens*) "belong to the Soul, but not to the Body: Others are of the "Body, but not of the Soul; namely, such as have no internal "Grace or true Faith; and they are like the Hair or the Nails, "or evil Humours in the Body. And thereunto adds, That his *Definition* of the Church comprizeth this *last sort only*; which is all one, as if we should define a Man to be a *Thing constituted*  
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and made up of Hair, Nails, and ill Humours ; and let others take heed that they have not such Churches.

There is nothing more certain in matter of Fact, than that *Evangelical Churches* at their first constitution, were made up, and did consist of such Members as we have described, and no other. Nor is there one Word in the whole Scripture intimating any *Concession* or *Permission* of Christ, to receive into his Church those who are not so Qualified. Others have nothing to plead for themselves but *Possession* ; which being *mala fidei*, ill obtained, and ill continued, will afford them no real advantage, when the time of trial shall come. Wherefore, it is certain that *such they ought to be*. No Man, as I suppose, is come unto that profligate sense of Spiritual things, as to deny, That the *Members of the Church* ought to be *visibly Holy*. For if so, they may affirm, that all the promises and privileges made and granted to the Church, do belong unto them who *visibly live and die in their Sins* ; which is to overthrow the Gospel. And if they *ought so to be*, and were so at first, when they are not so, *openly and visibly*, there is a declension from the Original Constitution of Churches, and a Sinful Deviation in them from the Rule of Christ.

This Original Constitution of Churches, with respect unto their *Members*, was for the substance of it, as we observed, preferred in the Primitive Times, whilst *Persecution* from without, was continued, and Discipline preserved within. I have in part declared before, what great care and circumspection the Church then used in the *Admission* of any into their Fellowship and Order, and what trial they were to undergo, before they were received ; and it is known also, with what *severe Discipline* they watched over the Faith, walking, conversation and manners of all their Members. Indeed, such was their care and diligence herein, that there is scarce left in some Churches, at present, the least *Resemblance* or Appearance of what was their State and manner of Rule. Wherefore, some think it meet to Ascend no higher in the imitation of the Primitive Churches, than the times of the *Christian Emperours*, when all things began



began to rush into the fatal Apostasie, which I shall here speak a little farther unto : For,

Upon the *Roman Emperours* Embracing Christian Religion, whereby not only outward Peace and Tranquility was secured unto the Church, but the Profession of Christian Religion was countenanced, encouraged, honoured and rewarded; the *Rule, Care and Diligence* of the Churches about the *Admission* of Members, were in a great measure relinquished and forsaken. The *Rulers of the Church* began to think, that the Glory of it consisted in its *numbers*; finding both their own Power, Veneration and Revenue encreased thereby. In a short time, the Inhabitants of whole Cities and Provinces, upon a bare outward Profession, were admitted into Churches. And then began the *outward Court*, that is, all that which belongs unto the outward Worship and Order of the Church, *to be trampled on by the Gentiles*, not kept any more to the *measure* of Scripture Rule, which thenceforth was applied only to the *Temple of God* and them that worshipped therein : For this corruption of the Church, as to the *matter* of it, was the occasion and means of introducing all that corruption in *Doctrines, Worship, Order and Rule* which ensued, and ended in the great Apostacy. For whatever belonged unto any of these things, especially these that consist in practice, were accommodated unto the state of the *Members* of the Churches : And such they were as stood in need of *superstitious Rites* to be mixed with their Worship, as not understanding the Power and Glory of that which is Spiritual; such as no interest in *Church Order* could be committed unto, seeing they were not qualified to bear any share in it; such as stood in need of a *Rule over them*, with *Grandeur and Power*, like unto that among the *Gentiles*. Wherefore, the Accommodation of all Church concerns, unto the state and condition of such corrupt Members as Churches were filled with, and at length made up of, proved the Ruine of the Church in all its Order and Beauty.

But so it fell out, that in the *Protestant Reformation* of the Church, very little regard was had thereunto. Those great  
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and worthy Persons who were called unto that Work, did set themselves principally, yea, *solely* for the most part, against the *false Doctrine* and *Idolatrous Worship* of the *Church of Rome*; as judging, that if they were removed and taken away, the people by the Efficacy of Truth and Order of Worship, would be retrieved from the evil of their ways, and Primitive Holiness be again reduced among them. For they thought it was the *Doctrine* and *Worship* of that Church, which had filled the people with Darknes and corrupted their Conversations. Nor did they absolutely judge amiss therein: For although they were themselves at first introduced in compliance with the ignorance and wickedness of the people, yet they were suited to *promote* them, as well as to *countenance* them; which they did effectually. Hence it came to pass, that the Reformation of the Church as unto the *matter* of it, or the Purity and Holiness of its Members, was not in the least attempted, until *Calvin* set up his *Discipline* at *Geneva*, which hath filled the World with clamours against him from that day to this. In most other places, Churches, in the matter of them, continued the same as they were in the *Papacy*, and in many places as bad in their Lives as when they were *Papists*.

But this *Method* was designed in the Holy, Wise Providence of God, for the good and advantage of the Church, in a *progressive Reformation*, as it had made a gradual Progress into its decay. For had the *Reformers* in the first place, set themselves to remove out of the Church such as were *unmeet for its Communion*, or to have gathered out of them such as were meet Members of the Church according to its Original Institution; it would through the *paucity of the number* of those who could have complied with the Design, have greatly obstructed, if not utterly defeated their endeavour for the *Reformation of Doctrine and Worship*. This was that in the Preaching of the Gospel and the Profession of it, which God hath since made effectual, in these Nations especially, and in other places, to turn Multitudes from *Darkness to Light*, and from the *Power of Satan unto Himself*, translating them into the *Kingdom of His dear Son*. Hereby way is made for a necessary addition unto the work of Reformation.

Reformation, if not to the closing of it, which could not at first be attained unto, nor well attempted; namely the Reduction of Churches, as unto their *matter*, or the Members of them unto their Primitive Institution.

The sum of what is designed in this Discourse, is this only. We desire no more to constitute *Church Members*, and we can desire no less, than what in judgment of Charity may comply with the *Union* that is between Christ the Head and the Church; 1 Cor. 12. 27. Eph. 2. 22. 1 Cor. 3. 16, 17. 2 Cor. 11. 1, 18. 1 Thess. 1. 1, 2, &c. that may in the same judgment answer the way of the beginning and increase of the Church according unto the Will of God, who adds unto the Church such as shall be saved, Act. 2. 47. the Rule of our receiving of them, being *because he hath received them*, Rom. 14. 1, 2. that may answer that Profession of Faith which was the Foundation of the Church, which was not what *flesh and blood*, but *what God himself revealed*, Matth. 16. 16. and not such as have a form of Godliness but deny the Power thereof, 2 Tim. 3. 5. We acknowledge that many Church Members are not what they ought to be, but that many *Hypocrites* may be among them; that the judgment which is passed on the Confession and Profession of them that are to be Admitted into Churches, is *charitative*, proceeding on evidence of moral Probability, not determining the reality of the things themselves; that there are sundry *measures* of Light, Knowledge, Experience, and Abilities and Readiness of Mind in those that are to be Admitted, all whose Circumstances are duly to be considered, with indulgence unto their weaknesses: And if the Scripture will allow us any further Latitude, we are ready to embrace it.

Our present Enquiry yet remaining on these considerations, is, What is our Duty *in point of Communion with such Churches* as are made up or composed of Members *visibly unholy*; or such as comply not with the Qualifications that are by the Rules of the Gospel indispensably required, to give unto any a Regular entrance into the Church, with a participation of its Privileges. For it is in vain to expect, that *such Churches will Reform*

Reform themselves, by any Act, Duty or Power of their own; seeing the generality of them are justly supposed averse from, and enemies unto any such Work. I answer therefore,

1. It must be remembred, that *Communion with particular Churches* is to be regulated absolutely by *Edification*. No Man is or can be obliged to abide in or confine himself unto the Communion of any particular Church, any longer, than it is for his *Edification*. And this liberty is allowed unto all persons by the *Church of England*. For, allow a Man to be born in such a *Parish*, to be *baptized* in it, and there educated; yet, if at any time he judge that the *Ministry of the Parish* is not useful unto his *Edification*, he may withdraw from all Communion in that *Parish*, by the removal of his Habitation, it may be to the next door. Wherefore,

2. If the corruption of a Church, as to the *matter of it*, be such as that,

1. It is *inconsistent* with, and overthroweth all that *Communion* that ought to be among the Members of the same Church, in *love without dissimulation*, whereof we shall treat afterwards.

2. If the *scandals* and *offences* which must of necessity abound in such Churches, be really obstructive of *Edification*.

3. If the *ways and walking* of the generality of their Members, be dishonourable unto the Gospel, and the Profession of it, giving no Representation of the holiness of Christ or his Doctrine.

4. If such Churches *do not, can not, will not* Reform themselves: Then,

It is the Duty of every Man who takes care of his own present *Edification*, and the future salvation of his Soul, *peaceably to withdraw from the Communion of such Churches*, and to join in such others, where all the ends of Church Societies may in some measure be obtained. Men may not only do so, because all obligation unto the use of means for the attaining of such an end, doth cease, when the means are not suited thereunto; but obstructive of its attainment; but also the giving of a *Testimony* hereby against the Declension from the Rule of

of Christ in the Institution of Churches, and the dishonour that by this means is reflected on the Gospel, is necessary unto all that desire to acquit themselves as *Loyal Subjects* unto their Lord and King. And it cannot be questioned by any, who understand the nature, use and end of *Evangelical Churches*, but that a relinquishment of the Rule of the Gospel in any of them, as unto the practice of Holiness, is as just a cause of withdrawing Communion from them, as their forsaking the same Rule in Doctrine and Worship.

It may be some will judge that sundry *inconveniences* will ensue on this Assertion, when any have a mind to practise according unto it. But when the matter of Fact supposed, is such as is capable of an uncontrollable evidence, no *inconvenience* can ensue on the practice directed unto, any way to be compared unto the *mischiefe* of obliging Believers to abide always in such Societies, to the ruine of their Souls.

Two things may be yet enquired into, that relate unto this part of the state of *Evangelical Churches*: As,

1. Whether a Church may not, ought not, to *take under its Conduct*, Inspection and Rule, such as are not yet meet to be received into full Communion; such as are the *Children and Servants* of those who are compleat Members of the Church. *Answ.* No doubt the Church in its Officers, may and ought so to do; and it is a great evil when it is neglected. For, (1.) They are to take care of *Parents and Masters* as such, and as unto the discharge of their Duty in their Families; which, without an inspection into the condition of their *Children and Servants*, they cannot do. (2.) *Houholds* were constantly reckoned unto the Church, when the Heads of the Families were entred into Covenant, *Luk. 19. 9. Act. 16. 15. Rom. 16. 10, 11. 1 Cor. 1. 16. 2 Tim. 4. 19.* (3.) *Children* to belong unto, and have an Interest in their *Parents Covenant*; not only in the promise of it, which gives them Right unto *Baptism*; but in the Profession of it in the *Church Covenant*, which gives them a Right unto all the Privileges of the Church, whereof they are capable, until they voluntarily relinquish their claim unto them. (4.) *Baptizing the Children of Church Members*, giving them

them thereby an Admission into the visible *Catholick* Church, puts an Obligation on the Officers of the Church, to take care, what in them lieth, that they may be kept and preserved *meet Members* of it, by a due watch over them, and instruction of them. (5.) Though neither the Church nor its Privileges be continued and preserved as of old, by *carnal generation*; yet, because of the nature of the Dispensation of Gods Covenant, wherein he hath promised to be a *God unto Believers and their Seed*; the advantage of the means of a gracious Education in such Families, and of conversion and edification in the Ministry of the Church, *ordinarily* the continuation of the Church, is to depend on the addition of Members out of the Families already incorporated in it. The Church is not to be like the Kingdom of the *Mamalukes*, wherein there was no regard unto natural Successors; but it was continually made up of *Strangers* and *Foreigners* incorporated into it: Nor like the beginning of the *Roman Common-weal*, which consisting of *Men* only, was like to have been the matter of *one Age* alone.

The Duty of the Church towards this sort of persons, consists, (1.) In *Prayer* for them. (2.) *Catechetical Instruction* of them, according unto their Capacities. (3.) *Advice* to their Parents concerning them. (4.) *Visiting* of them in the Families whereunto they do belong. (5.) *Encouragement* of them, or *Admonition* according as there is occasion. (6.) *Direction* for a due preparation unto the joining themselves unto the Church, in full Communion. (7.) *Exclusion* of them from a claim unto the participation of the especial Privileges of the Church, where they render themselves visibly unmeet for them, and unworthy of them.

The neglect of this Duty brings unconceivable prejudice unto Churches, and if continued in, will prove their Ruine. For they are not to be preserved, propagated and continued, at the easie rate of a constant supply by the *carnal baptized posterity* of those who do at any time justly or unjustly belong unto them: But they are to prepare a *meet supply of Members*, by all the spiritual means whose administration they are in-

trusted withal. And besides, one end of Churches, is, to *preserve the Covenant of God* in the Families once graciously taken thereinto. The neglect therefore herein, is carefully to be watched against. And it doth arise, (1.) From an *ignorance of the Duty*, in most that are concerned in it. (2.) From the *paucity of Officers* in most Churches, both Teaching and Ruling, who are to attend unto it. (3.) The *want of a Teacher or Catechist* in every Church, who should attend only unto the instruction of this sort of persons. (4.) *Want of a sense of their Duty* in Parents and Masters. (1.) In not valuing aright the *great privilege* of having their Children and Servants under the inspection, care and blessing of the Church. (2.) In not *instilling* into them a sense of it, with the Duties that are expected from them, on the account of their Relation unto the Church. (3.) In not *bringing them* duly unto the Church Assemblies. (4.) In not *preparing* and disposing them unto an actual entrance into full Communion with the Church. (5.) In not *advising* with the Elders of the Church about them. And, (6.) Especially by an *indulgence* unto that loose and careless kind of *Education* in Conformity unto the World, which generally prevails. Hence it is, that most of them on various accounts and occasions, drop off here and there from the Communion of the Church, and all Relation thereunto, without the least respect unto them, or enquiry after them; Churches being supplied by such as are occasionally Converted in them.

Where *Churches* are compleat in the *kind and number* of their Officers, sufficient to attend unto all the Duties and occasions of them; where whole *Families*, in the conjunction of the Heads of them unto the Church, are Dedicated unto God, according unto the several capacities of those whereof they do consist; where the *Design* of the Church is to provide for its own *successive continuation* in the preservation of the Interest of Gods Covenant in the Families taken thereinto; where *Parents* esteem themselves accountable unto God and the Church, as unto the Relation of their Children thereunto, there is provision for Church Order, Usefulness and Beauty, beyond what is usually to be observed.

2. The especial Duty of the Church in *Admission of Members* in the time of great Persecution, may be a little enquired into. And, (1.) It is evident, that in the *Apostolical and Primitive Times*, the Churches were exceeding careful not to admit into their society, such as by whom they might be *betrayed* unto the rage of their Persecuting Adversaries. Yet, notwithstanding all their care, they could seldom avoid it; but that when Persecution grew severe, some or other would fall from them, either out of fear, with the power of Temptation, or by a discovery of their latent *hypocrisie* and unbelief, unto their great trial and distress. However, they were not *so scrupulous* herein, with respect unto their own safety, as to exclude such as gave a *tolerable account* of their sincerity; but in the discharge of their Duty, committed themselves unto the care of Jesus Christ. And this is the Rule whereby we ought to walk on such occasions. Wherefore, (2.) On supposition of the *establishment of Idolatry, and Persecution*, there or in any place, as it was of old, under, first the *Pagan*, and afterwards the *Antichristian Tyranny*; the Church is obliged to receive into its Care and Communion all such as, (1.) *Flee from Idols*, and are ready to confirm their Testimony against them with suffering. (2.) *Make profession of the truth* of the Gospel of the Doctrine of Christ, especially as unto his Person and Offices; are, (3.) *Free from scandalous Sins*; and, (4.) *Are willing to give up themselves* unto the Rule of Christ in the Church, and a subjection unto all his Ordinances and Institutions therein. For in such a season, these things are so full an indication of *sincerity*, as that in the judgment of Charity, they render Men meet to be Members of the visible Church. And if any of this sort of persons, through the severity of the Church in their *non Admission* of them, should be cast on a conjunction in Superstitious and Idolatrous Worship, or be otherwise exposed unto Temptations and Discouragements prejudicial unto their Souls, I know not how such a Church can answer the refusal of them unto the great and universal Pastor of the whole Flock.