

the Union of all Churches, and so of the Catholick Church is preserved.

THIS is that blessed *oneness* which the Lord Christ prayed for so earnestly for his Disciples, that they might be *one in the Father and the Son, one among themselves*, and *made perfect in one*, Joh. 17. 20, 21, 22, 23. without any respect unto that horrid *Image* of it, which was set up in the latter days of the Church, which all Men were compelled to bow down unto, and Worship, with the fire of *Nebuchadnezzars Furnace*. Of any other Union there is not the least mention in the Scripture.

THIS Union of the Catholick Church in all particular Churches, is always the same, inviolable, unchangeable, comprehending all the Churches in the World at all times; not confinable unto any State or Party, not interruptible by any external form, nor to be prevailed against by the *Gates of Hell*; and all such Disputes about a *Catholick Church*, and its *Union*, as can be so much as *questionable* among them that profess to believe the Gospel, are in direct opposition unto the Prayers and Promises of Jesus Christ. Whilst *Evangelical Faith, Holiness, Obedience unto the Commands of Christ, and Mutual Love* abide in any on the Earth, there is the *Catholick Church*; and whilst they are professed, that *Catholick Church is visible*; other *Catholick Church* upon the Earth I believe none; nor any that needs other things unto its Constitution.

THESE things being premised, I proceed unto that which is our present Enquiry, namely, *Wherein the Communion of particular Churches among themselves doth consist*.

THE Communion of Churches, is *their joint actings in the same Gospel Duties towards God in Christ, with their mutual actings towards each other, with respect unto the end of their Institution and Being, which is the Glory of Christ in the Edification of the whole Catholick Church*.

AS unto the actings of the first sort, the ground of them is *Faith*, and therein is the *first Act* of the Communion of Churches. And this Communion in Faith among all the Churches of Christ is two-fold. (1.) *General* in the belief of the same *Doctrine of Truth*, which is according unto
 Godliness,

Godliness, the same Articles of Faith, and the publick profession thereof; so that every one of them is the *Ground and Pillar of the same Truth*. This the Primitive Church provided for in *Creeeds and Symbols*, or Confessions of Faith, as is known. But as never any one of them was expressly owned by all Churches; so in process of time they came to be abused, as expressing the sence of the present Church, whether true or false. Hence we have as many *Arian Creeeds* yet extant, as those that are *Orthodox*. But unto the Communion of all particular Churches in the World, there is nothing required but a *belief of the Scripture to be the Word of God*, with a professed assent unto all Divine Revelations therein contained; provided that no Error be avowed that is contrary to the principal or fundamental Doctrines of it. For although any *Society of Men* should profess the Scripture to be the Word of God, and avow an Assent unto the Revelations made therein, yet by the conceptions of their Minds, and misunderstanding of the sence of the Holy Spirit therein, they may embrace and adhere unto *such Errors*, as may cut them off from all Communion with the Catholick Church in Faith. Such are the denial of the *holy Trinity*, the *Incarnation of the Son of God*, *His Divine Person or Office*, the *Redemption of the Church by his Blood*; the *necessity of Regeneration by his Spirit*, and the like. And they may also add that of their own unto their professed Belief, as shall exclude them from Communion with the Catholick Church. Such are the *Assertion of Traditions* as equal with the written Word; of *another Head of the Church* besides the Lord Christ; of *another Sacrifice* besides what he once offered for all; and the like. But where any are preserved from such *Heresies* on the one hand and the other, there is no more required unto *Communion* with the whole Church, as unto Faith in general, but only the Belief before described.

2. *THIS Communion in Faith* respects the Church it self as its *material Object*. For it is required hereunto, that we believe that the Lord Christ hath had in all Ages, and especially hath in that wherein we live, a *Church on the Earth*, confined

fin'd unto no *Places* nor *Parties* of Men, no *Empires* nor *Dominions*, or capable of any confinement; as also that *this Church is Redeemed, Called, Sanctified by him*; that it is his *Kingdom*, his Interest, his concernment in the World; that thereunto, and all the Members of it, all the *Promises of God* do belong and are confin'd; that this *Church* he will *save*, preserve and deliver from all oppositions, so as that the *Gates of Hell* shall not prevail against it; and after Death will raise it up and glorify it at the last day. This is the *Faith of the Catholick Church concerning it self*; which is an Ancient fundamental Article of our Religion. And if any one deny that there is *such a Church* called out of the World, separated from it, unto which alone, and all the Members of it, all the *Promises of God* do appertain, in contradistinction unto all others, or confines it unto a Party, unto whom these things are not appropriate, he cuts himself off from the *Communion* of the Church of Christ.

IN the Faith hereof, all the true Churches of Christ throughout the World, have a comforting refreshing *Communion*, which is the spring of many Duties in them continually.

3. THIS *Communion of Churches in Faith*, consists much in the principal Fruit of it; namely, *Prayer*. So is it stated, *Ephes. 2. 18. For through Christ we have an Access by one Spirit unto the Father*. And that therein the *Communion* of the Catholick Church doth consist, the Apostle declares in the following Verses; 19, 20, 21, 22. *Now therefore, &c. For Prayer in all Churches having one object*, which is God even the Father, God as the Father, proceeding in all from one and the *same Spirit*, given unto them as a Spirit of Grace and Supplications to make Intercession for them, and all of them continually offered unto God by the *same High-Priest*, who adds unto it the Incense of his own Intercession, and by whom they have all an access unto the same Throne of Grace, they have all a *blessed Communion* herein continually. And this *Communion* is the more express in that the *Prayers of all are for all*; so as that there is no particular Church of Christ in the World, not any one Member of any of them, but they have the *Prayers*

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of all the Churches in the World, and of all the Members of them every day. And however this Communion be invisible unto the eyes of Flesh, yet is it glorious and conspicuous unto the eye of Faith; and is a part of the glory of Christ the Mediatour in Heaven. This Prayer proceeding from, or wrought by one and the same Spirit in them all, equally bestowed on them all, by virtue of the Promise of Christ; having the same object, even God as a Father, and offered unto him by the same High-Priest, together with his own Intercession, gives unto all Churches a Communion, far more glorious than what consists in some outward Rites and Orders of Mens devising.

BUT now if there be any other Persons or Churches, who have any other Object of their Prayers, but God even the Father, and as our Father in Christ; or have any other Mediators or Intercessors, by whom to convey or present their Prayers unto God, but Christ alone, the only High-Priest of the Church; or do renounce the Aid and Assistance of the Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of Grace and Supplications, they cut themselves off from all Communion with the Catholick Church herein.

4. THE Unity of Faith in all Churches, affecteth Communion among them, in the Administration of the same Sacraments of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. These are the same in, unto, and amongst them all. Neither do some, variations in the outward manner of their Administration, interrupt that Communion. But, where-ever the continuation of these Ordinances is denied, or their nature or use is perverted, or Idolatrous Worship is annexed unto their Administration, there Communion with the Catholick Church is renounced.

5. THEY have also by Faith Communion herein, in that all Churches do profess a subjection unto the Authority of Christ in all things, and an obligation upon them to do and observe all whatsoever he hath Commanded.

OTHER instances of the like nature might be given; but these are sufficient to manifest how unscriptural the Notion is, That there is no proper Communion with or among Churches but what consists in a compliance with certain Powers, Orders and

and Rites, the pressing whereof under the Name of *Uniformity*, hath cast all thoughts of real, Evangelical Church Communion into Oblivion.

SECONDLY, Churches Ordained and Constituted in the way and manner, and for the Ends declared in our former Discourse on this Subject, and by virtue of their Union unto Christ and among themselves, living constantly in all places of the World in the actual exercise of that Communion, which consists in the performance of the same Church-Duties towards God in Christ, unto their own Continuation, Encrease, and Edification, have also an *especial Union among themselves, and a mutual Communion thence arising.*

THE *Bond of this Union is Love*; not the common regulated Affection of Humane nature so called; not meerly that Power and Duty which is engraven on the Hearts of Men, by the Law of Creation, towards all of the same kind and blood with themselves; but an *especial Grace of the Holy Spirit*, acting in the Church as the Principle and Bond of its Union unto its self; whence the command of it is called a *New Commandment*; because in it self, as unto the *only Example* of it in the Person of Christ, the Causes and Motives unto it, with its peculiar Ends and proper Exercise, it was absolutely *New and Evangelical.* An Explanation of the Nature of it belongs not unto this place although it be a *Grace and a Duty* of so much importance, wherein so much of the Life, Power and peculiar Glory of Christian Religion doth consist, and is either so utterly lost, or hath such *vile Images* of it set up in the World, that it deserves a full Consideration; which it may receive in another place.

I SAY the *Holy Spirit of Grace and Love*, being given from Christ, the Fountain and Center of all Church-Union, to dwell in, and abide with his Church, thereby uniting it unto himself, doth work in it, and all the Members of it, that *mutual Love*, which may, and doth animate them unto all those mutual Acts which are proper unto the Relation wherein they stand, by virtue of their Union unto Christ their Head, as Members of the same Body one with another.

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HEREIN consists the Union of every Church in it self, of all Churches among themselves, and so of the whole Catholick Church; their Communion consisting in regular Acts and Duties, proceeding from this *Love*, and required by virtue of it.

THIS account of the *Union* and *Communion* of Churches may seem strange unto some, who are enamoured on that *Image* which is set up of them in the World, in *Canons*, *Constitutions* of *Rites*, and *outward Order* in *various Subordinations* and *Ceremonies*, which are most remote from making any due Representation of them.

THE Church, in its dependance on Christ its Head, being by his Institution disposed unto its proper Order for its own Edification, or *sitly joined together and compacted*, this Love working effectually in every Office, Officer and Member, according as unto its disposal in the Body, for the receiving and communicating Supplies for Edification, gives the whole both its *Union* and *Communion*, all the actings of it being regulated by Divine Rule and Prescription.

INSTEAD hereof to erect a *Machine*, the Spring and Center of whose motions are unknown, any other, I mean, but *external force compacted by the Iron joints and bands of humane Laws*, edifying it self by the *power of Offices and Officers*, foreign unto the Scripture, acting with *Weapons that are not Spiritual*, but Carnal, and mighty through him whose Work it is to cast the Members of the Church of Christ into Prison, as unto an outward Conformity, is to forsake the Scripture and follow our own Imagination.

THE *outward Acts of Communion* among Churches, proceeding from this love, and the obligation that is on them to promote their mutual Edification, may be referred unto the Two Heads of *Advice* and *Assistance*.

CHURCHES have Communion unto their mutual Edification, by *Advice* in *Synods* or *Councils*, which must in this place be considered.

SYNODS are the Meetings of divers Churches by their Messengers or Delegates, to consult and determine of such things as are of common concernment unto them all, by virtue of this Communion which is exercised in them.

1. THE necessity and warrant of *such Synods*, ariseth, (1.) From the *Light of Nature*. For all Societies which have the same Original, the same Rule, the same Interest, the same Ends, and which are in themselves mutually concerned in the good or evil of each other, are obliged by the power and conduct of Reason, to *advise* in common for their own good, on all *Emergencies* that stand in need thereof.

CHURCHES are such *Societies*; they have all one and the same *Authoritative Institution*, one and the same *Rule of Order* and Worship, the same ends as we have declared; and their entire Interest is one and the same. When therefore any thing occurs amongst them, that is attended with such Difficulties as cannot be removed or taken away by any one of them severally, or in whose *Determination* all of them are equally concerned, not to make use herein of common Advice and Counsel, is to forsake that natural Light which they are bound to attend unto in all Duties of Obedience unto God.

2. THE *Union of all Churches*, before described in one Head, by one Spirit, through one Faith and Worship, unto the same ends, doth so *compact them into one Body mystical*, as that none of them is or can be compleat absolutely without a joint acting with other Members of the same Body unto the common good of the whole, as occasion doth require. And this joint acting with others in any Church, can be no otherwise, but by *common Advice* and *Counsel*, which natural Circumstances render impossible by any means but their *convention in Synods*, by their Messengers and Delegates. For although there may be some use of *Letters missive*, and was so eminently in the Primitive Churches, to ask the *Advice* of one another in difficult Cases, (as the first instance we have of the *Communion* of Churches after the days of the Apostles, is in the Letter of the Church of *Corinth* unto that of *Rome*, desiring their *Advice* about the composing of a difference among them, and the Answer of the Church of *Rome* thereunto;) yet many Cases may fall out among them, which cannot be Reconciled or Determined but by *present Conference*, such as that was Recorded, *Act. 15*. No Church therefore is so *Independent*, as that it can
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always, and in all Cases, observe the Duties it owes unto the Lord Christ and the Church Catholick, by all those Powers which it is able to act in it self distinctly, without conjunction with others. And the Church that confines its Duty unto the *Acts of its own Assemblies*, cuts it self off from the external Communion of the *Church Catholick*; nor will it be safe for any Man to commit the Conduct of his Soul to such a Church. Wherefore,

3. THIS *acting in Synods* is an Institution of Jesus Christ; not in an expresse Command, but in the nature of the thing it self fortified with *Apostolical Example*. For having erected such a Church-State, and disposed all his Churches into that Order and mutual Relation unto one another, as that none of them can be compleat, or discharge their whole Duty without *mutual Advice and Counsel*; he hath thereby ordained this way of their Communion in *Synods*, no other being possible unto that end. And hereby such Conventions are interested in the promise of his *presence*; namely, that *where Two or Three are gathered together in his Name, there he will be in the midst of them*. For these Assemblies being the necessary effect of his own *constitution* in the nature and use of his Churches, are or may be *in his Name*, and so enjoy his presence.

4. THE *end* of all particular Churches is the Edification of the *Church Catholick* unto the Glory of God in Christ. And it is evident, that in many Instances this cannot be *attained*, yea, that it must be *sinfully neglected*, unless this way for the preservation and carrying of it on be attended unto. Truth, Peace and Love may be lost among Churches, and so the *Union of the Catholick Church* in them be dissolved, unless this means for their Preservation and Reparation be made use of. And that particular Church which extends not its Duty beyond its own Assemblies and Members, is *fallen off* from the principal end of its Institution. And every Principle, Opinion, or Perswasion, that inclines any Church to confine its Care and Duty unto its own Edification only; yea, or of those only which agree with it in some *peculiar practice*, making it neglective of all due means of the Edification of the Church Catholick, is *Schismatical*.

5. THERE is direction hereunto included in the *Order and Method* of Church-Proceedings in case of offence, prescribed unto it by Christ himself. The beginning and rise of it, is between *two individual Persons*; thence is it carried unto the *recognizance and judgment* of two or three others before unconcerned; from them it is to be brought unto the *Church*; and there is no doubt but the Church hath *Power to determine* concerning it, as unto its own *Communion*, to continue the Offender in it or reject him from it. This must abide, as unto outward *Order and the Preservation of Peace*. But no Church is *Infallible* in their judgment absolutely in any case; and in many, their determinations may be so doubtful as not to affect the *Conscience* of him who is *Censured*. But such a Person is not only a Member of that *particular Church*, but by virtue thereof of the *Catholick Church* also. It is necessary therefore that he should be heard and judged as unto his *Interest* therein, if he do desire it. And this can no way be done, but by such *Synods* as we shall immediately describe.

6. *SYNODS* are Consecrated unto the use of the Church in all Ages, by the Example of the Apostles, in their guidance of the First Churches of *Jews and Gentiles*; which hath the force of a *Divine Institution*, as being given by them under the *Infallible conduct* of the Holy Ghost, *Act. 15.* which we shall speak farther unto immediately.

HAVING seen the *Original of Church Synods* or their *Formal Cause*, we consider also their *Material Cause*, or the subject matter to be treated of or determined in them. And this in general is every thing wherein Churches are obliged to hold *Communion* among themselves, when any thing falls out amongst them, which otherwise would *disturb* that *Communion*. And hereof some Instances may be given.

1. *CHURCHES* have mutual *Communion* in the *profession of the same Faith*. If any doubts or differences do arise about it, any Opinions be advanced contrary unto it, either in any particular Church, which they cannot determine among themselves or among sundry Churches, the *last outward means* for the preservation of the *Rule of Faith* among them, and of their

their Communion in the condemnation of Errors and Opinions contrary unto the *form of wholesome Words*, is by these *Synods* or *Councils*. The care hereof, is indeed in the first place committed unto the Churches themselves, as was at large before declared: But in case through the subtilty, prevalency, and interest of those by whom *damnable Doctrines* are broached, the Church it self whereunto they do belong, is not able to rebuke and suppress them; nor to maintain its profession of the Truth, or that by suffering such things in one Church, others are in danger to be infected or defiled, this is the last *external Refuge* that is left for the preservation of the Communion of Churches in the same Faith. We have multiplied Examples hereof in the *Primitive Churches*, before the degeneracy of these *Synods* into Superstition and Domination. Such was eminently that gathered at *Antioch* for the condemnation of the Heresies of *Paulus Samosatenus* the Bishop of that Church.

2. IT is so, with respect unto that *Order, Peace and Unity*, wherein every particular Church ought to walk in it self, and amongst its own Members. There were *Schisms, Divisions, Strife and Contentions* in some of the Churches that were of *Apostolical* planting and watering: So there was at *Antioch*, and afterwards at *Corinth*, as also of some of the Churches in *Galatia*. The Duty of Remediing and Healing these *Divisions and Differences* from what cause soever they arise, is first incumbent on each particular Member in every such Church. Unto them it is given in charge by the Apostle in the first place; and if every one of them do perform their Duty in Love, an end will be put unto all strife. In case of failure therein, the *whole Church* is charged in the exercise of its Power, Authority and Wisdom, to rebuke and compose such Differences. But in case it is not able so to do, as it fell out in the Church at *Antioch*, then an *Assembly* of other Churches walking in actual Communion with that Church wherein the Difference is arisen, and thereon concerned in their Prosperity and Edification, by their *Messengers* and Delegates, is the last outward means for its Composure.

3. WHERE there hath been any *Male Administration* of Discipline,

discipline, whereby any Members of a Church have been injured, as suppose they are unduly *cast out* of the Church by the Power and Interest of some *Diotrephes*; or that any Members of the Church make a Party and Faction to depose their Elders, as it was in the *Church of Corinth*, when the *Church at Rome* gave them Advice in the case: It is necessary from the Communion of Churches and the Interest the Persons injured have in the *Catholic Church*, whose Edification is the end of all Church-Administrations, that the proceedings of such a Church be renewed by a *Synod*, and a Remedy provided in the case. Nor was it the mind of the Apostle that they should be left without Relief, which were *unduly* cast out of the Church by *Diotrephes*; nor is there any other ordinary way hereof, but only by *Synods*; but this case I suppose I shall speak unto afterwards.

4. THE same is the case with respect unto *Worship*, as also of Manners and Conversation. If it be *reported* or known by *Credible Testimony* that any Church hath admitted into the exercise of Divine Worship any thing superstitious or vain, or if the Members of it walk like those described by the Apostle, *Phil. 3. 18, 19.* unto the Dishonour of the Gospel and of the ways of Christ, the Church it self not endeavouring its own Reformation and Repentance; other Churches walking in Communion therewith, by virtue of their common Interest in the Glory of Christ, and Honour of the Gospel, after more private ways for its Reduction, as Opportunity and Duty may suggest unto their Elders, ought to Assemble in a *Synod* for Advice, either as to the use of farther means for the Recovery of such a Church, or to *with-hold Communion* from it in case of Obstinacy in its evil ways. The want of a due attendance unto this part of the Communion of Churches, with respect unto *Gospel Worship* in its Purity, and *Gospel Obedience* in its Power, was a great means of the Decay and Apostacy of them all. By reason of this Negligence instead of being helpful one to another for their mutual Recovery, and the Revival of the things *that were ready to die*, they gradually infected one another, according as they fell into their Decays, and countenanced one another by their Examples unto a continuance in such Disorders.

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THE *Image* which in late Ages was set up hereof in *Diocesan* and *Metropolitcal Visitations*, and those of *lesser districts* under Officers of Anti-Christian Names, hath been useful rather unto Destruction than Edification. But so it hath fallen out in most things concerning Church-Order, Worship and Discipline. The Power and Spirituality of Divine Institutions being lost, a *Machine* hath been framed to make an appearance and representation of them to divert the minds of Men from enquiring after the Primitive Institution of Christ, with an experience of their Efficacy.

CONSIDERING what we have learned in these later Ages, by woeful experience of what hath fallen out formerly amongst all the Churches in the World, as unto their *Degeneracy from Gospel Worship and Holiness*, with the abounding of Temptations in the days wherein we live, and the spiritual decays that all Churches are prone unto, it were not amiss if those Churches which do walk in express Communion, would *frequently meet in Synods* to enquire into the spiritual state of them all, and to give advice for the correction of what is amiss, the due preservation of the purity of Worship, the exercise of Discipline, but especially of the Power, Demonstration and Fruit of Evangelical Obedience.

2. HENCE it is evident what are the *ends* of such *Synods* among the Churches of Christ. The general end of them all, is to *promote the Edification* of the whole Body or Church Catholick. And that, (1.) To *prevent Divisions* from differences in judgment and practice which are contrary thereunto. The First Christian *Synod* was an Assembly of the *two First Churches* in the World by their Delegates. The First Church of the *Jews* was at *Jerusalem*, and the First Church of the *Gentiles* was at *Antioch*; to prevent Divisions, and to preserve Communion between them, was the *First Synod Celebrated*, Act. 15. (2.) To avoid or *cure offences* against mutual love among them. (3.) To advance the light of the Gospel by a *joint Confession* and Agreement in the Faith. (4.) To give a concurrent *Testimony* against pernicious Heresies or Errors, whereby the Faith of any is overthrown or in danger so to be. (5.) To *relieve* such by advice,

vice, as may be by any *Diotrephes* unduly cast out of the Church.

WHAT are the *ends* whereunto they have been used, may be seen in the *Volumes* written concerning them, and the *numberless Laws* enacted in them, whereof very little belongs unto the *Discipline of the Gospel*, or real Communion of Churches.

3. THE *measure* or extent of them ariseth from concernment and convenience. All unprejudiced Persons do now acknowledge, that the pretence of *Oecumenical Councils*, wherein the whole Church of Christ on the Earth, or all particular Churches should be represented, and so obliged to acquiesce in their Determinations, is a fond Imagination. And it were easie to demonstrate in particular, how every one of them which hath in *vulgar esteem* obtained that Title, were openly remote from so being. Such *Councils* never were, and, as it is improbable, never will nor can be, nor are any way needful unto the Edification of the Church.

THEIR due measure and bounds, as was said before, are given them by *concernment and convenience*; wherein respect also may be had unto the *Ability* of some Churches to promote Edification above others. Such Churches as are in the same instances concerned in the causes of them before declared, and may be helpful unto the ends mentioned, are to *convene* in such *Synods*. And this *concernment* may be either from some of those causes in themselves, or from that Duty which they owe unto other Churches which are immediately concerned. So it was in the Assistance given by the Church at *Jerusalem*, in that case which was peculiar to the Church of *Antioch*.

WITH this *interest* or *concernment*, there must be a *concurrency* of natural, moral and political Conveniences. Some Churches are planted at such distances from others, that it is naturally *impossible* that they should ever meet together to advise by their Messengers, and some at such as that they cannot assemble but with such difficulties and hazzards as exempt them from the Duty of it. And whereas they are placed under *different Civil Governments*, and those oft-times engaged in mutual *enmities*, and always jealous of the actings of their own Subjects in conjunction with them that are not so, they cannot so

convene

convene and preserve the outward peace of the Churches. Hence the largest of the *Councils* of old that are called *Oecumenical*, never pretended farther than the single *Roman Empire*; when there were innumerable Churches planted under the Civil Jurisdiction of other Sovereigns.

WHEREFORE in the Assembling of Churches in *Synods*, respect is to be had unto the convenience of their meeting, that it may be so far as is possible without trouble or danger. And this, with respect unto the causes or occasions of them will determine what Churches, which or how many may be necessary on such occasions to constitute a *Synod*. And it is useful hereunto, that the Churches which are planted within such a circumference as gives facility or convenience for such conventions, should by virtue of their mutual Communion, be in express readineſs to *convene* on all occasions of common concernment.

AGAIN, in the assistance which in the way of *Advice* and *Counsel*, any one Church may stand in need of from others, respect is to be had in their desire, unto such Churches as are reputed and known to have the *best ability* to give Advice in the case; on which account the Church at *Antioch* addressed themselves in a peculiar manner unto the Church at *Jerusalem* which was far distant from them.

BUT in all these cases use is to be made of *Spiritual Prudence*, with respect unto all sorts of Circumstances; which, although some would deny as the privilege of even matters of Fact, and the Application of general Scripture Rules unto Practice, because we require Divine Institution unto all parts of Religious Worship; yet we must not decline from using the *best we have* in the service of Christ and his Church; rather than comply with any thing which in the whole substance of it, is foreign to his Institution.

IT was the *Roman Empire* under one *Monarch* in its Civil Distributions for Rule and Government, which gave the first rise and occasion unto a pretended *visibly Ruling Catholick Church* under one *Spiritual Monarch*, distributed into those that were *Patriarchal, Diocesan, Metropolitcal*, and others of inferior kinds. For retaining the people in their Civil Distributions

whereinto they were cast according to the Polity and Interest of the Empire, there were *Ecclesiastical* Officers assigned unto each distribution, answerable unto the Civil Officers which were ordained in the Polity of the Empire. So in answer unto *Deputies, Exarchs, Praefects, Governours of Provinces and Cities*, there were found out and erected *Patriarchs, Metropolitans, Diocesans*, in various Allotments of Territories and Powers, requiring unto their compleat State one *visible Monarchical Head*, as the *Empire* had, which was the *Pope*. And whereas the *Emperors* had not only a *Civil Rule* and Power, but a *Military* also, exercised under them by *Legates, Generals, Tribunes, Centurions*, and the like; so there was raised an *Ecclesiastical Militia* in various Orders of *Monks, Friars, and Votaries* of all sorts, who under their immediate *Generals* and *Praefects* did depend absolutely on the Sovereign Power of the New *Ecclesiastical Monarch*. So was the visible professing Church moulded and fashioned into an *Image* of the old *Roman Pagan Empire*, as it was foretold it should be, *Revel. 13, 14, 15*. And although this *Image* was first framed in compliance with it, and for a resemblance of it; yet in process of time it substituted it self entirely in the room of the *Empire*, taking all its Power unto it self, and doing all its Works.

FROM this distribution of various sorts of new-framed Churches in the *Roman Empire*, arose a constitution of Synods or Councils in subordination one unto another, until by fundry degrees of Ascent they arrived unto those which they called *general* under the conduct of the *Pope*, whose *Senate* they were.

BUT these things have no countenance given them by any Divine Institution, Apostolical Example, or practice of the First Churches, but are a meer product of Secular Interest working it self in a *Mystery of Iniquity*.

SINCE the Dissolution of the *Roman Empire*, Nations have been cast into *distinct Civil Governments* of their own, whose Sovereignty is in themselves, by the event of War and Counsels thereon emergent. Unto each of these it is supposed there is a *Church-State accommodated*; as the *Church of England*, the *Church of Scotland*, the *Church of France*, and the like; whose Original and Being depends on the First event of War in that
Dissolution.

Dissolution. Unto these new Church-States whose Being, Bounds and Limits are given unto them absolutely by those of the Civil Government which they belong unto, it is thought meet that *Ecclesiastical Synods* should be accommodated. But in what way this is to be done there is not yet an agreement; but it is not my present business to consider the differences that are about it, which are known unto this Nation on a dear account. Yet this I shall say, that whereas it is eminently useful unto the Edification of the *Church Catholick*, that all the Churches professing the same Doctrine of Faith, within the Limits of the same Supream Civil Government, should hold constant actual Communion among themselves unto the ends of it before mentioned, I see not how it can be any abridgment of the Liberty of *particular Churches*, or interfere with any of their Rights which they hold by Divine Institution, if through more constant *lesser Synods* for Advice, there be a communication of their mutual concerns unto those that are greater, until, if occasion require and it be expedient, there be a *general Assembly* of them all to advise about any thing wherein they are all concerned. But this is granted only with these Limitations: (1.) That the *Rights of particular Churches be preserved* in the free Election of such as are to be Members of all these *Synods*. (2.) That they assume no *Authority or Jurisdiction* over Churches or Persons in things *Civil or Ecclesiastical*. (3.) That none are immediately concerned in this *proper Synodal Power or Authority*, (which what it is we shall enquire) who are not present in them by their own Delegates.

FOR that kind of *Synods* which some call a *Classis*, which is a convention of the Elders or Officers of sundry *Parochial Churches*, distinguished for *Presential Communion*, ordinarily in some acts of it by virtue of their Office, and for the exercise of Office-Power, it is the constitution of a new kind of *particular Churches*, by a combination of them into one, whose Original distinction is only in the Civil Limits of their Co-habitation; which probably may be done sometimes, and in some places, unto Edification.

4. THE Persons of whom all sorts of *Ecclesiastical Synods* are

are to consist, must be enquired into. And there is nothing of meer humane *prudential* constitution that hath longer obtained in the Church, than that those should be *Officers of the Churches only*. And, whereas after the days of the Apostles we have no Record of any *Synods* of more Churches than one, until after the distinction was made between *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, they were made up of both sorts of them. But afterwards, those who were peculiarly called *Bishops*, enclosed this Right unto themselves; on what grounds God knows, there being no one Tittle in the Scripture, or the Light of Reason to give them countenance therein.

IT must therefore be affirmed, that no Persons, by virtue of any Office meerly, have Right to be Members of *Ecclesiastical Synods* as such. Neither is there either Example or Reason to give colour unto any such pretence. Farther is no *Office-Power* to be exerted in such *Synods* as such, neither conjunctly by all the Members of them, nor singly by any of them. Officers of the Church, *Bishops, Pastors, Elders*, may be present in them, *ought* to be present in them, are meetest for the most part so to be, but *meerly as such*, it belongs not unto them. The Care, Oversight and Rule of the Churches whereunto they do belong, the Flock among them distinctly is committed unto them, and for that they are instructed with Power and Authority by virtue of their Office. But as unto their conjunction in *Synods*, which is a meer act and effect of the *Communion of Churches* among themselves, it is not committed unto them in a way of peculiar Right by virtue of their Office. If it be so, without respect unto the power of the Magistrate in calling them, or of the Churches in choosing them, then it belongs unto them all; for that which belongs unto *any* of them, as such by virtue of Office, belongs equally unto *all*, and if it belongs unto *all*, then it belongs unto all of *one sort only*, as for instance *Bishops*; or unto *all of all sorts*, as for instance *Presbyters* also. If it be stated in the *latter* way, then *every Presbyter*, as such by virtue of his Office, hath Right and Power to be present in all *Ecclesiastical Synods*, equal with that of the *Bishops*. For although it be supposed that his Office is not equal unto theirs; yet

yet it is so also that this Right doth equally belong unto his Office. If the *former* be avowed, namely, that this Right belongs unto *Bishops* only (such as are pleaded for) by virtue of their Office as such; then, (1.) I desire that any tolerable proof of the confinement of this Right unto such an Office be produced, either from the Scripture or Reason, or the Example of the First Churches; which as yet I have never seen. (2.) I fear not to say, that a false presumption hereof was one principal cause and means of introducing Tyranny into the Churches, and the utter ruine of their Liberty.

CONCERNING the composition that is made herein, that some should convene in *Ecclesiastical Synods* by their own *personal Right*, and in virtue of their Office, and others by a kind of *Delegation* from some of their own Order, it being a meer political constitution, which I shall immediately speak unto, it is not here to be taken notice of.

THERE is nothing therefore in Scripture Example, or the Light of Natural Reason, with the principles of all Societies in Union or Communion, that will lead us any farther than this; that such *Synods* are to be composed, and consist of such Persons as are chosen and delegated by those Churches respectively who do act and exert their Communion in such Assemblies. So was it in the First Example of them, *Act. 15*. The Church of *Antioch* chose and sent Messengers of their own number, to advise with the *Apostles* and *Elders* of the Church at *Jerusalem*; at which Consultation the *Members of that Church* also were present. And this is the whole of the nature and use of *Ecclesiastical Synods*. It is on other accounts that they make up so great a part of the History of the Church. For the first Three Hundred years, they were nothing but *voluntary conventions* of the *Officers* or *Elders*, *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, with some others of neighbouring Churches, on the occasion of *Differences* or *Heresies* among them. In and from the Council of *Nice*, there were Assemblies of *Bishops* and others called together by the Authority of the *Roman Emperours*, to advise about *matters of Faith*. In after Ages those which were called in the Western parts of the World, in *Italy*, *Germany*, *France* and *England*, were

were of a *mist nature* advising about things *Civil and Political*, as well as *Sacred and Religious*, especially with respect unto mutual contests between *Popes and Princes*. In them the whole nature of *Ecclesiastical Synods*, was lost and buried, and all Religion almost destroyed.

THUS this laudable practice of Churches acting their mutual Communion by meeting in *Synods* or Assemblies by their *Delegates* or Messengers, to advise about things of their common concernment and joint Edification, as occasion should require, founded in the Light of Nature, and countenanced by Primitive, Apostolical Example, was turned by the designing Interests and Ambition of Men, unto the enstating of all Church-Power in such *Synods*, and the Usurpation of a Power given unto no Churches, nor all of them together, as might be made evident by instances innumerable.

AND whereas they have made such a noise in Christian Religion, and have filled so many *Volumes* with their *Acts* and doings, yet some of them, who under the *Pope*, would place all Religion in them, do grant and contend that they are a meer *Humane Invention*: So *Bellarmino* affirms *Pighius* to have done in his Book *de Cælest. Hierarch. Lib. 6. Cap. 1.* But for his part he judgeth that it is *more probable* that they have a Divine Original by virtue of that Word; *Where Two or Three are gathered together in my Name, there I will be in the midst of them, Matth. 18. De Concil. Lib. 1. Cap. 3.* which will not bear the least part of the superstructure pretended to be built upon it.

OF these *Delegates* and Messengers of the Church, the Elders or Officers of them, or some of them at least, ought to be the principal. For there is a peculiar care of *publick Edification* incumbent on them, which they are to exercise on all just occasions: They are presumed justly to know best the state of their own Churches, and to be best able to judge of matters under consideration. And they do better represent the Churches from whom they are sent, than any private Brethren can do; and so receive that Respect and Reverence which is due to the Churches themselves. As also they are
most

most meet to report and recommend the *Synodal Determinations* unto their Churches; and a contrary practice would quickly introduce confusion.

BUT yet it is not necessary that *they alone* should be so sent or Delegated by the Churches; but many have others joined with them, and had so until *Prelatical Usurpation* overturned their Liberties. So there were others beside *Paul* and *Barnabas* sent from *Antioch* to *Jerusalem*; and the *Brethren* of that Church, whatever is impudently pretended to the contrary, concurred in the Decree and Determination there made.

5. THAT which is termed the *calling of these Synods*, is nothing but the *voluntary consent of the Churches concerned to meet together by their Delegates and Messengers, for the ends before declared.*

I NO way deny, but that a *Christian Magistrate* may convene by his Authority the Bishops, Pastors or Ministers, with such others as he shall think meet within his own Territories; yea, and receive into his Convention meet Men out of the Territories of others by their consent, to *advise among themselves*, and to *give him Advice* about such concerns of Religion, and of the Church under his Dominion, and Regulate himself accordingly. It hath been practised with good success, and may be with bad also. And I do deny that Churches have Power, without the consent and Authority of the *Magistrate*, to convene themselves in *Synods* to exercise any Exterior Jurisdiction that should affect the Persons of his Subjects, any otherwise than by the Law of the Land is allowed.

BUT whereas the *Synods* whereof we Treat, and which are all that belong unto the Church, can take no cognizance of any *Civil Affairs* wherein the Persons of Men are outwardly concerned; have no Jurisdiction in any kind, can make no determination, but only *Doctrinal Declarations* of Divine Truth, of the same nature with the Preaching of the Word; there is no more required unto their calling beyond their own consent, but only that they may meet in external
peace

peace by the permission of the *Magistrate*; which when they cannot obtain, they must deport themselves as in case of other Duties required of them by the Law of Christ.

6. IN the last place I shall speak briefly of the *Power and Authority of these Synods*, in what measures, extent and numbers soever they are assembled. For although this may be easily Collected from what hath been declared concerning their Original, Nature, Causes, Use and Ends; yet it may be necessary to be more particularly enquired into, because of the many differences that are about it.

THERE is a *three-fold Power* ascribed unto *Synods*. The First is *declarative*, consisting in an Authoritative Teaching and declaring the Mind of God in the Scripture. The Second is *constitutive*, appointing and ordaining things to be believed, or done and observed by and upon its own Authority: And Thirdly *executive* in Acts of Jurisdiction towards Persons and Churches.

THE Persons whom the Authority pleaded, may affect, are of Two sorts. (1.) Such as have their *proper Representatives* present in such Synods, who are directly concerned in its *conciliary* determinations. (2.) Such as have *no such Representatives* in them, who can be no otherwise concerned but in the Doctrine materially considered, declared in them.

WHEREFORE the *ground* of any Churches receiving, complying with, or obeying the Determinations and Decrees of *Synods* must be; either, (1.) The *evidence of Truth*, given unto those Determinations by the Synod from the Scripture; or, (2.) The *Authority of the Synod it self* affecting the Minds and Consciences of those concerned.

IN the *First* way, wherein the Assent and Obedience of Churches is resolved ultimately into the *evidence of Truth* from the Scripture, upon the judgment which they make thereof, not only the discovery of Truth is to be owned, but there is an *Authoritative Proposal* of it by virtue of the promised presence of Christ in them, if duly sought and regarded; whence great Respect and Reverence is due unto them.

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THE Power of a Synod for the execution of its Decrees, respects either, (1.) The *Things* or *Doctrines* declared; and is recommendatory of them on its Authority from the presence of Christ; or, (2.) *Persons*; to Censure, Excommunicate or punish those who receive them not.

THESE things being premised, the just Power of Synods may be positively and negatively declared in the two following Assertions.

I. THE Authority of a Synod declaring the mind of God from the Scripture in Doctrine, or giving Counsel as unto practice *Synodically* unto them whose proper Representatives are present in it, whose Decrees and Determinations are to be received and submitted unto on the *evidence of their Truth* and Necessity, as recommended by the *Authority of the Synod* from the promised Presence of Christ among them, is suitable unto the Mind of Christ, and the Example given by the Apostles, *Act. 15.*

HENCE it is evident, that in and after such Synods, it is in the power of Churches concerned, humbly to consider and weigh, (1.) The *evidences* of the Presence of Christ in them, from the manner, causes and ends of their Assembling, and from their Department therein. (2.) What regard in their Constitutions and Determinations there hath been unto the *Word of God*, and whether in all things it hath had its due pre-eminence. (3.) How all their Determinations have been *educed from its Truth*, and are confirmed by its Authority.

WITHOUT a due exercise of judgment, with respect unto these things, none can be obliged by any *Synodical Determinations*; seeing without them, and on the want of them, many Assemblies of Bishops who have had the outward Appearance and Title of Synods or Councils, have been *Dens of Thieves*, Robbers, Idolaters, managing their Synodical Affairs with fury, wrath, horrible craft, according to their Interests, unto the Ruine of the Church; such were the *Second Ephesine*, the *Second at Nice*, and that at *Trent*, and others not a few.

HENCE nothing is more to be feared, especially in a state of the Church wherein it is declining in Faith, Worship

and Holiness, than *Synods*, according to the usual way of their calling and convention, where these things are absent. For they have already been the principal means of leading on and justifying all the *Apostasy* which Churches have fallen into. For never was there yet Synod of that nature, which did not confirm all the Errors and Superstitions which had in common practice entred into the Church, and opened a Door to a progress in them; nor was ever the pretence of any of them for outward Reformation of any use or signification.

2. THE *Authority of a Synod* determining *Articles of Faith? constituting Orders and Decrees* for the conscientious observance of things of their own appointment, to be *submitted unto* and obeyed on the Reason of that Authority, under the penalty of *Excommunication*, and the trouble by Custom and Tyranny thereto annexed, or acted in a way of *Jurisdiction* over Churches or Persons, is a meer *Humane Invention*, for which nothing can be pleaded but prescription from the *Fourth Century* of the Church, when the progress of the fatal *Apostasy* became visible.

THE proof of both these Assertions depends on what was before declared of the nature and use of these *Synods*. For if they are such as we have evinced, *no other Power or Authority* can be ascribed unto them but that here allowed. Yet the whole may be farther illustrated by some brief considerations of the *Assembly at Jerusalem* in the nature of a *Synod*, Recorded, *Act. 15.*

1. THE *occasion* of it was a *difference* in the Church of *Antioch*, which they could not compose among themselves, because those who caused the Difference, pretended Authority from the *Apostles*, as is evident *v. 1. and 14.*

2. THE *means* of its *convention*, was the desire and voluntary reference of the matters in debate, made by the Church at *Antioch* where the difference was, unto that at *Jerusalem*, whence, as it was pretended, the cause of the difference arose unto the hazzard of their mutual Communion, to be consulted of with their own Messengers.

3. THE

3. THE *Persons constituting the Synod*, were the *Apostles, Elders and Brethren of the Church at Jerusalem*, and the *Messengers of that Antioch*, with whom *Paul and Barnabas* were joined in the same Delegation.

4. THE *matter* in difference was debated as unto the mind of God concerning it in the *Scripture*, and out of the *Scripture*: On *James's* proposal the determination was made.

5. THERE was *nothing imposed a-new* on the practice of the Churches, only direction is given in one particular instance as unto Duty, necessary on many accounts unto the *Gentile Converts*, namely to abstain from *Fornication*, and from the *use of their Liberty* in such instances of its practice as whereon scandal would ensue, which was the *Duty* of all Christians even before this determination, and is so *still* in many other instances besides those mentioned in the Decree; only it was now declared unto them.

6. THE *Grounds whereon* the Synod proposed the Reception of and compliance with its Decrees were Four, (1.) That what they had determined was the *mind of the Holy Ghost*: *It pleased the Holy Ghost*. This mind they knew either by *Inspiration*, or immediate Revelation made unto themselves, or by *what was Written* or Recorded in the Scripture, which on all other occasions they alledged as what was the *Word*, and *spoken* by the Holy Ghost. And it is evident, that it was this latter way, namely, a *discovery of the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture* that is intended. However, it is concluded that nothing be proposed or confirmed in *Synods*, but what is well known to be the *mind of the Holy Ghost* in the Scripture, either by immediate *Inspiration*, or by *Scripture Revelation*. (2.) The Authority of the Assembly as convened in the Name of Christ, and by virtue of his Presence, whereof we have spoken before: *It pleased the Holy Ghost and us*. (3.) That the things which they had determined were *necessary*, that is *antecedently* so unto that determination; namely, the *abstaining* from the use of their Liberty in things indifferent in case of scandal. (4.) From the *Duty*, with respect unto the Peace and mutual Com-
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munion of the Jewish and Gentile Churches: Doing thus, say they, ye shall do well, which is all the Sanction of their Decree; manifesting that it was Doctrinal, not Authoritative in way of Jurisdiction.

7. THE Doctrinal Abridgement of the Liberty of the Gentile Christians in case of scandal, they call the imposing of no other Burden, in opposition unto what they rejected, namely, the imposing a yoke of Ceremonies upon them, v. 10. So as that the meaning of these Words is, That they would lay no Burden on them at all, but only advise them unto things necessary for the avoidance of scandal. For it is impious to imagine that the Apostles would impose any yoke, or lay any burden on the Disciples, but only the yoke and burden of Christ, as being contrary to their Commission, Matth. 28. 19, 20.

HENCE it will follow, That a Synod convened in the Name of Christ, by the voluntary consent of several Churches concerned in mutual Communion, may declare and determine of the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, and Decree the observation of things true and necessary, because revealed and appointed in the Scripture, which are to be received, owned and observed, on the evidence of the mind of the Holy Ghost in them, and the Ministerial Authority of the Synod it self.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

Page 16. line 31. for to read do. p. 23. l. 34. r. state. p. 27. l. 2. r. believers be p. 31. l. 11. r. Mat. 20. p. 40. l. 23. r. if so, be. p. 41. l. 25. r. we enquire not. p. 47. l. ult. r. these. p. 53. l. 6. Ephes. 4. 7. p. 71. l. 33. r. Light. p. 72. l. 8. r. mere. p. 103. l. 33. r. Auricular. p. 112. l. 29. r. Conc. p. 117. l. 9. after publicly add Read. p. 119. l. 22. r. their mixed. p. 129. l. 5. for 18. r. 28. p. 132. l. 9. for 9. r. 3. p. 141. l. 30. read over you p. 147. l. 25. for 39. r. 38. p. 168. l. 20 for 24. r. 21. p. 186. l. 20. r. περιούσια. p. 192. l. 14. r. will fully. p. 205. l. 35. r. this. p. 228. l. 21. r. do. p. 244. l. 9. r. furnace. p. 256. l. 15. r. probable.

