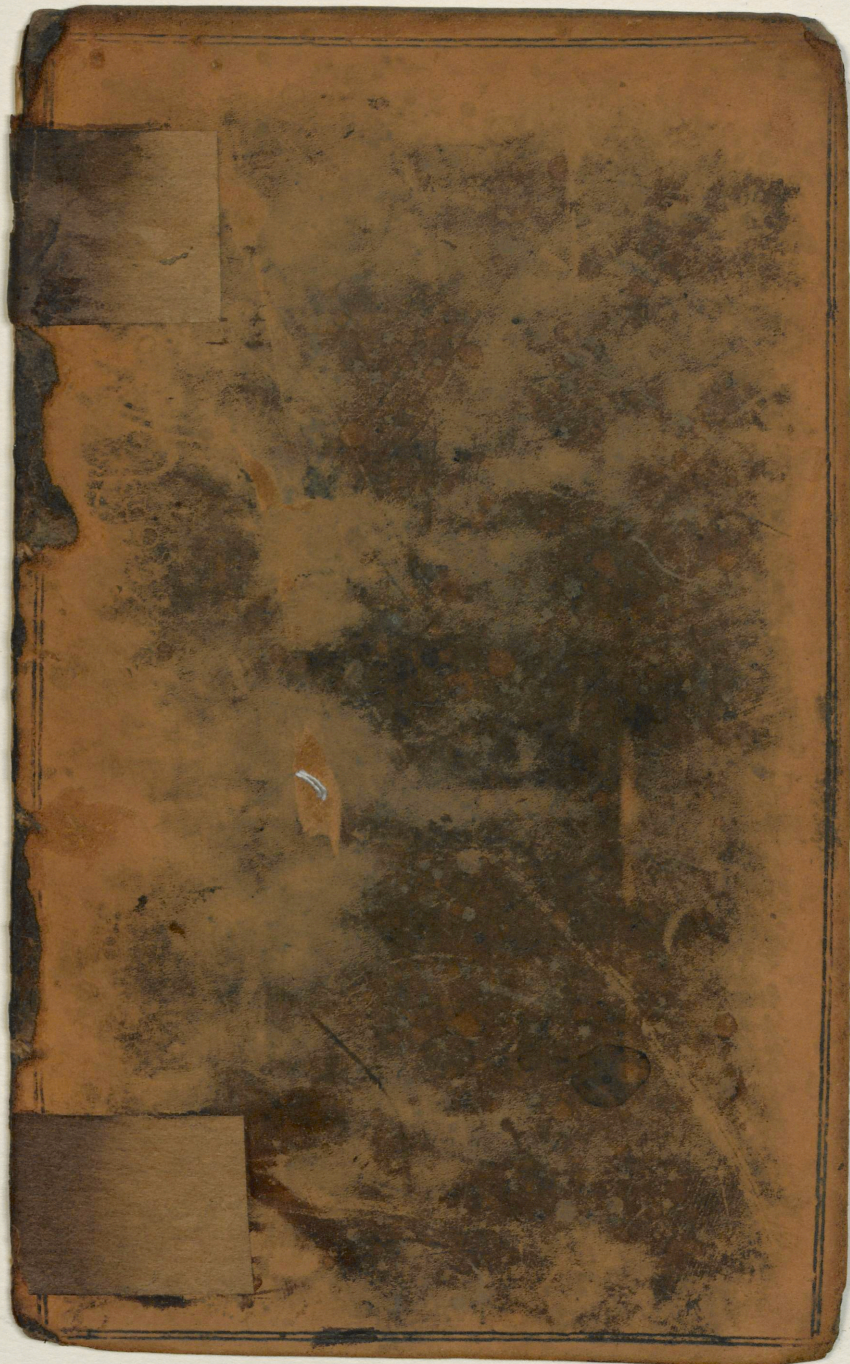


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See Cowles's Life Oct 3, 1841.

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THE
NONCONFORMISTS
PLEA for PEACE:

OR

An Account of their Judgment

In certain things in which they are misunderstood: written to *reconcile* and *pacifie* such as by mistaking them hinder Love and Concord.

Exhort. in the Liturgy before the Communion.

If any of you be—an hinderer, or slanderer of God's Word,—or be in malice or envy,—Repent of your sins, or else come not to the holy Table, lest after the taking of that Sacrament, the Devil enter into you as he did into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul.

By RICHARD BAXTER.

L O N D O N,

Printed for Benj. Alsop at the Angel and Bible over against the Stocks-Market. 1679.



To the Reverend

Conforming Clergy.

Reverend Fathers and Brethren,

IT is now seventeen years since neer two thousand Ministers of Christ were by Law forbidden the exercise of their Office, unless they did conform to Subscriptions, Covenants, Declarations and Practices, which we durst not do, because we feared God: Foreseeing what this would do to the destroying of Love and Concord, and of mens souls, weakning the Land, encouraging Popery, Heresie and Schism, we did our best betime by Reason, & submissive petitioning the Bishops, to have prevented it; but in vain: We never made one motion for Presbytery, or against Liturgies, nor to abate any of the Bishops Wealth, or Honour, nor any thing as to Church-Government, but Arch Bishop *Ushers* Model of the Primitive way: And we thankfully accepted of much less, exprest in His Majesties *Gracious Declaration* about

The Epistle.

Ecclesiastical Affairs, which, we hoped, would have ended all our discords. The Reasons of the *Great Change*, and *New Impositions*, it is God, and not we, that must have an account of from the Convocation, &c. and of the consequents. Since then, as we foresaw, contrary interests have increased contrariety: The Laws against our Preaching to more than four, the Penalties of forty pound a Sermon, and long imprisonment in common Gaols, and driving us five miles from Corporations, and places where we lately preachd, and the reasons given are not unknown to you: Many Books are written, and Sermons preached, earnestly pressing Magistrates to execute these Laws against us: And though, when demanded, we gave in a Catalogue of divers things in the old Impositions, which we undertook to prove to be great sins; and in our *Petition for Peace*, protested that nothing but avoiding sin should hinder our Conformity, and we had never call or leave to give our reasons against the New Conformity; I my self have been reported to my Superiours, to be one that confesseth the Lawfulness of all, save the renouncing of a rebellious Covenant: And while the Law and Canons imprison, and excommunicate us *ipso facto*, if we do but give the *reasons* of our Nonconformity; and I have offered to Reverend *Bishops* and others, to beg leave to do

The Epistle.

do it on my knees, and nothing more grieved me, than that I might not so endeavour to save men from the damning sins of Hating, false accusing, and ruining their Brethren, and sacrilegious hindering the Preaching of Gods Word; yet have I been called on to tell them *what it is that we would have*, and told that our *Superiours judge us not sincere*, but meer factious *Schismatics*, that will neither *Conform*, nor tell them *why we do not*. Vehement Letters of accusation are sent me: Many Books charge us with heinous Schism, even as wilfully done against our consciences: Yea that *Covetousness and Pride, and not Conscience, cause our Nonconformity*; that we are *the worst men alive, and unfit for humane society*, &c. while we are made their scorn, and many want bread, and many of us preach for nothing, save the spiritual benefits and rewards. And those of us that have bread, know of so many that have families, and nothing but alms to maintain them, that we are glad to give them all that our necessities can spare: And we suppose our accusers would not think that if they chose beggery and scorn, or lived only on mens charity, it would prove them to be covetous or proud. I have read the Books of Bishop Morley, Mr. Stileman, Mr. Fulwood, Mr. Durel, Mr. Fowles, Mr. Falkener, Mr. Nanfen, Dr. Boreman,
Dr.

The Epistle.

Dr. Parker, Dr. Tomkins, the *Friendly Debate*, Dr. Ashton, Mr. Hollingworth, Dr. Good, Mr. Hinkley, the *Counterminer*, Mr. L'Estrange, Mr. Long, and many more. And as my flesh is no more in love with poverty and scorn than yours, nor was I more incapable of such a lot as yours; so I here testifie that no man is more inexcusable than I, that have dwelt so long in pain, so neer the grave, if I have been so *mad* as to silence my self, and chose a Gaol among malefactors (where I have lain) and bitter accusations and prosecutions, for any thing of this world that I could hope for, or for any thing less than my salvation. And either I am an utter stranger to my self, or else I was willing to know the Truth: and Liberty and Wealth is liker to be a byas, than that which the Law decreeth against us. But if I be so unhappy as to be incapable of understanding the lawfulness of all that is made necessary to the Ministry, you should better think of it before you beg the ruine of all that are as ignorant as I. Had you told *us* how to come to *your measure of knowledge*, we would thank you: When I askt Bishop Morley such a question, he advised me to read *Bilson* and *Hooker*, where I found more than I approved for resisting or restraining Kings; and had long before read them and *Saravia*, Bishop Downam, *Spalaten-*
sis,

The Epistle.

sis, Petavius, Sancta Clara, Dr. Hammond, and abundance more for Prelacy, &c. He is not worthy the name of a man that would not know that truth, which maketh both for his temporal and eternal welfare.

Under these accusations my conscience urged me to acquaint the accusing Clergy with our Case, believing it be uncharitable to impute *all their false report to Malignity, or Diabolism*, but that it was *STRANGENESS to our Case*, while wrath and cross interest kept them from hearing us: But my prudent friends perswaded me silently to leave all to God, assuring me it would but more exasperate, till *they called us themselves to speak*. Twice we were since invited to a Tryal for Concord, and both times *came to an Agreement* with the moderate and eminent Persons that we treated with: But it was buried in privacy; and still we are called on, to give the reasons of our Dissent.

Having long forbore for fear of offending them that require it, at last I have here adventured, not so far as to *urge the Case*, but only to *state it*, and tell you barely what it is that I dare not do: If I find that you can bear this, if I have leave from God and man, I shall venture on more, and give you my reasons: This unarmed Account is easily trampled on. I doubt not but it will meet
with

The Epistle.

with such usage as I have had already : But I must say, that if such as the *Counterminer* will say that to *fear such sin as I have here named*, by one that is not willing to be damned, is *Treason, Rebellion, Schism, Faction, Pride, Obstinacy*; this will not pass with me for convincing Argument, on which I may venture my salvation. *Jul. Scaliger exercit.* tells us, that in *France* our *Bicott*, the Learned Schoolman, was envied by another for his Auditors in Philosophy, and his crafty adversary told the King, that *Bicott* was a *Peripatetick*, and *Aristotle* was against Monarchy: There needed no more, and *Bicott* was cast down.

As for them that think that to name the late Wars is a Confutation of Nonconformists, as if they knew not that they were raised on both sides by Conformists (*Heylin* in *Lands Life* will tell them who.) I now only repeat, [*Silence all that had a hand in those Wars* (except the Conformists) *and no more, and I and thousands will give you thanks:*] I plead not for my self: The years are past in which I might have better served the Church, had I been thought tolerable. I am almost incapable now of your kindness, or of any great hurt that you can do me. A torrent of reproaching scornful words may ease some mens minds, and serve some mens ends,
but

The Epistle.

but will not satisfie my conscience, nor heal the Land. I write not this as accusing Conformists, or the Law makers, but as answering their loud and long accusations and demands. If telling *what I fear*, seem a telling *what others are guilty of*, it is a consequent which I cannot avoid; but to avoid it and such like, have seventeen years been herein silent. So far am I from desiring the weakening of the Church, that I had not written this, but to prevent it. Though I with Saint *Martin* renounce communion with *Ithacius* and *Idacius*, I go not so far as he in separating from the Synods of Bishops; nor will I separate from any Christians, further than they separate from Christ, or expel me: Church Order I love; Church Tyranny and Schism I love not: I am for *more Bishops*, and not for fewer: If *Parish-Oratories*, or Chapels were made *Parish-Churches*, at least in each Corporation antiently called *vicar*: Yea if the *Parish-Ministers* might be Pastors, *Episcopi gregis*, and not forced by strangers to excommunicate, absolve and receive to communion against their knowledge and consciences, nor to profess, promise or practice sin against God, nor omit their known Ministerial duty, far be it from me to be against Conformity. I doubt not but he that will preserve Religion here in its due advantages, must endeavour to preserve

The Epistle.

serve the Soundness, Concord and Honour of the Parish-Churches. And as the truly wise and honest Judge Hale hath said to me, *It must be a new Act of Uniformity that must heal us, if ever we be healed.* I am of the mind of old Mr. Dod, who, for the peoples sake, thanked God that there were so many worthy Conformists, and for Truth and Conscience sake, thanked God that there were so many Nonconformists. I love and honour the Reverend, solid, worthy Preachers which I hear in most Churches in London, where I come; and I endeavour to have all others honour them: And though I am by the Canon *ipso facto* excommunicate, they shall put me out from them before I will depart. But for the Church, and Kingdom, and their Consciences sake, I beg of the Clergy, that before they any more render odious those whom they never heard, and urge Rulers to execute the Laws against them, that is, to confine, imprison, excommunicate, silence and undo them, they would be sure *what manner of spirit they are of*; and that this is acceptable to God, and profitable to the Land, or to themselves, and that which the Churches Experience commendeth. My honest friend, whom I once perswaded from Anabaptistry, writing against Separation, faith, that when he saw here a leg, and there an arm in the way, it was time for him to stop.

But

The Epistle.

But in *Church-history* I have had a sadder sight, even the carcases of thousands, streams of blood, and tumults in the chief Cities and Churches of the world, the Crowns of Emperours & Kings, the loss of the Eastern Empire, the generation of the Papacie, the reproach of Christianity, and that by *Clergie-Domination, and Contention*, striving who should be *Greatest and seem wisest*. Some say, *If we take in a few moderate men like you, what the better are we?* *Ans.* More than you dream of, are far better than I: I hope few are worse; Bishop *Morley* bid *Ab uno disce omnes*: Shall *London* have no clocks unless they will all strike at once? shall none be tolerated but the *perfect*? Are you such your selves? Do you differ in nothing? how then shall we have Communion with you when we differ in all the things here described? Pardon me for saying, I think that *Mr. Tombs* hath said more like truth for Anabaptistry, the late Hungarian for Polygamy, many for drunkenness, stealing and lying. in cases of necessity, than ever I yet read for the lawfulness of all that I have here described. And what is it that some men cannot copiously and confidently talk for? And what wretched Reasons be they that have hindred *Englands* unity and peace? And how fully hath *Rom. 14.* and *15.* and our Common interest and notorious experience confuted them! I have

The Epistle.

have long wondered what powerful cause it is, that with such men and so many, could so long prevail against such evidence and light. *If you will not hear, those will whom God will use to the healing of his Churches: and blessed are the Peacemakers* for (though you call them otherwise) *they shall be called the Children of God.* I have prefixed the words of some as our admonition; and I have written with this a fuller Treatise of the *only true terms of the Concord of all Christian Churches*, and of the false terms which they never will unite in, but are the causes of Schism. I commit all with my self living and dying, to him that is the Lord of the dead and living, and will shortly judge us all in righteousness. Come Lord Jesus; and prepare us for thy Coming. Amen.

THE

THE CONTENTS.

- I. **T**HE Reasons of this writing and the sense of the word CHURCH.
2. The various opinions of such as we have to do with.
3. What Churches we hold to be instituted of God and what not.
4. What Princes and Pastors may do in such matters.
5. What separation and what assembling or gathering Churches is unlawful and what lawful.
6. Matters of fact to be known preparatory to our case.
7. Matters required of us for Conformity, &c first of Lay-men.
8. Secondly, Matters imposed on Ministers: And I. Of Assent, Consent, Approbation, and Canonical subscription, that nothing is contrary to the Word of God.
- II. 9. The second Part of the Matter of Conformity: Reordination.
- III. 10. The third Part of the Matter of Conformity; of swearing or Covenanting never to endeavour any alteration of Church Government.
- VI. 11. The fourth part of the Matter; to declare that neither I nor any other person is obliged by the vow to endeavour any such alteration of Church Government.
- V. 12. The fifth Part of the Matter; The Declaration and Oath (as not understood) of not resisting any Commissioned.
- VI. 13. The sixth Part of the Matter: To cease preaching and administering Sacraments till we conform (at least not to preach to more than a family and four persons.)
- VII. 14. The seventh Part Consequential, Not to come within five miles of any City or Corporation which sendeth Burgessees to Parliament, or of any place where we have preached to more than aforesaid since the Act of oblivion.
15. The Adjuncts, and the other Matters agreed on which affright the Nonconformists
16. The case and practice of the Ministers since they were silenced.

Additions

Decorative border

Additions occasioned by Mr. L. Fresh Suit, and
some others, about National Churches.

THE Question stated § 3, &c. Whether we are
obliged by or to the Jewish National Polity?
§ 5, &c. or by scripture to a National limitation of
them?

Whether a National Church-form be lawful, § 30, &c?

Whether it be a prudential desirable form § 38, &c?

The resolution of this by a short history of Prelacie
and Councils. § 39, &c.

Obj. From the necessity of Appeals, § 40, &c.

Obj. Shall all gather Churches that will. *ib.*

Obj. The Apostles have successors. *ib.*

Q. Whether the King or who is the National
Church Head § 41. 42, &c?

A Christian Kingdom what § 43?

Q. Must real holyness in the judgment of rational
Charity be required in all Church members. § 1?

Q. What Covenanting is necessary to particular
Church relation? § 5, &c. The spirit maketh Mini-
strs, how?

I. The Epistle of an African Council (in Cyprian Ep. 68:
p. 200.) to Felix a Presbyter and the Laity at Legio and
Asturica; and to Lælius the Deacon and the Laity at Eme-
rita, concerning their Bishops Basilides and Marcial, worthy
to be read as to our present controversies.

II. The Letter of Rob. Grossthead, the good Bishop of Lin-
coln to Pope Innocent containing the reason of his Noncon-
formity. and shewing that hindring preaching is the greatest
sin next Idolatry and Antichristianism: Out of Mat. Pari
An. 1253. p. 871. 872. 1. 320

III. An extract from Bishop Saunderson de juramento.

704
Sect.



S E C T. I.

*The Reasons of this writing,
and the sense of the word*
[CHURCH.]

IT was the saying of acute and holy *Augustine* (though we call him not with *Fromondus Omniscium*) [that no man ought to be patient under an accusation of *Heresie*.] He meaneth by *Patience*, a silent neglect of his own *just Vindication*: Not that we must be like *Hectoring Duellers*, that would kill or hurt others in revenge, or in a sinful way of *Vindication*: But by silence, those that slander men may be encouraged in their sin to their own destruction, and those that value the slandered persons may be tempted to think too well of *Heresie* for their sakes: And the honour of God, and his Truth, and our own good names, so far as they are serviceable, are none of them to be disregarded. We have with grieved souls beheld the Land of our Nativity

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distracted

distracted by Divisions; and much, if not most about *Religion*, (we wish it were not against *Religion*, by some that indeed have no true *Religion*;) Teachers against Teachers, in Discourses, Sermons, Books, rendring each other despicable, and unlovely, and some calling out aloud to Rulers to draw the Sword against their Brethren; so learnedly and industriously pleading the Cause against each other with the Laity, high and low, as if the destroying of their Love, and kindling Wrath and Hatred, were the Evangelical necessary work; and without this zeal, and skill, and diligence hard to be accomplished. No wonder then if we have people against people, families divided, and all confounded; and this grievous *Schism* carryed on, by crying out against each other as Schismaticks, and implacably causing it while we loudly inveigh against it. The case is lamentable, that distraction should be thus expressed and promoted; and when God hath warned us by the mischiefs of an odious Civil War, and hath tryed us again with peace with all Nations about us, when most of them are involved in grievous Wars, that yet we will not give peace to one another, but live as if Peace were the Plague which we most desire to escape.

Yet as it is the good providence of God, that the Names of *Wisdom*, *Godliness*, *Truth*, *Justice*, *Mercy*, *Honesty* and *Vertue*, are all still honourable even among those that hate and oppose them; and the names of *Folly*, *Ungodliness*, *Lying*, *Unjustice*, *Unmercifulness*, *Dishonesty* and *Vice*, are all dishonourable where the things themselves are followed and prevail; so *Love*,
Peace,

Peace and *Concord*, are names that are by most commended; when if most were for the *things* indeed, we were in a hopeful way of recovery: And *Malice*, *Schism* and *Discord*, are cryed down by those, whom no intreaty will prevail with to forbear them, or to accept any remedy against them.

Yet we are thus far prepared for peace, that if we be not false Hypocrites, if we did *but know* which is the true way of *Love*, *Peace* and *Concord*, we would follow it: And if we *knew* what is *Schism* indeed, we would avoid it. And its pity that men that think themselves wise should yet *not know* the way of *Love* and *Peace*: Especially that the Learned Preachers of the Gospel of *Love* and *Peace*, should still be the incendiaries, and stir up the Laity that would be more peaceable, against each other. And that after so many Volumes of History have these thirteen hundred years at least, asperst the Clergy with the reproach of being the contentious troublers of the world. And yet must we despair of a cure of so odious a disease?

The thing that *Books*, *Sermons*, and *Discourses*, cry out against those called *Non Conformists* for, is *Humorous*, *Obstinate Schism*, and *Disobedience*, in *Preaching*, when forbidden, and keeping up *Assemblies* not allowed, and gathering *Churches* out of *Churches*, & separating from the *Parish-Communion*, and *Church of England*. If we can find out the *Schismatick*, we hope he will be condemned by us all. But that the Cause may be heard at least in some part, before it is judged, we that publish this, here give an account of our own judgment, and those that we are best acquainted with,

how far we hold it lawful or unlawful to *gather Churches*, or to *separate from Churches*, or to *differ from what is established by Authority*: But the Application to our particular Case, and our Arguments thereabout, we must not here presume to publish.

They that accuse others as Schismaticks, and Separatists, for deserting Churches, or gathering Churches out of Churches, and will not tell us what they mean by the word *Church*, nor give us leave to tell them what we mean, but judge in confusion, and despise explication, and necessary distinction, are men that we can neither be edified by, nor edifie, in this way.

SECT. II.

The Various Opinions of such as we have to do with.

Sect. 1. **B**Ecause men will judge of such Causes according to their several Principles, and Presuppositions, we must take notice of some of the divers Principles of those whose censure we must expect: (Though not of inconsiderable Sects.)

Sect. II. And 1. Some say that *no humane Form* of Church Government, and of Churches, as governed, is of *God's Institution* (or as they say, *Jure Divino*,) but that it is left to humane prudence.

Sect. III. 2. Some hold only an *Universal Church* (governed by a *Pope*, say some of them, or

or by a *General Council while sitting*, and a *Pope* in the *Intervals*, say others, or by a *Pope* and *Council* agreeing while it sits, and a *Pope* in the *Intervals*, say others) to be *jure Divino*, and all particular Church-Forms as subordinate, left to the prudence of this Universal Governour as Supreme; as Inferiour Officers in Kingdoms are made by the King.

Sect. IV. 3. Some hold that this *Universal Church-Form*, and also *Diocesan*, and no other, are instituted of God.

Sect. V. 4. Some hold that the *Universal*, *Patriarchal*, *Metropolitical* (or *Provincial*) *Diocesan*, and *Parochial*, are *jure divino*, or instituted by Christ and his Apostles.

Sect. VI. 5. Some hold that only *Diocesan Churches*, and *Metropolitical* or *Provincial*, are *jure divino*, and not the universal: And of these some take *Diocesan Churches*, for those only that contain many fixed Assemblies, and some for such as have one Bishop, whether over one Congregation, or over multitudes. Saith the very learned Dr. Hamond, in 1 Tim. 3. [The Church of the living God, was every such regular Assembly of Christians under a Bishop (such as Timothy was) an Oeconomus set over them by Christ: Such again every larger circuit under the Metropolitane, who as Timothy had *ἐξουσίαν* *κρίναι*, Ordination and Jurisdiction over the whole Province. And such all the particular Churches of the whole world, considered together under the Supreme Head Christ Jesus, dispensing them all by himself, and administering them severally, not by any one Oeconomus, but by the several Bishops as inferiour Heads of Unity to the several Bodies, so

constituted by the several Apostles in their plantations, each of them having an *Αὐτονομία*, a several distinct Commission from Christ immediately and subordinate to none, but the supreme Donor or Plenipotentiary. He here supposeth (as he elsewhere sheweth) that *de facto*, Episcopal Churches were in Scripture-times but single Congregations; but that after it was otherwise: And whether then the New Form of Congregations were *jure divino*, when they became but Parts of a Bishops Church, we leave to the Readers conjecture; as also of the New Form of a Diocesan Church.

Sect. VII. 6. Some hold that National Churches, that is, Christian Kingdoms, as governed by the Sovereign, Secular Power, are instituted by God, and that all Church-Forms else within that Kingdom, are *jure humano*, at the pleasure of the King, so be it that worshiping-Assemblies be kept up, and Bishops and Priests placed as it shall please the King.

Sect. VIII. 7. Some think that Diocesans (or Bishops whether over one Congregation or many) are instituted by God (and some say also Archbishops;) and that these have power by consent or contract among themselves, to make Patriarchal and National Churches: And so that these National and Patriarchal Churches are *jure divino mediato*, but *jure humano immediato*, and are rather made by the consent of Bishops, than by Kings: And so under Heathen Kings the Churches may be National.

Sect. IX. 8. Some think that Parochial Churches (consisting of Christians distinguished by the circuit of ground) and combinations of these into Synods less and greater, Classical, National,

nal, are *jure divino*, and no other lawful.

Sect. X. 9. Some think that only *Parochial Churches* ordinarily, and *single Congregations* of any *Neighbour Christians*, when *Parish Order* cannot be observed, are *jure divino*.

Sect. XI. 10. And some think that only such *single Congregations* of Christians, with their *Chosen Pastors*, without any necessary respect to *Parish bounds*, are properly called *Churches of Divine Institution*, though these Churches may and should hold such associations, as correspondence and mutual help require.

Sect. XII. There being so many sorts of Churches in the world, (as Universal, National, Patriarchal, Provincial, or Metropolitcal, Diocesan, Classical, Parochial, Congregational) it is hard to give a just decision of the question, *From which of these, and when it is a sin to separate*; till it be first known which of these is *Divine*, and which of *Humane Institution*, and which *Humane Churches* are necessary, which lawful, and which *sinful*. And it must be known of which the question is. And while there is so signal a diversity of Judgment, about the several Forms, the nature of *Schism* will be hardlier opened.

SECT. III.

What Churches we hold to be instituted by God, and what not.

Sect. I. OUR own Judgment we shall plainly express in this following Order:

1. We shall shew what Church we judge to be of God's Institution, and what not. 2. What about Churches the Magistrates or Pastors may institute by God's Authority or allowance: And what they may not institute. 3. In what cases it is lawful to gather Churches where Churches are: In what cases it is lawful to separate from Churches; and in what cases neither of these last is lawful.

Sett. II. 1. All Christians are agreed that Christ is the Author of the *Universal Church*, (considered both as *Baptized*, or *Externally covenanting* and *professing*, called *Visible*, and as *Regenerate* and *sincerely Covenanting*, called *Mystical*) as it is Headed by Christ himself, and called his Body, and his special Kingdom.

Sett. III. 2. We doubt not but Christ hath instituted the *Office* of the sacred *Ministry*, to be under him as the *Teacher*, *Ruler*, and *High Priest* of the *Church*, in *Teaching*, *Guiding*, and *Worshipping*: And that he hath instituted *holy Assemblies* and *Societies* for these things to be exercised in: And that [a *Society of Neighbour Christians associated with such a Pastor or Pastors, for personal Communion herein, even in such Doctrine, Discipline and Worship*] is a Church-Form of Divine Institution.

Sett. IV. If they be not [*Christians*] by Baptism, or visible Profession, they be not *visible Materials* for a Church.

If they be not [*Neighbours*] that is, within reach of each other, so as to be *capable* of such Communion, they are not *matter* that hath the necessary extrinsecal disposition.

If they be not [*associated*] explicitly or implicitly,

plicitely, by some signification of *Consent*, they may be an accidental Assembly, but not a proper *Christian Church*.

If they be not associated [*for this holy Communion*] they may be a *Civil Society*, but not a *Church*.

If they be not associated [*for Personal Communion*] at some due seasons, but only for *Communion at distance* by *Delegates, Messengers* or *Letters*, they are not a *Particular Church* of this *species* now defined, though they may be members of larger associations, *National, Diocesan, &c.*

If they are not associate with one or more *Pastors*, they may be a *Community* of *Christians*, but not a *Political Church*, which we now define.

If they are not joyned with a *Pastor* that hath all the *foresaid Powers*, of *Teaching, Ruling by the Word and Keys*, and going before them in *Worship*; and if they consent not to his *relation as such*, they may make a *School*, or an *Oratory*, but not a *proper particular Church simpliciter*, so called [*but only a Church secundum quid, or as to some part*]; for an *Essential* part is wanting. But it is not the defect of *Exercise* that unchurcheth them, while there is the *Power*, and that consented to (for Men cannot be *Pastors* or *Churches* against their wills.)

Sect. V. 3. As all *Christians* grant that the *Apostles* had a *general Commission* to call *Infidels* to *Christ*, and to *plant Churches* with their particular *Pastors* as aforesaid, and to take care that their *Pastor* and they do the duties, (not compelling them by their *Sword*, but by the *Word*,) so we are far from denying that yet
some