

**AN  
APOLOGETICAL  
NARRATION**

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# **An Apologetical Narration**

**Humbly submitted  
to the  
HONOURABLE HOUSES  
of  
Parliament**

**by**

**Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye,  
Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah  
Burroughes, William Bridge**

**Quinta Press  
Weston Rhyn  
2018**

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Meadow View, Weston Rhyn,  
Oswestry, Shropshire, England, SY10 7RN

*An Apologetical Narration*, first published in 1643/44.

Layout © Quinta Press 2018

It is planned to reprint this work with John Cotton's Writings on church government, including *The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church*; *A Sermon delivered at Salem, 1636*; *Reply to a Letter by Lord Say and Seal*; *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England*; *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*; *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*; *Of the Holiness of Church Members*; *Certain Queries Tending to Accomodation and Communion of Presbyterian and Congregational Churches*; and *A Defence of Mr John Cotton from the Imputation of Self-Contradiction* (including John Owen's Preface).

**T***his Apologetical Narration of our Reverend and dear Brethren the learned Authors of it, 'tis so full of peaceableness, modesty, and candour; and withall, at this time so seasonably needful, as well towards the vindication; of the Protestant party in general, from the aspersions of Incommunicableness within itself, and Incompatibleness with magistracy; as of themselves in particular, both against misreportings from without, & some possible mistakings from within too: That however for mine own part I have appeared on, and do still encline to the Presbyterial way of Church Government, yet do I think it every way fit for the Press.*

Charles Herle



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Apologetical Narration,  
HUMBLY SUBMITTED  
TO THE  
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OF  
*PARLIAMENT.*

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BY  
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*William Bridge.*

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LONDON

Printed for ROBERT DAWLMAN.

*M. DC. XLIII.*





AN  
APOLOGETICAL NARRATION  
OF SOME  
MINISTERS

Formerly in Exile:  
NOW

*Members of the Assembly of Divines.*



OUR cares have been of late so filled with a sudden and unexpected noise of confused exclamations, (though not so expressly directed against us in particular, yet in the interpretation of the most reflecting on us) that awakened thereby, we are enforced

to anticipate a little that discovery of our selves which otherwise we resolved to have left to *Time* and *Experience* of our ways and spirits, the truest Discoverers and surest judges of all men and their actions.

And now we shall begin to make some appearance into public light, unto whose view and judgements should we (that have hitherto lain under so dark a cloud of manifold misapprehensions) at first present our selves, but the Supreme Judicatory of this Kingdom, which is and hath been in all times the most just and severe Tribunal

for guiltiness to appear before, much more to dare to appeal unto; and yet withal the most sacred refuge and *Asylum* for mistaken and misjudged innocence,

The most, if not all of us, had ten years since (some more, some less) several settled Stations in the Ministry, in places of public use in the Church, not unknown to many of yourselves; but the sinful evil of those corruptions in the public worship and government of this Church, which all do now so generally acknowledge and decry, took hold upon our consciences long before some others of our brethren; And then how impossible it was to continue in those times our service and standings, all men's apprehensions will readily acquit us.

Neither at the first did we see or look further then the *dark part*, the evil of those superstitions adjoined to the worship of God, which have been the common stumbling block and offence of many thousand tender consciences, both in our own and our neighbour Churches ever since the first Reformation of Religion: which yet was enough to deprive us of the public exercise of our Ministries, and together therewith (as the watchfulness of those times grew) of our personal participation in some ordinances; and further exposed us either to personal violence and Persecution, or an exile to avoid it. Which latter we did the rather choose, that so the use and exercise of our Ministries (for which we were born and live) might not be wholly lost) nor our selves remain

debarred from the enjoyment o the Ordinances of Christ, which we account our birth-right, and best portion in this life.

This being our condition, we wore cast upon a farther necessity of enquiring into and viewing the *light part*, the positive part of *Church-worship* and Government; And to that end to search out what were the first Apostolic directions, pattern and examples of those Primitive Churches recorded in the New Testament, as that sacred pillar of fire to guide us. And in this enquiry, we looked upon the Word of Christ as impartially, and unprejudicedly, as men made of flesh and blood are like to do in any juncture of time that may fall out; the places we went to, the condition we were in, the company we went forth with, affording no temptation to bias us any way, but leaving us as freely to be guided by that light and touch God's Spirit should by the Word vouchsafe our consciences, as the Needle touched with the Loadstone is in the Compass: And we had (of all men) the greatest reason to be true to our own consciences in what we should embrace, seeing it was for our consciences that we were deprived at once of whatever was dear to us. We had no new Common-wealths to rear, to frame Church-government unto, whereof any one piece might stand in the others light, to cause the least variation by us from the Primitive pattern; We had no State-ends or Political interests to comply with; No Kingdoms in our eye to subdue unto our mould; (which yet will he coexistent with the peace of any form of Civil Govern-

ment on earth) No preferment or worldly respects to shape our opinions for: We had nothing else to do but simply and singly to consider how to worship God acceptably, and so most according to his word.

We were not engaged by Education or otherwise to any other of the Reformed Churches; And although we consulted with reverence what they hold forth both in their writings and practice, yet we could nor but suppose that they might not see into all things about worship and government, their intentions being most spent (as also of our first Reformers in *England*) upon the Reformation in Doctrine, in which they had a most happy hand: And we had with many others observed, that although the exercise of that Government had been accompanied with more peace, yet the Practical part, *the power of godliness* and the profession thereof, with difference from carnal and formal Christians, had not been advanced and held forth among them, as in this our own Island, as themselves have generally acknowledged. We had the advantage of all that light which the conflicts of our own Divines (the good old Non-conformists) had struck forth in their times; And the draughts of Discipline which they had drawn; which we found not in all things the very same with the practices of the Reformed Churches; And what they had written came much more commended to us, not only because they were our own, but because sealed with their manifold and bitter sufferings. We had likewise the fatal miscarriages and ship-

wrecks of the *Separation* (whom ye call *Brownists*) as Land-marks to fore-warn us of those rocks and shelves they ran upon; which also did put us upon an enquiry into the principles that might be the causes of their divisions. Last of all, we had the recent and later example of the ways and practices (and those improved to a better Edition and greater refinement, by all the fore-mentioned helps) of those multitudes of godly men of our own Nation, almost to the number of another Nation, and among them some as holy and judicious Divines as this Kingdom hath bred; whose sincerity in their way hath been before all the world, and will be unto all generations to come, by the greatest undertaking (but that of our father *Abraham* out of his own country, and his seed after him) a transplanting themselves many thousand miles distance, and that by sea, into a Wilderness, merely to worship God more purely, whither to allure them there could be no other invitement. And yet we still stood as unengaged spectators, free to examine and consider what truth is to be found in and amongst all these, (all which we look upon as Reformed Churches) and this nakedly according to the word; We resolved not to take up our Religion by or from any party, and yet to approve and hold fast whatsoever is good in any, though never so much differing from us, yea opposite unto us.

And for our own congregations we mean of *England* (in which thorough the grace of Christ we were converted, and exercised our Ministries

long, to the conversion of many others) We have this sincere profession to make before God and all the world, that all *that* conscience of the defilements we conceived to cleave to the true worship of God in them, or of the unwarranted power in Church Governors exercised therein, did never work in any of us any other thought, much less opinion, but that multitudes of the assemblies and parochial congregations thereof, were *the true Churches and Body of Christ, and the Ministry thereof* a true *Ministry*: Much less did it ever enter into our hearts to judge them *Antichristian*; we saw and cannot but see that by the same reason the Churches abroad in *Scotland, Holland, &c.* (though more reformed) yet for their mixture must be in like manner judged no Churches also, which to imagine or conceive, is and hath ever been an horror to our thoughts. Yea we always have professed, & that in these times when the Churches of *England* were the most, either actually overspread with defilements, or in the greatest danger thereof, and when ourselves had least, yea no hopes of ever so much as visiting our own land again in peace and safety to our persons; that we both did and would hold a *communion* with them as the Churches of Christ. And besides this profession, as a real testimony thereof, some of us after we, actually, were in this way of communion, baptized our children in Parishional congregations, and (as we had occasion) did offer to receive into the communion of the Lord's Supper with us, some (whom we knew godly that come to visit us when we were

in our exile) upon that relation, fellowship, and commembership they held in their parish Churches in England, they professing themselves to be members thereof, and belonging thereunto. What we have since our return publicly and avowedly made declaration of to this purpose, many hundreds can witness, and some of our brethren in their printed books candidly do testify for us. [Mr *Cheynett* Rise & growth of Socinianism]

And as we always held this respect unto our own Churches in this Kingdom, so we received and were entertained with the like from those reformed Churches abroad, among whom we were cast to live, we both mutually gave and received the right hand of fellowship, which they on their parts abundantly manifested by the very same characters and testimonies of difference which are proper to their own Orthodox Churches, and whereby they use to distinguish them from all those sects (which they tolerate, but not own) and all the assemblies of them (which yet now we are here some would needs rank us with) granting to some of us their own Churches, or public places for worship, to assemble in, where themselves met for the worship of God at differing hours the same day: As likewise the privilege of ringing a public Bell to call unto our meetings: which we mention because it is amongst them made the great signal of difference between their own allowed Churches and all other assemblies, unto whom it is strictly prohibited and forbidden, as *Guiciardine* hath long since observed: And others of us found such acceptance with them, that in testimony there

of they allowed a full and liberal maintenance annually for our Ministers, yea and constantly also Wine for our Communion. And then we again on our parts, not only held all brotherly correspondence with their Divines, but received also some of the members of their Churches (who desired to communicate with us) unto communion in the Sacraments and other ordinances. by virtue of their relation of membership retained in those Churches.

Now for the way & practices of our Churches, we give this brief and general account. Our *public worship* was made up of no other parts then the worship of all other reformed Churches doth consist of. As, public and solemn prayers *for Kings and all in authority, &c.* the reading the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament; Exposition of them as occasion was; and constant preaching of the word; the administration of the two Sacraments, Baptism to infants, and the Lord's Supper; singing of psalms; collections for the poor, &c, every Lord's day. For *Officers* and public Rulers in the Church, we set up no other but the very same which the reformed Churches judge necessary and sufficient, and as instituted by Christ and his Apostles for the perpetual, government of his Church, that is, *Pastors, Teachers, Ruling Elders*, (with us not lay but Ecclesiastic persons separated to that service) and *Deacons*. And for the matter *of government and censures of the Church*, we had nor executed any other but what all ac-



knowledge, namely, *Admonition*, and *Excommunication* upon obstinacy and impenitence, (which we bless God we never exercised.) This latter we judged should be put in execution, for no other kind of sins then may evidently be presumed to be perpetrated against the parties known light; as whether it be a sin in manners and conversation, such as is committed against the light of nature, or the common received practices of Christianity, professed in all the Churches of Christ; or if in opinions, then such, as are likewise contrary to the received principles of Christianity, and the power of godliness, professed by the party himself, and universally acknowledged in all the rest of the churches, and no other sins to be the subject of that dreadful sentence.

And for our directions in these or whatever else requisite to the manage of them, we had these three Principles more especially in our eye, to guide and steer our practice by.

First, the supreme rule *without us*, was the Primitive pattern and example of the churches created by the Apostles. Our consciences were possessed with that reverence and adoration of the fullness of the Scriptures, that there is therein a complete sufficiency, as to make the *man of God perfect*, so also to make the Churches of God perfect, (mere circumstances we except, or what rules the law of nature doth in common dictate) if the directions and examples therein delivered were fully known and followed. And although we cannot profess that sufficiency of knowledge is to be

able to lay forth all those rules therein which may meet will, all cases and emergencies that may or some times did fall out amongst us, or that may give satisfaction unto all Queres possible to be put unto us; yet we found principles enough, not only *fundamental* and essential to the being of a Church, but superstrutory also for the well-being of it, and those to us clear and certain, and such as might well serve to preserve our Churches in peace and from offence, and would comfortably guide us to heaven in a safe way: And the observation of so many of those particulars to be laid forth in the Word, became to us a more certain evidence and clear confirmation that there were the like rules and ruled cases for all occasions whatsoever, if we were able to discern them. And for all such cases wherein we saw not a clear resolution from Scripture, example, or direction we still professedly suspended, until God give us further light, not daring to eek out what was defective in our light in matters Divine with human prudence, (the fatal error to Reformation) left by *sowing any piece of the old garment* unto *the new*, we should make the *rent worse*; we having this promise of grace for our encouragement in this, which in our Public Assemblies was often for our comfort mentioned, that *in thus doing the will of God we should know more*.

A second Principle we carried along with us in our resolutions, was, Not to make our present judgement and practice a binding law unto ourselves for the future, which we in like manner made

continual profession of upon all occasions. We had too great an instance of our own frailty in the former way of our conformity; and therefore in a jealousy of ourselves, we kept this reserve, (which we made open and constant professions of) to alter and retract (though not lightly) what ever should be discovered to be taken up out of a misunderstanding of the rule: Which Principle we wish were (next to that most supreme, namely, to be in all things guided by the perfect will of God) enacted as the most *sacred law* of all other, in the midst of all other Laws and Canons Ecclesiastical in Christian States and Churches throughout the world.

Thirdly, we are able to hold forth this true and just Apology unto the world, That in the matters of greatest moment and controversy, we still chose to practice safely, and so, as we had reason to judge that all sorts, or the most of all the Churches did acknowledge warrantable, although they make *additaments* thereunto.

For instance: Whereas one great controversy of these times is about the *qualification of the Members* of Churches, and the promiscuous receiving and mixture of good and bad; Therein we chose the better part, and to be sure, received in none but such as all the Churches in the world would by the balance of the Sanctuary acknowledge faithful. And yet in this we are able to make this true and just profession also, That the Rules which we gave up our judgements unto, to judge those we received in amongst us by, were of that la-

titude as would take in any member of Christ, the meanest, in whom there may be supposed to be the *least of Christ*, and indeed such and no other as all the godly in this Kingdom carry in their bosoms to judge others by. We took measure of no man's holiness by his opinion, whether concurring with us, or adverse unto us; And Churches made up of such, we were sure no Protestant could but approve of, (as touching the members of it) to be a true Church, with which communion might be held. Again, concerning the great ordinance of *Public Prayer* and the *Liturgy* of the Church, whereas there is this great controversy upon it about the lawfulness of set forms prescribed; we practiced (without condemning others) what all sides do allow, and themselves do practice also, that the public Prayers in our Assemblies should be framed by the meditations and study of our own Ministers, out of their own gifts, (the fruits of Christ's Ascension) as well as their Sermons use to be. This we were sure all allowed of, though they superadded the other. So likewise for the government and discipline in the Churches, however the practice of the Reformed Churches is in greater matters to govern each particular congregation by a combined *Presbytery* of the *Elders* of several congregations united in one for government; yet so, as in their judgements they allow, especially in some cases, a particular congregation, an entire and complete power of jurisdiction to be exercised by the elders thereof within itself; Yea and our own Master *Cartwright*, holy *Baynes*, and other old

Non-conformists, place the power of Excommunication in the Eldership of each particular Church, with the consent of the Church, until they do miscarry, and then indeed they subject them to such Presbyterial and Provincial Assemblies as the proper refuge for appeals and for compounding of differences amongst Churches; which combination of Churches others of them therefore call *Ecclesiæ ortæ*, but particular congregations *Ecclesiæ primæ*, as wherein *firstly* the power and privilege of a Church is to be exercised. And withal we could not but imagine that the first Churches planted by the Apostles, were ordinarily of no more in one city at first than might make up one entire congregation, ruled by their own Elders, that also preached to them; for that in every city where they came, the number of converts did or should arise to such a multitude as to make several and sundry congregations or that the Apostles should stay the setting up of any Churches at all, until they rose to such a numerous multiplication as might make such a Presbyterial combination, we did not imagine. We found also those *Non-conformists* (that wrote against the Episcopal Government) in their Answer to the Arguments used for Episcopal Government over many, Churches, brought from the instances of the multitude of Believers in *Jerusalem*, and other places and cities, mentioned in the New Testament, to assert that it could not be infallibly proved that any of those we read of in the *Acts* and elsewhere; were yet so numerous, as necessarily to exceed the limits of one particular congre-

gation in those first times. We found it also granted by them all, that there should be several Elders in every congregation, who had power over them, in the Lord; and we judged that all those precepts, *obey your Elders, and them that are over you*, were (to be sure, and all grant it) meant of the Pastors and Teachers, and other Elders that were set over them in each particular congregation respectively, and to be as certainly the intendment of the holy Ghost, as in those like commands, *Wives obey your own husbands, Servants your own governors*, to be meant of their several Families respectively.

We could not therefore but judge it a safe and an allowed way to retain the government of our several congregations for matter of discipline within themselves, to be exercised by their own Elders, whereof we had (for the most part of the time we were abroad) three at least in each congregation, whom we were subject to: yet not claiming to ourselves an *independent power* in every congregation, to give account or be subject to none others, but only a full and entire power complete within ourselves, until we should be challenged to err grossly; such as *corporations* enjoy, who have the power and privilege to pass sentence for life & death within themselves, and yet are accountable to the State they live in. But that it should be the institution of Christ or his Apostles, that the combination of the Elders of many Churches should be the first complete and entire seat of Church power over each congregation so combined, or that they could challenge and assume

that authority over those Churches they feed and teach not ordinarily by virtue of those fore-mentioned Apostolical precepts, was to us a question, and judged to be an *additament* unto the other, which therefore rested on those that allowed us what we practised, over and above, to make evident and demonstrate (and certainly of all other the challenge of all spiritual power from Christ had need have a clear pattent to show for it) Yea we appeal further unto them that have read books, whether until those latter writings of the two reverend and learned *Divines of Scotland* set forth after our return, nor much more than two years since, and others of no elder date from *Holland*, and one of our *own* Divines more lately written with much learning and ingenuity; there hath been much settly and directly or with strength insisted on to prove that government and although assert and inculcate it they do as their opinions, yet the full strength and stream of our Non-conformists writings and others are spent rather in arguments against, & for the overthrowing the Episcopal government, and the corruptions that cleave to our worship, and in maintaining those several Officers in Churches which Christ hath instituted instead thereof (in which we fully agree with them) then in the proof of a combined classical Presbyterianial government as it is *authoritatively* practised in the most reformed Churches.

And whereas the common practice and exception laid into all men's thoughts against us and our opinions is, that in such a congregational govern-

ment thus entire within itself, there is no allowed sufficient remedy for miscarriages, though never so gross; no relief for wrongful sentences or persons injured thereby; no room for complaints: no powerful or effectual means to reduce a Church or Churches that fall into heresy, schism, &c. but every one is left and may take liberty without control to do what is good in their own eyes; we have (through the good Providence of God upon us) from the avowed declarations of our *judgements* among our Churches mutually during our exile, and that also confirmed by the most solemn instance of our *practice*, wherewith to vindicate ourselves and way in this particular; which upon no other occasion we should ever have made thus public.

God so ordered it that a scandal and offence fell out between those very Churches whilst living in this banishment (whereof we ourselves, that write these things) were then the Ministers) one of our Churches having unhappily deposed one of their Ministers, the other judged it not only as too sudden an act (having proceeded in a matter of so great moment without consulting their sister Churches, as was publicly professed we should have done in such cases of concernment) but also in the proceedings thereof as too severe, and not managed according to the rules laid down in the word. In this case our Churches did mutually and universally acknowledge and submit to this as a sacred and undoubted Principle and supreme law to be observed among all Churches that as by



virtue of that Apostolical command, Churches as well as particular men *are bound to give no offence neither to Jew nor Gentile, nor the Churches of God they live amongst*. So that in all cases of such offence or difference, by the obligation of the common law of *communion of Churches*, & for the *vindication of the glory of Christ*, which in common they hold forth, the church or churches challenged to *offend* or *differ*, are to submit themselves (upon the challenge of the offence or complaint of the person wronged) to the most full & open trial & examination by other neighbour Churches offended thereat, of whatever hath given the offence: And further, that by the virtue of the same and like law of *not partaking in other men's sins*, the Churches offended may, & ought upon the impenitency of those Churches, persisting in their error and miscarriage to pronounce that heavy sentence, against them, of with-drawing and renouncing all Christian communion with them until they do repent; And further to declare and protest this, with the causes thereof, to all other Churches of Christ, that they may do the like.

And what further *authority*, or proceedings purely *Ecclesiastical*, of one, or many sister Churches towards another whole Church, or Churches offending, either the Scriptures do hold forth, or can rationally be put in execution (without the Magistrates interposing a power of another nature, unto which we upon his particular cognisance, and examination of such causes, profess ever to submit, and also to be most willing to have recourse unto) for our parts we saw not then, nor do yet see. And

likewise we did then suppose, and do yet, that this principle of submission of Churches that miscarry unto other Churches offended, together with this other, that it is a command from Christ enjoined to Churches that are finally offended to denounce such a sentence of *Non-communication* and *withdrawing* from them whilst impenitent, as unworthy to hold forth the name of Christ, (*these principles being received and generally acknowledged by the Churches of Christ to be a mutual duty, as strictly enjoined them by Christ as any other*) that these would be as effectual means (through the blessing of Christ) to awe and preserve Churches and their Elders in their duties, as that other of claim to an authoritative power Ecclesiastical to *Excommunicate* other Churches or their Elders offending; For if the one be compared with the other, in a mere Ecclesiastical notion, *That* of Excommunication pretended hath but this more in it, That it is a *delivering* of whole Churches and their Elders offending *unto Satan*, (for which we know no warrant in the Scriptures, that Churches should have such a power over other Churches) And then as for the binding obligation both of the one way & the other, it can be supposed to lie but in these 2 things; First, in a warrant and injunction given by Christ to his Churches to put either the one or the other into execution; and 2. that men's consciences be accordingly therewith, so as to subject themselves whether unto that one way or the other: For suppose that other principle of an *authoritative* power in the greater part of Churches

combined to excommunicate other Churches, &c. to be the ordinance of God, yet unless it do take hold of men's consciences, and be received amongst all Churches, the offending Churches will sleight all such *Excommunications* as much, as they may be supposed to do our way of protestation and sentence of *Non- communion*. On the other side, let this way of ours be but as strongly entertained, as that which is the way and command of Christ, and upon all occasions be heedfully put in execution, it will awe men's consciences as much, and produce the same effects. And if the Magistrates power (to which we give as much, and (as we think) more, then the principles of the Presbyterial government will suffer them to yield) do but assist and back the sentence of other Churches denouncing this *Non-communion* against Churches miscarrying, according to the nature of the crime, as they judge meet, and as they would the sentence of Churches excommunicating other Churches in such cases, upon their own particular judgement of the cause; then, without all controversy this our way of Church proceeding will be every way as effectual as their other can be supposed to be; and we are sure, more brotherly and more suited to that liberty and equality Christ hath endowed his Churches with. But without the Magistrates interposing their authority, their way of proceeding will be as ineffectual as ours; and more liable to contempt, by how much it is pretended to be more authoritative; and to inflict a more dreadful punishment, which carnal spirits are seldom sensible of. This for our judgements.

And for a *real evidence* and *demonstration* both that this was then, our judgements, as like wise for an instance of the effectual success of such a course held by Churches in such cases, our own practice, and the blessing of God thereon, may plead and testify for us to all the world. The manage of this transaction in brief was this.

That Church which (with others) was most scandalised, did by letters declare their offence, requiring of the Church (supposed to be) offending, *in the name* and for the vindication of the honour of Christ, and the relieving the party wronged, to yield a full and public hearing before all the Churches of our Nation, or any other whomsoever, offended, of what they could give in charge against their proceedings in that deposition of their Minister, and to subject themselves to an open trial and review of all those forepassed carriages that concerned that particular; which they most cheerfully and readily (according to the fore-mentioned principles) submitted unto, in *a place*, and *state* where no outward violence or any other external authority either civil or ecclesiastical would have enforced them thereunto: And accordingly the Ministers of the Church offended with other two Gentlemen, of much worth, wisdom and piety, members thereof, were sent as *Messengers* from that Church; and at the introduction and entrance into that solemn assembly (the solemnity of which hath left as deep an impression upon our hearts of Christ's dreadful presence as ever any we have been present at,) it was openly and publicly pro-

fessed in a speech that was the preface to that discussion, to this effect, “That it was the most to be “abhorred maxim that any Religion hath ever “made profession of, and therefore of all other the “most contradictory and dishonourable unto that “of Christianity, that a single and particular society of men professing the name of Christ, and “pretending to be endowed with a power from “Christ to judge them that are of the same body “and society within themselves, should further arrogate unto themselves an exemption from “giving account or being censurable by any other, “either Christian Magistrate above them, or neighbour Churches about them. So far were our judgements from that *independent* liberty that is imputed to us, then, when we had least dependency on this kingdom, or so much as hopes ever to abide therein in peace. And for the issue and success of this *agitation*, after there had been for many days as judiciary and full a charge, trial, and deposition of witnesses openly afore all comers of all sorts, as can be expected in any Court where Authority enjoins it, that Church, which had offended, did as publicly acknowledge their sinful aberration in it, restored their *Minister* to his place again, and ordered a solemn day of fasting to humble themselves afore God and men, for their sinful carriage in it; and the party also which had been deposed did acknowledge to that Church wherein he had likewise sinned.

Thus we have rendered some small account of those, the saddest days of our pilgrimage on earth, wherein

although we enjoined God, yet besides many other miseries (the companions of banishment) we lost some friends and companions, our fellow labourers in the Gospel, as precious men as this earth bears any, through the distemper of the place, and ourselves came hardly off that service with our healths, yea lives.

When it pleased God to bring us his poor *Exiles* back again in these revolutions of the times, as also of the condition of this kingdom, into our own land, (the pouring forth of manifold prayers and tears for the prosperity whereof, had been no small part of that public worship we offered up to God in a strange land;) we found the judgement of many of our godly learned brethren in the Ministry (that desired a general reformation) to differ from ours in some things wherein, we do professedly judge the *Calvinian* Reformed Churches of the first reformation from out of Popery, to stand in need of a further reformation themselves; And it may without prejudice to them, or the imputation of Schism in us from them, be thought, that they coming new out of Popery (as well as *England*) and the founders of that reformation not having *Apostolic infallibility*, might not be fully perfect the first day. Yea and it may hopefully be conceived, that God in his secret, yet wise and gracious dispensation, had left *England* more unreformed as touching the outward form, both of worship & Church government, then the neighbour Churches were, having yet powerfully continued a constant conflict and con-

tention for a further Reformation for these four-score years; during which time he had likewise instead thereof blessed them with the spiritual light (and that increasing) of the power of Religion in the Practique part of it, shining brighter and clearer than in the neighbour Churches, as having in his infinite mercy on purpose reserved and *provided some better thing* for this Nation when it should come to be reformed, that the other Churches might not be made *perfect without it*, as the Apostle speaks.

We found also (which was as great an affliction to us as our former troubles and banishment) our opinions and ways (wherein we might seem to differ) environed about with, a cloud of mistakes and misapprehensions, and our persons with reproaches, Besides other calumnies, as of *schism*, &c. (which yet must either relate to a differing from the former Ecclesiastical Government of this Church established, and then who is not involved in it as well as we? or to that constitution and government that is yet to come; and until that be agreed on, established and declared, and actually exist, there can be no guilt or imputation of Schism from it) *That proud and insolent title of Independency* was affixed unto us, as our claim; the very sound of which conveys to all men's apprehensions the challenge of an exemption of all Churches from all subjection and dependence, or rather a trumpet of defiance against whatever *Power, Spiritual or Civil*; which we do abhor and detest: Or else the odious name of *Brownism*, together with all their opinions as they have stated and maintain-

ed them, must needs be owned by us: Although upon the very first declaring our judgements in the chief and fundamental point of all *Church discipline*, and likewise since, it hath been acknowledged that we differ much from them. And we did then, and do here publicly profess, we believe the truth to lie and consist in a middle way betwixt that which is falsely charged on us, *Brownism*; and that which is the contention of these times, the *authoritative Presbyterial Government* in all the subordinations and proceedings of it.

And had we been led in our former ways, and our removal out of this Kingdom by any such *spirit of faction* and division, or of *pride* and *singularity*, (which are the usual grounds of all Schism) we had since our returns again during this intermistical season, tentations, yea provocations enough to have drawn forth such a spirit; having manifold advantages to make and encrease a party, which we have not in the least attempted. We found the spirits of the people of this Kingdom that profess or pretend to the power of godliness (they finding themselves to be so much at liberty, and new come out of bondage) ready to take any impressions, and to be cast into any mould that hath but the appearance of a stricter way. And we found that many of those mists that had gathered about us, or were rather cast upon our persons in our absence, began by our presence again, and the blessing of God upon us in a great measure to scatter and vanish, without speaking a word for ourselves or Cause.



But through the grace of Christ, our spirits are and have been so remote from such dispositions & aims, that on the contrary we call God and men to witness our constant forbearance, either to publish our opinions by preaching (although we had the Pulpits free) or to print anything of our own or others for the vindication of ourselves (although the Presses were more free then the Pulpits) or to act for ourselves or way; although we have been from the first provoked unto all these all sorts of ways, both by the common misunderstandings and misrepresentations of our opinions and practises, together with incitements to this State not to allow us the peaceable practises of our *Consciences*, which the Reformed Churches abroad allowed us, and these edged with calumnies and reproaches cast upon our persons in print; and all these heightened with this further prejudice and provocation, that this our silence was interpreted, that we were either ashamed of our opinions, or able to say little for them; when as on the other side (besides all other advantages) Books have been written by men of much worth, learning, and authority, with moderation and strength, to prepossess the peoples minds against what are supposed our Tenets. But we knew and considered that it was the *second blow that makes the quarrel*, and that the *beginning of strife* would have been as the *breaking in of waters*; and the sad and conscientious apprehension of the danger of rending and dividing the godly Protestant party in this Kingdom that were desirous of Reformation, and of making se-

veral interests among them in a time when there was an absolute necessity of their nearest union and conjunction, and all little enough to effect that Reformation intended, and so long contended for, against a common adversary that had both present possession to plead for itself, power to support it, and had enjoyed a long continued settlement which had rooted it in the hearts of men; And this seconded by the instant and continual advices and conjurements of many *Honourable*, wise, and godly *Personages* of both *Houses of Parliament*, to forbear what might any way be like to occasion or augment this unhappy difference; They having also by their Declarations to His Majesty professed their endeavour and desire to unite the Protestant party in this Kingdom, that agree in Fundamental Truths against Popery and ether Heresies, and to have that respect to tender consciences as might prevent oppressions and inconveniences which had formerly been; Together with that strict engagement willingly entered into by us for these common ends, with the rest of our brethren of the Ministry, (which though made to continue but *ad placitum*, yet hath been sacred to us.) And above all, the due respect we have had to the peaceable and orderly Reformation of this Church and State; the hopeful expectation we have been entertained with of an happy *latitude* and agreement by means of this *Assembly*, and the wisdom of this *Parliament*: The conscience and consideration of all these, and the weight of each, have hitherto had more power with us to this deep silence and forbearance, than

all our own interests have any way prevailed with us to occasion the least disturbance amongst the people. We have and are yet resolved to bear all this with a quiet and a strong patience , (in the strength of which we now speak, or rather sigh forth this little) referring the vindication of our persons to God, and a further experience of us by men; and the declaration of our judgements, and what we conceive to be his truth therein, to the due and orderly agitation of this *Assembly* whereof *both Houses* were pleased to make us *Members*.

And whereas our silence upon all the forementioned grounds (for which we know we can never lose esteem with good and wise men) hath been by the ill Interpretation of some, imputed either to our consciousness of the badness and weakness of our Cause, or to our inability to maintain what we assert in difference from others, or answer what hath been written by others, we shall (with all modeaty) only present this to all men's apprehensions in confutation of it. That whatever the truth and justness of our Cause may prove to be, or how slender our abilities to defend it, yet we pretend at least to so much wisdom, that we would never have reserved ourselves for, but rather by all ways have declined *this Theatre*, of all other the most judicious and severe, an *Assembly* of so many able, learned, and grave *Divines*, where much of the piety, wisdom, and learning of two Kingdoms are met in one, honoured and assisted with the presence of the *Worthies* of both *Houses* at all debates (as often as they please to vouchsafe

their presence) as the Stage whereon first we would bring forth into public view our Tenets (if false and counterfeit) together with our own folly and weakness: We would much rather have chosen to have been venting them to the multitude, apt to be seduced, (which we have had these three years opportunity to have done.) But in a conscientious regard had to the orderly and peaceable way of searching out truths, and reforming the Churches of Christ, we have adventured ourselves upon this way of God, wisely assumed by the prudence of the State; And therein also upon all sorts of disadvantages (which we could not but foresee) both of *number*, *abilities* of learning, *Authority*, the stream of *public interest*; Trusting God both with ourselves and his own truth, as he shall be pleased to manage it by us.

Moreover, if in all matters of *Doctrine*, we were not as *Orthodox* in our judgements as our brethren themselves, we would never have exposed ourselves to this trial and hazard of discovery in this Assembly, the mixture of whose spirits, the quick-sightedness of whose judgements (intent enough upon us) and variety of debates about all sorts of controversies afoot in these times of contradiction, are such, as would be sure soon to find us out if we nourished any monsters or Serpents of opinions lurking in our bosoms. And if we had carried it so, as that hitherto such errors were not *aforehand open* to the view and *judgement* of all, yet

sitting here (unless we would be silent, which we have not been) *we could not long be hid*. But it is sufficiently known that in *all points of doctrine* (which hitherto in the review and examination of the *Articles* of our Church, or upon other occasions have been gone thorough) our judgements have still concurred with the greatest part of our brethren, neither do we know wherein we have dissented. And in matters of *Discipline*<sup>1</sup> we are so far from holding up the differences that occur, or making the breaches greater or wider, that we endeavour upon all such occasions to grant and yield (as all may see and cannot but testify for us) to the utmost latitude of our light and consciences; professing it to be as high a point of Religion and Conscience readily to own, yea fall down before whatsoever is truth in the hands of those that differ, yea though they should be enemies unto us, as much as earnestly to contend for & hold fast those truths wherein we should be found dissenting from them; and this as in relation to peace, so also as a just due to truth and goodness, even to approve it & acknowledge it to the utmost grain of it, though mingled with what is opposite unto us. And further when matters by discussion are brought to the smallest dissent that may be, we have hitherto been found to be no *backward* urgers unto a temper (not only in things that have concerned our own consciences, but when of others also) such as may suit and tend to union as well as searching out of truth; judging this to be as great and useful an end of *Synods*

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<sup>1</sup> Other editions add "(which we are now upon) when our judgements cannot in all things concur with others (as indeed not others all, in all things amongst themselves) yet".

and *Assemblies*, as a curious and exact discussion of all sorts of lesser differences with binding *Determinations* of truth one way.

And thus we have nakedly and with all simplicity rendered a clear and true account of our ways and spirits hitherto; Which we made choice of now at first to make ourselves known by, rather than by a more exact and *Scholastic* relation of our judgements in the points of difference about *Church government*; reserving that unto the more proper season and opportunity of this *Assembly*, and that liberty given by both Honourable Houses in matters of dissent; or as necessity shall after require, to a more public way of stating and asserting of them. In the mean-time from this brief historical relation of our practices, there may a true estimate be taken of our opinions in difference, which being instanced in, and set out by practices, is the most real and least collusive way, and carries its own evidence with it. All which we have taken the boldness together with ourselves humbly to lay at the feet of *your wisdom and piety*; Beseeching you to look upon us under no other Notion, or character, then as those, who if we cannot assume to have been no way furtherers of that reformation you intend, yet who have been no way hinderers thereof, or disturbers of the public peace; and who in our judgements about the present work of this age, the reformation of worship and discipline, do differ as little from the Reformed Churches, and our Brethren, yea far less, than they do from what themselves were three years past, or then the

generality of this kingdom from itself of late. And withal to consider us as those who in these former times, for many years suffered even to exile, for what the kingdom itself now suffers in the endeavour to cast out; and who in these present times, and since the change of them, have endured (that which to our spirits is no less grievous) the opposition and reproach of good men, even to the threatening of another banishment, and have been through the grace of God upon us, the same men in both, in the midst of these varieties; And finally, as those that do pursue no other interest or design but a subsistence (be it the poorest and meanest) in our own land (where we have and may do further service, & which is our birth-right as we are men) with the enjoyment of the ordinances of Christ (which are our portion as we are Christians) with the allowance of a latitude to some lesser differences with peaceableness, as not knowing where else with safety, health, and livelyhood, to set our feet on earth.

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