

## A LETTER

TO

THE REV. MR. TOOGOOD, OF EXETER;

OCCASIONED BY HIS "DISSENT FROM THE CHURCH OF  
ENGLAND FULLY JUSTIFIED."

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SIR,

IF you fairly represent Mr. White's arguments, they are liable to much exception. But whether they are or no, your answers to them are far from unexceptionable. To the manner of the whole I object, you are not serious; you do not write as did those excellent men, Mr. Baxter, Mr. Howe, Dr. Calamy, who seem always to speak, not laughing, but weeping. To the matter I object, that if your argument hold, as it is proposed in your very title-page; if "a dissent from our Church be the genuine consequence of the allegiance due to Christ;" then all who do not dissent have renounced that allegiance, and are in a state of damnation!

I have not leisure to consider all that you advance in proof of this severe sentence. I can only at present examine your main argument, which indeed contains the strength of your cause: "My separation from the Church of England," you say, "is a debt I owe to God, and an act of allegiance due to Christ, the only Lawgiver in the Church." (Page 2.)

Again: "The controversy turns upon one single point, Has the Church power to decree rites and ceremonies? If it has this power, then all the objections of the Dissenters, about kneeling at the Lord's supper, and the like, are impertinent: If it has no power at all of this kind, yea, if Christ, the great Lawgiver and King of the Church, hath expressly commanded, that no power of this kind shall ever be claimed or ever be yielded by any of his followers; then the Dissenters will have honour before God for protesting against such usurpation." (Page 3.)

I join issue on this single point: "If Christ hath expressly commanded, that no power of this kind shall ever be claimed, or ever yielded, by any of his followers;" then are all who yield it, all Churchmen, in a state of damnation, as much as those who "deny the Lord that bought them." But if Christ hath not expressly commanded this, we may go to church, and yet not go to hell.

To the point then: The power I speak of is a power of decreeing rites and ceremonies, of appointing such circumstances (suppose) of public worship as are in themselves purely indifferent, being no way determined in Scripture.

And the question is, "Hath Christ expressly commanded, that this power shall never be claimed, nor ever yielded, by any of his followers?" This I deny. How do you prove it?

Why, thus: "If the Church of England has this power, so has the Church of Rome." (Page 4.) Allowed. But this is not to the purpose. I want "the express command of Christ."

You say, "Secondly, The persons who have this power in England, are not the Clergy, but the Parliament." (Pages 8, 9.) Perhaps so. But this also strikes wide. Where is "the express command of Christ?"

You ask, "Thirdly, How came the civil Magistrate by this power?" (Page 11.) "Christ commands us to 'call no man upon earth father and master;' that is, to acknowledge no authority of any in matters of religion." (Page 12.) At length we are come to the express command, which, according to your interpretation, is express enough; "that is, Acknowledge no authority of any in matters of religion;" own no power in any to appoint any circumstance of public worship, anything pertaining to decency and order. But this interpretation is not allowed. It is the very point in question.

We allow, Christ does here expressly command, to acknowledge no such authority of any, as the Jews paid their Rabbies, whom they usually styled either Fathers or Masters; implicitly believing all they affirmed, and obeying all they enjoined. But we deny, that he expressly commands, to acknowledge no authority of governors, in things purely indifferent, whether they relate to the worship of God, or other matters.

You attempt to prove it by the following words: "'One is your Master' and Lawgiver, 'even Christ; and all ye are brethren;'" (Matt. xxiii. 8, 9;) all Christians; having no



dominion over one another." True; no such dominion as their Rabbies claimed; but in all things indifferent, Christian Magistrates have dominion. As to your inserting, "and Lawgiver," in the preceding clause, you have no authority from the text; for it is not plain, that our Lord is here speaking of himself in that capacity. *Διδασκαλος*, the word here rendered "Master," you well know, conveys no such idea. It should rather have been translated "Teacher." And indeed the whole text primarily relates to doctrines.

But you cite another text: "The Princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them; but it shall not be so among you." (Matt. xx. 25.) Very good; that is, Christian Pastors shall not exercise such dominion over their flock, as heathen Princes do over their subjects. Most sure; but, without any violation of this, they may appoint how things shall "be done decently and in order."

"But Christ is the sole Lawgiver, Judge, and Sovereign in his Church." (Page 12.) He is the sole *sovereign* Judge and Lawgiver. But it does not follow (what you continually infer) that there are no subordinate judges therein; nor, that there are none who have power to make regulations therein in subordination to Him. King George is sovereign judge and lawgiver in these realms. But are there no subordinate judges? Nay, are there not many who have power to make rules or laws in their own little communities? And how does this "invade his authority and throne?" Not at all, unless they contradict the laws of his kingdom.

"However, he alone has authority to fix the terms of communion for his followers, or Church." (*Ibid.*) "And the terms he has fixed, no men on earth have authority to set aside or alter." This I allow, (although it is another question,) none has authority to exclude from the Church of Christ those who comply with the terms which Christ has fixed. But not to admit into the society called the Church of England, or, not to administer the Lord's supper to them, is not the same thing with "excluding men from the Church of Christ;" unless this society be the whole Church of Christ, which neither you nor I will affirm. This society therefore may scruple to receive those as members, who do not observe her rules in things indifferent, without pretending "to set aside or alter the terms which Christ has fixed" for admission into the Christian Church; and yet without "lording it over God's

heritage, or usurping Christ's throne." Nor does all "the allegiance we owe Him" at all hinder our "obeying them that have the rule over us," in things of a purely indifferent nature. Rather, our allegiance to Him requires our obedience to them. In being "their servants," thus far we are "Christ's servants." We obey his general command, by obeying our governors in particular instances.

Hitherto you have produced no express command of Christ to the contrary. Nor do you attempt to show any such, but strike off from the question for the twelve or fourteen pages following. But after these you say, "The subjects of Christ are expressly commanded to receive nothing as parts of religion, which are only 'commandments of men.' (Matt. xv. 9.)" (Page 26.) We grant it; but this is no command at all, not to "obey those who have the rule over us." And we must obey them in things indifferent, or not at all. For in things which God hath forbidden, should such be enjoined, we dare not obey. Nor need they enjoin what God hath commanded.

Upon the whole, we agree that Christ is the only "supreme Judge and Lawgiver in the Church;" I may add, and in the world; for "there is no power," no secular power, "but of God;" of God who "was manifested in the flesh, who is over all, blessed for ever." But we do not at all agree in the inference which you would draw therefrom, namely, that there is no subordinate judge or lawgiver in the Church. You may just as well infer, that there is no subordinate judge or lawgiver in the world. Yea, there is, both in the one and the other. And in obeying these subordinate powers, we do not, as you aver, renounce the Supreme; no, but we obey them for his sake.

We believe, it is not only innocent, but our bounden duty, so to do; in all things of an indifferent nature to submit ourselves "to every ordinance of man;" and that "for the Lord's sake;" because we think he has not forbidden but expressly commanded it. Therefore, "as a genuine fruit of our allegiance to Christ," we submit both to the King and governors sent by him, so far as possibly we can, without breaking some plain command of God. And you have not yet brought any plain command to justify that assertion, that "we may not submit either to the King, or to governors sent by him, in any circumstance relating to the worship of God."



Here is a plain declaration, "There is no power but of God; the powers that exist are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power," (without an absolute necessity, which in things indifferent there is not,) "resisteth the ordinance of God." And here is a plain command grounded thereon: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." Now, by what scripture does it appear, that we are not to be subject in any thing pertaining to the worship of God? This is an exception which we cannot possibly allow, without clear warrant from holy writ. And we apprehend, those of the Church of Rome alone can decently plead for such an exception. It does not sound well in the mouth of a Protestant, to claim an exemption from the jurisdiction of the civil powers in all matters of religion, and in the minutest circumstance relating to the Church.

Another plain command is that mentioned but now: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." And this we shall think ourselves hereby fully authorized to do, in things of a religious, as well as a civil, nature, till you can produce plain, explicit proof from Scripture, that we must submit in the latter, but not in the former. We cannot find any such distinction in the Bible; and till we find it there, we cannot receive it, but must believe our allegiance to Christ requires submission to our governors in all things indifferent.

This I speak, even on supposition that the things in question were enjoined merely by the King and Parliament. If they were, what then? Then I would submit to them "for the Lord's sake." So that in all your parade, either with regard to King George or Queen Anne, there may be wit, but no wisdom; no force, no argument, till you can support this distinction from plain testimony of Scripture.

Till this is done, it can never be proved that "a dissent from the Church of England" (whether it can be justified from other topics or no) "is the genuine and just consequence of the allegiance which is due to Christ, as the only Law-giver in the Church." As you proposed to "bring the controversy to this short and plain issue, to let it turn on this single point," I have done so; I have spoken to this alone; although I could have said something on many other points which you have advanced as points of the utmost certainty, although they are far more easily affirmed than

proved. But I wave them for the present ; hoping this may suffice to show any fair and candid inquirer, that it is very possible to be united to Christ and to the Church of England at the same time ; that we need not separate from the Church, in order to preserve our allegiance to Christ ; but may be firm members thereof, and yet “have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.”

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

JOHN WESLEY.

BRISTOL,

*January 10, 1758.*

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## SERIOUS THOUGHTS

CONCERNING

GODFATHERS AND GODMOTHERS.

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1. In the ancient Church, when baptism was administered, there were usually two or more sponsors (so Tertullian calls them, an hundred years after the death of St. John) for every person to be baptized. As these were witnesses, before God and the Church, of the solemn engagement those persons then entered into, so they undertook (as the very word implies) to watch over those souls in a peculiar manner, to instruct, admonish, exhort, and build them up in the faith once delivered to the saints. These were considered as a kind of spiritual parents to the baptized, whether they were infants or at man's estate ; and were expected to supply whatever spiritual helps were wanting either through the death or neglect of the natural parents.

2. These have been retained in the Christian Church from the earliest times, as the reason for them was the same in all ages. In our Church they are termed, by a proper and