

REMARKS

UPON

II

A DISCOURSE

INTITULED

An OVERTURE.

Presented to the REVEREND SYNOD
of Dissenting MINISTERS sitting
in *Philadelphia*, in the Month of *September*, 1728.

In a LETTER to the AUTHOR.

By a Member of the said SYNOD.

Wm. Dickinson

Printed by *J. Peter Zenger*, in *Smith-Street*,
in *New-York*. 1729.

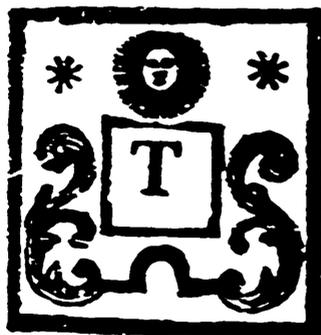


R E M A R K S

Upon a DISCOURSE Intituled
An OVERTURE, &c.

In a LETTER to the *Author*.

Reverend and Dear Brother,



THE Glory of *God*, and Interest of Religion, having been the Motives of your publishing your Reasons for a *Subscription* to the *Westminster Confession*, &c. You cannot be displeas'd with me, if from the same Motives, I offer some Objections against the propos'd *Subscription*, and your Arguments to perswade it.

I have nothing to object against your appearing publickly in this Case: For, if *Subscription* be a Duty, and the Cause you espouse be the Cause of God, (as you seem very confident that it is) it must be a commendable Zeal, that prompts you to be extensively useful and serviceable, in such an important Affair. I shall therefore make no Remarks upon your *Apology*, for the Publication of the *Overture* and *Preface*:

But immediately enter upon the Merits of the Cause, and consider,

Whether it is the Duty of our *Synod*, *publicly and Authoritatively to adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, &c. and to oblige their Members, and every Candidate for the Ministry within their Bounds, to subscribe them?* This you hold in the Affirmative, and have endeavoured to prove. But either you have wanted Success in that Attempt, or I am so unhappy as not to see the Force of your Arguments.

I shall therefore, with all that Candour and Respect that is due to you, as a *Christian* and a *Minister* of the Gospel, offer you the Reasons of my Dissent from your Proposal, by first taking some Notice of the Arguments for establishing your Opinion, both in the *Overture* and *Preface*, then, by stating my own Objections, and occasionally considering what occurs in your Discourse, to obviate them.

The Argument that claims my first Notice, is in the first and second Pages of the *Overture*, which may be thus summed up.

That it's the unquestionable Duty of every *Christian*, according to his Station, especially of every *Gospel Minister*, and not of them only; but of every *Gospel Church* as an *Organized Body politic*, to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel against all Opposition; and also to endeavour to perpetuate and propagate them unto Posterity, pure and uncorrupt.

But

But what Consequence would you draw from hence? Is the debated *Subscription* therefore necessary; because it's the only, or the most probable Means to answer these Ends? This I think must be your Meaning, or else your Argument is inconclusive. But then,

1. It's the unquestionable Duty of every *Christian* according to his Station, to subscribe the Westminster Confession, &c. For it is their unquestionable Duty (as you observe) to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel against all Opposition. And consequently their unquestionable Duty, to submit to, and comply with, the necessary Means to that End. You should therefore move for an *Act of Synod*, that all the Ministers within our Bounds, enjoin a *Subscription* upon every Member of their respective Congregations; and that too upon Pain of Exclusion from their sacred Fellowship. A just Penalty for an open Defiance to unquestionable Duty. For, (to use your own Words, p. 21.) it's utterly impracticable for those of subscribing Principles, to take the Measures which these Principles oblige them unto, in order to their Defence against the Dangers of encroaching Errors; and at the same Time to drop this *Overture*; by way of Compliance with those (Members of their Congregation) of non-subscribing Principles. It's true this Method would put our Congregations into utmost Confusion, it would (to use your own Words) procure Rents and Divisions in our small Infant Church; and be of most

most pernicious and dangerous Consequence, contrary to Christian Charity; and most obstructive to spiritual Edification. This indeed at first view, seems a formidable Objection. But you have taught me how to answer it. You apprehend (you tell us p. 12.) that this is in it self a proper Preventive and Antidote against Division, being a suitable Mean to bring a Church to be of one Mind, and one Judgement; and if it should in the Event have other Effects, it is only by Accident, &c. And again. If it be a Churches Duty as a Church (in which Sence surely it includes the Congregations as well as the Ministers) to declare unto the World, and unto one another, the Principles of their Faith, &c. it's not the Fear or Danger of Division, that should deter from it. Thus Sir, if your Conclusion will follow from these Premises, the Consequence is unavoidable, that it's our Duty to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel, by Schisms, Contentions and Confusions; and even the total Subversion of our Congregations.

2. If this Argument prove any thing to the Purpose, it must also be a necessary Consequence, that those Churches that want this Defence, and enjoin no Subscription upon their Ministers, have no good and proper Means to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel, and propagate them to Posterity: But Nothing can be more contrary to Truth and Experience, than this Supposition.

I believe it will prove a difficult Task, to find so much as a Proposal, much less an Injunction of Subscription, to any Formula whatsoever in the primitive Church, before Constantine the Great. They then found other Means to detect Heresies, to resist Gainfayers, to propagate the Truth; and to keep the Church not only a Garden enclosed, but a Garden of Peace. The Synod of Nice did indeed impose Subscriptions; but what was the Consequence, but horrible Schisms, Convulsions and Confusions, until the Church was crumbled into Parts and Parties, each uncharitably anathematizing one another. Never was the Church infested with such a Swarm of Hereticks and Heresies, as sprung from that corrupt Fountain of Imposition and Subscription. The Arrians were not only strengthened in their Heresy, and encreased in their Numbers by their Persecution; but there was quickly added to 'em, the black Catalogue of Eustatians, Macedonians, Anomoioi, Eunomians, Photinians, Luciferians, Anthropomorphites, Donatists, Appollonarians, Dimerite, Massilian, Antidicomorianite, Collyridiani, Metangismonite, Psathyrians, Eutiebians, Seluciani, Patriciani, with a long and almost endless Et cætera. All which Heresies rose out of the bottomless Pit, in about Seventy Years space, in the same Church. Whence one Council was conven'd after another, to draw up new Creeds, and impose new Subscriptions, until almost every Article of Christianity was both condemned

ned and established. This was the *Mark* set by Providence upon the first *Subscription* of this kind, that was ever imposed in the World; and this the Defence and Propagation of Truth that followed from it.

I might exemplify this Case, by Instances of the same kind, in all the succeeding Ages of the Church, unto the present Time. I might particularly shew you, how this imposing and subscribing of *Creeds*, was both an Inlet to the *Papacy*, and a continued Engine of Papal Tyranny, after the *Pope* was mounted upon the *Seven-headed Beast*. I might also observe, on the contrary, how the *Waldenses*, *Wickliffians*, *Lollards* &c. flourished in Purity of Doctrine and Discipline, defended and propagated the Truth pure and uncorrupt against the utmost Opposition of Hell and Earth, without any *Imposition* or *Subscription*. But we need not look so far back, nor go farther from Home, than the Countries where you and I were born, to find brightest Examples of this kind. The Presbyterian Church in *Ireland*, subsisted some Ages in Peace and Purity, to the Honour of their Profession, and Envy of their malignant Enemies; and thus might they probably have continued, had not the Fire of *Subscription* consumed their Glory; and this Engine of Division broke them to pieces, disunited them in Interest, in Comunion, and in Charity; and rendered them the Grief of their Friends, and the Scorn of their Enemies. And on the other
Hand,

Hand, the Churches of *New-England* have all continued from their first Foundation *Non-Subscribers*; and yet retain their first Faith and Love. From all this I think it naturally follows, that *Subscription* is not Necessary for the Being, or Well-being of the Church; unless Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions and Heresies, are necessary to that End,

3. I'm sure this Argument is very little to the Purpose if *Subscriptions* have no direct Tendency to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel; and propagate them uncorrupt to Posterity. It seems you were not aware of this Objection; but have taken for granted, as a first Principle not to be debated, that *Subscription* is not only a means, but the best means to this End. You have built all your Superstructure upon this *Postulatum*; and therefore, if upon Examination it proves a Sandy Foundation, you know the Fate of your whole Fabric. Let us then consider the Case a little. Let us view this Fortification you are for erecting about a poor defenceless *Lair*; and see whether it don't agree to that Description *Neb. iv. 3. If a Fox go up, he shall even break down this Stone Wall.*

You'll readily grant that there's no Need of *Subscriptions*, for confirming and establishing the sincere Christian and orthodox Professor in the true Faith. He is influenced with higher Motives, he is establish'd upon a more stable Foundation; and kept by the Power of God
through

through Faith unto Salvation. There wants no Laws nor Subscription to secure them, when all the Malice of Men and Devils can neither draw nor drive into Apostacy. These will be ready enough to profess their Faith *They'll not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.* And they'll be sincere in their Profession, being so far removed from Hypocrisy; and from *loving and making a Lye.*

You'll also grant, that *Subscription* can't be of any Service to open profess'd and declar'd Hereticks, either with Respect to themselves, or to the Jurisdiction they belong to. 'Twill be of no Use with Respect to themselves. It won't let new Light into their Minds, to dispel the Mists of Ignorance and Error; nor will it conquer the Perverseness of their Wills, and bring 'em to bow their Necks unto Christ's Yoke. Neither can it be of any Use with respect to us as we are an Ecclesiastical Judicatory, to direct our Conduct towards them. Known Hereticks are not to be put upon subscribing Formulas or Confessions, but *after the first and second Admonition to be rejected.*

It therefore remains, that there can be no Prospect of Advantage from *Subscriptions*, save only as a Means to keep *Hypocrites* out of the Church, to detect cover'd and conceal'd Hereticks; or (as you express it) to search out, discover, and set a Mark upon secret Bosom Enemies to the Truth. Let us therefore next consider, whether the Imposition of *Subscription* is like to attain this End.

Who can be imagined more ready to subscribe blindfold, whatever is imposed, than such Men as are last described. If they are under no Restrain of Conscience, what should hinder their Compliance with any Injunctions, that may prove a Means of Profit or Advantage to 'em? Or if their Consciences are not wholly laid waste, how easily do they quiet 'em, by the famous Distinction of subscribing in a Scripture Sense. — This Practice may be exemplified in all the Churches, in all Ages, where *Subscriptions* have been imposed. Look into the Primitive Church, and you'll find *Arrians, Macedonians, Eutichians* &c. Subscribing the Orthodox Faith when required; and when they could find their account in doing it*. Look into the Reformed Churches of *France*, and you'll find almost every *Synod*, a black Roll of apostate Hereticks, who had not only Subscribed but sworn to their *Confession*; And so did the *Sieurs Amiran* and *Testard* again and again, notwithstanding the dangerous Errors they held; and at length publish'd, to the just Alarm both of the *Gallican* and other Reform'd Churches †. Look into the early Times of the Church of *Scotland*, and you'll find how ready her bitterest Enemies were to subscribe her *Formulas*, when secretly gnawing out her Bowels; and Malingantly con-

* *Socrat. Ecclesiast. Hist. Lib. I. Cap. X. & XIX. Lib. II. Cap. XIX. et alibi.*

† *Vid. Quicks Synodicon on the Synod of Alanfon.*

ted to us, and received by Faith alone. But they all mean the same Thing, when they subscribe the very same Words? Nothing less than their erroneous Opinions: And that Doctor The *Antinomian* understands it, that the Righteousness of Christ is imputed to us from Eternity, and that by our eternal Justification we are acquitted from the Guilt of all Sins, present, and future. And our receiving this by Faith, is (according to him) a Believing that Christ dyed for us in particular, and thence taking the Comfort of our happy State. *Arminian* on the contrary understands this Article, that the Righteousness of Christ imputed to us, is His purchasing for us new Justification, and substituting sincere in the Place of perfect Obedience: And our receiving this by Faith, is our Assent to, and Compliance with these Terms, by a sincere Obedience. I need not tell you how the *Calvinists* understand the Article.

I think you your self must grant, that *Subscription* will not prove of very glorious Service to the Church, if this be the Effect of it. And you must be very much a Stranger to the Controversies formerly managed in *England*, and more lately in *Scotland* upon these mention'd Points, if you don't know, that each Party press'd this very Article into their Service. I might also add, that you can't be such a Stranger to the present Circumstances of the Church of *England*, as to be ignorant, that not only the *Arminians*; but even the *Arrians*, themselves

elves have found out away, to bring in all the excellent Articles of that Church, as Vouchers of their erroneous Opinions: And that Doctor the Head of the modern *Arrians*, has undertaken in Print, to reconcile all the Church *Formulas*; and even the *Athanasian Creed* it self, to his new Schemes. I will conclude this Head with Observing, that Nothing can have a direct tendency to advance the Interest, of the Church; but what *Christ* himself has instituted to that End. *God* will own and bless his *own Institutions*; but He ordinarily puts a Mark of His Displeasure upon the most artful Contrivance of Men, in the Affairs of His House and Kingdom, as I've already shewn that He has done in the Affair under Debate. Whatever Shew of Wisdom and Policy may appear in such human Inventions, they nevertheless impeach the Wisdom, or Faithfulness of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; for not giving sufficient Instructions in these important concerns. *Heb.* iii. 2. they assume His *Throne*, who is sole King of the Church, *Col.* i. 18. and proclaim the Contrivers of these politick Schemes, to be *Darkness it Self*. *Isai.* viii. 20. If you pretend that *Subscription* is required in the Scripture, you would do well to point out the *Text* that requires it, that we may learn our Duty. And I must tell you, that it should be a *Text* full and clear to the Purpose. It is not enough to say as you do (p.9.) that it's possible *here might be Confessions of Faith or Creeds*, (in the

the Apostolic Times; besides the Scriptures; but you must make it evidently certain, that there were such in those Times. It is not enough, think as you do, (*ibid.*) that we have a plain hint in Scripture of something like a Creed & but you must prove that Subscription is enjoin'd before you can justly expect a Compliance with your Proposals, For certainly Lord never impos'd a Duty of this importance upon His Church; and yet left us at a Loss where to find the Institution. Since therefore I am certain that there is no such Precept in the Bible, you must pardon me, if I must wait for better Instruction and Conviction, before I can subscribe.

And now I think I have perform'd what I pretended under this Head; and have plainly shew'd that *Subscription* has no direct tendency to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel; and that it is therefore at best, but Useless and insignificant.

4. If there be other *Means* besides this suspected and contested Method, sufficient to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel, then this is not necessary to that End. Let us therefore consider whether there be no such *Means*, that will every way answer the End propos'd. And I shall here only take Notice of the Duties belonging to us, as we are Ministers of the Gospel, and an Ecclesiastical Judicatory

I would first propose to this Purpose, a strict Examination of all *Candidates* of the Ministry before

before they are admitted to the Exercise of that sacred Function. It is impossible to imagine, what Advantage can accrue from *Subscription*, that can't be attain'd by this *Means* only. This will as well discover the Seriousness, the natural or acquired Abilities, and other Ministerial Qualifications in the *Candidate*, as his Soundness in the Faith; which *Subscription* can never do, the most carnal Wretch and unletter'd Dunce, being as capable, and as ready to subscribe as any. This is a method we have hitherto been in the Practice of from the Beginning, with Unanimity and Success; and which the Word of God requires us yet to continue in. We are to lay Hands suddenly upon no Man, 1 Tim. v. 22.

What can be intended by this, but that by personal Acquaintance and previous Examination, (not by subscription, which can be very suddenly done) we have good Proof of the Candidate's Fitness for the Work, before we separate him to the Sacred Employment? We are required

to commit the Dispensation of the Gospel, to faithful Men, who shall be able to teach others. 2 Tim. ii. 2. How shall we discover these Qualifications? Will their *Subscribing* & *Confession* acquaint us with their Fidelity or Ability? Or must we not know the former, by examining the Inducements to their putting their Hand to this Plow; and the latter, by strictly enquiring into their Capacity for this Work; and their Orthodoxy in the Faith.

I would again propose a strict *Discipline* in the

the Church, especially with respect to *Scandalous Ministers*, and all such as can be prov'd guilty of dangerous Errors. By a seasonable rejecting of whom, we may prevent the Progress of Immorality, or *Heresy* among us. In this Case we have also express Commands and Directions, in the *Divine Oracles*, 2 *Tim.* iii. 5. 1 *Tim.* vi. 5. 2 *Thes.* iii. 6. *Tit.* iii. 10.

I would lastly propose, that the Ministers of the Gospel be most diligent, faithful, and painful, in the discharge of their awful Trust. That by their sedulous Application to their Work, they may instruct the ignorant, establish the wavering, and convince the erroneous. Or to sum up all in a Word, that they may be instrumental to convert poor perishing Sinners to *Christ*, and thereby to have them built upon the *Foundation of God that standeth sure*. Such painful Address to our Business, join'd with fervent Prayer for Success, is the proper Engine to subvert the Kingdom of Satan in all it's Branches; and to confirm and establish the Kingdom of our Lord *Jesus Christ* among us. See 1 *Tim.* iii. 13 and *Fin.* 2. *Tim.* iv. 1, 2. 3.

Thus Sir, I have something particularly considered this first Argument; and I think fully answer'd whatever occurs in the *Overture*. For allowing that a *Principal of spiritual Wisdom* would direct the Church of *Christ*, to fortify itself against all assaults that *secret Bosom Enemies* to the Truth, are as dangerous as any whatsoever. Admit, that we are so a particular

Church

Church, as not to be a Part of any particular Church in the World; that we are in no small Danger of being corrupted in *Doctrinals*; that we are too much like the People of *Laish*, in a careless defenceless Condition; that we are surrounded with many pernicious Corruptions in *Doctrine*; that our Poverty renders us incapable to plant a *Seminary of Learning* among us; and that the Edge of our Zeal against prevailing Errors is blunted. If we allow all these Reasons for our being upon our Defence, and for our endeavouring to propagate the Truths of the Gospel to Posterity: Yet it all makes nothing for the *Subscription* under Consideration, if that be't the proper Means to answer these Ends, which I think I have fully prov'd.

Your second and last Argument, I find (in page 7.) thus propos'd. As it is observed in the *Overture*, we are an intire Church of our selves, so as not to be a Part of any particular Church in the World, with which we are join'd as a Part. Now every Collection of People, which are united together under a politic Body, whether ecclesiastical or civil, must have some Bond of Union, by which the several Parts are join'd together, to make or constitute them one entire whole. &c. Now, until we fulfil the Intent of the following *Overture*, I am at a loss where to find a sufficient external Bond of Union, by which we are united, &c. In answer to which, I shall offer these three Things to your Consideration.

(1.) That there may be a sufficient Bond of Un-

B 2.

ion

ion without Subscription. (2.) That we have already all the external *Bond of Union*, that the Scriptures require of us. (3.) That what has a natural Tendency to *Dissunion* and Division, can't (agreeable to the Laws of Charity) be propos'd as a *Bond of Union*.

I. There may be a sufficient *Bond of Union* without *Subscription*. A joint Acknowledgement of our Lord *Jesus Christ* for our common Head, of the sacred Scriptures for our Common Standard both in Faith and Practice; with a joint Agreement in the same essential and necessary Articles of Christianity, and the same Methods of Worship and Discipline, are a sufficient external *Bond of Union*, either for the Being or Well-being of any Church under Heaven. To this you object. *How is it possible for us to know concerning one another, or for others to know concerning us, in what Sence we take or understand the Scriptures, &c.?* To which I answer.

1. By retorting the Objection upon you. How is it possible for us to know concerning one another, or for others to know concerning us, in what Sence we take or understand the *Assembly's Confession*, suppose we all subscribe it.

2. It's possible for us to continue in strict Examination of Candidates for the Ministry, that by that Means we may discover whether they be orthodox or erroneous; and in what Sence they understand the Scriptures.

3. It's possible for us to reject *Heretics* when

we find any such among us. For tho' we have no just claim to impose our Faith, and our Interpretation of Scripture upon any Man; yet we have an undoubted Right to reject their Opinions, when we think them erroneous; and to refuse Communion with them in sacred Ordinances, and even in the exercise of Church Government, when we suppose their *Heresy* renders them unqualified for it. This (as I've shewn above) is what the Scriptures enjoin upon us. And if these Scriptural Methods be duly attended, what further external *Bond of Union* can be wanting? *Profess'd Deists, Socinians, Arminians and Free-thinkers, can't be united to us in the same Church Government*, as you suppose p. 10. if these Rules of *Christ* be duly observed.

You object again, that an *Erastian*, who supposes that *Christ* has left us at Liberty, to chuse what Form of Government we think most agreeable, may freely join with us in the actual Exercise of *Presbyterian Government*. To which I answer. Why not? I hope your Charity is hardly so restricted to those of our own Sentiments in this Matter, as to suppose this a *damning Heresy*; or an *Error* that incapacitates for Communion in all Ordinances. And I can't see what Prejudice these can be to our Constitution, so long as they heartily join in our Methods of Discipline; and thereby declare 'em best for us, whether they believe 'em of *Divine Right* or not. Can't we live peaceably with those who live

pea-

peaceably with us, and join with us in consulting and concerting the Interest of Christ's Kingdom among us, without breaking in upon their Consciences; and destroying their Right of judging for themselves?

I might here subjoin, that a view of this Affair from the very Infancy of Christianity will convince us, that the Churches of Christ have been always better united, and every way more flourishing, when no other external *Bond of Union* but what is now propos'd, have been impos'd upon 'em, than when they have been fetter'd with *Subscriptions*, and other Impositions and Institutions of human Invention; as I have something exemplified above.

II. We have already all the external Bond of Union, that the Scriptures require of us. We all of us for ought I know, have *one Faith, one Lord, one Baptism*, and one Discipline. And what more is needful? You indeed require, that we should all subscribe to one Confession: But does our Lord Jesus Christ require this? Have you cited, or can you cite, any thing like a Precept or Direction to this Purpose, from that *one Lawgiver who is able to save or destroy? Who art thou then that judgest another?* Jam. iv. 12. You indeed p. 9. infer from *Heb. v. 12.* compar'd with Chap. vi. 1. that *there were both rudimental Principles, for the use of young and more ignorant Professors; and more difficult and mysterious Doctrines of the Christian Faith, that were to come after the former, collected for the*

Use

Use of the Church, in the Apostolic Times. Now were this granted, what does it argue for *Subscriptions*? Can you your self pretend that these were the Dictates of fallible Mⁿ, imposed and subscribed in those Times? Or can you pretend, that there is no Difference between *Catechizing* our Children, and *Subscribing Confessions*? To what Purpose then do you quote this Scripture?

III. What has a natural Tendency to *Dis-union* and Division, can't (agreeable to the Laws of Charity) be propos'd as a *Bond of Union*. What you have offer'd in answer to this, does Nothing affect the present Case; because you apprehend *Subscription a proper Antidote against Division; and if it should in the Event have other Effects, it's only by Accident* (p. 12.) If it does therefore appear, that this has a natural and direct Tendency to *Division*, you have said Nothing to the Purpose. Let us then consider this Case.

I must first observe to you, that the requiring and enjoining any unscriptural Terms of Union or Communion, is a direct and natural Means to procure *Rents* and *Divisions*, in the Church. For there will be such thinking and serious Persons, whose Consciences will startle at these Innovations; and who will sooner dye, than submit to these Injunctions against their Consciences. A *Schism* will follow. And who are the criminal Causes of this *Schism*, they who refuse to sin against their Consciences; or they that lay this Unnecessary Burthen upon 'em? If the former,

mer,

mer, we are brought into the midst of *Rome*, must believe as the Church believes, and expect Salvation by that public Faith. If the latter, it necessarily follows that these Unscriptural Institutions (and such is the debated *Subscription*) are directly and formally, the *troublers of Gods Israel*. This Argument has been constantly used by our Dissenters from the Church of *England*. It has hitherto triumphed over all *Impositions*, and remain'd unanswerable, and will ever do so.

I can't but further observe to you under this Head, that we all of us know, that that Subscription under Debate, has been scrupled and opposed by many godly, learn'd, and faithful *Ministers* of Christ; that it has made horrible Divisions and Confusions in other Churches, and that it's like to have the same sad Effects among our selves. And I must therefore take the Freedom to tell you, that I would not for all the World, be the Author of that Dishonour to God and our holy Profession, and of that *Schism* and Confusion that is like to follow, if this be enjoined by the Synod. No Sir! It's better to dye in the Cause, than to merit that Character in *Rom. xvi. 17. 18.* For if it be better for a Man to have a Millstone hung about his Neck, and be cast into the midst of the Sea, than to offend ONE of Christ's little ones, as *Mat. xxiii. 6.* How will such be able to account at Christ's Tribunal, who rend His Church in pieces, and offend so MANY of His Ministers and other fer-

ious

ious Christians among us, that can't in *Conscience* come into the propos'd Subscription?

Having thus finish'd my *Remarks* upon your Arguments. I shall now proceed briefly to offer you some few more *Objections* against your *Overture*.

1. I think a *Subscription* to any human Composition as the Test of our Orthodoxy, is to make it the *Standard* of our Faith; and thereby to give it the Honour only due to the *Word of God*. I take a *Subscription* to imply a solemn Declaration to the World, that we believe the Articles subscribed to be the Mind and Will of God, free of all Error and Mistake. A *Subscription* in any laxer Sence, is to open a Door to all the Unfincerity in the World. Every one of what-ever Sentiments, may subscribe with his own Reserves; and so the *Subscription* instead of a Test of Orthodoxy becomes a Door to Hypocrisy, as I have hinted above. If we subscribe in this Sence, we give to fallible Men, all the Honour due to the Inspired Pen-men of the Sacred Pages; and ascribe that Perfection to human Compositions, which no Book but the *Bible*, ever had a just Claim to.

You offer several Things to obviate this Objection, which I shall briefly consider.

1 You tell us (p. 14.) that the Matter is of Divine Authority, being contain'd in the *Word of God*; and the Words tho' compos'd by fallible Men, being agreeable to the Divine Matter, tho' falling short of that Perfection that the Scripture

justly

justly claims, must of Necessity have the Divine Approbation. But how do you know that the *Assemblies Confession* &c. is contain'd in the *Word of God*? You indeed, and we that agree with you in the same *Creed* do thus interpret the word of God. But I challenge you to bring one Word to evince your Certainty, that our Interpretations are agreeable to the Meaning of the *Holy Ghost*; and have the Divine Approbation. that any *Sect* under Heaven may n't bring in the same Case Suppose I was now debating with a *Roman-Catholic*, against Subscription to the Decrees of the *Council of Trent*. He answers my Objection in the very Words that you do; and tells me that *the Matter is of Divine Authority* &c. what shall I say to him? Shall I tell him that they subvert the Scriptures, and that there are no such Doctrines contain'd in them? Won't he retort the Answer and tell me, that the Argument is the quite contrary Way, that it is *we* who wrest the Scriptures to our own Damnation, and *they* are sure that they are in the Right, they being infallible, which we don't pretend to be. Or if you please instead of a *Roman-Catholic* suppose a *Quaker* thus disputing; and in the strongest Terms affirming me, that he has the Witnes in himself from the Illuminations of Gods Holy Spirit, that *Barclays Apology* is contain'd in the Word of God. Now I demand of you, whether we must subscribe these mention'd Books upon this Evidence. If not, what Assurance can you give me, that you

are

are in the Right and they not; You are sure of it, so are they of the contrary. You compare Scripture with Scripture, and find your System agreeable to the whole Scope of the Gospel. They'll not be behind hand with you in the same Pretence. You suppose yours the most rational System, most worthy of God, and most agreeable to the Circumstances of fallen Man. They apply the same Lofty Attributes to their *Creed*, be it in it self never so inconsistent. If you reply to all this, that *Truth* has certainly from the Nature of Things, the Advantage of *Error*. This is true; but then this also may be urg'd with as good Advantage, by any other Persuasion. You have therefore no Refuge left, but a recourse to *Infallibility*, which is what I'm now objecting against.

As for your long Discourse about the Necessity of our subscribing our own Words; and not the Words of Scripture, I have but this short and general Answer to make. Tho' I cant possibly see into your Methods of Reasoning; nor draw your Conclusion from your Premises, yet if it be granted, that our *Confessions* must be in our *own Words*, and not in the Words of Scripture, I don't see how it will follow, that we must therefore subscribe them. Can't we have Confessions in our own Words, without the Imposition of *Subscription*, Can there be no other Use made of Confessions, but as an exclusive Test of Orthodoxy? Certainly there may. May not Confessions be useful for Instruction to the ignorant, for

Quick-

Quickning to the careless and secure, for a Help to our Devotions; and even for a public Declaration of our Religious Sentiments. And therefore until you have prov'd a necessary Connection between Composing, and *Imposing* or *Subscribing* a Confession, you say Nothing to the Purpose.

2 I can't see how we can impose *Subscriptions* upon others, without Invading His *Soalty*, who is sole King and Lawgiver unto His Church; and practicing our selves, what we so loudly complain of in others. To this you answer (p. 14.) *For a Church to oblige their Members to receive, embrace, acknowledge, subscribe or practice, any thing that is not founded upon the Word of God, is indeed Tyranny and Persecution &c.* If you mean by this, that it's Tyranny and Persecution for a Church to impose what they *acknowledge* is not founded on the Word of God. I believe it will be difficult to find any Church upon Earth guilty of such Impositions. And if every Church may impose what they *suppose* to be founded on the Word of God, even the *Church of Rome* must be acquitted from all unwarrantable Impositions. For they as resolutely claim a Scripture Foundation for all their Articles of Faith, as we can do. And why han't they as good Authority to impose their Interpretation of Gods Word, as we have to impose ours? Is not the Imposition of such Interpretations as properly a *Legislative* Faculty in us, as it is in them? Are we sure we are in the Right? Don't they

they profess the same Certainty? Do we impose our Creeds in Honour to God and His Truth? They have the same Pretence. Do we appoint *Subscription* to keep out Error and Heresy? They are acted by the same Views. Do we impose them by ministerial Authority committed to us by Christ. And have not every other Society the same Claim? But the Difficulty is, I find Nothing in the *Divine Oracles* by which either *they*, or *we* can support this Claim; but the direct contrary. *Iam. iv. 12. Col. ii. 22. 23. Rom. xiv. c. 9. Mat. xxviii. 18. &c.* And to deal freely with you, I have no worse Opinion of the *Assemblies Confession*, for the 2 *Art.* in the *xx. Chap.* "God alone is Lord of the Conscience; and hath left it free from the Doctrines and Commandments of Men which are in any thing contrary to His Word, or **BESIDE** it, in Matters of Faith or Worship. So that to believe such Doctrines, or obey such Commands out of Conscience, is to betray true Liberty of Conscience; and the requiring a implicate Faith, and an absolute and blind Obedience, is to destroy Liberty of Conscience and Reason also." And I must tell you that to *subscribe* this Article, and *impose* the rest, appears to me the most glaring Contradiction.

If you reply to this, that there is no *Imposition* design'd. I answer, what is then design'd? Is not *Subscription* propos'd as the Test of Orthodoxy, as the Terms of Membership with the Synod;

Synod; and of Admission to the Ministry? And if this be't *Imposition* with a Witness, with all the Penalties annex'd that we are capable of, I don't know what *Imposition* means.

You indeed argue, that according to our recorded and common Way of Speaking, 'tis hard to say, whether Subscribers or Non-subscribers would be obliged to separate. But pray Sir, what Occasion that either should be obliged to separate? What Law or what Reason is there for these Injunctions, that must of course produce a Separation? Why mayn't every one enjoy his own Opinion, and act according to his Conscience in this Matter, without a Separation? Or why mayn't some middle Way be thought on, that will every Way answer the End propos'd; and give Satisfaction to both Parties? For my own Part, I can cheerfully come into any Method for securing our Faith, that I can apprehend consistent with Liberty of Conscience, and Christian Freedom.

You subjoin, if one Party think it an *Imposition* to be required to subscribe, as a Term or Condition of our continuing united as formerly. The other Party upon as good grounds, may esteem it an *Imposition*, to be oblig'd to continue in the Neglect of what in Conscience they conceive to be (as the Case now stands) a necessary Duty incumbent upon them. I answer. Whoever think it their Duty; shall have my free Vote, to subscribe with both Hands if they please: But I hope none of you will imagine your selves bound

bound in Conscience, to Lord it over your Brethren.
 3 If I subscribe, or concur in imposing *Subscription* on others, I must either do it as a necessary Duty; or as a Thing in it self indifferent. Not the former, until you can find some Scripture that requires *Subscription* to human Compoſures; and even to this under Debate in particular. in Contradistinction to all others elsewhere impos'd. which I am sure you can never do. If it be in it self indifferent who gave the Synod Authority to take away the Liberty, with which Christ has made us free? We ought to leave Things as Christ has left 'em; And on the one Hand, not to bring our selves under the Power of any 1 Cor. vi. 12. Nor on the other Hand, to destroy them with our Meat, for whom Christ dyed Rom. xiv. 15.

4 I know not how to concur, in making this *Subscription* the Terms of our admitting *Candidates* to the Ministry, lest I keep them out of Christs Vineyard, whom He has sent to labour there; and qualified for glorious service in His Church. Such as these may (as I do) scruple *Subscription* to any human Compoſure; Or they may be doubtful as to some Particulars in the impos'd *Formula*, and yet be sound in the Faith. Or they may not satisfactorily understand some of the *credenda* thus enjoind; and yet have very promising Capacity for the Sacred Service. If all qualified *Candidates* cannot understand the whole of that large *Confession*, it's just Matter of shame to me, who have be'n a Minister between twenty and thirty Years; and yet don't understand several Things in it, as I shall be ready to give a Particular Account when desir'd. I'm afraid therefore, that most of our *Candidates* must subscribe blindfold, or be kept out of the Ministry from invincible Necessity. And is this to receive one another, as Christ also receiv'd us to the Glory of God Rom. xv. 7? Is this charitably to bear with Mens differing Sentiments in Matters not essential, as the Apostle requires, Phil. iii. 15. 16?

5. Suppose me if you please a weak Brother, in my Conscientious Opposition to *Subscription*. Will my Weakness and Mistake in this Matter, justify the Synod in

in excluding me their Fellowship, in exposing me as a Heretic to the Jealousies and Censures of my Congregation; and in doing what they can, to render my Ministry useless for the future? Is this agreeable to the Apostles Rule, Rom. xiv. 1. If this must be the Case, a weak Brother is in a sad Dilemma. Either he must subscribe against his Conscience, contrary to Rom. xiv. 22 or else be persecuted for his Weakness. If you answer to this, that weak Ministers are no waies qualified for the Ministry. I reply. Tho' I could wish that there were fewer in this awful Truth, who deserve that general Character: yet he must be a strong Man indeed, that has no particular Weakness. The greatest Men have discovered themselves contemptibly weak in some particular Opinions. and this may be either your Case, or mine, in this great Affair under Debate, for ought either of us know to the contrary. Others (and not we our selves) may be Judges of that Matter.

I think what I have already offer'd abundantly sufficient to dispose you of your unjust Claim to imposing upon other Mens Consciences. I therefore omit many other Arguments, that might have been brought to the same Purpose.

Upon the whole the more I have a higher Opinion of the Assemblies Condemnation of this Book of that kind extant in the World, yet I don't think it perfect. I know it to be the Dictates of sensible Men, and I know of no Law either of Religion or Reason, that obliges me to subscribe.

Thus Sir you have form'd your Sentiments upon this Matter, if you can't approve 'em. I shall not insist upon your Subscribing 'em. I only require of you, the same Charity and Pardon for me, that I have for you, which is but Justice due to

Your Brother

Elizabeth Towne,
April 10. 1729.

and Servant

JONATHAN DICKINSON.