

special
collections
DOUGLAS
LIBRARY



QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
AT KINGSTON

KINGSTON ONTARIO CANADA

The Criterion :
O R,
TOUCHSTONE,
By which to judge of the
PRINCIPLES
O F
High and Low-Church.

In a Letter to a Friend.

*Thy Power is the beginning of Righteousness, and
because thou art the Lord of all, it maketh thee
to be gracious unto all. Wild, 12. 16.*

L O N D O N :

Printed and are to be Sold by *B. Bragge*
at the *Raven* in *Pater-noster-Row*. 1710.

Price One Penny.

C17
Frant

AC 74.1710.F72
The University of

TOUCHSTONE

By which to judge of the

PRINCIPLES

OF

WISDOM AND LAW

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND

By the Author of the Touchstone of the
Principles of the Law, &c.

LONDON

Printed and sold by S. B. ...
at the Sign of the ...

Printed by ...

S I R,

I Have often observ'd, whenever the Subject of Conversation has turn'd upon the Principles in Controversy, between *High* and *Low Church*, either relating to Religion or Politicks, your Wish has been for a *Criterion* between the Two Parties, by which, even the meanest Capacity of either, may satisfy himself, which makes the nearest approaches to Truth, seeing both have their formidable Champions, and both pretend to be possess'd of it. This Wish of yours has procur'd you the trouble of this Letter, containing my Test, by which to judge of the Truth of most Opinions, the belief, or disbelief of which are, by the Learned Contenders for them, charg'd upon the Conscience. How far it may be of Service to others I know not.

I have this short Soliloquy: If I am in Conscience oblig'd to the Belief or Practice of any thing, the Obligation must arise from its being requir'd, or not requir'd: or, which is all one, its being agreeable, or disagreeable to the Will of the Deity; and seeing the Champions on both side the Question, assert, That God, both by Reason and Revelation, is on their side, (which I know is impossible to be true) What then must I do, to take my Mind from this *Equilibrium*? I presently have recourse to my Idea of God, and whatever Doctrine I find inconsistent with that Idea, such a Doctrine must, to me, be false. Being got thus far, I have nothing more to do, but to consider, with all the Exactness I can, the natural Consequences arising from either side of the Question; and that which seems most consistent with my Notion of the Deity, must command my Assent.

Pop/c Burmester
 May 1990 16/26

My Idea of God then suppose is, That he is a Self-existent eternal Spirit, of infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness, Truth, and Justice. Any Doctrine or Opinion, destructive of any part of this Idea, must necessarily appear to me false; as long as I retain this Notion of the Deity, even tho' it be pretended to be drawn from what God himself has Reveal'd.

For Instance, As long as I believe that God is a Spirit, I can never believe that he has Eyes, Ears, and Hands, tho' the Scripture, literally taken, declare he has. What must I do then? Must I not believe what God reveals? Yes, but still with regard to the Rule, by putting such a Meaning to the Expressions, as are consistent with the Notion I have of a Spirit, and then I shall presently quit the Letter, and consider, That there are such Ways of Speaking and Writing, as are call'd Figures, Metaphors, and the like, many times made use of for the better convenience of Truths to uncultivated Understandings; by which the Eye of God changeth into his Omnipresence, and his Arm into his Omnipotence; so that now I can firmly believe what is Reveal'd, consistently with my Idea of God's being a Spirit.

To instance further, in that mighty controverted Doctrine of Predestination. Which way can I, an unlearned Man, altogether unacquainted with the Languages in which the Original Scriptures were wrote, and thereby incapable of knowing whether what one Learned Doctor tells me, that such is the true meaning of the Text in the Original, and therefore 'tis evident that Predestination, in his sence, *viz.* The absolute Decree of God from all Eternity to save some particular Persons and damn others, is true. Another, equally Learned, tells me, That they who put such a sence did not well attend to the drift and design
of

of the Writer, and that the Text he so much insists upon, is to be explain'd by a parallel one, That such a Word is never us'd throughout the Scriptures in that sence; and that there are several express Declarations therein of God, to the contrary. Now when I have heard both these Learned Dogmatists, I know no easier Way of settling my Mind, than having recourse to my Rule; and that makes it evident, that as long as I believe God to be a Being of infinite Justice and Goodness, 'tis impossible to believe absolute Election and Reprobation, a Doctrine altogether inconsistent with those two Attributes; for indeed (as a most excellent Divine has well observ'd) 'tis impossible to speak worse of the Devil; and therefore, sure, no way reconcilable with the Idea of God.

Having now, briefly, by two Instances, illustrated the use of my Rule, I shall now, more largely, apply it to the Controversy I first mention'd. In order to which, it will be necessary that I first set down the Principles of the Two Parties, in relation to Religion and Government; and the Consequences or Tendency of those Principles; and then it will be no difficult Matter to shew, which are most consistent with our Idea of God, supposing my Readers Idea to be the same with mine.

To begin then with the *Tories* or *High-Church*. They believe, That the Prince deriveth his Right of Government from God immediately, and therefore to God only is accountable for any of his Actions, which, if never so extravagant, must meet with no opposition from any of his Subjects. That Conscience is likewise subject to his absolute Authority, so far as to be oblig'd to uniformity in Worship; for support of which they bring several Texts of Scripture.

The *Whigs*, or *Low-Church* hold, That God hath

made Man such a Creature as naturally to dispose him for Society: That the Inconveniences of Society, without Government, are so many, that it quickly brings them to enter into such Pacts as they think will best serve the End of all Political Societies, *viz.* The better securing the Lives and Properties of every Individual. And thus may Government (abstractedly consider'd, they say) be said to be of Divine Right; but the particular Modes or Species of Government are left wholly to Mankind. That this must necessarily be the Origin of Political Authority, they think is evident from all Mens being born equal. That God has the sole Authority over Conscience, and therefore 'tis the natural Right of all Mankind to have the Liberty of Worshipping God in that Way which they think most acceptable to him, in order to their better securing their everlasting Happiness. The evidence of which they think so clear, from the Light of Nature, that nothing but the Authority of Scripture could any way oppose; therefore they have shewn, that those Texts brought to favour the contrary Opinions are fairly capable of another sense; and that there was no design in the Scripture Writers to settle the Form of Government, or the Power of Governors.

I know, Sir, you must agree, that I have not fix'd a wrong Creed upon either of the Parties; but if any should make a doubt, I could easily bring abundant Testimonies from the Writings of both.

Having now set down their Principles, I shall proceed with as strict Impartiality in deducing the Consequences.

Those of the first are, That the Supreme Magistrate in every Monarchy (for with them there are no Legal Republicks) is absolute: From hence it must needs be, that there can't be a limited Monarchy, but all are exactly equally Despotick; that

that is, That the Subjects of every Monarch in the World were made solely for his Use and Pleasure here, as much as my Dog or Horse are for mine. If it be said, That the Magistrate must take care so to act towards those thus subjected to his Will, as not to endanger his own future State of Happiness. 'Tis answer'd, So ought the Thief and Murderer; but yet, I believe, it will readily be agreed by both Parties, that there need some further restraint upon them, to prevent their committing such Crimes, than what will arise from their own Reflexions; and therefore, till it can be shewn, that Kings are not subject to the like Passions and Irregularities as their Subjects; or, that all Histories agree, that there never was a wicked Prince, nothing can be more reasonable, than that they should be restrain'd from doing Ill as well as the rest of Mankind, unless God has forbid any such Restraint, which is what is to be consider'd at the Conclusion.

Further, Hereby the Subject is excluded from all manner of Property in relation to the Prince; for if I am his Property, all that I can call mine, must be his likewise.

As to Religious Matters, the Consequences are evidently these: That they must make true Religion very precarious, and that more regard ought to be had to Uniformity than Sincerity in Religious Worship.

That true Religion will be rendred hereby very precarious, is evident from the uncertainty of Princes being of like Minds in Religion, who succeed each other on the Throne: And if they should differ, then what was true Religion in the Last Reign, is false in This, and all the Subjects oblig'd to Change, in conformity to their Prince, at least in appearance. If it be ask'd, Whoever asserted any such thing? 'tis answer'd, That 'tis

the natural consequence of that Principle, That Conscience is under the Authority of the Magistrate, so far as to oblige to Uniformity. If it be ask'd further, Who held such a Principle? The Answer will be, Bishop *Parker*, in his *Ecclesiastical Polity*, and every one else who are against Liberty of Conscience, which, Dr. *Sacheverel* says, can't be vindicated but only by *Falsc-brethren*.

So that when good *K. Cha. II.* (if he had made a right use of the Power the Gentlemen of these Principles had invested him with) had brought us all to be good Sons and Daughters of the *Church of England*, at least in appearance; and we had somettme walk'd in this direct Pathway to Heaven, e're he goes before us, and is succeeded by *K. J.* who being no less zealous for the future Happiness of his Subjects obliges them to a Conformity with his Religion, as being a much safer Way than what they were in before. And tho' some of his Subjects, pursuant to their Principles, presently turn into the Royal-Road, yet many of them may be of a different Opinion, and may think themselves to be very safe, as they are, and upon it beg leave to take care of their own Souls, and that they may be permitted to continue in their old Way, which they doubt not is the right, because they find those Marks in it, which those, who infallibly knew, told them they must meet with. This seems to be a reasonable Request, but the King tells them, they are a parcel of Bigots, and easy to be impos'd upon, he knows better; That they are so far from being in the direct Road to Happiness, that it leads to Misery; and therefore having such a Kindness for them, he'll make them sensible of it in *Smithfield*, if they don't immediarely turn out. This Answer to their Petition can do no less than produce Conviction in the Mind, but if there should be any so obstinate,

as to go about to make out, that Mankind has a Natural Right of pursuing those Methods they think most effectual to procure eternal Happiness, such an one can be only a *False-Brother*.

Having thus given an Instance, only to illustrate the Consequence of their Principles, I shall now do them the Justice to mention what they have from Reason, to say in Vindication of them, so far as is consistent with my Design, which is not to discuss the Question in Controversy, but only just to mention what is asserted by both Parties, without entering far into the detail of the Arguments; so that having both in view, we may the easier perceive which have the greatest Conformity to the Idea abovemention'd.

Not only the Scriptures, they say, but Reason tells us, that we ought not, upon any Account whatever, to resist the Commands of the Sovereign, because 'tis impossible for the Sovereign to be Subject in any case: 'tis a contradiction in the very Terms. Again, If they may in any Case be resisted, as in Tyranny or the like, Who shall judge whether his Actions are such as ought to be oppos'd? If every one is left to judge for himself, what a pretty Condition are the Prince and the Government in, when every ignorant Fellow shall set himself up for a Judge in State Affairs; and if they be not manag'd according to the Model in his wise Brain, then he finds Fault, cries out of Male-administration, procures Abettors, and, by their Assistance, endeavour to overturn the Government, and bring it into those Miseries that attend Anarchy and Confusion.

The Reasons they urge to oblige all to Uniformity in Worship are, That Mankind are in nothing so zealous, as for their Religious Opinions, and that makes them very desirous of getting the Power of Government into their Hands, that they
may

may have theirs established. And this Zeal likewise puts them upon Contests in vindication of the Truth of their several Opinions; which Contests, and the desire of Power, must very much endanger the State; and therefore it were much better that all should be of one Mind, and then there would be no Foundation for Party-Feuds and Animosities, those Seed-Plots of Rebellion. And then again, there is nothing requir'd in order to Conformity with the Church of *England*, that is in itself sinful, and therefore to dissent is only Obstinacy.

The Answers to these several Reasons will appear in the Consequences of the *Low-Church* or *Whig* Principles. The first is, That if the Origin of Government be, as they say, then 'tis plain, That the End of all Political Societies is the good of the Community; so that in entring into it they can't be conceiv'd to invest any Person or Persons with such Power as to render their Lives and Properties less safe than in the State of Nature; and therefore that there ought to be fix'd Rules in every such Society, call'd Laws, by which every one may know how to conduct himself; so that if he be not guilty of the Breach of any of these Laws, he can't, by any Power in such a Society, be punish'd; If he shou'd, it wou'd be an Arbitrary Tyrannical Act, 'tis laying aside the common Measure of every Individual, even from the supream Magistrate to the meanest Subject; and if often repeated will give a general Alarm, every one will be apt to think it may be his own Case next, and therefore 'twill put those Subjects who are of greatest Power upon uniting their Force, to try if they can't stem this Torrent of Oppression, and bring the Society to its old State of Safety, by re-establishing this common Measure.

From

From hence, say the *Whigs*, 'tis easy to reconcile Sovereignty and Subjection in the same Person or Persons; for He, or They may be invested with the supream Executive Power, tho' not Legislative, because in the first, he has the same Director with every one of his Subjects, *viz.* The Law, and consequently, that in all well-regulated Governments both these Powers ought not to be solely in one Hand. They think it no less easy to answer that common Question of the other Party, Who shall be judge of the Actions of Sovereigns? The *Whigs* say, The People. Say you so, they reply, the Prince have a fine time of it, if the Mob, the conceited Mechanick, shall judge of Reasons of State, and approve or condemn his Actions; this must needs tend to the Safety of a State, when every illiterate Fellow may, without the Checks of Conscience, endeavour to overturn it.

This Objection to their Scheme, the *Whigs* think so weak that they suppose (in favour of those who use it) 'tis only the plausibility of it have made it been urg'd so often, in hopes of gaining an inconsiderate Reader; for is it not clear, that every one must have this Right of judging the Actions of others relating to himself? If a Lord do's commit any act that is injurious to his Plebean Neighbour, is not he a proper judge whether his Fences be broke, or his Servant abus'd, because the Person committing the Offence was so far above him in Quality: Indeed if there be no real Injury done, but the Fellow will be fanciful, and suppose there is, let him take his Remedy at Law, and see what he will get by it; Let him see, that finding Fault without a Cause is the direct Road to Ruin. And then he needs no checks of Conscience to keep him from such Contests. But the Prince is still in a much safer con-

condition. For if any Subject tho' never so great think himself injur'd by his Princé, and perhaps really is so, yet if it be his Case alone, and that 'tis very rarely that the Prince deviate from the common Rule, the Law, He may attempt to relieve himself in vain, He'll find but few Assistants, unless amongst his dependants; so that if he proceed to Hostilities, it must inavoidably terminate in his Ruin; a sufficient Consideration to keep him within bounds, how much less then are the Inferior ones able to effect any Revolutions in Government, so that 'tis evident this Argument can be made use of only as a Childish-Bugbear, and can't have any force but only with such Understandings.

This Scheme then is so far from rendring the Prince unsafe upon his Throne, that it has a direct tendency to the contrary, because he has his safety always in his own Power, he has nothing to do but to pursue the Publick Good, (the end for which he possesseth that Post) and it is impossible for any Rebellious Attempts ever to succeed. For when those at Helm pursue the publick Welfare, it is so generally seen, and felt, that none but Mad-Children would rise up against such truly nursing Parents, and it would be hard to suppose the Majority under such a fatal Lunacy.

In answer to the Political Reasons urg'd against Liberty of Conscience, the Whigs say, that Evil is not to be done that Good may arise from it.

That it is an Evil to punish Persons for not acting contrary to their Consciences, no doubt can be made, tho' what is requir'd to be done be really in itself Innocent, and Lawful, for 'tis not what the Act is in itself, nor what sence the Imposer have of it, but what he who is to perform it thinks of it, is what is to be minded: For otherwise, the *Roman-Catholicks* have the same Plea

Plea against all the Reform'd, that 'tis only their Humour, and Obstinacy, which makes them separate from their Safe-Church, for they require nothing sinful, nothing but what 'tis their Duty to comply with.

And whereas it is further pleaded by the other side; That the Zeal of Sects for their several Religions, make them push at Power, every one being desirous of getting it into their own hands, in order to Establish their own Way, to the endangering the Publick Peace. They think this Argument, if rightly pursu'd, would plead strongly in behalf (of what 'tis brought against) Liberty of Conscience. Because if every Man have so great a Zeal for his own Way, 'tis because he thinks it the safest to Heaven, which makes him desirous that he, nor his Posterity, may never be forc'd out of it. Which thought indeed makes him desire Power in the Hands of his Party, but 'tis only that it may be establish'd, so as no other may have the Power of persecuting him for his Religious Opinions. And therefore were Liberty of Conscience so settl'd, as that one Party never would oppress, or persecute another, but all equally share in the publick Advantages, what occasion would there then be to contend for Power, when all are equally safe in what hands soever it be? Such an amiable Toleration, would then be so far from endangering the State, that nothing would so strongly Cement us against a Foreign Enemy, which would be the only one we could there have, or need to fear.

Having thus, my Friend, with all the Brevity I could, set down the Principles, the Consequences, and the Reasons of both Parties, I have nothing more to do (in order to adhere to one side) but to consider which set of Principles is most likely to be authorized by God.

In order to which, let us consider, whether it be consistent with the Idea of our Infinitely Good Being, who has declar'd that his Mercy is over all his Works, to order that all Mankind (except some few endow'd with no natural Advantages above the rest) should be in a State of perpetual Slavery both in Body and Mind, and this for no real advantage to them either here or hereafter.

Or whether, on the other hand, there appear not greater Consistency, that he should allow Mankind perfect Liberty, as far as is consistent with the Safety of Government, Liberty being a Blessing so valuable, so deeply implanted in our Natures, that nothing (as long as we have a Being) can eradicate it. The very Advocates for Slavery, plead as strongly as any for it, in their Actions, nothing but their Writings appear against it. Is it not the voice of Nature as well as Revelation (and therefore doubly a Command of that God who gives himself the Title of Love,) That we should do that to every one, as we would be done by? And is it consistent with this Rule, for one to persecute another, only for worshipping God that way he thinks most acceptable? is that a Crime worthy to be punish'd by the Magistrate? What notion must such Men have of God, that think he is better pleas'd with the Modes than the Esteem of Religion, with Conformity than Morality, with praying for Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, than in Acts of Kindness, and Humanity towards them. And tho' he lets his Rain descend, and his Sun shine upon the Unjust as well as Just, yet he would not be imitated in this universal Benificence.

And pursuant to their several Principles, you find one Party continually declaiming against Moderation, full of uncharitable Thoughts of their Neighbours, representing all that differ from them,

as Hypocrites, that make pretences to Religion only as a Cloak, that they may the better bring about their Mischievous Designs; and all they who come not up to the same pitch of violence, with themselves are proclaim'd to be *False-Brethren*. Whereas the Other are always in their Writings pleading for Moderation, Charity, Humanity and universal Justice, without regard to Parties. That all impartially partake of the Benefits of that Government under which they live, as long as they behave themselves in such Manner as the Laws require.

Now, which of these makes the nearest Approaches to Justice and Goodness, could not hold me in Suspence, but quickly determin'd me to the Latter. If this Method do not carry the same Evidence with it to your obliging Neighbour, with whom, you say, you have often some little Disputes on this Subject; if it makes no Alterations in his Thoughts (as I almost despair it should) considering with whom he has so often convers'd, without being a Convert, assure him, that I shall not have him in less Esteem, but shall always desire, that neither He, nor any one else, may ever be compel'd to deny or suffer for that, which he at the same time firmly believes.

I am,

S I R,

*Your real Friend and
humble Servant*

