

The controversy concerning
LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE
IN
MATTERS OF RELIGION
BY
JOHN COTTON

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The Controversy concerning
Liberty of Conscience
IN
matters of Religion,

TRULY STATED, AND DISTINCTLY AND PLAINLY HANDLED,
BY MR JOHN COTTON OF BOSTON IN NEW ENGLAND.
BY WAY OF ANSWER TO SOME ARGUMENTS TO THE CONTRARY SENT
UNTO HIM.

WHEREIN YOU HAVE AGAINST ALL CAVILS OF
TURBULENT SPIRITS, CLEARLY MANIFESTED, WHEREIN LIBERTY OF
CONSCIENCE IN MATTERS OF RELIGION OUGHT TO BE PERMITTED,
AND IN WHAT CASES IT OUGHT NOT, BY THE SAID MR COTTON
LONDON, PRINTED FOR *THOMAS BANKS*, AND ARE TO BE SOLD AT HIS
SHOP IN **BLACK-FRYERS ON THE TOP OF BRID-WELL STAIRES, 1646.**

I
*Scriptures and reasons written long since by a witness of Jesus Christ close prisoner
in Newgate, against persecution in cause of conscience, and sent some while since
to Mr Cotton, by a friend, desiring to be instructed, whether persecution for
conscience be not against the Doctrine of Christ. The Scripture and Reasons are
these, which were alleged against persecution.*

1. Because Christ commands that the Tares and Wheat (which some understand are those that walk in the Truth, and those that walk in lies), should be let alone in the world, and not plucked up till the Harvest, which is the end of the World, *Matthew 13:30,38, &c.*

2. Because Christ commandeth, *Matthew 15:14*, that they that are blind (as some interpret led on in false religion, and are offended with him for teaching true religion) should be let alone, referring their punishment to their falling into the ditch.

3. Because Christ reproveth his Disciples, *Luke 9:54*, who would have had fire come down from Heaven to devour those *Samaritans* which

would not receive him, in these words, *Ye know not of what spirit ye are of, the Son is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.*

4. Because *Paul* the Apostle of our Lord teacheth, 2 *Timothy* 3:24, That the servant of the Lord must not strive, but must be gentle towards all men, suffering the evil men, instructing them with meekness, that are contrary minded, proving if God at any time will give them repentance that they may acknowledge the truth and come to amendment out of the snare of the Devil, &c.

5. According to these commandments the holy Prophets foretold, that when the Law of *Moses* (concerning Worship) should cease and Christ's Kingdom be established, *Isaiah* 2:4, *Micah* 4:3-4, that they should break their swords into mattocks, and their Spears into scythes, And *Isaiah* 11:9, *Then shall none hurt or destroy in all the*

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for they come to seek the faithful, the faithful are them that are sought: the wicked are the besiegers, the faithful are the besieged.

Mountains of my Holiness, &c. And when he came the same he taught and preached as before, and so did his Disciples after him, *for the Weapons of his warfare are not carnal*, saith the Apostle, 2 *Corinthians* 10:4. And he charges his Disciples straitly, that his Disciples should be so far from persecuting those that should not be of their Religion, that when they were persecuted they should pray, (*Matthew* 5) when they were cursed they should bless, &c.

And the reason seems to be because they who are now Tares may hereafter become Wheat; they who now are blind may hereafter see, they that now resist him may hereafter receive him; they that are now in the Devils snare by adverseness from the truth, may hereafter come to repentance, they who are now persecutors and blasphemers (as Paul was) may in time become faithful as he did, they that are Idolaters as the Corinthians once were (1 *Corinthians* 6:9), may hereafter become true worshippers as they; and they that are now no people of God nor under mercy (as the Saints sometimes were) 1 *Peter* 2:20, may hereafter become the people of God and obtain mercy as they. Some come not till the ii hour, *Matthew* 10:16, if those that come not till the last hour should be destroyed because they come not at the first, then should they never come but be prevented: Thus for the Argument from Scripture.

But 2. Because this persecution for cause of conscience is against the profession and practices of famous Princes.

First, You may please to consider the Speech of King *James*, in his Majesties Speech to Parliament, 1609. He saith, *It is a sure rule in Divinity, that God never loves to plant his Church by violence and bloodshed.* And in his Highness's Apology, page 4, speaking of such papists who took the oath, thus: *I have good proof, that I intended no persecution against them for conscience sake, but only desired to be secured for civil disobedience, which for conscience sake they are bound to perform.* And page 60, speaking of Blackwell (the Arch-Priest) His Majesty saith; *It was never my intention to lay anything to the said Arch-Priest's charge (as I have never done to any for cause of conscience).* And in his Highness exposition on revelation 20, printed 1588, and after 1603. His Majesty writeth thus:

Sixthly, *The compassing of the Saints and the besieging of the beloved City declareth unto us a certain note of a false Church, to be persecution*

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Secondly, the saying of *Stephen*, king of Poland: I am a king of men, not of consciences, a Commander of bodies, not of souls.

So the king of Bohemia writeth thus: *And notwithstanding the success of the later times (wherein sundry opinions have been hatched about the subject of Religion) may make one clearly discern with his eye, and as it were to touch with his finger, that according to the verity of holy Scriptures, and a Maxim heretofore told and maintained by the ancient Doctors of the Church; That men's consciences ought in no sort to be violated, urged, or constrained. And whensoever men have attempted anything by this violent course, whether openly or by secret means, the issue hath been pernicious, and the cause of great and wonderful innovations in the principalest and mightiest Kingdoms and Countries of all Christendom.*

And further, his majesty saith: *So that once more we do profess before God and the whole World, that from this time forward we are firmly resolved not to persecute or molest, or suffer to be persecuted or molested, any person whomsoever for matter of Religion, no not they that profess themselves to be of the Romish Church, neither to trouble or disturb them in the exercise of their religion, so they live conformable to the Laws of the States, &c.*

And for the practice of this, where is persecution for cause of conscience, except in *England* and where popery reigns, and there neither in all places, as appeareth by *France*, *Poland*, and other places, nay, it is not practised amongst the Heathens that acknowledge not the true God, as the *Turk*, *Persian*, and others.

3. Because persecution for cause of conscience is condemned by ancient and latter writers, yea even Papists themselves.

Hilary against *Auxentius*, saith thus: The Christian Church doth not persecute, but is persecuted, and lamentable it is to see the great folly of these times, and to sigh at the foolish opinion of this world, in that men think by human aid to help God, and neither worldly pomp and power to undertake to defend the Christian church.

I ask of you bishops, what help used the Apostles in the preaching of the Gospel? With the aid of what power did they preach Christ, and convert the heathen from their Idolatry to

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God: when they were in prisons, and lay in chains, did they praise and give thanks to God, for any dignities, graces, and favours received from the Court? or do you think that *Paul* went about with regal Attendants, or Kingly Authority to gather and establish the church of Christ? sought he protection from *Nero*, *Vespasian*?

The apostles wrought with their hands for their own maintenance, travelling by land and water, from Town to City, to preach Christ; yea, the more they were forbidden, the more they taught and preached Christ. But now alas human help must assist and protect the faith, the same against the Arians: The Church which formerly by enduring misery and imprisonment, was known to be a true Church, doth now terrify others by imprisonment, banishment, and misery, and boasteth that she is highly esteemed of the world, when as the true Church cannot but be hated of the same.

Tertullian ad Scapulam, it agreeth both with human reason, and natural equity, that every man worship God uncompelled, and believe what he will, for it neither hurteth nor profiteth any one another, man's Religion, and belief: neither beseemeth it any Religion to compel another to be of their Religion, which willingly and freely should be embraced, and not by constraint; for as much as the offerings were required of those that freely and with good will offered, and not from the contrary.

Jerome impæmi. Iib. 4. in Jeremiam. Heresy must be cut off with the sword of the Spirit, let us strike through with the arrows of the Spirit all Sons and Disciples of misled Heretics: that is, with testimonies of holy Scriptures, the slaughter of Heretics is by the Word of God.

Brentius upon 1 *Corinthians* 3, No man hath power to make or give laws to Christians, whereby to bind their consciences, for willingly, freely,

and uncompelled, with a ready desire and cheerful mind, must those that come, run unto Christ.

Luther, in his Book of the Civil Magistrate saith, The Laws of the Civil Magistrate's government extend no further than over the body or goods, and to that which is external, for over the soul God will not suffer any to rule, only he himself will rule there. Wherefore, whosoever doth undertake to give Laws

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to the Souls and Consciences of men, he usurpeth that Government himself, which appertaines unto God, &c. Therefore, upon 1 *Kings* 5. In the building of the temple there was no found of Iron heard, to signify that Christ will have in his church a free and a willing people, not compelled and constrained by Laws and Statutes.

Again, he saith upon *Luke* 22, It is not the true Catholic Church which is defended by the secular arm, or human power, but the false and feigned Church, which although it carries the name of a Church, yet it denies the power thereof.

Again upon *Psalms* 17, he saith, for the true church of Christ knoweth not *Brachium seculare*, which the Bishops now-a-days chiefly use. Again, in *Postil. Dom. 1. post. Epiph.* he saith, Let not Christians be commanded, but exhorted; for he that willingly will not do that whereunto he is friendly exhorted, he is no Christian, wherefore they that compel those that are not willing, show thereby that they are not Christian preachers, but worldly beadles.

Again, upon 1 *Peter* 3, he saith, If the civil Magistrate shall command me thus and thus, I should answer him after this manner. Lord, or Sir, look you to your worldly or civil government, your power extends not so far as to command anything in God's kingdom. Therefore herein I may not hear you: For if you cannot bear it, that any should usurp authority where you have to command, how do you think that God should suffer you to thrust him from his seat, and to seat yourself therein?

Lastly, the papists, the inventors of persecution, in a wicked book of theirs, set forth in King *James* his reign, thus; Moreover, the means which Almighty God appointed his Officers to use in the conversion of Kingdoms and Nations and people, was humility, patience, charity, saying; *Behold, I send you as Sheep in the midst of Wolves, Matthew* 10:16. He did not say, *behold, I send you as wolves among sheep*, to kill, imprison, spoil and devour those unto whom they were sent.

Again, verse 17, he saith, They to whom I send you, will deliver you unto Councils, and in their Synagogues they will scourge you; and to presidents and to Kings shall ye be led for my sake: He doth not say; Them whom I send, shall deliver the people (whom you ought to convert) unto Councils, and put them in prisons, and lead them to presidents

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and Tribunal seats, and make their Religion Felony and Treason.

Again he saith, verse 32, when ye enter into a house, salute it, saying; Peace be unto this house, he doth not say you shall send Pursuivants to ransack or spoil the house.

Again he saith, *John 10, The good Pastor giveth his life for his sheep, the Thief cometh not but to steal, kill and destroy*, he doth not say, the thief giveth his life for his sheep, and the good Pastor cometh not but to steal, kill and destroy.

So that we holding our peace, our adversaries themselves speak for us, or rather for the truth.

But it is objected, that it would be a prejudice to the Common-wealth, to permit liberty of conscience.

We answer, it is no prejudice to the Common-wealth if liberty of conscience were suffered to such as fear God indeed, as is or will be manifest. *Abraham* abode among the *Canaanites* a long time, yet contrary to them in matters of Religion, *Genesis 13:7* and *16:13*. Again, he sojourned in *Gerar*, and King *Abimelech* gave him leave to abide in his Land, *Genesis 20:21–22*. *Isaac* dwelt in the same land, yet contrary in Religion, *Genesis 26*. *Jacob* lived 20 years in one house with his uncle *Laban*, yet differed in Religion, *Genesis 31*. The people of *Israel* were about 430 years in that infamous Land of *Aegypt*, and afterwards 70 years in *Babylon*, all which time they differed in Religion from those States, *Exodus 12* and *2 Chronicles 36*. Come to the time of Christ, where *Israel* was under the *Romans*, where lived divers Sects of Religion, as *Herodians*, *Scribes and Pharisees*, *Sadducees*, and *Libertines*, *Thudeans* and *Samaritans*, besides the common Religion of the Jews, Christ, and his Apostles. All which differed from the common Religion of the State, which was like the worship of *Diana*, which almost the whole world worshipped, *Acts 19:20*.

All these lived under the government of *Cæsar*, being nothing hurtful unto the Common-wealth, giving unto Cæsar that which are his: And for their Religion and consciences towards God he left them to themselves, as having no Dominion over their souls and consciences. And when the

enemies of the truth raised up any tumults, the wisdom of the Magistrate most wisely appeased them, *Acts* 18:14 and 19:35.

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The answer of Mr John Cotton, of Boston, in New-England, to the aforesaid Arguments against persecution for cause of conscience.

The question which you put is, whether persecution for cause of conscience be not against the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings?

Now, by persecution for cause of conscience, I conceive you mean, either for professing some point of doctrine which you believe in conscience to be a truth, or for practising some work which in conscience you believe to be a Religious duty.

Now in points of Doctrine some are fundamental, without right belief whereof a man cannot be saved; others are circumstantial, or less principal, wherein men may differ in judgment without prejudice of salvation on either part. In like sort, in points of practice, some concern the weightier duties of the Law, as, what God we worship, and with what kind of worship; whether such, as if it be right, Fellowship with God is held; if corrupt, Fellowship with him is lost.

Again, in points of Doctrine and Worship less principal, either they are held forth in a meek and peavenble way, though the thing be erroneous or unlawful, or they are held forth with such arrogance and impetuousness, as tendeth and reacheth (even of itself) to the disturbance of civil peace.

Finally, let me add this one distinction more; when we are persecuted for conscience sake, it is either for conscience rightly informed, or for erroneous and blind conscience. These things premised, I would lay down mine answer to the question in certain conclusions.

First, It is not lawful to persecute any for conscience sake rightly informed, for in persecuting such, Christ himself is persecuted in them, *Acts* 9:4.

Secondly, for an erroneous and blind conscience (even in fundamental and weighty points) it is not lawful to persecute any, until after admonition once or twice, and so the Apostle directeth, *Titus* 2:10, and giveth the reason, that in fundamental and principal points of Doctrine, or Worship, the Word of God is so clear, that he cannot but be convinced in conscience of the dangerous error of his way, after once or twice admonition wisely and faithfully dispensed. And then if any one persist, it is not out of

conscience, but against his conscience, as the Apostle saith, verse 11, he is subverted, and sinneth, being

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condemned of himself, *viz*, of his own conscience: So that if such a man after such admonition, shall still persist in the error of his way, and be therefore punished, he is not persecuted for cause of conscience, but for sinning against his own conscience.

Thirdly, in things of lesser moment, whether points of Doctrine or Worship, if a man hold them forth in a spirit of Christian meekness and love (though with zeal and constancy) he is not to be persecuted, but tolerated, till God may be pleased to manifest his truth to him, *Philippians* 3:17, *Romans* 14:1-4.

Fourthly, but if a man hold forth, or profess any error or false way, with a boisterous and arrogant spirit, to the disturbance of civil peace, he may justly be punished according to the quality and measure of the disturbance caused by him.

Now let us consider of your reasons or objections to the contrary.

1. *Objection.* Your first head of objections is taken from the scripture, because Christ commandeth *to let alone the tares and wheat to grow together unto the harvest, Matthew* 13:30, &c.

Answer. Tares are not briars and thorns, but partly hypocrites, like unto the godly, but indeed carnal, as the tares are like the wheat, but are not wheat: or partly such corrupt doctrines or practices as are indeed unsound, but yet such as come very near the truth (as tares do to the wheat), and so near that good men may be taken with them, and so the persons in whom they grow, cannot be rooted out, but good will be rooted up with them. And in such a case Christ calleth for toleration, not for penal prosecution, according to the third conclusion.

2. *Objection.* In *Matthew* 15:14, Christ commandeth his Disciples *to let the blind alone till they fall into the ditch*, therefore he would have their punishment deferred till their final destruction.

Answer. He there speaketh not to public Officers, whether in church or Common-wealth, but to his private Disciples, concerning the Pharisees, over whom they had no power; And the command he giveth to let them alone, is spoken in regard of troubling themselves, or regarding the offence which they took at the wholesome Doctrine of the Gospel, as who should say, though they be offended at this saying of mine, yet do not you fear their fear, nor be troubled at their offence which they take at my Doctrine,

not out of sound judgment, but out of their blindness. But this maketh nothing to the cause in hand.

3. *Objection* In *Luke* 9:54, Christ reproveth his Disciples, who would

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have had fire come down from heaven, to consume the Samaritans, who refused to receive him.

And *Paul* teacheth *Timothy*, not to strive, but to be gentle towards all men, suffering evil patiently.

Answer. Both these are directions to ministers of the Gospel, how to deal (not with obstinate offenders in the Church that sin against conscience, but) either with men without, as the Samaritans were, and many unconverted Christians in Crete, whom *Titus* (as an Evangelist) was to seek to convert, or at best with some Jews or Gentiles in the Church, who though carnal, yet were not convinced of the error of their way: And it is true, it became not the Spirit of the Gospel to convert Aliens to the faith of Christ (such as the Samaritans were) by fire and brimstone, nor to deal harshly in public Ministry, or private conference with all such contrary-minded men, as either had not yet entered into Church-fellowship, or if they had yet did hitherto sin of ignorance, not against conscience: But neither of both these texts do hinder the Ministers of the Gospel to proceed in a Church-way against Church-members, when they become scandalous offenders, either in life or doctrine, much less do they speak at all to civil Magistrates.

4. *Objection.* From the prediction of the Prophets who foretold that *carnal weapons should cease in the days of the Gospel*, *Isaiah* 2:4, and 11:9; *Micah* 4:3-4. And the apostle professeth, The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, *2 Corinthians* 10:4, and Christ is so far from persecuting those that would not be of his Religion, that he chargeth his Disciples when they are persecuted themselves they should pray, and when they are cursed they should bless: the reason whereof, seemeth to be, that they who are now persecutors, and wicked persecutors, may become true Disciples and converts.

Answer. Those predictions in the prophets do only show, first, with what kind of weapons he will subdue the Nations to the obedience of the faith of the Gospel, not by fire and sword, and weapons of war, but by the power of his Word and Spirit, which no man doubteth of. Secondly, those predictions of the prophets, show what the meek and peaceable temper will be of all the true converts to Christianity, not Lions or

Leopards, &c., not cruel oppressors, nor malignant opposers, nor biters of one another: but doth not forbid to drive ravenous wolves from the sheepfold, and to restrain them from devouring the sheep of Christ.

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And when *Paul* saith, *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual*, he denieth not civil weapons of Justice to the civil magistrate, but only to Church-Officers: and yet the weapons of such Officers he acknowledgeth to be such, as though they be spiritual, yet are ready to take vengeance of all disobedience, 2 *Corinthians* 9:6, which hath reference (amongst other Ordinances) to the censure of the Church against scandalous offenders.

When Christ commandeth his Disciples to bless them that curse them, and persecute them, he giveth not therein a rule to public Officers, either in Church or Common-wealth, to suffer notorious sinners, either in life or doctrine, to pass away with a blessing, but to private Christians to suffer persecution patiently, yea and to pray for their persecutors.

Again, Christ it is true, would have his Disciples to be far from persecuting (for that is a sinful oppression of men) for righteousness sake; but that hindereth not, but that he would have them execute upon all disobedience the judgment and vengeance required in the Word, 2 *Corinthians* 10:6; *Romans* 13:4. Fourthly, though it be true that wicked persons now may by the grace of God, become true Disciples, and Converts, yet we may not do evil that good may come thereof, and evil it would be to tolerate notorious evil doers, whether seducing teachers, or scandalous livers. Christ had something against the Angel of the Church of Pergamos, for tolerating them that held the Doctrine of *Balaam*, and against the Church of Thyatira for tolerating *Jezebel* to teach and seduce, *Revelation* 2:14,20.

Your second head of reasons is taken from the profession and practice of famous Princes, King *James*, *Stephen* of *Poland*, King of *Bohemia*. Whereunto a treble answer may briefly be returned.

1. We willingly acknowledge that none is to be persecuted at all, no more than they may be oppressed for righteousness sake.

Again, we acknowledge that none is to be punished for his conscience, though misinformed as hath been said, unless his error be fundamental, or seditiously and turbulently promoted, and that after due conviction of his conscience, that it may appear he is not punished for his conscience, but for sinning against his conscience.

Furthermore, we acknowledge none to be constrained to believe or profess the true Religion till he be convinced in judgment of the

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truth of it; but yet restrained he may from blaspheming the truth, and from seducing any unto pernicious errors.

2. We answer, what Princes profess or practise, is not a rule of conscience, they many times tolerate that in point of State policy, which cannot justly be tolerated in point of true Christianity.

Again, Princes many times tolerate offenders out of very necessity, when the offenders are either too many or too mighty for them to punish; in which respect *David* tolerated *Joab* and his murders, but against his will.

3. We answer, that for those three Princes named by you, who tolerated Religion, we can name you more and greater, who have not tolerated Heretics and Schismatics, notwithstanding their pretence of conscience: For example, *Constantine* the Great, at the request of the general Council of Nice, banished *Arius*, with some of his fellows, *sozem. lib. 1. Eccles. Hist. cap. 29. 20* The same *Constantine* made a severe law against the Donatists, and the like proceedings against them were used by *Valentinian*, *Gratian*, and *Theodosius*, as *Augustine* reporteth in Epist. 166. Only *Julian* the Apostate granted liberty to Heretics, as well as unto Pagans, that he might by tolerating all weeds to grow, choke the vitals of Christianity, which was also the practice and sin of *Valens* the Arian.

Queen *Elizabeth* as famous for her Government as any of the former, it is well known what Laws she made and executed against Papists: yea, and King *James* (one of your own witnesses) though he was slow in proceeding against Papists (as you say) for conscience sake, yet you are not ignorant how severely and sharply he punished those whom the malignant world calleth puritans, men of more conscience and better faith than he tolerated.

I come now to your third and last argument taken from the judgment of ancient and later writers, yea, even of Papists themselves, who have condemned persecution for conscience sake.

You begin with *Hilary*, whose testimony we might admit without any prejudice to the truth; for it is true the Christian church doth not persecute, but is persecuted, but to excommunicate a Heretic is not to persecute, that is it is not to punish an innocent, but a culpable and damnable person,

and that not for conscience, but for persisting in error against light of conscience as hereof it hath been convinced.

It is true also what he saith, that the Apostles did, neither may we

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propagate Christian religion by the sword; but if Pagans cannot be won by the Word, they are not to be compelled by the Sword: Nevertheless this hindereth not, but if they or any others should blaspheme the true God and his true Religion, they ought not to be severely punished, and no less do they deserve who seduce from the truth to damnable Heresy or Idolatry.

Your next writer (which is *Tertullian*), speaketh to the same purpose in the place alleged by you, his intent is only to restrain *Scapula*, the Roman Governor of *Africa*, from the persecution of Christians, for not offering sacrifice to their Gods; and for that end fetcheth an argument from the law of natural equity, not to compel any to any Religion, but to permit them either to believe willingly, or not to believe at all; which we acknowledge, and accordingly permit the Indians to continue in their unbelief: Nevertheless. it will not therefore be lawful openly to tolerate the worship of Devils or Idols; or the seduction of any from the truth

When *Tertullian* saith, Another man's Religion neither hurteth nor profiteth any: It must be understood of private worship, and Religion professed in private, otherwise a false Religion professed by the Members of a Church, or by such as have given their names to Christ, will be the ruin and desolation of the Church, as appeareth by the threats of Christ to the Churches of *Asia*, *Revelation 2*.

Your next Author, *Jerome*, crosseth not the truth, nor advantageth your cause, for we grant what he saith, that heresy must be cut of with the sword of the Spirit: But this hindereth not, but that being so cut down, if the Heretic will still persist in his heresy to the seduction of others, he may be cut off by the civil sword, to prevent the perdition of others. And that to be *Jerome's* meaning appears by his note upon that of the Apostle [a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump] therefore saith he, a spark, as soon as it appeareth, is to be extinguished, and the leaven to be removed from the rest of the dough, rotten pieces of flesh are to be cut off, and a scabbed beast is to be driven from the sheep-fold, lest the whole house, mass of dough, body and flock, be set on fire with the spark, be soured with the leaven, be putrified with the rotten flesh, perish by the scabbed beast.⁷

Brentius (whom you quote next) speaketh not to your cause, we willingly grant him and you, that man hath no power to make Laws to bind conscience; but this hindereth not, but that men may see

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the Laws of God observed, which do bind conscience.

The like answer may be returned to *Luther*, whom you next allege.

First, The government of the evil Magistrate reacheth no further than over the bodies and goods of their subjects, not over their souls, and therefore they may not undertake to give laws to the souls and consciences of men.

Secondly, That the Church of Christ doth not use the Arms of secular power to compel men to the faith, or profession of the truth, for this is to be done by spiritual weapons, whereby Christians are to be exhorted, not compelled. But this hindreth not that Christians sinning against light of faith and conscience, may justly be censured by the Church by excommunication, and by the civil sword also, in case they shall corrupt others to the perdition of their souls.

As for the testimony of the Popish book, we weigh it not, as knowing (whatsoever they speak for toleration of Religion, where themselves are under the hatches) when they come to sit at Sterne, they judge and practise quite contrary, as both their writing and judicial proceedings have testified to the world these many years.

To shut up this argument from testimony of writers; It is well-known that *Augustine* retracted this opinion of yours, which in his younger times he had held, but after in riper age reversed and refuted, appears in his second book of retractions, *cap. 5*, and in his Epistles 48:50, and in his first book against *Parmenianus*, *cap. 17*, he showeth that if the Donatists were punished by death, they were justly punished, and in his 11. Tractate upon *John*, they murther saith he souls, and themselves are afflicted in body, they put men to everlasting death, and yet they complain when themselves are put to suffer temporal death.

Optatus in his third book, justifieth *Macharius*, who had put some Heretics to death, that he had done no more herein, than what *Moses*, *Phineas*, and *Elias* had done before him.

Bernard in his 66 sermon in *Cantica*, out of doubt (saith he) it is better they should be restrained by the sword who beareth not the sword in vain, than they should be suffered to draw many others into their error, for he is the Minister of God for wrath to every evil doer.

Calvin's judgement is well known, who procured the death of

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Michael Servetus for pertinency in heresy, and defended his fact by a book written of that Argument.

Beza also a writ a book *de Hæreticis morte plectendis*, that Heretics are to be punished with death, *Arlius* likewise took the like course about the death of *Valentius Gentilia*, and justified the Magistrates proceeding against him, in a history written of that Argument.

Finally, you come to answer an objection, that it is no prejudice to the Common-wealth if liberty of conscience were suffered to such as fear God indeed, which you prove by the example of the Patriarchs and others.

But we readily grant you liberty of conscience is to be granted to men that fear God indeed, as knowing they will not persist in heresy, or turbulent schism, when they are convinced in conscience of the sinfulness thereof.

But the question is whether an Heretic after once or twice admonition (and so after conviction) or any other scandalous or heinous offender, may be tolerated either in the Church without excommunication, or in the Common-wealth, without such punishment as may preserve others, from dangerous and damnable infection.

Thus much I thought needful to be spoken, for avoiding the grounds of your Error.

I forbear adding reasons to justify the contrary, because you may find that done to your hand, in a Treatise sent to some of the brethren late of Salem, who doubted as you do.

The Lord Jesus lead you by a spirit of truth, in all truth.

JOHN COTTON

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