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**T H E**  
**UNREASONABLENESS**

Of the CHARGE of

**I M P O S I T I O N**

Exhibited against Several



**DISSENTING MINISTERS**

In and About **L O N D O N**,

**CONSIDER'D.**

**AND THE**  
**DIFFERENCE** between **CREED-MAKING**  
as practis'd in *former Ages*, and Their  
*late Conduct* in declaring their **FAITH**  
in the *Doctrine* of the **BLESSED TRINITY**,  
Stated and Argued.

By **THOMAS RIDGLEY.**

**L O N D O N:**

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**THE** Desire of *Liberty* is so rooted in the Nature of Man, that to whisper a Word against it, or plead for *Imposition*, is to proclaim War, not against particular Persons, but the whole World. And, which is more, 'tis a kind of

Violence offer'd to our selves ; an Attempt to establish by Argument, what we would not have put in Practice, unless standing at the greatest distance from it. It is therefore one of the most injurious Characters, a Stain to the Reputation, and Bar to the Usefulness of any one, to have such a Charge brought in against him, if it obtain Credit in the World. To call a Man an *Imposer* and *Persecutor*, and load him with all the Chain of Calumny, which a fruitful Invention sharpen'd with Resentment is dispos'd to join with it, is to maintain a Charge that had need be well supported, lest the Accusers render themselves liable to the same Confuse, and give Occasion to the injur'd Party to turn their Weapons on themselves. There is at this Day a Charge of this Nature advanced against many of us, which, whether supported by just Arguments, or whether there be

not sufficient ground of Vindicating our selves from it, I leave the World to judge ; submitting my Reasoning on this Subject, in the following Papers, to those who are most disinterested in the Controversy, and without being prepossess'd with Prejudice, are dispos'd to judge impartially about this Matter.

THE particular Instances of *Imposition*, refer to *Creed-making*, irregular Proceeding in *Synods*, especially in imposing a *Rule of Faith*, and herein casting a Reflection on the *Divine Oracles*, and some have carried the Matter yet further, and charg'd us with setting up a *Court of Inquisition*, by which they wou'd have the People understand something like those in *Italy*, and *Spain* ; and lest any should think the Character, they are pleas'd to compliment us with, is misapplied, they take care to inform them withal that we are *Papists* ; and to prevent any Mistake, because some *Papists* are better humour'd than others, they represent us as having Instruments of Cruelty in our Hands, and give out that we thirst after Blood.

It will doubtless be inquir'd, what we have done to deserve *such a Censure* ; and tho' some in their *Writings and Discourses* are dispos'd to blacken, without pretending to make good their Charge, and produce *Raillery* instead of *Argument* : Yet when we hear *Ministers* complain in a very moving Way of *Injuries, Persecutions, and Impositions*, from their *Brethren*, this will oblige us to inquire what are the Reasons, on which this Complaint is grounded ; for to be sure the World will expect to hear something very shocking and criminal. For my own part, I should be glad to know, as far as I am concern'd in the Charge, if there be any Reason, which I could never yet see, to accuse my self, and so far as this is convincing, to give any reasonable Satisfaction ; but at present I must be

be excus'd, if I cannot have as bad thoughts of my self in this particular Instance as they have of me. The whole Foundation of this heavy Charge, so far as I can learn, is, our professing our *Faith* in the *Doctrine of the Trinity* in an *Assembly of Ministers*, by subscribing the *first Article of the Church of England*, and the *Answers to the Fifth and Sixth Questions in the Assemblies Catechism*; unless you will add a Circumstance or two, viz. our desiring that it might be put to the *Vote*, whether we should do it with the Approbation of that *Assembly*, or when we had done it, our requesting that our Brethren would concur with us herein. If there was any Exorbitancy of *Passion* or reflecting Expressions us'd by particular Persons on either Side, this comes not into our present Argument; for that will not give Occasion to such an Accusation against the whole Body. And if there be any thing else on which 'tis grounded, I profess my self ready to receive any Conviction; but till then, shall take leave to consider the Invalidity of the Charge. And since we read much of *Creed-making* and *Synods*, we shall first concede, that there have been many Instances of *Imposition* in *former Ages*, from whence I suppose the Hint is taken, which are not justifiable; and shall consider how far the *Imposition* of *Creeds* is disclaimed by us; and how readily we join with our Brethren in reflecting on those who justly deserve this Character: And then we shall consider how far those *venerable Bodies*, might have been the Composers of *Creeds*, and yet not expos'd themselves to the Reproach of succeeding Ages. This will lead us further to inquire, whether some Endeavours may not be us'd to know what Men believe in Religious Matters, which are not liable to the Imputation of *Persecution*, setting up an *Inquisition*, or pretending to give Laws to other Men's Consciences; and to prove that the making a

*Profession*

*Profession* of our *Faith*, cannot be reasonably subjected to the like Charge, tho' there may be Ground to doubt at the same time, whether many whom we otherwise value, will come into the same Measures with us.

To begin with the Head of *Imposition* as practis'd by *Synods*, contain'd in the Charge of *Creed-making*. It is allow'd by all that the Mind of Man is not to be compell'd to believe a Truth by any other Methods, but such as are agreeable to its Nature, *i. e.* by presenting to it sufficient Evidence; so that violent Methods us'd to propagate an Opinion, have not had a direct Tendency to answer that End, how much soever they may have given a Check to the outward Actions. For tho' our visible Conduct is subjected to humane Laws and Censures, yet as to what concerns our private Sentiments, we have to do with none but the Heart-searching God, and how far these Sentiments ought to be discover'd to *others*, will be consider'd under a *following Head*. But we must suppose, that every one who thinks consistently, has a Scheme of Doctrines, or a Set of Notions about religious Matters, as well as Things of a less important Nature. It follows from hence, that some Methods which have been us'd by the *Ancient Church*, especially in the *Fourth Century* by venerable Assemblies, or Bodies of Men distinguish'd by the awful Name of *Synods*, whether *Provincial* or *Oecumenical*, with a Design to propagate the *Faith*, have been attended with Infringement on the Liberty of Christians, as well as pav'd the Way to endless *Jealousies* and *Persecution*, under the plausible Pretence of *Zeal for Truth*. The first *Synod* that we read of in Scripture was the *Sanhedrim*, which how much soever it retain'd its Integrity for some Ages, when endow'd with an extraordinary *Affatus* of the *Divine Spirit*; yet at last it degenerated



generated into the most *contemptible Assembly* in the World, and having miserably prostituted the Faith, added to its Guilt the vile Crime of managing the most unjust Prosecution of the *Lord of Glory*, cover'd with the specious Pretence of expressing their Zeal against *Blasphemy*, which they falsely charg'd him with.

AFTERWARDS, in the *first Age* of Christianity there was a *Synod* held by the *Apostles* and *Elders*, together with the *whole Multitude* of the Church at *Jerusalem*, mentioned *Acts xv.* which had greater Prerogatives than any since that Time could pretend to. This Assembly met together to determine that important Question which gave great Disturbance to the Progress of Christianity, *viz.* Whether the converted *Jews* might continue their wonted Subjection to the Law of *Moses*, distinguishing themselves from other Nations by Circumcision, which some thought not only expedient but necessary to Salvation. They were not conven'd by the Civil Magistrate, who at that Time was not in the Interest of Christianity, nor by any one of the Apostles as pretending to a Superiority over the rest: But they assembled themselves at the Request of *Paul* and *Barnabas* on the one Side, and *some* on the other, who asserted a Necessity of adhering to the *Jewish Rites* in Dispute. And after Debate and Reasoning, a perfect Harmony being obtain'd, the Determination of this Question is express'd in Words peculiar to that Dispensation, *Ver. 28. It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, &c.* Which Words were afterwards made use of as a Preface to the Decrees of Synods conven'd by the *Bishop of Rome*, to give Countenance to *Impositions* when there was just Ground to complain of them. But in this *Assembly* there were several present who had an extraordinary Inspiration from the Holy Ghost, which probably might *then* give Occasion to this Mode  
of

of Speaking. Tho' if there is only a Reference had to the Case of *Cornelius* in these Words, intimating, that the *Holy Ghost* had, not long since, determin'd this Controversy by falling on those who were uncircumcised, as some suppose.\*: Yet we have herein an Exception to the general Charge brought against such-like Assemblies, for they determin'd Matters without the least Shew of *Imposition*. It is not much to our present Purpose to enquire, whether the Apostles held a *Synod* immediately before they separated to determine by Lot into what Parts of the World they should dispose of themselves; for the Account we have thereof is taken from *Spurious Writings*, which have nothing more to recommend 'em than the Name of Antiquity: And the *Creed*, which is commonly attributed to the *Apostles*, said to be compos'd in this *Synod*, deserves that Character, rather as containing a Summary of the Doctrine deliver'd by them, than from their being the Compilers thereof in the Form in which it stands. This has been sufficiently prov'd by some who are well vers'd in the Writings of Antiquity †: But if the *Apostles* were the genuine Authors thereof, they would not be aspers'd with the infamous Character of *Creed-Makers* in the Sense of some late Writers, because they who express themselves with the greatest Warmth against *Creeds*, can subscribe it, whereas in Reality the Character is no otherwise opprobrious than as it carries in it the Mark of *Imposition*; for to be an *Imposer*, if I apprehend the Meaning of these Gentlemen, does not so much consist in compiling a *Creed*, as in inserting those Things in it which they cannot comply with.

AFTER the Apostles Time, till the Empire became Christian in the Reign of *Constantine the Great*, as there

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\* Vid. *Whitby in Loc.*

† *Hist. of the Apostles Creed.*

Du Pin's *Hist. of the Can. of the Old and New Test.* Vol. II. Cap. 6. § 9.

was no external Pomp and Grandeur attending the Worship of God, and the Utmost that was enjoy'd was a Toleration from the Civil Government, and that only at some Times, as an Instance of the Clemency and Justice of the Prince who sat upon the Throne; it cannot be suppos'd they were in a Capacity, or had an Inclination to exercise *Tyranny* over their Brethren. It is true, many *Heresies* sprang up during this *Interval*, which gave Occasion to those who were faithful to bear a Testimony to the Truth, which they did in the Discharge of their Ministerial Function; and tho' many of them drew up *Creeds*, yet these were no more than a Declaration of their *own Faith*, or an Abstract of some of the main Principles of Christianity, containing the Substance of what they largely insisted on in their Sermons, and so were a *Guide* to, rather than an *Imposition* on the Consciences of their Hearers. There were very few *Synods* \* held, especially if compar'd with following *Ages*: The first *Heresies* being confuted without any such *Authority*. The most considerable were two held at *Antioch*, the former circa *Ann.* 264. the latter *Ann.* 270. with a Design to fortify the Faithful against the *Heresy* of *Paul* of *Samosata* who was then living, and tho' in some of these *Synods* Debates were not managed without much of Human Frailty, yet the Foundation of the Prejudice which many entertain against such *Assemblies*, is suppos'd to take its principal Rise from the Management of such-like Bodies of Men in the following *Age*.

If therefore we proceed to the *fourth Century*, when the *Church* had the *Civil Government* on its Side, we have flagrant Instances of *Imposition* practis'd by whatsoever Side was uppermost. When

Vid. Du Pin's *Ecc. Hist.* Cent. 3. p. 172.

*Arius* first began to propagate his Opinions, and had perverted many of the City of *Alexandria*, partly by the Subtilty of his Reasoning, for which he is remark'd, \* and partly because *Alexander* the *Bishop* of that Place, tho' a very good Man, and zealous Assertor of Truth, had no great Talent at arguing, and therefore was run down by his Antagonist, not for want of a good Cause, but of Skill to manage it; a *General Council* was call'd by the Emperor, which met at *Nice*. This was the ready Way, tho' not design'd, to propagate the growing *Heresy*; for now *Arius* has the Honour to be taken Notice of, and thought a greater Man than ever he was before, when above three hundred *Bishops* are sent for from most Parts of the Christian World to confute him, which one *Athanasius* was sufficient to have done. This *Venerable Body* being met; after several Compliments pass'd between 'em and the Emperor, who express'd an uncommon Instance of Condescension, in that he wou'd not sit down till they had signified their Desire of having this Honour put on the Assembly by bowing their Heads†. The first Thing they enter upon, which was Foreign to the Design of their Meeting, was the bringing Charges against one another, as tho' 'twas morally impossible for so great a Body of Ministers to meet together to censure Men or Doctrines, without some private *Animosities* and *Intemperate Zeal*. But this was over-rul'd by the prudent Management of the Emperor, who order'd 'em first to burn their Letters of Accusation against one another, and then to proceed to Business.

AND now the Cause of *Arius* comes before 'em, and many warm Debates were manag'd on both

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\* *Soz. Hist. Eccl. Lib. 1. Cap. 15.*

† *Soz. Hist. Eccl. Lib. 1. Cap. 8.*

Sides, at length they agree together in a *Form of Sound Words*, expressing the contrary Truth. This could not be done without some Difficulty; for some of them instead of being dispos'd to declare against *Arius's* Scheme, were very much byass'd in Favour of it: And here the *Emperor* again interposes his good Offices for Peace, and takes his Part in making Orations in the *Council*, in which he commended those who spoke well, and by his Reasoning, as the \* *Historian* tells us, confirm'd others whose Minds were wavering, till at length he made 'em almost all unanimous, which can be reckon'd little more than a Compliment return'd to that great Man for the Notice which he took of them. But tho' his Presence might aw them into a Degree of Decency and Moderation, yet *Eusebius* his Favourite and Admirer, in this seems to attribute too much to him, especially considering that he had before this been very little conversant in *Theologic Disputes*, his Education having been till about Ten or Twelve Years before this in the *Heathen Idolatry*; and it appears, that for as many Years after, he was not thought sufficiently instructed in the Christian Faith to be admitted into Communion with the Church, not being baptiz'd before his last Sickness; And in the latter Part of his Life, 'tis certain he was too much impos'd on by *Eusebius* Bishop of *Nicomedia*, and others in the *Arian* Scheme, in so much that if they did but approve of the *Council of Nice*, which he always paid a Sacred Regard to, they might be as remote as they pleas'd in their Sentiments from the Doctrine therein declar'd.

THIS *Council* being in some Measure brought into Temper by the *Emperour's* Management proceeded to draw up a *Creed*, which takes it's Deno-

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\* *Euseb. Vit. Con. Lib. 3. Cap. 13.*

mination from it. The most offensive Term therein was *ὁμοούσιος*, which was not now first invented, but used by some before this Time, as *Eusebius* confesses in his *Epistle* to the People of *Cesarea*, in which he excuses his Conduct in agreeing to the aforesaid *Creed* \*. This Word as he and others pretend to explain it, is rendred more difficult to be understood than it was before, but doubtless the Design of its being there inserted, was to declare the *Son* to have the *same Essence* with the *Father*, without which they might assert 'em to be *one*, and yet very widely differ in the Regards they pay to 'em. A small Number of this *Synod*, made a Stand against this Word, and endeavour'd, tho' in vain, either to have it left out, or *ὁμοιούσιος* put in the Room of it, which tho' differing only in one small Letter was deem'd no less than a giving up the whole Cause. But others were allow'd to put their own Sense on it, as it is possible to make plain Words signify what Men please, and hereupon they assented to the *Creed* for fear of the Consequence of the Refusal rather than a ZEAL for Truth.

THEN follows the *imposing* and *persecuting* Part of the Management, they who refus'd to Assent to it were banish'd, as well as *Anathemas*, and *Excommunicati* n annex'd to the *Creed*. And indeed a *Creed* without the Addition of such a *Sanction* can hardly be reckon'd to come within the Verge of Imposition.

AND now the Way was open'd, what could be expected, but that when the Tables were turned, *Anathemas*, *Excommunications*, and *Banishments* should be tack'd to other *Creeds*, and that the once persecuted Party should Act the same Part on those

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\* Vid. *Soc. Hist. Eccl. Lib. I. Cap. 8.*

who before had led the Way, which they did to a considerable Degree.

THEIR first Attempt of this Nature was against *particular Persons*, for having wrought up the Emperour by Management to a Perswasion that the Difference was principally in Words, and that the *Nicene-Faith* was as much embrac'd by those who could not say the *Son* was of the *same Essence*, or *Substance* with the Father, as by others who thought themselves oblig'd to assert it. And even *Arius* himself together with many of his Followers, Dissembling their Notions, and pretending that the Flame was first kindled by the fond Humour of some unquiet Spirits of which *Athanasius* and *Eusebathius* were the principal, the Storm begins to fall upon 'em; and to add a solemn Grace to *Persecution*, three or four *Synods* were conven'd in their Turns, during the remaining Part of the Reign of *Constantine*, whose principal Business was to *Accuse*, *Condemn*, and *Excommunicate* some of their old Antagonists as they had serv'd 'em before, which is indeed a very unfair Way of disputing, especially considering that the Power of *Excommunication*, where the Merits of the Cause will justify it, belongs, according to *our Saviour's Rule*,\* to a *Church*; and from the Nature of the Thing it must belong to that particular *Society* of which the Person before was a Member, and is not subject to the arbitrary Resolves of an *Assembly of Ministers* whose Advice is not so much as desir'd by them relating thereunto. But that which rendred the Procedure more keen, and indeed formidable, was the Sentence of *Banishment* which usuall'y follow'd it, of which there were many instances of both Sides. And as for the *Nicene-Creed* which had bred all

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\* *Matth. xviii. 17.*

this ill Blood among 'em, the *Arians* indeed did not think it expedient to press the Alteration of it, or make a *New one* in that Reign, for 'twas impracticable: But in *Constantius's* Time when the Day was their own, they were so zealously Affected that Way, as tho' they resolv'd to ingross the Character of *Creed-Makers* to themselves; and they rendered themselves as formidable by their *Anathemas* as any of their *Predecessors* on the other Side had done.

I SHALL not insert the many *Arian Creeds* which a few Years produc'd, but only observe in General that some few Things in them seem'd hard to be understood, as tho' they design'd People should subscribe they knew not what. A *Specimen* of this we have in the *Creed*\* composed by the *Synod at Antioch*, A. 341. in which they call the Son not only as 'tis express'd in the *Nicene-Creed* God of God, but whole of whole, only of only, Perfect of Perfect. What is this but to darken rather than explain the *Faith* contain'd in *Scripture*? Besides we often find Things express'd in so general Terms that it was not possible to know the *Faith* of those who assented to them, as to the principal Things in Controversy about the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, and in all of 'em they either left out any Word which might signify the Son to have the same Substance with the Father, or substituted some other Word in the Room of it which plainly discovered they were of a different Opinion. Thus in the *Creed* above mention'd, after having taken notice of the Form of *Baptism* in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and pretending to explain those Words, they add that we are to understand thereby, that the Father is truly the Father, the Son truly the Son, and the Holy Ghost truly the Holy Ghost;

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\* See. I. 2. c. 10.



and that they are *Three in Person but one in Consent* which serves instead of *ἑνωσις*.

A *NOTHER Council*, \* conven'd about *Three or Four Years* after this in the *same place*, compos'd a large *Creed*, in which the *Eastern Bishops*, attempt a Vindication of themselves from the Charge of *Arianism*, which they sent to those of the *West*. In this *Creed* the Word *ἑνωσις* is studiously omitted ; but to make amends for it, many Things are said concerning the *Son*, which seem to carry a Fair shew, as tho' they ascrib'd all the *Glory* to him that is his due. Thus they confess that *he was before all Ages*, that *he was not of another Substance from that of God*, and that 'tis not safe to Assert *he had his Being* [*ἦν ἐκ ὕλης*] out of Nothing. They moreover, declare against the Opinion of *Paul of Samosata*, who held that the *Son* was by Nature a meer Man, and only a made God, and they add, which one wou'd think a sufficient Vindication from the Charge of *Arianism*, that the *Son* is true and perfect God by Nature, perfect from the Beginning, and in all Things like the Father, which is more than *ἑνωσις* or *ἑως* ; and that he subsists in like Manner as the Father doth : But when on the other Hand, they denounce an *Anathema* against those who deny that the Father begat the Son of his own Will and Pleasure, and assert that he, the Son ministr'd, i. e. was an Instrument to the Father in creating all Things, they also add, that the Father Rules over all Things, even over the Son himself, which (supposing they take it for the Son, considered in his Divine Nature, as I see no Reason to doubt but they do) favours of *Arianism*. And indeed, it is hard to determine their Faith by the Words of their own Creed, which makes it Matter of Dispute, Whether this Synod was *Arian* or not ? if they were so, it shews how easily Men may

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\* See. Hist. Eccl. Lib. 2. C. 19.

may conceal their Sentiments about important *Articles of Faith*, especially when they, as in this Case, give themselves a Liberty of speaking so inconsistently with themselves.

THERE was another *Creed* compos'd in the *Council at Sirmium*, \* in which, as in that last mention'd, many Truths are advanc'd, which seem to contradict the *Arian Scheme*, as that the *Son does not Exist* *ἐκ ἑωυτου*, that he is not another *Substance from the Father*, and that his *Deity underwent no Corruption, Passion, Change or Diminution*, and that those Words in *Gen. i.* *Let us make Man* were spoke by the *Father* to the *Son*, and not by the *Father* in the *plural Number*, and that it was not the *Father*, but the *Son* who appear'd to *Abraham*, *Gen. xviii.* And when 'tis said the *Lord rain'd fire on Sodom from the Lord*, 'tis not meant the *Lord* rain'd it from himself, but from the *Father*; and so tenacious are they of this Exposition of these Scriptures, that they *Anathematize* those who take them in a contrary Sense.

BUT notwithstanding this Semblance of truth they deal forth their *Anathemas*, as plentifully against those who don't fall in with 'em in many *Arian Errors*, particularly, against any who assert that the *Son did not minister to the Father in creating all Things*; they also maintain'd that the *Son is not to be plac'd in the same Degree with the Father, but is inferior to him, viz. as God*, and that he does not sit at his *Father's right Hand of himself*, speaking still of him as God, but in pursuance of a *Command given him to sit there*: And when they speak of the *Son as uncreated*, as tho' they design'd herein to make an *Excursion from the Arian Scheme*, there is something added, which notwithstanding deter-

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\* *Sec. Hist. Eccl. Lib. 2 C. 30.*

mines 'em at the same time to be in it, when they say, *whoever shall assert that the Son is like other Creatures, let him be Anathema.* And tho', in *one* part of their Creed, they allow the Son to have been *before all Ages*; yet they denounce an *Anathema* in another part of it, against those who say that he is *unborn* or *without beginning*; supposing, that to assert the Father and Son both to be *without Beginning*, is to infer that there are *two Gods*; adding also, that tho' *the Son is the Head and Beginning of all Things*, yet *God the Father is his Head*, speaking of him as God, and that *all Things are refer'd by the Son to one, viz. the Father who is without Beginning.* There was also another Creed, composed at *Sirmium*, in which they expressly forbid the Use of the Word *ὁὐκ* or *οὐκ* *ἔστι*, &c. in explaining the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, as being offensive and *unscriptural Terms*, and assert that the Father is greater than the Son in *Honour* and *Divinity*, pretending that to be the Sense of the Text, wherein our Saviour says, *my Father is greater than I.*

THERE is another Creed mention'd by *Socrates*,\* which is the *Ninth* he reckons up in his Account after that publish'd at *Nice*; and as one tired with the Task he had gone through, he passes this general Censure on them, as containing a *Labyrinth of Exp. sitions of Faith*, which are so obscure and doubtful, and often contradictory to one another, as well as deviating from the Faith which was before receiv'd, that they do in Effect explain it away. There is nothing remarkable in this Creed which is not contain'd in those before mention'd, unless that when they had forbid the Use of the Word *ὁὐκ* in this Controversy, as giv-

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\* Hist. Eccl. Lib. 2. Cap. 41.

ing Offence, and not contain'd as they pretend in Scripture, and asserted the *Son* to be *like the Father* in that Sense which the *Scriptures teach*, which in effect is to resolve not to declare in what Sense they understand such like Scriptures, they conclude with an *Anathema* against all Doctrines contrary to those contain'd in this Composure as Heretical.

FROM what has been suggested, it appears that both Sides have been criminal as to the Matter of *Imposition*: But none so much as the *Arians*, unless we proceed in our Account a *Century* or two further, when Invasions were daily made on the *Peace and Liberty*, as well as on the *Faith* of the Church. And when *in after Ages* the *Bishop of Rome* had wrested the Sword out of the Magistrate's Hand, having usurp'd the Character of *universal Bishop* and *Head of the Church*, and made bold Pretensions to *Infalibility*, then all Things were turn'd out of Course and *Imposition* was wrote in Characters of Blood, especially in the *thirteenth Century*, when the *Court of Inquisition*, render'd it self more terrible to Mankind than the worst of *Synods* had done before. To plead such a Cause as this, is to lie open to the justest Censure, and none ought to be charg'd with an Imputation of this Nature; but on far better Grounds than any have as yet produc'd. But what will not Prejudice and Resentment attempt, when Men resolve to blacken those who have differing Sentiments from 'em in religious Matters, with Calumny for want of better Arguments!

It cannot be justly inferr'd from these *Historical Remarks* on the *Impositions* practis'd of old by *Syneds*, and contain'd in *Creeds*, that 'tis not possible to separate *Contention* from the one or *Imposition* from the other. What tho' we have reason with

Gregory

*Gregory Nazianzen* \* to complain in some particular Instances, which come within our Observation, of some Confusions and *want of Temper*, with which Debates have been manag'd in Assemblies of Ministers, and especially the *unhappy Event* thereof, when Things have been render'd worse then before : Shall we from hence conclude that all *such Assemblies* are a Grievance to Mankind ? This is to extend the Corruption of Human Nature too far, and to cast too great Contempt on the Advantage that might be expected from a *Multitude of Counsellors*. When these keep within their own Sphere, and pretend not to a Power which they know not the Original of, they may be of use to others ; for that can't be denied to an *united Body* which belongs in some Degree to every *single Member* of it. Advice may be given in Matters of *Faith* as well as *Practise*, to those over whom they don't pretend to Exercise *Authority*, much less to *Impose on*, or *Persecute*. As for *Creeeds* or *Confessions of Faith*, 'tis certainly lawful for one Man to make an express *Declaration of his Faith*, and at the same time to recommend it to the Approbation and Consent of others ; and if so, then a *Multitude* may agree together in declaring and recommending their *Faith* in like manner to the World ; and especially if they are *Ministers*, may they not give a summary Account of what they preach ? Besides to deny this is to deny all *Liberty of Conversation* about Matters of *Faith*, and will by just Consequence preclude *preaching* it self ; which, they who desire to expunge it out of the World, need only call *Creed-Making* or *Imposing* on the *Faith* of Mankind, and then the Matter is at an End.

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\* *Epist. 42. ad Procop.*

BUT I humbly conceive the *Iniquity*, or just Ground of Censure, so far as it concerns *Creed-making* consists, not meerly in a Person's making a *Declaration of his Faith* when call'd to it; for that ought to be done whatever be the Consequence thereof, as being a Debt due to Truth, and is call'd by our Saviour *confessing him before Men*: And if he may do this in a *Form* of his own Composing, I suppose it will be allow'd, that 'tis not unlawful to do it in Words compos'd by others, if so be they contain his Sense, and are agreeable to the *Holy Scriptures*, the Standard of Truth; unless the Form be *impos'd*, and even this admits of divers Qualifications taken from the *End* of imposing it, which determines his Compliance or Refusal; and so far as the Imposition appears to be unlawful, the Compliance of any one therewith will in like manner be deem'd so. Thus if the imposer, assumes to himself the least Branch of *Divine Glory*, or makes Pretensions to *Infallibility*, as tho' his composures were equally binding with Scripture, and not to be tried by it; and tho' they be call'd an *Exposition of Scripture*, yet if their *own Authority*, and not the *Justice of their Consequence* from that sacred Fountain, is suppos'd to constitute a *Rule of Faith*, this is no less disown'd by those who are call'd *Creed-makers*, than by others who put that Character upon them.

AGAIN, if testifying my Assent to a *Creed*, be made a *Condition* of my enjoying that which I have a *Natural* or *Civil* right to, it is unjustifiable, and as such disown'd by us, as rendring that *precarious* which we had a Right to from the Sovereign disposer of all Things; or renders that *conditional* which He had made an *absolute* Grant of. From hence it may be argued, that *Persecution* either by Banishment, Confiscation of Goods, or Death, and indeed an *abridging a Man*, in any other respect that

that which he has a Right to by *another Tenure*, is an high Instance of *Imposition*: And to apply this to *religious Matters*, if we suppose a *Creed* enforc'd by such a Sanction, to be no other than what we may see the highest Reason to declare our Assent to from the Evidence of Truth contain'd in it; yet while we declare our Faith, we are to express a just Abhorrence of all Methods of Violence annex'd to it. In this Case then, we must enquire what this *imposed Creed* is made a Condition of, and whether the *religious Privileges* which we had an antecedent Right to are subjected to it. As for Instance: If I have a Right thro' Divine Goodness to the Dispensation of the Gospel, and those Ordinances of Divine Service, which *our Saviour* has granted to all without Distinction, contain'd in that general Commission given in those Words, \* *Go preach the Gospel to every Creature*, my professing my Faith is not to be impos'd as a necessary Qualification for this Privilege: But if we extend *religious Matters* yet farther, and consider those Things which *all* have *not a Right to*, then the Case is vastly differing, and some Things may be charg'd with *unjust Imposition*, which, if duly consider'd, will not really appear to be so.

AND this leads us to consider that there are some Cases in which we are called to pass a Judgment on *Persons* as well as *Things*, if not, why have we so many *Characters of Persons* given in *Scripture*. It is an Advantage to *Christians* to know, that there are others in the World who have a Right to *that Character* as well as themselves; and to desire to know this, is not merely to satisfy their too curious Enquiries, but to excite that Praise which redounds to God thereby. This the Apostle *Paul* calls † *glo-*

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\* Mark xvi. 15.

† Gal. i. 24

*visiting God in him.* It will recommend the Cause of *Christianity* to consider, that there are Multitudes who adhere to it in Truth, and how light a Matter soever many make of it, I can't but rejoice in this Thought, that others embrace the same Faith with myself, and that more especially in a Time when many profess their Zeal for the contrary Error. Besides, a Man may be called to *vindicate others*, when suspected, perhaps unjustly, of turning aside from the Faith; and this End can't be attain'd, unless he knows what they believe; and how can he know it unless they make a plain intelligible and determinate *Confession* thereof? and whether this be done in his Words, or their own, or in any others drawn up to their Hands, it can't be justly reckon'd an Imposition, if the Thing be only *propos'd* as an Expedient to answer a *valuable End*: Neither can it be reckon'd a *Crime*, if upon a Refusal to comply with it, Men proceed no farther than merely to suspend their Judgment concerning those who conceal their Sentiments from them. And so far as the *Honour of God* is concern'd in its being profess'd and known, they can't be reckon'd *Imposers*, who leave them who desire in this respect to be conceal'd, to account for the Dishonour that may be brought to his Name thereby, which they themselves can by no means help.

BUT the Case of *Imposition* in religious Matters will have a considerable Turn, when we take a View of it, which we shall proceed to do, as the Act of a *Church*; this being a Society in some Respect founded in, and continued by *mutual Consent*, and govern'd by certain Laws or Rules conducive to its Well-being. No one has a Right to be admitted a Member of it, but there is a suppos'd Consent to conform to these *Laws*; therefore the Claim or Right of every one hereunto is *conditional*, and consequently 'tis in the Power of a *Church* to impose on those who



who are admitted into it, the Observance of those *fundamental Rules* which are contain'd in its Constitution, and to reject those who refuse to comply therewith. What these *Laws* are, 'tis not my present Business to consider; 'tis true there are some Things peculiar in the Government of several *religious Societies*, arising from the differing Views which Bodies of Men, as well as particular Persons have of Things; but there is one *Rule* which seems to be *universal*, viz. That the Members of each *Society* must so far agree as to Principles, Profession and Practice, that one part of the Body may not destroy the other, or advance Doctrines reflecting Dishonour on their great Lord and Founder. And as a *Church* is a *worshipping Assembly*, 'tis necessary, to prevent Confusion, that there should be an Agreement, at least in some Things relating to the *Object* of *Worship*, or those necessary Ingredients in religious Exercises, without which there can be no *true worship*, but instead of it an Affront is offer'd to the Divine Majesty; thus far Uniformity may easily be defended. But 'tis not my present Design to enquire how much farther it may be extended, especially as to Things of an indifferent Nature; tho' 'tis far from being an indifferent Thing for a *Church* to profess their giving equal, Divine Honour to the *Father, Son, and Spirit*: For this is contain'd in its original Constitution, and is included in all its religious Exercises; so that without it, they are all unacceptable to God.

It will therefore follow from hence, that it has power to demand a *Profession of Faith*, as a Term of Communion which Persons ought to comply with, or desist from desiring that Privilege; unless, contrary to all the *Laws of Society*, they would claim that without Consent, which, as was hinted, is founded in it. And to deny them this Privilege for want of their Compliance with the  
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Terms thereof can no more be call'd *Imposition*, than any one's refusal to admit another into his Family whose Temper is disagreeable to it.

If it be objected that we ought not to make *Terms of Communion* which Christ has not made, and that to assert him to be *God equal with the Father* is one of these *Terms*, I answer, this is to suppose that the *Doctrine of the Trinity* is not a *Fundamental Article of Faith*, which my design'd Brevity admits me not to enquire into. It is enough, to support my present Argument, to suppose that a *Church* believes it so, which may have the Liberty of judging for it self; and if any, who are otherwise minded, form *Societies* built on other *Principles*, we pretend not to lay any restraint on them in this Matter, tho' bound consistently with *our own*, to conclude, that such Societies would not be agreeable to the Original Pattern of *Churches* in the purest *Ages*.

THUS concerning *Conditions of Communion* impos'd on those who desire it; but the Case may probably seem somewhat differing when applied to those who are Members of a *religious Society*. For it will be said that they being *absolutely* possess'd of that Privilege, no new Terms are to be impos'd on them, for then an Account of their Faith might be demanded every Week, which would also imply a Jealousy of their Stedfastness therein.

To this it may be reply'd, that where a Condition is *Moral*, and the Privilege suspended on it, has *always* the same reference thereunto as it had at first, 'tis not the performing it *once* that Entitles to the Privilege, but a *Continuance* therein is necessary to the constant Enjoyment thereof. For 'tis not like a Person's performing some Condition *Arbitrarily* impos'd, or giving a valuable Consideration for a thing in a Way of commutative Justice

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as if he purchases an Estate, he can be laid under no other Condition, to be continu'd in the quiet Possession thereof: But when any one is admitted a Member of a *Society*, on Condition he gives some proof of his being worthy of it, *that Society* hath liberty to demand fresh Satisfaction, or to exclude him from their Number, if they have Ground to suspect that either he deceiv'd them at first, or is not the same Man that once he was. This is agreeable to the *Laws of Society* in General, and if it was not allowable in *religious Societies*, there could be no excluding any one from 'em, tho' it were for the vilest Crimes, which contain a not adhering to the Conditions on which he was at first admitted.

I know no Objection that can be made to this, unless it be, that hereby a Church incurs the Charge of *Censoriousness*, and lays a Foundation of endless *Suspensions*, which would prove destructive to it self.

To this, I answer, that my Argument, rather concerns the *common Rights* of Churches, than declares what is their frequent *Practice*. God forbid, that there should be Occasion to reduce this into daily Practice; but yet there may be just Ground of Jealousy or Suspicion with respect to particular Members, as deviating from the *Fundamental Articles of Faith*, as well as with respect to *Enormities* in Conversation: For that is equally a Breach of the Original Contract, which was the Foundation of their Union.

THIS leads me to consider the Case of *Ministers*, who preside in *religious Societies*; 'tis not to be suppos'd they are accountable to none but God, for that includes in it, a greater Instance of *Imposition* than *Creed-making* it self. And 'tis certain, that the *Overfight* of a *particular Church*, is devolved upon them by *mutual Consent*; accordingly 'tis

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well known to be the constant Practice of *Dissenting Churches*, first to hear and then to chuse their *Ministers*. And surely one great End of hearing them is, that Satisfaction may thereby be attain'd, that he, who is propos'd to their Choice, embraces that *Faith* which they have been taught, and desire still to be confirm'd in. This is the tacit Condition of his Election, and if they happen to be mistaken with relation to him, which is not impossible, since a Minister may *conceal* his Sentiments, till a convenient Opportunity offers to divulge them; Is this mistake on their side irretrievable? Or suppose he turns aside from the *Faith* he once profess'd and preach'd, is there no Remedy left? If so, how easily might all the Churches be *turn'd aside from him who call'd them to another Gospel*, or at least those among them, who are less capable of distinguishing Truth from Error. If therefore such *Ministers* are dismiss'd from Churches; there is herein no greater Instance of *Imposition* on the Church's Side, than there was before on its *Minister's* in not discovering at first what they were. But this seems not to come into the Charge of Imposition; for it would be an Infringment on the noble Principle of *Liberty*, which is maintain'd on both Sides.

AND this leads us to consider the Case of Ministers, endeavouring to *conceal* their Sense of some of the greatest Doctrines of Christianity, from the People under their immediate Care. I can't mention this Supposition without some regret; for if they don't think fit to oblige *others* with an Account of their Faith, their Call and Character, as *Ministers*, leads them to be Open and Free in explaining their Sentiments to their *People*, who have the greatest right to it of any in the World; neither can I see how they may be said to *declare the whole Counsel of God*, if they avoid to mention some of

of the most Important Doctrines of Religion; or at least leave their Hearers as much in doubt about the Sense of those *Scriptures*, in which they are contain'd as they were before. If this be any part of the Sense of that \* Advice lately given to all *whom it may Concern*. " That Ministers should " insist most on those Things, wherein Christians " are generally agreed, but more sparingly on those " in which good Men do, or may differ"; I hope, God will not give his Ministers up to such a time-serving lukewarm Spirit as to follow it. For whereas 'tis hard to determine what those Things are, so it is certain that all are not generally agreed about the *Doctrine of the Trinity*; but God forbid that it should be either pass'd over in silence, or insisted on in such a Way, as tho' we were afraid to disoblige, or 'twas an indifferent matter whether it was believed or not. What is this but to stand the Shot of an Enemy, without endeavouring self Defence? Can we reasonably suppose, if the *Arians* and *Socinians* thought it a fit time to discover their Errors, *i. e.* if the People should be prepar'd to receive them, that they would insist *more sparingly* on those Things wherein they differ from *us*; and what a Tendency such a Method of preaching would have to hasten that time, I leave the World to judge.

BUT that the State of the Question, may be consider'd in a differing View, from what has been already suggested, we will consider the Charge of deviating from the Faith, to be contain'd principally in *Suspicion*. All must grant that *Jealousies* are often founded either in *Ignorance* or *Prejudice*; therefore we must consider, whether this be only the Charge of a *single Person*, or if it be *publick* and

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\* Vid. *Authentick Account*. p. 12.

*almost Universal*; if the *former*, the Person is accountable to the *Church*, where the Matter may be issu'd if the Accuser be a Member of it, or is willing to submit to their impartial Determination whom it very much concerns. But if the Suspicion be more *publick*, then the *Church* ought to enquire into the Merits of the Cause, *not* only for their own Satisfaction, but that they may be in a Capacity either of defending the accused Party if it appears that he is herein *injur'd*, or asserting the Truth against him if the *Suspicion* is prov'd to be *just*; and this can't be effectually done, if he still resolves to be upon the Reserve, and yet complains of Imposition and Persecution, when only ask'd what his Sense is of those Doctrines on which the Charge depends. If he thinks fit to explain himself, which is all we contend for, then he will not think such a Practice without Exception the Result of a criminal Imposition: But if he refuses to give this *easy* and *reasonable Satisfaction* in such an emergent Case, he must not blame the World, if they conclude from hence, that he either has too little Regard to that which we call the Truth or else desires to be thought to believe those contrary Doctrines, which notwithstanding he accounts it a Crime to be tax'd with.

I might further add, that this Profession of our Sentiments in the great *Doctrines of Christianity*, is not only necessary for our own Vindication when Things are brought to the utmost Extremity; But it is a Duty more especially incumbent on them who have the *Overfight* of a *Church*, and are therefore highly concern'd to use all Endeavours to promote its further Advances in the Knowledge of the *Truth*. And certainly this is not a Matter of the least Importance, but I see no way how this can be secur'd, where *seeking the Law at the Priest's Mouth, who is the Messenger of the Lord, to use the Prophets*

Prophets phrase \* is call'd *Imposition*, and Compliance therewith, a being an Encourager, and Abettor thereof. In this Case therefore I humbly conceive the Cause of *Creds* may be defended, viz. when I am oblig'd to signify my *Faith* to those who have a Right to demand; and are immediately concern'd in the Knowledge of it.

BUT that we may extend this Matter beyond the Limits of a Church, and consider the Charge of *Imposition*, as brought by one *Minister* against *another*, which, is not the Case of a religious Society, but of Friends and Brethren who are altogether unarm'd, not having so much as the Power of Excommunication; how much soever this has been usurp'd by *Synods* of old, these stand on a Level, their Interests separate, and they are no farther dependent on one another than in those things in which almost all may be said to be dependent, viz. in what respects *common Justice* to their mutual Character, or the occasional Advantage of *Conversation*; the *latter* of these is not suspended on any other Condition than that which tends to make the thing it self agreeable; this has no regard to *Orthodoxy*, for there is a Duty which we owe to Men, as Men without the least Consideration of 'em, as holding the *same Faith* with our selves. And as for the *other* Condition, taken from the Obligation we are under to do Justice to the Character of our Brethren, this I confess is of large extent, in which I ought to treat 'em as carrying on the same common Interest, preaching the same Gospel, and must therefore think all Reproaches cast on them no less deserving my Resentment, than if they immediately reach'd my self. In particular, if they are charg'd with having turn'd aside from the Faith to the *Arian Heresy*, I am to

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\* *Malach. ii. 7.*

endeavour to vindicate them, supposing I know it to be a Calumny, with the same same Zeal as tho' I myself was charg'd; but this from the Nature of the thing can't be done without knowing their Sentiments.

IF it be objected, that 'tis not our immediate Concern to know the *Faith* of those who may believe what they please without involving *us* in the *Guilt* thereof.

TO this the Answer is very natural and easy, that if there was ground to suspect that any such Overture would be reckon'd officious, or give disturbance to those who are desirous to conceal themselves, or that unfriendly Complaints would be made of *Injuries*, *Imposition*, and *Persecution*, where nothing can be more remote from our Intention, or disagreeable to our Inclination; it would be expedient, and certainly more agreeable not to urge any displeasing Method, where no private Advantage could be design'd. But it is impossible to render that undone which is complain'd of, tho' one would think it not very difficult to extinguish the Flame kindled, if Men would give way to their calmer Thoughts, especially if the Matter was fairly debated; for it is strange to think that they who are Masters of the Argument on each Side, should so widely differ as that the one should imagine there is Foundation for the vilest Charge of Injuries not to be nam'd amongst Christians, while the other apprehends that there is not the least shadow of Argument to support it. I shall therefore take leave to hint a few things which I hope will be reckon'd a Vindication from the Imputation of Persecution by impartial Judges.

THE first thing to be consider'd is, that my making a *publick Declaration* of my Faith, does not *always* carry in it the Nature of *Imposition*, tho' I have Reason to conjecture that many will

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not join with me therein. This all will grant who make a Profession of Religion in general, which the greatest Part of Mankind disapprove of. Again, if this be done in an *Assembly* met together by consent, it does not so much alter the Case as that the former should be warrantable, the other a Persecution; and if the *Form* of doing it contains in it something foreign to the first Design of their Meeting, the most that can be made of it, is only a *Breach of Order*. But if any unforeseen Accident occurs which would render it necessary to desire that it may be put to the *Vote* whether the *Assembly* will make a *Profession* of their *Faith*, it can hardly be reckon'd a *Breach of Order*; nor is it an Imposition, to desire or demand that a Question of this Nature be put, since every Member has a Right to propose it, and much more a considerable Number. It is true such a Question may be put and pass'd in the Negative, and then the only Relief would be either submission or protesting; but if the Question is demanded and denied, the Laws of Society are broken: And therefore 'tis no crime as I apprehend to withdraw to make such a Declaration which I am not otherwise allow'd to do. Thus far there is no *Imposition* or *Persecution* in the least; the principal *Foundation of the Charge* consists, according to the Report of common Fame, and occasional Complaints, whether by Word or Writing, either in what is an *Injury to the Divine Majesty* as assuming the Prerogative of dealing with Conscience, in a Way peculiar to *Himself*, and setting up our *own Faith* as the *infallible Rule* and Standard of *another's*, and thereby lessening the Authority of Scripture; or else in designing to set a *Mark of Distinction* on those who are otherwise minded, that they may by this Means be known by the odious Character of *Arians*. As to the *former* of these, were there the least Colour for it;

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it would lay us under the Guilt of *usurping* the Prerogative of God, as well as *imposing* on Men. And indeed this is improv'd against us in such a Way, as tho' 'twas Matter of Fact; so that we are charg'd with casting Contempt on *Divine Revelation*, in forcing our own Sentiments with the Terroure of Persecutors, and *torturing* Men's Consciences after the Way of the *Inquisition*. This is a heavy Charge: But I am altogether at a Loss to understand, how it can be concluded from a Desire to know by *Vote* (which is the most expeditious Way in large Bodies, and such as carries in it less of personal Discrimination) Whether others are consenting to that *Declaration of Faith* which we may think expedient to be made, that so it may be deem'd, the *Act* of the *Assembly*? and this is all that can be pretended to be done in this *Court of Inquisition*. Had we indeed address'd our selves to particular Persons, and finding them upon the Reserve, attempted to *extort* a *Declaration* of their *Faith* by Methods of *Threatning* or *Violence*, there might be some Reason for the Charge; but can any thing be more foreign to Truth, and indeed less believ'd by those, to the Warmth of whose Temper rather than their more mature Thoughts, it is to be ascrib'd? As to the *other* Part of the Charge, as tho' we had done something to lessen the Authority of *Scripture Revelation*, this is founded on a general Proposition, That whosoever professes his Faith, or desires others to do it in any besides express Words of Scripture, tho' it be by just Consequences deduc'd from it, detracts from its Authority, and sets up his own Explication, as tho' of equal Authority, Credit and Importance, therewith: But there is a vast Difference between Asserting and Proving: We wait for an Attempt of this Nature, on which the whole Cause seems to depend; and if evinc'd by sufficient Arguments, will

will be more convincing than whole Volumes of Raillery, where that Victory is unfairly obtain'd.

It is no reflection on *Scripture* to profess that we believe some Doctrines which are no other than Deductions from it, otherwise to pretend to give the Sense thereof, is to cast Contempt on it. This I suppose will be allow'd, and therefore I add that *subscribing* to what we believe, differs but in a very small Circumstance from a *verbal Declaration* thereof. And if this be done *publickly*, it favours no more of Imposition, than if done *privately* in occasional Conversation, unless the World's knowing what we believe is the only thing that renders it Criminal. And why any should think so who would reckon it an intolerable Instance of Slander and Cenforiousness, to say that this is not their constant Business every time they preach the Gospel, I can't understand. Again to desire to know whether another understands any Scripture in the same Sense with my self does not in the least Argue that I judge my *Reasoning* from Scripture to be *infallible*; or that the *Consequence*, as far as it is *mine*, is of the same Authority with the *Text* from whence 'tis drawn: For to pretend to this, would be an instance of Arrogance, and no less criminal than Imposition. I speak not of *Consequences* drawn from Scripture which are suppos'd to be just; for so far as they are *so*, they are of equal Authority with Scripture, and every one who believes them to be so, is bound to pay the same regard to them as to the Premises from whence they are deduc'd. This would be necessary to be insisted on, did my argument lead me to vindicate the Truth of the *Words* in which we declar'd our Faith, but my design at present is to vindicate the *Action* it self from the Charge of *Imposition*, rather than the *Doctrine* from the Charge of *Heterodoxy*, tho' few, or I hope none of our Brethren on the other Side

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of the Question, will think there is *any* need of such a Vindication from any Objection which they make against it. But as to what concerns the *Imposing* hereof, this is call'd an assuming to our selves a Sovereignty over the Consciences of others, which indeed is the only unwarrantable *Idea* in *Creed-making*: And will our Brethren say, that what was done in their Company contain'd a positive Demand of their Belief of that Doctrine? Was not that rather suppos'd in desiring that they would declare their Faith? It would have been most censorious to suppose they did not believe it, and would not have answer'd the main Design of the Proposal, if we had thought so; or had we demanded their Belief of this Doctrine, this would have been preposterous without attempting the Proof thereof. Our Conduct therefore must be resolv'd into the Dictates of *Prudence*, and a Desire to proceed with greater unanimity with them in what might be for the Honour of God and good of others rather than to impose on them.

*Object.* But it will be objected, we make our Sentiments about the Doctrine of the Trinity a *Test of Truth* and *Orthodoxy*, which is equivalent to a setting our own Authority on a level with Scripture.

*Answ.* TRUTH and *Orthodoxy* are convertible Terms, and that which is a *Test* of one, must be so of the other. But we may distinguish between an Action's being a *Test* hereof *absolutely* consider'd, and a *Test* or Indication of *my own Sentiments*, or what I call Truth, supposing and making large Abatements for the Fallibility of my own reasoning. The *former* of these was never pretended to, nor can be inferr'd from any Circumstance attending our Conduct: And as for the *latter*, it is so far from being an instance of *Imposition*, that we are not just to our selves or others, and cannot be reckon'd

reckon'd sincere Asserters of *Truth* without it, in any instance thereof.

BUT that which is principally intended in this Objection, is that we make *our own* explications of Scripture, a *Test* of the *Truth*, or *Orthodoxy* of others, as tho' all were oblig'd to believe as we do.

TO which it may be reply'd, that if *my* explication of any particular Doctrine is design'd to be a *Test* of the *Orthodoxy* of others, i. e. of their thinking and speaking agreeably to what I call the Mind of God in his Word, whereby it will appear that we agree in our Sentiments relating thereunto, this is certainly no Crime, for how can *consent*, in any instance, be known without a mutual Declaration of our Sentiments: Or suppose I first believe a Doctrine contain'd in Scripture my self, and then ask another whether he is of the same Mind, this comply'd with, is a *Test* of our *mutual Agreement*, but contains not the least shadow of *Imposition* or pretence to *infallibility*, neither is it an obliging him to believe as I do, but only a Desire to know whether he does so or no. And suppose we disagree in our Sentiments, if I content my self, without using any coercive Methods to bring him to be of my Mind, with this Reflection, that so far as I have Truth on my Side, I can't but judge him Heterodox as deviating from it, and that his Error is dangerous agreeably to the Importance of the Truth deny'd: I say if in both these, I pretend only to judge for *my self* or agreeably to *my own* way of thinking, how can this be liable to the Imputation of offering any Hardship or *Inposition* on another.

THUS concerning the Charge of *Inposition*, as containing in it a making Pretensions to an Authority over the Consciences of others, or setting up our own Performance in competition with Scripture. But there is one Thing more alledg'd

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against us, viz. that we design'd by our Conduct, to set a *mark of Distinction* on those who should refuse to come into the same Measures of *Subscription*. This *Charge* I could not but mention, because some think it so just and defensible, that they wonder at our *Obstinacy* in refusing to fall under the Weight thereof; and indeed, as the *former* gives the World an *Idea* of us as guilty of *Profaneness*; this contains in it *Immorality*, especially when improv'd in such a Way, as the exasperated Passions of Men are apt to do suppos'd injuries. They who alledge that we *design'd* hereby to set a *mark of Distinction* on our Brethren, as tho' we had some base and malicious End to answer, have an extraordinary task on their Hands to make good their Allegations, which can't be done without prying into our very thoughts, and discovering Things which never had the least place there.

BUT I suppose, this is rather charg'd on us, as what some apprehend to have been the known *Tendency* of our Action. This deserves our particular Consideration. Actions 'tis true, may be render'd bad by their foreseen Consequences; but can that which is altogether *Accidental*, and Depends only on the Supposition of a Thing which might never happen, be said to have that Weight, so as to make what was done by us criminal. I think I may justly call it *Conditional* and *Accidental*, for how could we be sure that all our Brethren would not have come into the same Measures with us, till the Matter was propos'd and entertain'd with Dislike? And even then we were not sure that they who at first oppos'd it, would not be prevail'd on by those Arguments which were convincing to us, to lay aside their first resolve.

BUT supposing this was a vain Expectation and the Thing had been morally impossible, can our *persisting* herein be suppos'd to have a direct *Tendency*

cy to fasten the Charge of *Arianism*, on all but those who were on our side of the Question? this can't be fairly deduc'd from our procedure therein. And that no such Charge was design'd by us, appears from explicit Professions, then made to the contrary as well as an open Attestation that we had another design in View, *viz.* The clearing our selves as a Body from that imputation, which, tho' founded *only* in *Suspicion*, is of such a Nature as ought not to remain upon us a Moment, if 'tis in our Power to remove it; and what expedient could be more eligible than that which was most *publick*, especially since the surmis'd Offence was like to be so? We were all herein oblig'd to stand or fall together, for Calumny would have made no distinction, neither would it be *generally* known who had *printed* or *preach'd* against those Errors.

MATTERS being thus circumstantiated, how can it be reckon'd a Crime to profess our Faith in the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, in Words not only agreeing with all the *Reformed Churches*, but with almost the whole *Christian World*, in Words which we had all paid such a Deference to, and given such Ground to suppose we believ'd as is contain'd in our making a Profession thereof on other Occasions. To say therefore, that the thing it self contains a *Brand* on any, is to suppose that some will not profess their Faith therein, and if the World from thence infer, whether justly or not, I will not determine, that some of 'em do not believe the Doctrine, we leave them to account for this, and cannot but think, that this insinuation contains in it a greater Instance of *Injury* and *Imposition*, than can be proved from any part of our Conduct towards 'em.

MOREOVER, 'tis plain that the *Action complain'd of* had not in it self a Tendency to cast the *Odium* above mention'd, on all who herein dissented from

from us, as appears from hence ; because the World might ascribe their refusal to join with us herein to some *other Reason*, rather than not holding the *same Faith*. Give me leave, in Defence of my Argument, to suppose that by some, it may be attributed to a *stiffness of Temper*, which no Arguments taken from the Expediency of the Thing propos'd could prevail upon, unless they were convinc'd (which 'tis plain they were not) that the whole Management was free from *Imposition*. And might they not hereupon think themselves liable, should they have comply'd with us, to the hateful Charge of being *Imposers* and *Persecutors*, from a small number among themselves, who would still dissent from them ? These would be laid open to the reproach of *Arianism* without having any Companions in the Charge, whose Reputation was more establish'd to bear them thro' it ; therefore some will be ready to think (I mention this only for Argument's sake) that many chose rather to be partners in Censure than to desert a few of their Brethren in this exigency, which brings to my mind the Compliment which *Milton* \* supposes *Adam* paid to *Eve*, when perceiving her first in the Transgression, he *knowingly* involved himself in the same Guilt, that she might not be *alone* therein.

BUT if it be a disparagement, not to be suppos'd, that they should value a Reproach so ill grounded, let me further add, that others will ascribe their refusal to the vast extent of their *Charity* as it is fit that they who were then giving Advice against Censoriousness should be most remote themselves from that Vice. In fine many would conclude and not without Ground, that some who believed the *Doctrine of the Trinity* but refus'd to sig-

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\* *Paradise lost. Book 8.*



nify their Faith therein, had not the same regard to the *Importance* of it as others have: For 'tis one thing to believe a Doctrine to be true, another thing to suppose the Belief thereof necessary to Salvation. The only reason why, I suppose, the World might put this Construction on the refusal of our Brethren to comply with us is, that it might appear, that the Consequence above mention'd is just, *viz.* That we could not by our Action necessarily impose the *Brand of Arianism* on those who refus'd to join with us, since it might admit of another Interpretation, and if so, it is unreasonable for them to found so heavy a Charge on our Conduct herein.

BUT this will further appear if it be consider'd, that we had other Inducements which render'd our Conduct necessary; the Circumstances of Affairs requir'd it, since not only *dangerous Errors* were maintain'd by many with a great deal of Warmth, and such Explications of the *Doctrine of the Trinity* had been given of late in many *printed Books*, which are not only contrary to, but subversive of the Faith which we have been taught, and ought always to adhere to: But the *Dissenters* were reported by *some* in a Way of *boast*; by *others* with *insult* and *reproach*, to give in to them. It is needless to enquire what were the secret Springs of this Report, and indeed, who can account for common Fame? However, the number of those who were concern'd in it was so small, that a Proposal to make a Declaration of our Faith in the *Doctrine of the Trinity* would then have seem'd needless, tho' it ought never to be rejected when design'd to answer a valuable End: Yet this gave Occasion to several Ministers to establish the Minds of their People in the *present Truth*, and at the same time satisfy them that they were not involv'd in the growing Censure.

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THIS was the Posture of Affairs, when a Paper call'd *Advices for Peace, &c.* was first recommended to our Perusal, the History of the Rise and Progress whereof, I had rather others should give if needful, than my self, for it cannot be grateful to call to mind the *first spring* of our present unhappy Differences. Whether our *Brethrens* Reasons for signing them, or *ours* for refusing, are just, they will be able to judge who have read the *Authentic Account* with its *Answer*. I shall only add, that if one Reason urg'd against proceeding in the *Advices* had been receiv'd agreeably to its Weight, *viz.* "that since they had already occasion'd so much  
 "uneasiness among our selves, we could entertain  
 "no reasonable hope that they would have any  
 "better Effect with respect to those for whom they  
 "were design'd", I say, had this been duly consider'd, our Hands had not been weaken'd, nor our affections towards one another cool'd, as they seem to be at this Day. Whether these *Heads of Advice*, gave just Occasion to the Charge of *favouring the Arian Cause*, I shall not enquire: But it is certain some have thought so, and this increas'd their former *Jealousies*. But more especially the Refusal by a *Majority of Votes* to insert in them a *Declaration of our Faith* concerning the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, increas'd the Suspicion of *Arianism* against the Body of *London Ministers* to such a Degree, that we cou'd not but think it necessary to make a *publick Declaration* of our *Faith*, tho' we had not the Satisfaction of the Concurrence of many of our Brethren therein. If these *Jealousies* were real (how ill grounded soever we may suppose them to have been) our Conduct is justified; and that they were so, I leave any one to judge who took Occasion about that time to make this Affair the Subject matter of Conversation.

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It notwithstanding all this, we are charg'd with the *Guilt* of all the *Consequent Evils* which have ensued; the only Reply which I need make is, that we could not be supposed to know before-hand that *our Brethren* would not think themselves equally concern'd herein with *us*, or that they would put a worse Construction on it than what we thought Charity oblig'd them to do, or retain the least doubt whether the same Regard was had herein to them as to our selves. And I humbly conceive no one will pretend that Things were so pre-concerted, as that any one could determine before hand that those on the *one side* of the Question would join with him in *subscribing* any more than those on the *other*, unless we could be suppos'd to know the Sentiments of many whom probably we had never convers'd with, or seen before this unhappy Occasion. Therefore the Stress of this whole matter seems to lie in this, that they who have the *least Reason* on their side; must bear the Weight of this *Charge*: If a *Declaration of our Faith* was not necessary, we were exceedingly to blame in insisting so much on it, but if it appears that it was; then I presume some will think them blame-worthy, who not only refus'd to comply herewith, but conclude themselves injur'd by what others thought their *indispensible Duty*.

If the *Subject Matter*, or *Words*, in which we declar'd *our Faith* has any place in the Charge of *Imposition*, as their arguing seems to Import who are for declaring in *no other* than *express Words* of Scripture: I may take leave to add, that then there was no need of any other Profession of Faith, than what is contain'd in our acknowledging the Scriptures to be the *Word of God*, and Consequently, that they are of *infallible Verity*. But since a *Declaration of our Faith* must contain an *Explication* of it, or a signifying what we think to be the Mind

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of God contain'd in Scripture, with respect to some important *Articles of Faith*, there must be something more than a Repetition of Scripture Words, unless they are so express and full, that no one can doubt of the Sense thereof; but if those Scriptures which speak of the *Blessed Trinity*, are taken in a very different Sense by those who are on each side of the Question in dispute about it, we ought to use some Words, whereby we may be known to understand them in another Sense than what they do who in Words confess, but in the Course of their arguing deny the *Deity of our Saviour* and the *Holy Ghost*.

If we should declare as some have done, that we are no *Arians*, but *utterly disown the Arian Doctrine*, this would be no sufficient mark of Distinction from those who are generally call'd so; for wherever *Arianism* is reckon'd a Reproach, they are ready to declare that they have nothing to do with *Arius*, that his Scheme and Sentiments are no Rule to them. There are different Methods of Evasion, which Men have made use of to clear themselves from this Character. That was but a very weak one indeed, which some *Bishops* conven'd at *Antioch*, us'd, who tho' they design'd to propagate the *Arian Heresy*, yet as the *Historian* \* observes in an *Epistle* publish'd by 'em concerning *their Faith*, they declare themselves not to be *Arians*, and prove it too, for say they, "how should we who are "are *Bishops* be followers of a *Presbyter*," and they further add, "that upon enquiry into his Faith "they entertain'd and embrac'd it, not that they "follow'd him therein." Others disclaim the Name, since any Name or Character taken from particular Persons is too mean, and looks as tho' we own'd

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\* See. *Hist. Eccl. Lib.* 2 C. 10.

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them *Lords of our Faith*, contrary to our Saviour's Rule call no Man Master or Father upon Earth. Another Method taken to vindicate themselves from the Charge of *Arianism*, is as others pretend that they do not adhere to *Arius's peculiar Notions*. If these be particularly consider'd, there will appear to be but a small thread of Difference between them and the *new Scheme*, and so far as they differ the *Latter* is inconsistent with it self. *Arius* held in plain Terms that *the Son was made* *ἐκ οὐκ ὄντος* out of nothing, and that there was a Time in which he was not, and therefore he denied that the Father was in Propriety of Speech an eternal Father, or the Son an eternal Son; he also asserted, which is a just Consequence from the former, that it was possible that *the Son might not have been* since he deriv'd his being from the meer Will and Pleasure of the Father. \* He also maintain'd that Christ had no humane Soul † which we may reckon one of his Peculiarities, because many who are his Advocates in other Things think fit to dissent from him in this. And as for the *Holy Spirit*, he calls him the Creature of a Creature, || meaning that the Son created him with other Things, so that here are two Instruments, the one. viz. the Son who was created by, and Ministers to the Father in creating all Things; and the other, viz. the Spirit who was created and made use of by the Son in creating all Things.

Now, the principal Difference as I apprehend between these Positions of *Arius*, and the *new Scheme* is, that they who embrace the *Latter* are not

\* Sox. Hist. Eccl. Lib. I Cap. 15. Soc Hist. Eccl. Lib. I Cnp. 6: Epiph. Heres. 69. § 7, and 8. † Epiph. Her. 69. § 49.

|| Ibid. § 56.

so free and open in declaring whether they believe the *Son* to be no more than a meer Creature, who might not have been, or if it was the Divine Pleasure, might be annihilated, and according to the Constitution of his Nature, is capable of Vice as well as Virtue, tho' all these Things necessarily follow from other Things which they hold in common with *Arius*, and in particular from his being as they assert *Dependent* on the *Father* in all Things.

ANOTHER Thing in which some *Modern Writers* seem to explain their Sentiments a little differing from *Arius*, is, that they deny that there was the least Point of Time in which the Son was not, the Difference between 'em seems to be this, that *Arius* thought it an Absurdity to speak of a Person's being the Effect of the Sovereign Will or Power of God, whose *Being* was therefore *arbitrary*, and yet that he was *without Beginning*, or properly from all Eternity, in the same Sense as the *Father* was. *Arius* knew this to be an indefensible Position, and therefore denied it; but those in the *New Scheme* have taken the Burden of the Proof hereof, but never acquitted themselves to the least Degree of Satisfaction; they had therefore better have spoke plain, and concluded as their Premises lead to it, that the Son was not properly from all Eternity.

As for the *Holy Spirit*, they call him in Scripture-Words, the *Sanctifier*, *Inspirer* of the Prophets, *Comforter*, &c. but wou'd have us conclude, that they deny him to be *true* and *proper God*, since they challenge us to produce any Scripture which declares him to be so. And what is this but in Effect to say, as *Arius* does, that he is the *Son's Creature*, tho' they don't think fit to enter so far into his Explication or Mode of Speaking.

MOREOVER, if we consider *Arius's* Sense of those Scriptures on which his Scheme is founded, we may observe an exact Harmony between *him* and  
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some *Modern Writers*. A few Instances of this Nature are sufficient. *Arius* infers from *John* xvii. 3. that the *Father is the only true God*, as contra-distinguish'd from the *Son*\*; and from *Matth.* xix. 17. that the *Father and Son are distinct Beings*†, since the *Father* alone is essentially and independently *Good*; and from *Matth.* xx. 23. he argues, that the *Son* had no *Authority* but what he receiv'd from the *Father*\*\* , speaking of him as *God* in his Sense of the Word; and from *Luke* xxii. 42. he argues, that the *Father and Son* are not of the same Essence, because they have not the same *Will*††; and that *John* xiv. 10. *I am in the Father, &c.* argues no more than a *Consent of Will* in two Persons of different Natures†‡. How far this agrees with the Explanation of these Texts contain'd in some *Modern Writings*, I leave any one to judge, who is conversant in them.

SOME have suppos'd the *New Scheme* differs as much from *Arius's*, as the Sentiments of *Eusebius Bishop* of *Cesarea* are suppos'd to have done; therefore they are content to be call'd *Eusebians* rather than *Arians*. This Learned Writer has been claim'd by each Side, thus an ancient *Historian*\* vindicates him from the Charge of *Arianism*; so does a very Learned *Modern Writer*†. And there are some Things which he asserts, which seem to determine the Matter on that Side; thus when he calls Christ υἱὸς θεῷ ὡς ἡμεῖς\*\* the *natural, proper, or genuine Son of God*: And adds, that he is ἀρχαῖος, *originally God*, a Word scarce us'd by him elsewhere, which *Valesius* thinks sufficient of itself to

\* *Epiph. Her.* 69. § 31.

† *Ibid.* § 57.

\*\* § 58. †† § 58.

†† § 67.

\* *Sec. Hist. Eccl. Lib. 2. Cap. 21.*

† *Cave's Dissert. de Euseb. Arianism, &c.*

\*\* *Euseb. Hist. Eccl. Lib. 10. Cap. 4.*

clear

clear him from the Calumny of *Arianism*. He seems very expresse in asserting the *Eternity of Christ*, and accordingly calls him the *Light that shone before the World, the intellectual and essential Wisdom, that was before all Ages, who was in the Beginning with the Father* ††. He also asserts, that he has a *two-fold Nature*, and therefore cou'd not be suppos'd to think, that he had *no Human Soul*; he also speaks of his *Generation, Dignity, and Nature as ineffable*. From these and such like Passages one wou'd think, that he is not in the *Arian Scheme*, and especially when he expressly rejects the Error of those who say, that the Son was made *ἐξ ἑκ ὀντων*. But you will find in many other Places of his Writings, as well as in these very Chapters in which he speaks so honourably of our Saviour, that he asserts other Things which favour of *Arianism*, by which it appears that he had not the Talent of Speaking consistently with himself at all Times; or if he was Orthodox, he often lays himself open to the Suspicion of *Arianism* by unwary Expressions, as you may see in the *two Chapters* above referr'd to, and other Places where he calls the Son the *Minister of the Will of God*, the *second to the Father* in Creation; and he denies that the Son is to be *adored* any otherwise than on the Account of the *Father that dwelleth in him* \*. And that the Son as God is *inferiour* to the Father, *less than the Father*, and don't deserve equal Honour with Him †. He also asserts, that the Holy Ghost is *not God*, but one of those Things that were *made by the Son*, this is certainly very differing from their Way of Speaking, who are really Opposers of *Arianism*; and it was doubtless on the Ac-

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†† *Hist. Eccl. Lib. 1. Cap. 2.*

\* *Præp. Evang. Lib. 5. Cap. 4 & 8.*

† *Eccl. Theol. Lib. 2. Cap. 7.*



count of such Passages as these, as well as his Conduct in joining with the *Arians* in persecuting some of the Defenders of the *Nicene Faith*, that *Jerome*, *Athanasius*, and others have taken Occasion to charge him as an Espouser of that *Heresy*. Therefore to be no *Arian* but an *Eusebian*, is nothing else but to agree with *Arius* in the Main, while entring a Protest against the Name of *Arianism*, because dissenting from him in some peculiar Modes of Speaking.

THESE things I have taken leave to observe that it may appear we had good Reason to declare our Faith in more express Terms, than by asserting that we are no *Arians*, or that we utterly disown the *Arian Doctrine*. For it is very certain that not only they who are in the *New Scheme*, but the *Socinians* themselves are ready to declare that they believe the *Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity*, if they may be admitted to explain their Sense of this Doctrine in their own Way, and also that they believe the proper Divinity of our Saviour, or that he is God by Nature, if you understand this only as oppos'd to Idols which in reality are no Gods, as having no branch of divine Glory put upon 'em, nor any warrant from God to be called so. Therefore a Declaration of this Nature will not argue the Persons that make it to be altogether free from the Suspicion of *Arianism*; and tho' many of our Brethren who have thought fit to assert no more, appear by better Evidence to be unjustly Charg'd with it; yet I hope they will not continue to reckon others *Imposers* who thought fit to express their Faith in Words which never were reckon'd exceptionable amongst us till of late; and I hope the Impartial Enquirers after Truth, who take the Pains to know what has been advanc'd on both Sides, will see Reason to conclude, that the Explication of the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity containd

contain'd therein, is not only above Contempt, but is, as has been prov'd by several judicious Writers supported by the justest Consequences deduc'd from Scripture, so that it is no Crime to recommend it by our Subscription as worthy of Belief, tho' we are hardly thought of as *Imposers*, not only by our *Brethren*, but by many who profess themselves open *Enemies* to us, and at present are more than ordinarily exasperated against us, concerning whom we are bound to believe, that their *Invectives* are not levell'd meerly at our Conduct, but at the Doctrine which we profess; in whose Writings a better Temper is desir'd, as well as more cogent Arguments, that if we are mistaken we may be convinc'd, and not necessitated to judge that our Conviction is the least Part of the Design of many, whom we have no otherwise injur'd than by declaring our stedfast Adherence to that Doctrine, on which our Religion and our Hope is founded, viz. that *the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are the one and only God blessed for evermore.*



**F I N I S.**

