

THE  
O P I N I O N  
O F A  
Known Dissenter

On the BILL for

*Preventing Occasional Conformity.*

**W**HAT is the publick Possession of Places, or Offices of Trust in a Government, to the Case of Religion? They who separate from the Communion of a Church, cannot in reason expect to be entertained in the Service of that very Church: And they that separate from the Church, ought to consider Places and Offices beforehand, and to examine whether they can forego them for their Consciences or not, and if they did so, they would not be so frequently foregoing their Consciences to possess them again.

And I cannot but wonder at, and condemn the Injustice of such Dissenters, who would have those People, to whose Communion they cannot or will not join, receive them into equal Advantages of Honour and Profit, of Trust and Management, in the Politick Concern.

I cannot approve the equity of it, nor I would not have the Dissenters cover it; nor had they the Government in their hands, would they admit it themselves.

This coveting Offices of Trust, Honour and Profit, in the Government, has been the cause of that Occasional Compliance, which to the Dishonour and Shame of the Dissenters, has Branded them with too much Levity in Religion.

For whoever dissent from an Establish'd Church on any account, but from a real Principle of Conscience, is a Politick, not a Religious Dissenter.

Nothing can be Lawful and Unlawful at the same time. If it be not Lawful for me to Dissent, I ought to Conform, but if it be Unlawful for me to Conform I must Dissent; and he that cannot Die, or at least desire to do so, rather than Conform, ought to Conform.

If I shall Dissent, and yet at the same time Conform, by Conforming I deny my Dissent being Lawful; or by my Dissenting, I damn my Conforming as sinful.

An Act of Parliament is of every Mans own doing, and therefore 'tis just every Man should comply with the Terms or suffer the Penalty, but here is no Penalty, if no Crime, and if no Preferments are sought, no Honours accepted, there is no Crime; if Self-denial was as practicable as Self-advancement, here is no need of Occasional Conformity, for all such do seek the Crime, that is the first Sin, then Mortgage their Consciences to avoid the Penalty, and so add one Sin to another:

No Man can be said to separate from, and join to a thing at the same time, if your Conscience is satisfy'd in joining; it cannot be satisfy'd in separating, unless you can suppose your Conscience to be satisfy'd and dissatisfy'd both together.

A Man passively Religious, that can Communicate any where, may from the same Principle, and with far less guilt, Communicate no where, for he has prostituted the little Religion he had, if ever he had any, to his Interest.

No Occasional Conformist can be receiv'd into Communion in any Dissenting Assembly, upon any other Terms than as a Penitent; for this Practice is prepostrous, excentrick and destructive of the very Foundation of the Dissenters Principles.

Metinks Men should seem what they are, if a Man dissent from the Church let him do so, and his Principle being well-grounded for such Dissent, let him hold it; if not well grounded, let him leave it, if he cannot suffer one way, let him suffer another, and why should we not be as honest to God as our Country?

'Tis an intolerable Affront to the Church of England, resting upon its Doctrine as well as Practice, to make use of the Church for a Cover to fence them against the Laws, at the same time continuing to Disown its Communion as a thing not fit to be continued in.

Conformity and Nonconformity at the same time, in one and the same Person, for a Secular End, to save a penalty, and privately; and then, as being ashamed of it, to go back and sit down as not having done it at all, are Contradictions I must insist upon, and rather wish, than expect to see rectify'd.

He who dissent from the Establish'd Church, except from true Principles of Conscience, is guilty of a great Sin.

He who Conforms to the Establish'd Church against his Conscience, is guilty of a great Sin.

He who both Dissents and Conforms at the same time, and in the same point of Religion, must be guilty of one of these great Sins. And



And he who has committed either of these Sins, ought not to be receiv'd again on either side, on any other Terms than a Penitent.

As to Partial Conformity, Dissent in some things, and Conforming in others, does not seem to concern this Case, no Man among the Dissenters pretended to dissent in every thing, but we are speaking of conforming in those very Points in which we dissent; and that no less than the Article of Communion.

If Gentlemen who have such a Latitude in their Opinions, wou'd not have it thought they are moved to it by their Interests, let them practise it openly, and not Time it so, to the every Eve of an Election, as to have it speak of it self, and, as it were, force Men to believe it done on purpose; nay, let them not put such a Reproach in the Mouths of their Enemies, as to have it spoken in contempt, with circumstances that stop the Mouths of Argument, and are as Convincing as Demonstration.

'Tis not a light thing to shift and change Communion with an Establish'd, and with a Separate Church, as often as convenience, or Reason of State or Interest invite.

As to the Excuse that is made, That this is no Conformity in Point of Religion, but done as a Civil Action, in Obedience to the Laws of the Land, as a Qualification for admittance into Publick Employments, which they think it their Duty to accept, in order to serve their Country; are not Sacraments Religious Acts? Are they not the same thing, tho' differently Administr'd in the Establish'd, and in the Dissenting Church? And how can you take it as a Civil Action in one place, and a Religious Act in another? This is playing Bo-peep with God Almighty, and no Man can tell when they are about a Civil Action, and when about a Religious. And if the Service of their Country be so dear to them, pray why should they not undergo the Penalties, and chuse to expose their Bodies and Estates for that Service, rather than their Souls? These are Patriots indeed! that will damn their Souls to save their Country! For, as hath been observ'd, Conformity is a Sinful Act in a Dissenter, or else his dissenting before and after must be a Sinful Act; and he has no Excuse, unless it be that he was convinc'd and re-convinc'd, and then convinc'd again.

After description of true Protestant Dissenters, who cannot conform, he proceeds in this manner: If there are crept into their Company State-Dissenters, or Politick Dissenters, they are not of them, and we wish they would go out from them. I see no Act of Parliament a making to the prejudice of this Dissenter.—This is the Dissenter to which Her Majesty has promis'd her Protection. The Act against Occasional Conformity does not concern us, I dare undertake not one Dissenter offer'd to present a Petition to the Honourable House against its passing; they who can conform for one Reason, may conform without two, and ought to conform. And we are therefore content to be distinguish'd who cannot conform at all; if we have any Knaves amongst us, take them; if we have any Hypocrites, any who can conform and do not, we are free to part with them; that the remainder may be all such as agree with the true Character of a Conscientious Dissenter.

'Tis plain, that Occasional Communion is contrary to the very Nature and Being of a Dissenter, who, if he can conform, ought to conform; and if he can for a Place of Preferment, ought to do it without the Preferment.

It is an Act destructive of all possible pretence for dissenting, and never was, nor never can be defended by any Dissenter, without overthrowing all the Reasons they could ever give for dissenting; How then can this Bill be aim'd at the Dissenters? We hold it to be a Novelty, an Abuse crept in amongst us, and we are glad to have it condemn'd by Authority. We are so content with the suppressing the grievance of this scandalous Ambidexter Conformity, that we think the Hardships put upon us with it not worth the naming.

All the Parliaments that ever were, or will be, can never suppress any thing amongst us so scandalous to our Reputation, and to that Candour with which we desire to guide our Actions, nor so contrary to, and destructive of the very Nature of our separating from the Church of England, and the Constitution of all our Collected Congregations; and therefore, if these Occasional Conformists would accept of the Friendly Advice of their Brethren; it should be, That they would for the future conform to the Church of England.

As for his Authority to write thus in the Name of the Dissenters, he alleges that he hath the General Concurrence of all the Dissenters he ever convers'd with; that Publication is an Appeal to the World, and if he hath affirm'd any thing in the Name of the Dissenters which is not their Opinion, he is liable to an easie Confutation: Truth (says he) is a General Commission, and any Man may write it.

He modestly conceals his Name, that his Reasons might not come clogg'd with the dead weight of the Meanness and Imperfections of the Author: The Occasional Conformity of Dissenters (says he) is not Condemn'd or Defended by the Names of Authors on either side, but by Truth, Scripture and Reason; and so far as that is on his side, he thinks it ought not to be despis'd for being usher'd in by an Unworthy Instrument.