

**A DISQUISITION
CONCERNING
ECCLESIASTICAL
COUNCILS: PROVING**

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A Disquisition Concerning Ecclesiastical Councils: Proving by Increase Mather

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DISQUISITION

Concerning

Ecclesiastical Councils.

By *Increase Mather*. D. D.

1716.



A
DISQUISITION

Concerning

Ecclesiastical Councils.

Proving, that not only Pastors, But Brethren delegated by the Churches, have equally a Right to a decisive Vote in such Assemblies. To which is added, Proposals concerning Confociation of Churches, Agreed upon by a *Synod*, which Convened at *Boston*, in *New-England*.

With a *Preface*, containing a further Vindication of the
Congregational Discipline.

By *Increase Mather*. D. D.

Prov. 11. 14. *In the Multitude of Counsellors there is safety.*

Acts 15. 23. *They wrote Letters by them, after this manner, The Apostles, and Elders, and Brethren.*

Jus ferendi in Concilijs ad Laicos potest Extendi, et plus aliquando, quam ad Multos clericorum. *Gerjom. Citante Parker Ecclesiast. Lib. 3. Cap. 28. p. 387.*

Judicium [in Concilijs] et quoad facultatem, et quoad Autoritatem, Convenire potest doctis qui non sunt Episcopi, *Ames Bellarm. Enerv. Tom. 2 Cap. 2. p. 18.*

Boston, Printed for *N. Boone*, at the Sign of the Bible in *Cornhill*.

1716.

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1870.

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THE
P r e f a c e .

THAT Controversies about Forms of *Ecclesiastical Discipline*, concern not the *Essentials* of Religion, but that Good Men may be of various Sentiments about them ; *Salva Fide, et Caritate*, is readily acknowledged. Nevertheless, there ought to be a singular Regard unto Truths of this Nature, by us in *New-England*, above what may be affirmed of Men in any other Part of the World, since our Fathers were Persecuted out of their Native Land, and fain to fly into the Wilderness, for their Testimony thereunto : great were the Difficulties and Temptations, and Straits, which they for some time conflicted [ii] with, and all upon no other Account, but that so they might enjoy a *pure Discipline and Church State*, exactly conformable to the Mind of *Christ*, revealed in the Holy Scriptures. On which Account, for their Posterity to depart from what their Fathers have with so much Clearness of Scripture Light, taught and practised, and confirmed with so great Sufferings ; must needs be a greater Sin and Provocation to the Eyes of his Glory, than may be said of any other People on the Face of the Earth.

Concerning *Forms of Church-Government*, besides those of the *Congregational Way*, there have been especially two Pretenders to a *Divine Right*, viz. those that plead for the *Episcopal*, and those that are for the *Presbyterian* Discipline. In the famous Treaty at *Uxbridge* between eminent Divines of both Persuasions, after they had been for *some* time arguing the Matter, the Marquis of *Hertford* spoke to this Effect ; (a) *My Lords*, (said he) *here is much said concerning Church-Government in* [iii] *general ; the Reverend Divines on the Kings Part affirm, that Episco-*

(a) *Sir B. Whitlock's Memorials. p. 123.*

pany is *Jure Divino*; the Reverend Ministers on the other Part do affirm, that Presbytery is *Jure Divino*; for my part, I think that neither of them, nor any other Form is *Jure Divino*, and therefore desire we may hear no more about that Controversy. I could easily say as that Noble Lord did, as to the two contending Parties, without concurring in his general Negative. I have been told, that the admirably Learned Dr. Prideaux, (once *Regius Professor* in Oxford, and a great Ornament to that University) being asked what Form of Church-Government he thought was of Divine Institution, replied, that he supposed that no particular Form was *Jure Divino*; but if any were so, it was that which Congregational Men made a Profession of. The Protestant Churches in *Helvetia*, have no Ecclesiastical Discipline; but if any Members of (*b*) their Churches fall into Scandals, they turn them over to the Civil Magistrate to discipline them. But so [iv] much has been written by the Learned Mr. Robert Parker, (*b*) to prove that there is a Form of Church-Government of Divine Institution, as I think cannot be answered, and the famous Mr. George Gillespy (*d*) has abundantly confuted *Erastianisme*.

It has been injurious to those of the Congregational Persuasion, that the Name of *Brownists* has been undeservedly imposed upon them, from whom they differ essentially. The *Brownists* make the Community to be Rulers; whereas those of the Congregational Discipline, although they believe that *Priviledge*, and in that respect *Power* belongs to the Fraternity, yet that Rule and Government is peculiar to the Presbytery; and that there cannot be a Valid Church Act without the Consent of the Brotherhood, nor without the Concurrence of the Eldership, in an Organick Church. *Brownists* disown all Churches besides their own, renouncing all the Parish Churches in [v] *England*, and the Reformed Churches in other Nations also, as no true Churches of

(b) *Tigurine Liturgy*. p. 133.

(c) *De Politia Ecclesiastica*. L. 1. Cap. 10 15. et Lib. 2. C. 42. 44.

(d) *Aaron's Rod blossoming*.

Christ. It deserves a Remark, that *Robert Brown*, the Father of those called (e) *Brownists*, after he had maintained, that there was *no Church in England*, did himself become a Conformist, and Parson of a Parish in *Northamptonshire*, called *A Church*. Congregationalists are of another Spirit and Principle. They are the genuine Posterity of the good *Old Puritan Nonconformists*. There was long since an admirable little Book, (little in bulk, but great in worth) Printed with that Title, *Puritanismus Anglicanus*, which Dr. *Ames* has honoured with a Preface, whence he has been supposed to be the Composer of it. But a Learned (f) Professor in the University of *Leyden*, has informed us, that not Dr. *Ames*, but Mr. *Bradshaw*, an Eminent Nonconformist Minister, (whose Life has been written by Learned Mr. *Gataker*, and published by Mr. *Clark*) was the Author of that Judic[i]ous Script. It is perfect *Congregationalism*. The Principles of those, who are for the Congregational Discipline, are such as these. 1. That a Particular Church, as to the Matter of it, ought to consist of such as are in the Judgment of rational Charity, *Saints, and faithful Brethren in Christ*. Of such were the Churches planted by the Apostles. 2. That the *Form* of a Church, or that which does essentiate and distinguish it from all other Societies, is a *Covenant* or Agreement to walk together in the Observation of all the Ordinances of the Lord Jesus Christ; which Covenant, tho' only implicit, gives Being to a Church; nevertheless, that an explicit Covenant is most eligible. 3. That a Particular Church, has Power given to them from the Lord Christ, to Choose their own Officers, *viz.* Pastors, Teachers, Ruling-Elders, and Deacons. 4. The Essence of a Minister's Call to the Pastoral Office, is in a mutual Election. They are for the Imposition of the Hands of the Presbytery in Ordination. Nevertheless, they look not on that as essential, but as adiaphorus. [vii] In which they agree with some Eminent Divines of the Presbyterian Judgment, partic-

(e) *Pagitt. Hæretography. p. 67.*

(f) *Hornbeck Epist. ad Durium. p. 27.*

ularly with Mr. *Gilgpy*, (g) nay with the general Kirk Assembly in Scotland, as whoever shall consult Mr. *Calderwood*, (h) will find it often asserted. 5. That a Particular Church being furnished with Elders, at least with a Teaching Elder, has full Power to exercise Discipline within it self, without depending on any other Superiour Jurisdiction. The famous Mr. *Paul Baine* (i) affirms, particular Churches are equal and independent on one another. He is (so far as I understand) the first Writer by whom that Term has been used. It is very unreasonab, that for this, Congregational Men should be Nick.named *Independents*. A late Author, who is not of that Way, but a Conformist, (k) says, *That in the Primitive [viii] Times every Particular Church was Independent, h. e. that it had a sufficient Right and Power in it self to punish all its Delinquents, without the Concurrence of other Churches.* There is then no Reason why such as are for the Congregational Discipline, should be reproachfully called *Independents*. Our *New-England* Platform of Church Discipline dislikes that Name. Mr. *Hooker* (l) thinks it was from the Subtily of Satan, to fix that Name upon those that professed the Truth; that to the Truth it self might be made nauseous and distastful. Mr. *Fohn Beverley* (m) complains of it. Those famous Apologists, Dr. *Goodwin*, Mr. *Nye*, Mr. *Simpson*, Mr. *Burroughs*, Mr. *Bridge*, (who have been esteemed Pillars amongst those of that Way,) publickly and solemnly declared, *That it was a Maxim to be abhorred, that a single Society of Men, pretending to be endow'd with a Power from Christ, to judge them of the same Body, should arrogate to themselves an Exemption from [ix] giving an Account, or being Censurable of any other, either Christian Magistrate, or Neighbour Churches. So far (say they) was our Judg-*

(g) *English Popish Ceremonies*. p. 285.

(h) *History of Church of Scotland*, p. 26, 383, 418, 425: (i) *Diocens Trial*.

(k) *Enquiry concerning the Discipline of the Primitive Churches, supposed to be written by Mr. King*, Chap. 8. p. 39.

(l) *Survey*, part 2. Chap. 3.

(m) *Unio Reformantium*.

ment from that Independent Liberty, which has been imputed to us. 6. As all Protestant Writers of Note (*Grotius* only excepted) approve of the Necessity and Usefulness of Ecclesiastical Councils, so do those of the Congregational Discipline. It has ever been their declared Judgment, that when there is Want of either Light or Peace in a Particular Church, it is their Duty to ask for Council, with which Neighbour Churches ought to assist by sending their Elders, and other Messengers, to advise and help them in their Difficulties. And that in Momentous Matters of common Concernment, Particular Churches should proceed with the Concurrence of Neighbour Churches. So in the Ordination of a Pastor, much more in the deposing of one. Thus it has ever been in the Churches of *New-England*. And so it was in the more Primitive Times of Christianity, when the People had Chosen a Pastor, they desired Neighbour Pastors to Concur [x] in his Ordination. When (n) *Alexander* was Chosen a Bishop or Pastor at *Jerusalem*, it was with the Concurrence of the Neighbours. *Cyprian* (o) says, that when *Cornelius* was Ordained, it was the Approbation of Sixteen Pastors. So when any Church had sufficient Cause to depose a Pastor, they would not do it without the Advice of a Council. When *Paulus Samositanus* (p) was deposed for his Hæretical Opinions, it was with the Concurrence of a Council, which met at *Antioch*, about that Affair. When *Privatus* the Bishop of *Lambee* (q) was deposed, it was with the Advice of many other Pastors.

But if those of the Congregational Discipline are so well affected to Councils, what then is the Difference between a Presbyterian and Congregational Man? Truly, a moderate Presbyterian and a solid Congregational Man differ so little, as that 'tis Pity they [xi] shou'd differ at all. My Dearest Brother *Samuel Mather* (whose Successor I am here in *Boston*, he having been the first that preached the Gospel to that Church

(n) *Euseb. Lib. 6. Cap. 11.*

(o) *Epist. 52.*

(p) *Euseb. Lib. 7. Cap. 30.*

(q) *Cyprian. Epist. 55.*