

Why Baptists Dissent, 1728.

ROBERT MERCER of Warbleton, to DR. SCOTT.

A copy of this letter, delivered 27 August 1728, was lent to Sir W. J. Collins by a descendant of the writer, Miss Flint, now living at Sedlescombe, where the Mercers had an old estate called Jacobs.

AS you were pleased yesterday very kindly and earnestly to desire to tell you ye main reasons why ye Baptist dissented from ye Church of England. I think it not amiss to give you a more perticular answer now than yt opportunity would permitt. And being required by St. Peter *to give to every man an answer of ye Reason of the Hope yt is in me with meekness and fear* I truly and sincerely declare ye principal reasons to be as follows, viz

First we believe yt ye manner of gathering a constituting ye members of your Church is in almost all respects contrary to Gospel Rule; for you not only place Infants as Church Members without either precept (?) or precedent in ye scriptures; but this is done in such a manner as we can't joyn or abett with, without acting or consenting contrary to our consciences; for we can't conceive what right Infants can have to Baptism; or how they are thereby *Regenerated by the holy Ghost*: or how any sensible or rational persons can promise for Infants such great and impossible things as is usually done by ye godfathers as they are called; neither can we see what

authority any Christians can have to change ye mode of Baptism from Dipping to Sprinkling: for we are assured by Dr. Whitby yt it was done without any License from ye author of ye Justification. See Anent Rom: 6, 3.

But if the Church would indulge us so far as to administer Baptism at such times and in such manner as we believe to be according to Gospel Rule; I don't see how we could joyn in communion with others who are so deficient in their constitution, without a great scruple in our consciences: especially considering some further obstructions as—secondly another Reason of our dissenting from ye Church is because her members are denyed the privilege of chuseing their own ministers by ye suffrage of ye People: which we believe is a hardship, and contrary to Gospel Rule, and ye best antiquity, for by this arbitrary constituting of ministers the people have no way to help themselves if a careless or unworthy minister happen to be imposed upon them, that neither teaches them by due instruction, or good example: which we believe to be the minister's duty, and peoples necessary advantage. Thirdly another cause of our dissenting from your Church is her imposing an actual conformity to general ceremonies and practices in her worship which we can't with good conscience conform to and joyn with you because we believe them to be very inconsistent with primitive Christianity. There is a constant precomposed form of prayers and psalms of praise imposed so that they can't be avoided; and a more spiritual and experimental worship improvised without, breaking the cannons and Rules of your Church. By this means many of ye best capacitys, Experiences and Desires are limetted, prevented of a more full improvement; while ye young and airy and too often ye most vain and ignorant persons are most loudly and plausibly exercised in those publick

services in ye church, Those things with some other ceremonial circumstances being maintained and practised we can't with good conscience conform to; knowing that *whatsoever is not of faith is sin*. Fourthly another reason of our dissenting from your church is because we believe she is very defective in her discipline to correct ye disorders of her members; for instead of every church judging ye cause of her own members, after private and timely reproofe and admonission according to Gospel Rules. Math 18. Wee find yt offenders are prosecuted in the Bishops Court only, and their cause judged by such as are strangers to ye persons offending, and consequently to ye extenuating or agravating circumstances of their offences, save only as they are informed by such persons as that too often either prejudice or interest perverts justice, which rather hardens than reforms the offenders. And therefore since we find that a more regular and effectual discipline is maintained in the Baptist Churches, we conscionably believe it to be our Duty and interest to dissent from your church; Notwithstanding we have a good esteem of all such persons of yr community as are well disposed, and her consistents with ye principals of Christianity; But if those obstructions could be removed we should gladly avoid the trouble of maintaining a separation: In hopes that our Dissenting is tolerable and acceptable, in ye sight of God, and all wise men, till these obstructions are removed, or our Judgments convinced. I remain with humble service

Yr humble servant

ROB^t MERCER.