Excerpts from

Ecclesiastical Characteristics

by John Witherspoon, 1st of 9 editions, printed 1753

**Context:**

 Witherspoon was a committed Calvinist and embraced a full subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. He belonged to the church of Scotland. During the twelve years in his first pastorate at Beith, he observed that many other ministers were unorthodox. “They were obliged to declare upon oath that they believed and accepted doctrines which they privately repudiated and publicly ignored or criticized. … In all the meetings of the church, where protest was proper, he championed the cause of popular rights against those who, because of their loose and easy theology, were called Moderates, and who were almost always in a majority in the General Assembly. … ‘When men are considered as individuals, we acknowledge that they have no guide but their own understanding and no judge but their own conscience; but when joined in society the right of private judgment is superseded the conscience of the individual is merged in that of the community and the minority must yield to the dictates of the majority. … These maxims form the basis of Presbyterian church government. The two capital articles, by which Presbytery is distinguished from every other ecclesiastical polity, are the parity of its ministers and the subordination of its courts. By the one, individual ministers are prevented from exercising lordship over their brethren; by the other, confusion and anarchy are prevented. … Accordingly every minister is required at his ordination to vow that he will submit himself to the discipline and government of the church. Submit himself, therefore he must, or if he cannot there is but one remedy, he must withdraw himself from its communion.’

 Failing to make any impression by appeals to reason and justice Witherspoon determined [another path]. In 1753, he issued, anonymously and so safely, a little book which he entitled ‘Ecclesiastical Characteristics … in which he pretended to give ‘a plain and easy way of attaining to the character of a moderate man as at present in repute in the Church of Scotland. (DW)

**Introduction**

 The reader will doubtless agree with me, that moderation is an excellent thing, and particularly the noblest character of a church man. It is also well known, that as all churches have usually in them a moderate, and a zealous, high-flying, wild party; so our church has at present a certain party, who glory in, and fight for moderation; and who (it is to be hoped justly) appropriate to themselves wholly the character of moderate men: neither is it a small presage of a glorious and blessed state of the church, in its approaching periods, that so many of our young men are smitten with the love of moderation, and generally burn with desire to appear in that noble and divine character. … This has inspired me with the ambition and expectation of being helpful in training up as as many as are desirous of it, in this most useful of all sciences.

 These effects, I humbly conceive, flow chiefly, if not only, from the want of a complete system of moderation, containing all the principles of it, and giving a distinct view of their mutual influence one upon another, by examples, how they ought to be put in practice.

 There is no work of this kind, to my knowledge, yet extant, which renders my present undertaking of it the more laudible, and will, I hope, render it the more acceptable.

 I shall now proceed to the principal part of the work, after I have informed the reader of the plan of it; which is briefly this, to enumerate distinctly and in their proper order and connexion, all the several maxims upon which moderate men conduct themselves: … N.B. I shall make but very little use of Scripture, because that is contrary to some of the maxims themselves; as will be seen …

**Maxim I**

 ***All ecclesiastical persons, of whatever rank, whether principals of colleges, professors of divinity, ministers, or even probationers, that are suspected of heresy, are to be esteemed men of great genius, vast learning, and uncommon worth; and are, by all means, to be supported and protected.***

 All moderate men have a kind of fellow-feeling with heresy, and as soon as they hear of anyone suspected, or in danger of being prosecuted for it, zealously and unanimously rise up in his defense. This fact is unquestionable. I never knew a moderate man in my life, that did not love and honor a heretic, or that had not an implacable hatred at the persons and characters of heresy-hunters; a name with which we have thought proper to stigmatize these sons of Belial, who begin and carry on prosecutions against men for heresy in church-courts. …

 As to the justice of this maxim, many solid reasons may be given for it. Compassion itself, which is one of the finest and most benevolent feelings of the human heart, moves them to the relief of their distressed brother. Another very plain reason may be given for it: moderate men are, by their very name and constitution, the reverse, in all respects, of bigoted zealots. Now, it is well known that many of this last sort, both clergy and common people, when they hear of a man suspected of heresy, conceive an aversion at him, even before they know anything of the case; nor after he is acquitted (as they are all of them commonly in our church-courts) can they ever come to entertain a favorable opinion of him. The reverse of this then is, to be as early and as vigorous in his defense, as they are in prosecution, and as implicit in our belief of his orthodoxy, as they are in their belief of his error. …

 This brings to my mind another reason or the maxim, vis. That heretics being so nearly related the moderate men, have a right to claim their protection out of friendship and personal regard. This serves a very noble end; for it vindicates the Christian religion from the objection of some infidels, who affirm that it does not recommend private friendship; now moderate men having all a very great regard to private friendship, and personal connections, do by their practice, which is the most solid way, confute this slander. …

**Maxim II**

 ***When any man is charged with loose practices, or tendencies to immorality, he is to be screened and protected as much as possible; especially if the faults laid to his charge be, as they are incomparably well termed in a sermon, preached by a hopeful youth that made some noise lately, ‘good humored vices.’***

 … In order to understand the nature of ‘good-humored vices,’ the reader may please to take notice, that it is an observation of one Lord Shaftsbury, that ‘the best time for thinking upon religious subjects, is when a man is merry, and in good humor;’ and so far is this observation drawn from nature, that is the time commonly chosen for that purpose, by many who never heard of his lordship, or his writings. Whatever, therefore, serves to promote merriment, and heighten good humor, must so far serve for the discovery of religious truth. But as there are many ways of making a person merry, which narrow-minded people will call vice; from thence, in compliance with common language, arises the new compound ‘good humored vices.’ It is not, however, so to be understood, as if either the inventor of it, or those who love and patronize him, mean anything by it but what is, ‘in their apprehension,’ both innocent and laudable.

 Let it also be observed, that as gravity is almost a necessary consequence of solitude, ‘good-humored vices’ are certainly ‘social pleasures,’ and such as flow from, and show benevolence; and this is an affection for which our whole fraternity have the highest regard, insomuch that no surer mark can be taken of a man’s being ONE OF US, than the frequent returns of his expression in his discourses or writings. …

 I must not however, omit taking notice, to prevent mistakes, of one exception that must be made from this maxim; that is that when the person to whose charge any faults are laid, is reputed orthodox in his principles, in the common acceptation of that word, or comes in by orthodox influence, in that case they are all to be taken for granted as true, and the evil of them set forth in the liveliest colours. In consequence of this, he is to be prosecuted and torn to pieces on account of these crimes. But if it so happen, that he cannot be convicted upon a trial, then it is best to make use of things as they really are; that is, to express suspicions, to give ingenious and dubious hints, and, if possible, ruin him without any trial at all. There was a noble example of this given a few years ago, in the case of a settlement in the bounds of a presbytery, very many of whom are eminent in moderation. In that case, there were several faults laid to the charge of the candidate; and yet, though he himself very much insisted upon an inquiry into their truth, and a judgment upon their relevancy, the presbytery wisely refused to do either the one or the other, but left them to have their own natural weight in fame, rumour, and conversation. …

**Maxim III**

 ***It is a necessary part of the character of a moderate man, never to speak of the Confession of Faith but with a sneer; to give sly hints, that he does not thoroughly believe it; and to make the word orthodoxy a term of contempt and reproach.***

 The Confession of Faith which we are now all laid under a disagreeable necessity to subscribe, was framed in times of hot religious zeal; and therefore it can hardly be supposed to contain anything agreeable to our sentiments in these cool and refreshing days of moderation. So true is this, that I do not remember to have heard any moderate man speak well of it, or recommend it, in a sermon, or private discourse, in my time. And, indeed, nothing can be more ridiculous, than to make a fixed standard for opinions, which change just as the fashions of clothes and dress. No complete system can be settled for all ages, except the maxims I am now compiling and illustrating, and their great perfection lies in their being ambulatory, so that they may be applied differently, with the change of times. …

 But besides these general reasons, there is one very strong particular reason why moderate men cannot love the Confession of Faith; moderation evidently implies a large share of charity, and consequently a good and favorable opinion of those that differ from our church; but a rigid adherence to the Confession of Faith, and high esteem of it, nearly borders upon, or gives great suspicion of harsh opinions of those that differ from us: and does not experience rise up and ratify this observation? Who are the narrow-minded, bigoted, uncharitable persons among us? who are the severe censurers of those that differ in judgment? Who are the damners of the adorable Heathens, Socrates, Plato, Marcus Antonius, etc.? In fine, who are the persecutors of the inimitable heretics among ourselves? Who but the admirers of this antiquated composition, who pin their faith to other’s men’s sleeves, and will not endure one jot less or different belief from what their fathers had before them! It is therefore plain, that the moderate man, who desires to enclose all intelligent beings in one benevolent embrace, must have an utter abhorrence at that vile hedge of distinction, the Confession of Faith. …

 What is said might suffice in so clear a case; but I am here able to give a proof of the improvement of the age, by communicating to the reader a new way of subscribing the Confession of Faith, in a perfect consistency with sincerity, if that be thought of any consequence: it is taken from the method of attesting some of our gentlemen elders to the general assembly. Many insist, that they ought to be attested, and do attest them, as qualified in all respects, if the attestors are wholly ignorant about the matter; because, in that case, there is no evidence to the contrary, and the presumption ought to lie on the favorable side. Now, as every new discovery should be applied to all the purposes for which it may be useful, let this method be adopted by the entrants into the ministry, and applied to the subscription of the Confession of Faith. Nothing is more easy than for them to keep themselves wholly ignorant of what it contains; and then they may, with a good conscience, subscribe it as true, because it ought to be so.

**Maxim IV**

 ***A good preacher must not only have all the above and subsequent principles of moderation in him, as the source of everything that is good; but must, over and above, have the following special marks and signs of a talent for preaching. 1) His subjects must be confined to social duties. 2) He must recommend them only from rational considerations, viz. the beauty and comely proportions of virtue, and its advantages in the present life, without any regard to a future state of more extended self-interest. 3) His authorities must be drawn from heathen writers, none, or as few as possible, from Scripture. 4) He must be very unacceptable to the common people.***

 These four marks of a good preacher, or rules for preaching well (for they serve equally for both purposes) I shall endeavor distinctly to illustrate and confirm, that this important branch of my subject may be fully understood.

 As to the first of these rules, ‘That a preacher’s subjects must be confined to ‘social duties,’ it is quite necessary in a moderate man, because his moderation teaches him to avoid all the high flights of evangelic enthusiasm, and the mysteries of grace, which the common people are so fond of. It may be observed, nay, it is observed, that all our stamp, avoid the word grace as much as possible, and have agreed to substitute the ‘moral virtues’ in the room of the ‘graces of the Spirit,’ which is the orthodox expression. And indeed it is not in this only, but in all other cases, that we endeavor to improve the phraseology, and show, that besides sentiment, even in language itself, we are far superior to, and wiser than our fathers before us. I could show this by a great many examples, but that it would be too tedious; and therefore only add, to the one mentioned above, that where an ancient orthodox man, or even an old fashioned modern, that thinks religious can never be amended, either in matter or manner, would have said ‘a great degree of sanctification,’ a man of moderation and politeness will say, ‘a high pitch of virtue.’ Now, as this is the case, it is plain a moderate preacher must confine his subjects to social duties chiefly, and not insist on such passages of Scripture as will by the very repetition of them, contaminate his style, and may perhaps diffuse a rank smell of orthodoxy through the whole of his discourse.

 After all, I cannot refuse, that it is still a more excellent way, for those who have talents equal to the undertaking, to seize an orthodox text, explain it quite away from its ordinary sense, and constrain it to speak the main parts of our own scheme. …

 The second rule will be easily confirmed. That duties are to be recommended only from ‘rational considerations.’ What can be imagined more foolish than to contradict this? If there be anything in a sermon different from rational considerations, it must be irrational, that is to say, absurd. It is in this part of our scheme that we moderate men obtain a glorious triumph over our adversaries and despisers. Who but must smile, when they hear the contemptible, vulgar, ignorant, hot-headed country elders, or silly women, led captive by them at their will, saying, they do not love this rational way of going to heaven! …

 The third rule, vis. recommending ‘virtue,’ from the authority and examples of the Heathens, is not only highly proper, because they were very virtuous, but has this manifest advantage attending it, that it is a proper way of reasoning to two quite opposite kinds of persons. One is, such as are real Christians, who will be ashamed by the superior excellence of mere Heathens, as they call them, and whom they so much despise. The other is, our present living heathens, who pay no regard to the Christian religion at all; and therefore will only be moved by the authority of the persons they esteem. It is well known, there are multitudes in our land, who reckon Socrates and Plato to have been much greater men than any of the apostles, although, as the moderate preacher I mentioned lately told his hearers) the apostle Paul had an university education, and was instructed in logic by professor Gamaliel. Therefore let religion be constantly and uniformly called ‘virtue,’ and let the Heathen philosophers be set up as the great patterns and promoters of it. Upon this head, I just particularly recommend M. Antoninus by name, because an eminent person of the moderate character says, his mediations is the BEST book that ever was written for forming the heart.

 But perhaps the last part of this third rule will be thought to need most illustration and defense, vis. That none at all, ‘or very little use is to be made of Scripture.’ And really, to deal plainly, the great reason of this is, that very few of the Scripture motives and arguments are of the moderate stamp; the most part of them are drawn from orthodox principles: for example, the apostle Paul cannot even say, ‘Husbands, love your wives,’ but his argument and example comes in these words, ‘as Christ also loved the church.’ The apostle John also speaks in a very dangerous way, of union with Christ, and abiding in him, in order to bring forth fruit, which is his way of speaking for a virtuous life. Now, let any indifferent person judge, how this kind of expression, and others of a like nature, such as mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit, would agree with the other parts of our discourses: they would be like opposite kinds of fluids which will not compound; they would be quite heterogeneous, which is against all the rules of fine writing, and hinders it from being an uniform, beautiful, and comely whole. …

 The fourth and last rule for a preacher, is, that he must be ‘very unacceptable to the people.’ One periodical, I remember, somewhere says, that most of the critics in the land seem to act as if the first rule of dramatic writing were ‘not to please.’ Now, what they make the first rule of writing plays, I make the last rule for composing sermons; not as being the least, but the most important. It is indeed the grant criterion, the most indispensable rule of all. Though one should pretend to adhere to all the former rules, and be wanting in this alone, he would be no more than ‘a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal;’ pardon the expression, the importance of the matter requires it. I shall put a case: suppose a man should have the approbation of the very best judges, vis. ‘Those whose taste we ourselves allow to be good, if at the same time, he happens to be acceptable to the common people, it is a sign that he must have some subtle refined fault, which has escaped the observation of the good judges aforesaid; for there is no man even of our own fraternity, so perfect and uniform in judging right, as the common people are in judging wrong. …

 To conclude this maxim, it would be too formal for me, and too tedious to the reader, to enumerate all the objections that are, by some, raised against our way of preaching: I shall therefore mention but one, and show it is false; hoping that the reader will suppose there is no more foundation for any of the rest. It is alleged, there is no method in our discourses, but that they consist in random flights, and general declamations. Nothing more untrue. The polite reader, or hearer, knows that there may be an excellent and regular method, where there are no formal distinctions of firstly, secondly, and thirdly; but, to cut off all occasion of cavil, let the world hereby know, that one of our most famed preachers chose once for his text, John 11:29, and of that verse the following words, ‘He stinks.’ He observed, we had there (or thereabouts) a description of the threefold slate of a bad man: first, he sickened; secondly he died; thirdly, he stank. This I take to have been an accuracy in point of method, to which it will not easy to find a parallel.

**Maxim V**

 ***A minister must endeavor to acquire as great a degree of politeness, in his carriage and behavior, and to catch as much of the air and manner of a fine gentleman, as possibly he can.***

 This is usually a distinguishing mark between the moderate and the orthodox; and how much we have the advantage in it is extremely obvious. Good manners is undoubtedly the most excellent of all accomplishments, and in some measure supplies the place of them all when they are wanting. And surely nothing can be more necessary to, or more ornamental and becoming in a minister: it gains him easy access into the world, and frees him from that rigid severity which renders many of them so odious and detestable to the polite part of it. In former times, ministers were so monkish and recluse, for ordinary, and so formal when they did happen to appear, that all the jovial part of mankind, particularly rakes and libertines, shunned and fled from them; or, when unavoidably thrown into their company, were constrained, and had no kind of confidence to repose in them: whereas now, let a moderate, modern, well-bred minister go into promiscuous company, they stand in no manner of awe, and will even swear with all imaginable liberty. This gives the minister an opportunity of understanding their character, and of perhaps sometimes reasoning in an easy and genteel manner against swearing. This, though indeed it seldom reforms them, yet is as seldom taken amiss; which shows the counsel to have been administered with prudence.

 How is it possible that a minister can understand wickedness, unless he either practices it himself (but much of that will not yet pass in the world) or allows the wicked to be bold in his presence? To do otherwise, would be to do in practice what I have known narrow-minded bigoted students do as to speculation, viz. avoid reading their adversaries books because they were erroneous; whereas it is evident no error can be refuted till it be understood.

 The setting the different characters of ministers in immediate opposition, will put this matter past all doubt, as the sun of truth rising upon the stars of error, darkens and makes them to disappear. Some there are, who may be easily known to be ministers, by their very dress, their grave demure looks, and their confined precise conversations. How contemptible is this! and how like to some of the meanest employments among us; as sailors, who are known by their rolling walk, and taylors, by the shivering shrug of their shoulders! But our truly accomplished clergy put off so entirely every thing that is peculiar to their profession, that were you to see them in the streets, meet with them at a visit, or spend an evening with them in a tavern, you would not once suspect them or men of that character. Agreeably to this, I remember an excellent thing said by a gentleman, in commendation of a minister, that ‘he had nothing at all of the clergyman about him.’ …

**Maxim VI**

 ***It is not only unnecessary for a moderate man to have much learning, but he ought to be filled with a contempt of all kinds of learning but one; which is to understand Leibnitz’s scheme well; the chief parts of which are so beautifully painted, and so harmoniously sung by Lord Shaftsbury, and which have been so well liked into form and method by the late immortal Mr. H\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_n.***

 This maxim is necessary, because without it the former could not be attained to. Much study is a great enemy to politeness in men, just as a great care of household affairs spoils the free careless air of a fine lady: and whether politeness is to be sacrificed to learning, let the impartial world judge. Besides the scheme which I have permitted the moderate man to study, doth actually supercede the use of all other learning, because it contains a knowledge of the whole, and the good of the whole; more than which, I hope, will be allowed to be not only needless, but impossible.

 This scheme excels in brevity; for it may be understood in a very short time; which, I suppose, prompted a certain clergyman to say, that any student might get as much divinity as he would ever have occasion for in six weeks. It is also quite agreeable to the improvements that have been made in arts and sciences of late years; for every thing is now more compendiously taught, and more superficially understood, than formerly, and yet as well and better to all the purposes of life. In the very mechanic arts, laborious diligence gives way to elegance and ease; as the lumpish, strong, old Gothic buildings, to more genteel, though flighter, modern ones. There have been schemes published for teaching children to read by way of diversion. Every year gives us a shorter method of learning some branch of knowledge. In short, in these last days the quintessence of every thing has been extracted, and is presented to us, as it wre, in little phials; so that we may come to all learning by one act of intuition. agreeably to all this, have we not seen in fact, many students of divinity brought up in hot-beds, who have become speakers in general assemblies, and strenuous supporters of a falling church, before their beards were grown, to the perfect astonishment of an observing world?

 I must also observe, that there is a providential fitness of that scheme, in another respect, for the present age and time. When the fees of colleges, and expence of boarding is raised; when the rate of living is quite altered, and when a spiteful landed interest, and a heedless parliament, have refused to grant any augmentation to our stipends; there is no other way remains for us, but o cheapen our education, by taking less time to it, and arriving at the point designed by a nearer cut. Then there will be no need at all for the critical study of the Scriptures, for reading large bodies of divinity, for an acquaintance with church-history, or the writings of those poor creatures the Christian fathers: but all is absorbed into the good of the whole: …

 We find that moderate men have mostly, by constitution, too much spirit to submit to the drudgery of the kinds of learning above-mentioned, and despise all who do so. There is no controversy now about Arian, Arminian, Pelagian, or Socinian tenets, but only whether this good of-the-whole scheme holds. This shews, by the by, the injustice and malignity of those poor beings the Seceders, who cry out of erroneous doctrines in the church, and assert, that Arminianism is publicly taught by many. It is known, that they mean by the moderate men, when they speak so; and yet I will venture to affirm, that there are not a few young men of that character, who, if they were asked, could not tell what the five Arminian articles are, so little do they regard Arminianism. I myself, the reader will perceive, know the number of them; but whether I know any more about them or not, I shall preserve as a secret in my own mind. It will perhaps be objected against this maxim, That the moderate party commonly set up on a pretence of being more learned than their adversaries; and are, in fact, thought to be very learned in their sermons by the vulgar, who, for that reason hate them. Now, as to their pretending to be more learned than their adversaries, it is most just; for they have, as has been shown, got hold of the sum-total of learning, although they did not calculate it themselves. And as to their being thought learned in their sermons by the vulgar, it is sufficient for that purpose that they be unintelligible. Scattering a few phrases in their sermons, as harmony, order, proportion, taste, sense of beauty, balance of the affection, &c. will persuade the people that they are learned: and this persuasion is, to all intents and purposes, the same thing as if it were true. …

**Maxim VII**

 ***A moderate man must endeavor, as much as he handsomely can, to put off any appearances of devotion, and avoid all unnecessary exercises of religious worship whether public or private.***

 … Now, as to the public exercise of religious worship; although a certain measure of them is reasonable enough, and though the office by which we have our bread, obliges us to be often engaged in them; yet a truly moderate man, without renouncing his calling, has it in his power to pare off a great many superfluities with which the orthodox clergy are apt to overload religion, and render it unpalatable to the polite world.

 Being members of church-judicatures, and, we hope the majority in most of them, the moderate party can discourage and stifle all motions for extraordinary fasts or thanksgivings; which experience has taught us serve only to promote idleness, and discourage industry. … For this reason, it was very refreshing to hear, as we did lately, that even in the most distant and nothernly corners of this country, there is a set of clergy of an heroic spirit, who are resolved to reform their people, and beat them out of that unpolite and barbarous inclination, which many of them still retain, of hearing sermons.

 With a view to the same good end, we can curtail our business at home, both as to the number and length of our pulpit performances. In our own families, though it would not perhaps yet be convenient to imitate the fashionable part of society so very quickly, in discarding the worship of God altogether; yet we may, by degrees, sometimes omit it, through hurry of business, at other times be dropping, now and then at least, some parts of it; and in gentlemen’s families, take care to give discreet intimidations that we do not incline to put them out of their ordinary way, or occasion the least interruption to the mirth of the company. …

 The necessity of such a conduct cannot be denied, when it is considered what effect the length and frequency of public devotion has had in driving most of the fashionable gentry from our churches altogether; and that even such of them as still vouchsafe their company sometimes, are yet driven away from the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, where the service is expected to be more tedious and tiresome. Now, the only way to regain them to the church, is to accommodate the worship, as much as may be, to their taste: the manner of doing which is so well known, that I will not spend time in explaining it.

 I confess there has been sometimes an ugly objections thrown up against this part of my argument, viz. That this desertion of public worship by those in high life, seems, in fact, to be contemporary with, and to increase, in a pretty exact proportion, to the attempts that have been, and are made to suit it to the taste. It is alleged, that they are led to such a conduct, not by the dictates of their reason, but by the depravation of their hearts; and therefore make use of the behavior of the clergy, as an excuse and justification of their conduct. In answer to this objection, I shall not pretend to say what use gentlemen may sometimes make of our conduct, for I have known them often very preposterous in their judgment, condemning others for what they freely indulge in themselves, and no less unthankful, rendering evil for good. But still I say, there remains no strength in their objection to a man of moderate principles; for it plainly comes much to the same thing at last, whether the mountain comes the mouse, or the mouse to the mountain. If I should meet a friend halfway, that had got at a distance from me, though he should not move a foot, I am sure we should be nearer one another, than if I had kept my place as well as he.

 But whatever be in this, I must acknowledge, that to be constantly whining and praying, looks so extremely orthodox-like, that I cannot help conceiving a prejudice at it, for this very reason; and I doubt not but every moderate man, will have the very same fellow-feeling. In truth, a great abundance of devotion has such a tendency to inflame one with zeal, that any man who would maintain his moderation, had best keep out of the reach of such ensnaring influence. Besides, it has been an old remark, and I begin to suspect there is some ground for it, that let one embrace what system of divinity he will, it is impossible to pray but according to the orthodox system. And whatever laudable pains had been taken, by some of our friends, to avoid this inconvenience; yet, from what I have observed, in the most successful of them, I must own, I can at present see no other remedy but to deal as little that way as possible.

**Maxim VIII**

 ***In church-settlements, which are the principal causes that come before ministers for judgment, the only thing to be regarded is, who the patron and the great and noble heritors are for; the inclinations of the common people are to be utterly despised.***

 That this maxim is invariably observed by all moderate men is certain, and may be attested by all that ever were present at a General Assembly of this national church. …

 There are many reasons upon which this maxim is founded; as the implacable hatred we bear to the elders and common people, and their constant wrong judgment. As this is so very evident, I cannot pass it without expressing my grief and astonishment, that so clear-sighted an author, and in all respects so agreeable to our sentiments, as Lord Shafsbury, should have said, in his Essay on the freedom of Wit and Humor, that, ‘it belongs to men of slavish principles to affect a superiority over the vulgar, and to despise the multitude.’ …

 But to return: The natural respect we owe to those in great and high stations, claims from us the testimony of it required in the maxim. There is an original and essential difference between gentry and common people, which out to be particularly kept here.

**Maxim IX**

 ***While a settlement is carrying on, the candidate against whom there is a strong opposition from the people, must be looked upon, and everywhere declared to be, a person of great worth, and remarkable abilities; provided always, that if ever the same person, after he is settled, be at pains, and succeed in gaining the people’s affection, he shall then fall as much below the ordinary standard in his character, as before he was raised above it.***

Both parts of this maxim will appear very reasonable to all that see with our eyes. The people being against a man, is a certain sign of his being a good preacher, as has been formerly proved: it is also a pretty sure sign of his being of moderate principles, ‘which make the comers thereunto perfect;’ and these two things are sufficient to justify us in raising his character. It is indeed often absolutely necessary, when a process is in agitation, that it may help him out with a scanty concurrence, and have an influence upon the church courts, which are composed of a mixed multitude. Nor is it easy to conceive, how excellent and well invented a weapon this is, the giving a man an extraordinary and high character. It necessarily imprints a kind of veneration of him on the minds of his judges; and hath this peculiar advantage, that there is no parrying of it; for whatever some few of different principles may think, they dare not plainly contradict it.—Every man has it in his power to speak well of one another, but nobody must take the liberty to speak ill of a man in a public court, unless he can also venture to give him a libel. Many a time have I heard young men highly extolled in church courts, when their settlement was in dependence, who, in strict truth, were but middling kind of men, and some of them very heavy, who afterwards proved no small incumbrance upon the moderate body.

 As to the other part of the maxim, taking away their character for ability when they apostatize to orthodoxy, this will be easily accounted for, if it be remembered how they came by it. It was freely given them; and therefore it may be taken away at pleasure: It was given to bring them in as an additional strength to the moderate interest; and therefore, when they forsake that interest, it is but just to deprive them of it. If any shall object, that this is not agreeable to the strict rules of veracity, I desire it may be remembered, that the present fashionable scheme of moral philosophy is much improved in comparison of that which prevailed some time ago. Virtue does not now consist in ‘acting agreeably to the nature of things,’ as Dr. Clarke affirms; not in ‘acting according to truth,’ which an old school-master, one Woolafton, once wrote a book to prove; but in ‘the good of the whole;’ and therefore an illustrious and noble end sanctifies the means of attaining it. …

 If it be further objected, That still this only satisfies ourselves, whereas in the case in hand it is necessary to satisfy the world. As to this, we can freely say, that the man was good, but now he is bad; and that is no contradiction: for though the Confession of Faith maintains the infallible perseverance of the saints in grace, yet we never affirmed the necessary perseverance of men in moderation, these two things being entirely distinct the one from the other. Some of our friends do fall away now and then: our strength, for ordinary, consists in young men; for there are several who, in old age, through the decay of their faculties, begin to incline a little to orthodoxy, and then we term them, not ‘old men,’ but ‘old wives.’ However, there are also some, who not only persevere, but gloriously improve in moderation to the latest old age, and to their dying day; of which number was the late Rev. Mr. J. R. in K. whose name I have thought proper to record in this immortal work, that it may be had in everlasting remembrance.

**Maxim X**

 ***Whenever we have got a settlement decided over the belly perhaps of the whole person in the parish, by a majority in the General Assembly, the victory should be improved, by appointing some of the orthodox opposers of the settlement to execute it, especially those of them that pretend to have a scruple of conscience at having an active hand in any such settlement.***

They do not deserve a victory, who know not how to push it, or to improve the advantage they have gained. A sentence of the General Assembly, even as of any other court, signifies nothing, if it be not executed. To rest satisfied with the victory we have gained, by the bare decision, would indeed be yielding it back again, and losing in fact, what we gained in appearance. This is self-evident. But the next point is Who shall be employed in executing it; those who appointed, or those who pretend a scruple of conscience at doing what appears to their disordered intellects to be what they call sinful?—Now, as to this, allow me only to ask a few plain questions. Is not every society divided into the governing and the governed, the master and the servants? What is the subject of any debate in the Assembly that ends in a vote, but to determine who is the one, and who is the other? When once a vote has made us masters, does not the same vote make the minority servants? And do I need to ask further, if there is any piece of drudgery to be performed, who it belongs to, the masters or the servants? Apply this then to the case in hand: Who would hazard his own life in fording a river, if he had a servant to try the depth of it before him? Who would choose to go to a pulpit under a shower of stones from an enraged populace, if he had others under his authority, whom he could send upon the same ungracious errand?

 Now, the usefulness of this conduct is very evident: for it is plain, they will either obey or disobey. If the first is the case, then we shall have the honor of bringing them, and they themselves the profit and advantage of being brought, into the hatred and abhorrence of the common people; in commendation of which state, enough has been said already. If they disobey, they must be deposed, and cast out as incorrigible, to make way for those that are better than themselves. This will be to the advantage of the church: for young men, ‘caeteris paribus,’ are much better than old.

 As this method of purging the church of corrupt members is like to be a prevailing measure in our days, I shall endeavor to support it by a few, but these demonstrative arguments; in most of which, indeed, I shall have little more than the honor of recording the sentiments and reasoning of some eminent men that were members of the two last General Assemblies.

 In the first place it is certain, that the command of a proper authority is sufficient to make any action not only innocent and lawful, but perfectly right, and strictly obligatory; insomuch that if an executioner should be commanded to hang his father or son, for praying to God, or reading his Bible; nay, if one of Jesus Christ’s disciples had happened to have been a Roman soldier, and should have been commanded to crucify his master, he should have betrayed the most egregious ignorance of the Christian religion, had he made the least difficulty in executing such orders.

 It is to no purpose here to object the immutability of moral laws, and the supreme authority of God: for if obedience to human authority be one of his laws, as it plainly is, then all his other laws must be submitted to such alterations and suspensions as our superiors think proper. The apostles do indeed sometimes speak of ‘obeying God rather than man:’ but we can explain this as easily as we do another text, in the third chapter of the Romans, which seems to teach, that ‘we should not do evil that good may come:’ for as, in the one case, whatever promotes good cannot be evil; so, in the other, if human authority be once duly interposed, it is obeying God to comply with whatever is injoined thereby; and therefore it is impossible that ever there can an interference happen. Besides, some allowance must, no doubt, be made for the difference of times, and disadvantages which all the ancient writers lay under, the late fine improvements in the science of morals not having then been excogitated. But I can assure the reader, the principle which I have laid down, is now the doctrine of this church, wherein both divines and lawyers who are member of our Assemblies, are entirely agreed, and will not suffer any body to call it in question. …

I shall only observe two very plain and clear advantages in this principle, whereby it will appear, how happy it is that the church hath fallen so entirely in with it, and proceeds so uniformly upon it.

 The first is, that in case of necessity, an action which no body would chuse perhaps to take the weight of upon them, may yet be done without the least hazard of any body’s being called to account for it in the other world. If the doer of an action were to be the judge of its lawfulness, he might be damned perhaps for doing it, in case it were found to be wrong; but upon this principle of implicit obedience to his superiors, there is no repelling his defence: it was not his province to judge whether it was lawful or unlawful; and the Assembly or Commission who gave the order, being bodies politic, are, by that time, all dissolved, and appear only in the capacity of individuals.

 The other advantage is this, that if the supreme court of any kind, were allowed to be the only proper judge of the lawfulness of its own appointments, it would be impossible, in the nature of things, that ever there could be a separation in the church, or a rebellion in the state. The justness of this consequence is so evident, that I shall not spend any time in illustrating it, but heartily with the principle from which it flows, were universally embraced.

 In the second place, the disobedient brethren have but one pretence for their conduct, which is groundless, viz. a ‘scruple of conscience:’ as to which, hear Dr. Goodman, a noble English writer: ‘A tender conscience is nothing else but an ignorant and uninstructed mind; or a sickly, melancholy, and superstitious understanding.’ I could easily show, that there is no such thing as a real scruple of conscience: the lawyers in the General Assembly, who are men of as great penetration as any in the land, have most of them plainly declared, that they do not conceive it possible. A certain learned gentleman of this court hath assured us, that taking away ministers stipends would enlighten their conscience. The renowned author of Hudibras is known to be of the same opinion: from which two authorities I will endeavor to amend Dr. Goodman’s definition: for a ‘tender conscience is not an ignorant mind,’ but a ‘full stomach.’ This accounts for appearances better, and particularly for the epithet of tender, commonly given to it, as all physicians are agreed, that a wound upon a full stomach is very dangerous. Having thus rooted up the very foundation of this pretence, it is needless to go through the several particulars insisted upon by the disobedient as straitening to them: and therefore I shall but in a word mention one of them. They pretend it is a profane farce to confer, in a solemn manner, the care of the souls of a certain people, when nothing is really conferred but a legal title to a benefice: as also, that the candidate cannot conscientiously answer several of the questions commonly put on those occasions. But is it not extremely strange, that any body can be so dull as not to regard these questions in their only true and proper light, as a necessary piece of formality, without which a charge of horning for the stipends could not be raised? And as to the other part of the objection, whether it be not much more a mock ceremony, to ordain a man to a congregation, when a title to the benefice cannot be conferred, I shall leave the reader to determine, as if the case were his own.

 The third principle upon which our conduct is founded, is of such undoubted verity, that the bare mentioning of it is sufficient to convince all the world how little it stands in need of any proof; accordingly no moderate man views it in any other light than as an axiom, or self-evident truth; namely, That if any excuse for disobedience were once admitted, or any indulgence granted to these tender-conscienced inferiors, there would be an end of all government in an instant; neither commands nor obedience could proceed one step further, but every individual instrument of power, in that fatal society, astonished at the monstrous phaenomenon, would stare at one another; all the wheels of the political machine would stop at once; nay, would split into ten thousand pieces; every relation and connexion of their parts would be instantly dissolved, and the beautiful whole would rush into a wild chaos of anarchy and confusion. The reader will easily believe, I am too wise to offer a proof of an axiom or self-evident truth; however, I think it but fair to inform him, that such is the nature of paper and ink, that they have not the power of doing it all the justice even in narration, of which it is capable elsewhere. Whoever has heard the demonstrative tone, or beheld the infallible air, and gesture of certainty, with which it has been asserted by an Assembly-orator, would be ashamed that he ever stood in need to be put in mind of it: for my own part, I am so entirely influenced by it, that if the most faithful, diligent, and useful servant should, in the humblest manner represent to me, that he has a scruple about executing any of my orders, and beg to be excused, suppose from shaving me on Sunday morning, and I should unfortunately be so far off my guard, as for once to indulge him, I would immediately dissolve my whole family, and never more think of lodging with a living soul under the same unhappy roof. …

 The last principle which I shall mention, and which, with the rest, I am sure is abundantly sufficient to support the maxim laid down for our conduct, is, That the best method of conviction, and of all others the most proper for a church-court, is that of authority, supported in its highest rigor by censures, which may be felt by men of the dullest capacities, as deposition, and suspension from benefice as well as office. If the goodness of an argument, or the excellency of a method, is to be measured by the frequency of recourse that is had to it, I think none can dispute precedency with this. It must be allowed to be, of all others, the most Christian method; it reigned over the whole church without a rival, for many ages; and though protestants, for a while pretended to find fault with it in the hands of their enemies; yet, which of them all, when they became able to make use of it, have not tried it in their turn? And whether we consider the majority, by whose hands this weapon is to be wielded, or the minority upon whom the weight of it must fall, it will plainly appear to be admirably suited to the present times. As to the beasts of burden, who fail to be driven by this method, they are known to be such dull and lifeless animals (as they are most of them past the vigor of youth) that no other argument can make any impression upon them. However a horse might be managed, who is a generous creature, no body could think of another method to make an ass move, but constantly to belabour its sides. There cannot be a clearer evidence of the dullness and stupidity of these obstinate beings we have to do with, than the expence of rhetoric that has been thrown away upon them, to persuade them of a thing as clear as the sun, viz. that if they had any conscience they would depose themselves, and yield their place to more pliable successors. They even pretend conscience here again; and tell us they are placed in a station which they dare not desert, unless they be thrust out of it. Now, let the reader judge how incapable of persuasion one must be, to find difficulty in so plain a case; and therefore how necessary it is, that a more effectual method should be tried.

 On the other hand, the majority in Assemblies and Commissions seems, at present, to be peculiarly adapted to such a method of conviction as I have mentioned. One part of our strength lies in the laity who attend our judicatures; these, as they possess no benefice in the church, they are out of the reach of this sort of censure, and therefore are only capable of inflicting, but not of suffering it; and as they are not much accustomed to solving cases of conscience, what other method can occur to them, when things of this nature are thrown in their way, than the more gentleman-like method, for which Alexander the Great is so justly celebrated, viz. cutting the troublesome knot, which they would find tedious and difficult to untie? The rest of our side consists in clergy of the youngest sort; who, as they are imitators of the manners of gentlemen, may be supposed to act with the same spirit in public judgment. …

**Maxim XI**

 ***The character which moderate men give their adversaries, of the orthodox party, must always be that of ‘knaves’ or ‘fools;’ and, as occasion serves, the same person (if it will pass) may be represented as a ‘knave’ at one time, and as a ‘fool’ at another.***

 The justness of this proceeding may be easily made appear. The principles of moderation being so very evident to reason, it is a demonstration, that none, but unreasonable men can resist their influence: and therefore we cannot suppose, that such as are against us can be so from conscience. Besides, setting aside the superior intrinsic excellence of the one set of principles above the other, there are much stronger carnal motives, to speak in their own style, to act in their way, than in ours; and therefore there is great ground to conclude, that they act from hypocrisy, but not so of us. They please the people; we please, at least endeavor to please, those of high rank. Now there are many remarkable advantages they gain by pleasing the people; whereas it is evident, ‘ex post facto,’ that we gain nothing by pleasing the gentry; for they never trampled upon us so much as of late; and have entirely defeated our application to parliament for augmentation of stipend. So far are we from being in any respect the better of the gentry, that we have really great reason to complain of them; for when we have endeavored to ingratiate ourselves with them, by softness and complaisance, and by going considerable lengths with them in their freedom, they oftentimes most ungenerously despise us but the more: nay, many of them have first taught us to live at a high rate, and then refuse to give us any thing to keep it up. Now, as we men of reason could not but foresee this, it is plain nothing but the most disinterested virtue could lead us to act as we have done. Whereas, on the other hand, the orthodox have gained, and do possess the esteem of the common people; and so, it is plain they could have no other view in their conduct but to attain it. However, to shew our charity, we allow there are some on their side who are indifferently honest; but these are men of very weak intellectuals, as is evident from their not thinking as we do.

 The other part of the maxim is abundantly reasonable, but not so easily put in practice, viz. representing the same individual person sometimes as a knave, and sometimes as a fool. This affair is sometimes unluckily managed, when it is incautiously attempted. In order to its being done, successfully, therefore let the following rules be observed.

 1st. Let a man be represented as a knave and a hypocrite to one sort of people in the world; and let him be represented as a fool, not to the same, but to another sort: let the first be chiefly our better sort of people, particularly those among them that hate much profession of religion, and are apt to call all strictness hypocrisy: the other it is plain, must be the simple and credulous.

 The second rule is, that, if possible, there should be different persons employed in spreading these different calumnies of the same man. By this apparent consistency in every one’s opinion with itself, they will be the more easily maintained, and be the less liable to discovery: and thus, as the several wheels of a watch, by opposite motions, promote the same end; so the several members of the moderate body, by seemingly different and opposite means, conspire in promoting the good of the whole. This principle upon which these two rules are founded, is, That probability ought to be studied in every falsehood we would have believed; which principle is laid down, and finely illustrated, in the Art of Political Lying, said to be wrote by one Dr. Arbuthnot.

 It will not, I hope, be reckoned wandering from my subject, when I observe, that the very same principle of studying probability is to be applied to the celebration of the characters of our friends, as well as the defamation of our enemies. These two designs indeed have a very strong connextion, and do mutually support and promote one another. Praising one character is, by necessary and manifest consequence, a defamation of its opposite; and, in some cases, which may easily be conceived, it is the most eligible, and the most effectual way of doing it. I have been present at a conversation, where the chief intention of one of the speakers, and what he had most at heart, was to ruin the character and reputation of a certain person who happened to be mentioned, with his hearers; but he could not well know, whether they were able to bear a large quantity of unmixed reproach, he chose the wiser and safer method, of celebrating another character, and drawing it with all his art, in such a manner, as the strongest opposition possible might appear, in some of its circumstances, to that of the person intended to be wounded by reflection.

 But in this, as in the former case, great judgment and prudence must be used; nothing must be said, the contrary of which is, or may be easily known to be true; and particularly all the antiquated orthodox phrases, in giving a minister’s character, are to be religiously avoided. The necessity of this direction will best appear from an example: Suppose I should say of Momus, he was a youth of early, and continues to be a man of eminent piety, walking with God, and spending many hours every day in secret devotion; has a deep and strong sense upon his mind, of the worth and value of time, and lay it out wholly in fitting others and himself for eternity; has so sacred a regard for truth, that he never tells a lie, even in jest; has a most humble deportment, and is perfectly free from that prevailing fault of triumphing over the weak or shame-faced by raillery or impudence; has been frequently heard to express his displeasure at all lenity of carriage, and frothy unprofitable discourse, in persons of the sacred characters; and as he was always himself remarkable for a purity of conversation, so he cannot allow the most distant allusion to obscenity to pass without a reproof; in short, his whole behavior commands both the reverence and love of all who have the happiness of his acquaintance. I say, if I should draw the character of Momus in this manner, as some authors do those of the Puritan clergy about a hundred years ago, it is probable he would give me no thanks; and indeed, he would owe me none; for it would have much more the air of a satire than of a panegyric.

 It is, however, possible to draw a character of the same person, which shall have some truth, and much probability in it; and which, as being the character of a modern, shall be much more in the modern commendatory style. He is a man of a most sprightly and lively fancy, of an inexhaustible fund of wit and humour, where he pleases to display it, though the iniquity of the times has, in some measure, checked its indulgence. He is, notwithstanding he grimness of his countenance, entirely free from any sourness or moroseness of temper, so that in his conversation a man may enjoy all manner of ease and freedom. He is a most genteel and elegant preacher and poet; and, to my knowledge, a man of a warm and good heart.

 [This expression, ‘a man of a good heart,’ is much in fashion among the moderate, and of great significancy and beauty; but it is only to be used in speaking to persons of some degree of taste; for I knew a particular instance in which it disobliged the person it was intended to gain.]

**Maxim XII**

 ***As to the world in general, a moderate man is to have great charity for Atheists and Deists in principle, and for persons that are loose and vicious in their practice; but none at all for those that have a high profession of religion, and a great pretense to strictness in their walk and conversation.***

 This maxim seems to be pretty strongly laid; and yet, upon a strict inquiry, it will be found that we follow it very exactly. That we have charity for the first-mentioned sort of persons, is evident; for we endeavor to accommodate ourselves to them, and draw as near them as possibly we can, insisting upon nothing in our sermons but what may be said to be a part, or an improvement, of the law of nature. And as to our having no charity for the other sort, it is as evident; witness the odious idea we have affixed to the name of a professor (unless when it is meant of a professor in a college;) and witness our ironical way of speaking, when we say of a man, he has a ‘grave sanctified air.’ Nay, even holiness and godliness are seldom taken by us in a very good sense: when we say, ‘One of the holy brethren,’ or, ‘A good godly lady,’ they would mistake us very much that would think we had a high opinion of any of these persons. …

 The very meaning of charity is to believe without evidence; it is no charity at all to believe good of a man when we see it, but when we do not see it. It is with charity in sentiment, as with charity in supplying the wants of the necessitous; we do not give alms to the rich but to the poor. In like manner, when there are all outward appearances of goodness, it requires no charity to believe well of the persons: but when there are none at all, or perhaps very many to the contrary, then I will maintain it is charity, and charity in its perfection, to believe well of them. Some object to this, Well, since it is your will, have charity for them; but have charity for them; but have charity also for such as are apparently good. Oh! the stupid world! and slow of heart to conceive! is it not evident to a demonstration that if the appearance of wickedness be the foundation of charity, the appearance of goodness, which is its opposite, must be the foundation of a quite contrary judgment, viz. suspecting, or rather believing ill of them? If any still insist, that if not charity, yet justice should incline us to believe well of them? as I have seemingly confessed; I answer, that we have no occasion for justice, if we have charity; for charity is more than justice, even as the whole is more than a part: but though I have supposed, ‘argumentandi gratia,’ that justice requires this, yet it is not my sentiment; for the person meant being usually great enemies to us, are thereby cut off from any claim in justice to our good opinion; and being also, as has been proved, improper objects of charity, it remains that we should hate them with a perfect hatred, as in fact we do.

**Maxim XIII**

 ***All moderate men are joined together in the strictest bond of union, and do never fail to support and defend one another to the utmost, be the cause they are engaged in what it will.***

This maxim I do not insert so much for the instruction of the ignorant, as for the perfection of my own plan, and the honor of the whole body; for I have hardly ever known it to fail in any instance whatever. And as this character belongs, without controversy, to all the moderate, so it belongs to them by an exclusive privilege; for they do most loudly complain of, and load with most opprobrious epithets, any of the orthodox, who attempt to imitate them in it, as has been sometimes known. Nothing indeed can be more just and reasonable than these complaints; for such conduct in the orthodox is a plain desertion of their own principles, a robbery and invasion of the property of others. Conscience, upon which they pretend to act, is, of all things, the most stiff and inflexible; and cannot by any art, be moulded into another shape, than that which it naturally bears; whereas the whole principles of moderation are most gentle and ductile, and may be applied to almost all purposes imaginable.

 If any, through an envious infidelity, entertain a doubt of the truth asserted in the maxim, they are referred, for satisfaction, to the history of the proceedings of this church for these twenty years past, which I take to have been the true reforming period; and are hereby defied [challenged] to produce an instance in which any moderate man, wise or unwise, old or young, grave or sprightly, failed to concur in supporting one of his own side, whatever was his cause, active or passive, a project for advancement, or the danger of a prosecution. Let but one of us start a scheme, in which he may find his account, or become candidate for an office, the whole, upon the first impulse, as the concordant strings of a musical instrument answer to the touch, return and reverberate the sound. If Momus unwarily makes a sally into the territories of ‘good-humoured vice,’ and is unhappily betrayed by those who ought not to have been trusted; how powerfully is he upheld by the gravest of the party, and the uncharitable malevolent enemy stung and destroyed, like the bear in the fable, for disturbing the hive of industrious bees? Nay, as a yet stronger instance, (being more against nature) I could shew, in the records of a certain presbytery, declarations signed by the most moderate hands, and yet containing as high and ranting expressions in favor of the rights of the Christian people, as ever were used by the most orthodox writer; because, by a wonderful concurrence of circumstances, they served, at that time, to promote the settlement of a moderate man.

 Every eye must immediately perceive the beauty and excellence of this part of our character. What more amiable than union? or what more necessary to the support of any society? and what more hateful and horrid than discord and division? Is it not also, by this very means, that we have obtained the victory, and do still preserve our superiority over the orthodox party? They are wholly ignorant of the laws of society, as they have been lately well explained by some of our brethren in print; and know not that all who enter into it, give up their rights as individuals, and are bound ‘to follow what they disapprove;’ to see with the eyes, and act for the interest of the whole body.

 It must be no small commendation of such conduct, that in so doing we either follow, or are followed, by the most eminent and illustrious characters in this nation. It is probable there may be several controverted elections tried before the parliament in a short time; and I dare say, any wise man will foretell their issue in each case, much more certainly from the character of the person, than from the merits of the cause. And it is with some pleasure I observe, that whoever began this practice first, we have carried it to the greatest perfection: for amongst us, the characters of men have been openly pleaded in defence of their cause, which, if I am not mistaken, hath hardly ever been done in any civil court. …

 Time would fail me, if I should go through all the excellencies of this crowning maxim; and therefore I shall only further observe, that it excels all the known principles of action for clearness and perspicuity. In order to determine which side to choose in a disputed question, it requires no long discussions of reason, no critical inquiry into the truth of controverted facts, but only some knowledge of the characters of men; a study much more agreeable, as well as more common than that of books. To speak more properly, it requires no study at all of any kind; for, as to the gross, or general tendency of a character, common fame communicates the impression, and seldom or never deceives us. This is probably the reason that the maxim, … is constantly and unerringly followed by the moderate of every age and condition: on which account I give it as my opinion, that it be added to the number of the feelings, which are at present so much upon the growing hand.

**Conclusion**

 Thus I have laid down and illustrated these excellent maxims, not without labour and expence of thought; and I think, carried them so far as to make a complete system for the education and accomplishment of a moderate clergyman, for his guidance in public judgment, and his direction as to private practice. And now, courteous reader, as a traveler, after having gone through the different parts of a country, ascends some eminence to review the whole, let us stand still and rejoice over the happy state of our mother-church of Scotland, in which moderation so greatly prevails; and let us rejoice in hope of what improvements she may yet arrive at, by adhering to these maxims, now digested into such admirable form and order. O what noble, sublime, and impenetrable sermons shall now be preached! What victories and triumphs shall be obtained over the stupid populace, by forced settlements, which never have such a beautiful and orderly form, as when finished by soldiers, marching in comely array, with shining arms: a perfect image of the church-militant! And what perfectly virtuous and sinless lives shall be led by these clergy, who with steady eye, regard the good of this vast whole, which never yet went wrong! There is nothing indeed that any way tarnished the beauty of this prospect, but the miscarriage of the augmentation-scheme; over which I could now lament in elegiac strains, but that my hope is not yet quite extinct; for who can tell whether, when we shall have brought moderation to perfection, when we shall have driven away the whole common people to the Seceders, who alone are fit for them, and captivated the hearts of the gentry to a love of our solitary temples, they may not be pleased to allow us more stipends, because we shall have nothing to do but to spend them?

 I would now propose, that the next ensuing General Assembly would appoint (what indeed I might not without some reason expect, whether they appoint it or not) that all the professors of divinity in the nation shall lecture one day every week upon this system of moderation, that our youth may be trained up from their infancy in a taste for it. This, I am sure, will be much more profitable than any of the antiquated systems of divinity, as Pictet or Turretine; nay, I am persuaded, it is more exactly calculated for the present times, than even the more modern authors, Epictetus and Marcus Antoninus, which last, in Mr. Foulis’s translation hath, by many young divines, in their first year, been mistaken for Markii Medulla Theologiae.

 If this my treatise shall meet with the success and acceptance that is justly deserves, it is my intention to offer to the public a still more minute and particular delineation of the moderate character, either in another book of a different form from this, or perhaps in a second edition of the same; which shall in that case, be the text, and to which I will add large explanatory notes, containing much private history, and referring to many particular facts, in order to render it the more grateful, as well as the more instructing to the reader. I have also by me the ‘stamina vitae’ of many useful and edifying treatises, which shall be produced in due time, as the muses shall give assistance; such as, The art of making a flourished sermon with very little matter, by a proper mixture of similies, and by repeating every paragraph over again in the form of a soliloquy: One resolution of all cases of conscience, from the good of the whole scheme: A directory for prayer, upon the same scheme: The horrid sin and danger of ministers spending too much time in catechizing and visiting in country-parishes; I do not make any mention of towns, to avoid giving offence; as also, lest it should prove true what I have heard, that the practice is scarcely known in any of our great towns, in which case, my reasoning would look like beating the air. These, with many others, I am with assiduous care purchasing materials for completing, by observation and conversation, that our church may go on in a progressive motion toward the zenith of perfection and meridian of glory.

 I shall now shut up this work, by acquainting the reader with a secret, which perhaps he would not otherwise advert to, viz. that I enjoy the pleasure of having done a thing seemingly quite impracticable. I have given the moderate, and those who desire to be instructed in that science, a complete view of the maxims and principles of moderation, without, at the same time, prostituting or giving them up to the possession of every common reader. Perhaps some will ask, how I imagine I have effected this? I answer, that I have so framed the whole of my book, that it is really intelligible only to persons duly qualified; and to every such person it is transparent as the spring-water. I have given only moderate reasons for moderate principles, so that however strongly they may convince some, viz. those of our kidney, others they will be so far from convincing, that they will be thought to operate a quite contrary way. I have managed this so carefully, that I could venture to lay a wager of all that I am worth, that this treatise shall be taken, by very many, to be the work of an orthodox pen, and to be intended as a banter upon moderate men and their way. They will be tempted to laugh at us, whom they will imagine to be exposed by this revelation of our mysteries: but how ingeniously are they deceived? For, by that very means, every properly prejudiced mind is furnished with a complete system, upon which to form his sentiments, and regulate his conduct.

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Witherspoon, J., Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon, vol. 3, Phil: W.W. Woodward, 1802, pp. 209-268

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Woods, David, John Witherspoon, Edinburgh: Fleming H Revell Co., 1906, pp. 39ff.