
Sir,

You have been pleas’d (to use your own Words¹) to Recommend Mr De Laune to the World, and to write a Monument upon his Work; and say, You are sorry you have perform’d it no better: You praise him and his Performance with such Emotion and Transport of Mind, as if you were infallibly assur’d of their Extraordinary Worth. You tell the World,² That he has fairly, modestly, and closely apply’d the Reasons for your Dissenting. That the Gentlemen of the Church of England would do well to consider of some Mediums, to defend Dr Benjamin Calamy, or ingeniously own he was fairly confuted. That there remains nothing to be added to the Argument, till some attempts to confute the same, shall make a Rejoinder Necessary. That the Dissenters cannot desire to have their Case more fairly stated. That few greater Scholars, clearer Heads, or greater Masters of Argument than he, ever Grac’d the English Nation.³ That his Book is Perfect of it self, That never Author left behind him a more Finish’d Piece, and that you believe the Dispute is entirely ended. Thus (Sir) You go on, with abundance of Assurance, Ostentation and Triumph.

I had not the Curiosity to read your Preface, till about the end of July last; and then Observing your general Challenge, and especially considering, that I had been Personally and particularly Challeng’d by several Dissenters, to justify my Conformity by Answering De Laune’s Plea, as Reviv’d and Republish’d by You; I form’d a Resolution to do it.

‘Tis strange (Sir) that You, who in some of your Writings have express’d your self, so far (at least) a Favourer of the Church of England, as not to wish nor desire her Overthrow; should yet Adopt, and in such a boasting Manner recommend a Book, the whole Design of which is, expose the Church as Popish, Antichristian and Heathenish, and to spirit the Mob to raze her to the Ground. Are not such Defamations, a Prologue to intended Ruin?

I cannot but admire, that You, who profess your self to be a Christian and a Protestant, should Recommend a Book, stuff’d with such Principles and Assertions, as would, if strictly believ’d and put into Practice, not only introduce several Branches of Popery, but which is worse, downright Infidelity and Atheism amongst us; as is demonstrated in the following Treatise: And yet that Book of De Laune’s (as we are told in the Title Page) shews the true State of the Dissenters Case. A most wretched State! For it represents you as maintaining, that our Bishops, Priests, Ordinations, Liturgy, Fasts, Feasts, Ceremonies, Kneeling at Confession, and at repeating (after the Minister) Lord have Mercy upon us; are all Popish and Heathenish; that is to say (in plain English) Abominable; and that the good Things that are found in the Apocrypha or Popish Mass-Books, are not to be put into our Prayers. Is this (Sir) part of the State of the Dissenters’ Case? Are these the Assertions that procur’d your Admiration and Praise, and push’d you on to Libel the Church? 'Tis not the first time, Sir, that
Jugglers, Inchanters, and Sophisters have been extoll’d, while God’s Prophets and Priests, yea, and Wisdom itself, have been slighted.

I have been apt (Sir) to think, that you have read De Laune’s Book in great haste, or rather that you never read it at all, but Recommended it upon the bare Hear-say of others; else I suppose, you would have alter’d the Title, or made some Apology for it in your Preface. A Plea for the Non-Conformists is its Title: Now you know (Sir) the divided State of the Non-Conformists (as such) so well, that you cannot but judge it impossible to form one Plea for the several Sects. And you cannot be ignorant, that De Laune’s Plea (if you have narrowly observ’d it) condemns several things which Dissenters own and practice, when in Power; as the Maintenance of Ministers by Tythes; their distinguishing themselves from the Laity by Habits’ forcible Impositions; Vocal Church Music, Infant Baptism, besides several other things which are mention’d in the after Treatise: But it seems, that defaming and black’ning the Church, being the suppos’d Common Interest, and the real Central Point, in which the several Sects of Non-Conformists do unite; and De Laune’s Book having so inimitably defam’d and blacken’d the Church, was judg’d sufficient to support its Title; viz. A Plea for the Non-Conformists.

I design not any Re-search into the other Particulars in your Preface: I have only accepted the Challenge to Answer De Laune’s Plea, and concern my self only with what relates to that, I have paid solemn Attendance to his Arguments and Objections, Confuting the one, and Answering the other. And not only so, but have either Expressly, or Implicitly consider’d all the Allegations of other Non-Conformists, with respect to the Church’s Power to Decree Rites and Ceremonies, tho’ not expressly and particularly commanded by God, provided he hath not forbidden them. And you will find (Sir) the Dissenters themselves faithfully and fairly introduc’d, condemning their own Separation from the Church of England; ruining their fundamental Principle of Non-Conformity, and overturning the Pillars on which De Laune’s Plea stands. The Book (you’ll find) is Argumentium ad Hominen & ad Rem, joining Issue with Dissenters upon their own Principles, and stated Practices; Arguing with them from their own Concessions, condemning their Notions out of their own Mouths, and cutting off Goliath’s Head with his own Sword: And I have taken peculiar Care to avoid being justly charg’d, either with false Quotation, or wrong Construction.

I Protest before God, that I manage the Case, as I really believe it is; what I offer you and others has effectually convinc’d my self, and I hope it may strike you with full Evidence, and oblige you to Renounce Non-Conformity; especially, seeing you have ingenuously own’d already, in your Preface to De Laune’s Plea (p. 8) That the Principles of Dissenters are Selfish.

Some suppose it to be dangerous, to Oppose such a great Body of Men, and of so great Influence as the Dissenters are, or to Address my self unto you, who so frequently and publickly appear in Defence of their Cause, and who misconstrue the Defenders of the Church Constitution, as if attempting to Reverse, Contract, or Invade the Act of Toleration; as you intimate in your Preface, (p. 2) But (Sir) I solemnly declare, that I am in Charity with all Mankind, and particularly with your Self: I Oppose not the Persons of any, but in their Principles, (and I have been Challenged to do that) I don’t in the least Repine at the Dissenters’ Repose, but would have you all to live at ease, and quietly and thankfully to enjoy the Favours of the Toleration,
without spitting in the Face of the Church, and exposing her as Popish and
Heathenish, as De Laune’s *Plea* does; and then extolling that *Plea* as a very Modest
Piece, as your self (Sir) does in your Preface. Was the Toleration granted to inflame
Dissenters, and render them troublesome? Surely not, but to make them easie, and to
satisfy them. As for Danger from Dissenters, I dread it not: I fear none from their
Arguments, and he that in other Respects minds Danger more than Duty, fears Man
more than God; refuses to depend upon God, and turns his back upon the Cross of
Christ. I thank God (Sir) I am not of the Opinion of those Indians, who Worship the
Devil, for fear he should hurt them.

In short (Sir) I have attempted to Confute De Laune’s *Plea*, and if it be so, as
you say in your Preface (p. 1) that a Rejoinder will be Necessary, who can help it? Let
it come forth as soon as you please. If either you, who have Adopted the *Plea*, or any
other Dissenter or Dissenters in England, have a mind farther to examine the Merits of
the Cause, and to attempt, by downright Arguing from Scripture and Reason, to
defend that Plea; and if any of you pretend to Reply to what I have offer’d against
your separating Principles, in Justification of mine own Conformity; I promise to
attend such a Performance, in order to your happy Reduction.

But (Sir) if any Person or Persons shall fall into Tartarean Exstasies, and speak
the Dialect of Dragons, (as your own Mr. J Goodwin once said to another Dissenter;)
if they pour out the Vials of their Wrath, use Reviling Language, and Personal
Reflections; I do declare beforehand, that I reckon my self superseded from Replying
to such poor guilty Methods, which do always demonstrate, that the Cause they are
introduc’d to support, is in desperate Distress, and in its last Agonies.

As for your self (Sir) I know, (if any) are able to improve De Laune’s
Arguments, in the most polite, decent, and pungent way, that such Gross Errours are
capable of. I know no Successour abler than your self, to effect what (as the following
Sheets do demonstrate) De Laune has not finish’d: But now I Observe, you have told
us in your Preface (p. 5) That you can add nothing to his Argument, that it is not
capable of any greater Illustration, than what is to be found in it self. And thus, as I
despair of ever seeing a Reply, so I hope you will Yield to Conviction when you see
his *Plea* impleaded, his Arguments confuted and the main Pillars of Non-Conformity
overthrown; (the most Eminent Societies of Dissenters being Judges.) I hope (Sir) that
as you don’t reckon your Self Priviledg’d from Mistakes, so you will count it no
lessening of your Reputation, to forsake them, when you see good Reason; but will
rather Exult and Rejoice at the Victories of Truth. For this End (Sir) I do (with this
Letter) send you my Answer to De Laune’s *Plea* by your Printer, accompanying the
same with hearty Prayer to the Most Glorious Undivided Trinity, the Fountain of
Truth, that all such as have erred and are deceived, may be brought into the way of
Truth.

I am, Sir, Your Unfeigned Friend, and Humble Servant,

William Robertson

London,
July 10, 1710
1 Mr Foe’s Preface to *De Laune’s Plea for the Non-Conformists, &c. London*, Printed 1706. p. ult.
2 Ibid. p. 1.
3 Ibid. p. ult.
4 De Laune’s *Image of the Beast*, added to his *Plea*, &c. p. 5.
5 Ibid, p. 4.
6 Ibid, p. ult.
7 Ibid, p. 5.