

*The Reasonableness of our Belief in the Doctrines of Christianity asserted.*

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T W O  
S E R M O N S

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,

At St. MART's,

On Sunday, Oct. 12. 1755. and Jan. 25. 1756.

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To the Reverend

*Geo. Huddesford* **D.D.**

VICE-CHANCELLOR of the

UNIVERSITY of *OXFORD*,

And to the other Reverend and

Worshipful **HEADS** of **HOUSES**;

These **DISCOURSES**,

Publish'd at their Request

Are most respectfully inscrib'd

By

Their Obedient

Humble Servant

**WILLIAM HAWKINS.**

## LUKE XII. 57.

*Yea, and why even of Yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

**O**UR Blessed Saviour in the verse now read, and a few preceding it, upbraids the People, as he does the Pharisees and Sadducees in a passage of *St. Matthew* parallel to this, with their perverseness and voluntary blindness, which had prevented them from attending with a suitable regard to the many clear proofs, and infallible tokens he had given them, either in general of the Divinity both of his Person and Commission, or more particularly of the dreadful judgments, the infidelity of the Jews would shortly draw down upon their whole Church and Nation. This perverseness our Lord observes was most extraordinary and inexcusable, as no more sagacity or discernment were requisite in either of these cases, than men usually discover in the apprehension of things that fall under their constant and daily observation. The passage in *St. Matthew's Gospel* runs thus — *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came and tempting, desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven; he answer'd and said unto*

Matth. 16. 1, &c.

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*them,*

them, when it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather for the sky is red, and in the morning it will be foul weather to day; for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times? There is no material difference between this and the following account of St. Luke from whence my Text is taken; and he said also to the People, when ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say there cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, there will be heat, and it cometh to pass: ye hypocrites ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth: but how is it that ye do not discern this time? yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? A question this that may, 'tis apprehended, be ask'd at this day with equal propriety and severity of reproach. For as there can be no stronger presumptive proof of the Truth and Excellency of any Religion, or any particular Doctrine thereof, than its free and unreserv'd appeal to the common judgement and reason of mankind; so 'tis certain this is the rule by which Christ and his Religion have ever been ready to be tried. Christianity was first propagated, and has been since confirm'd and establish'd by arguments of all kinds, and by the most regular methods of persuasion; and tho' some of its sublime Truths are not in themselves the objects of Demonstration, but of Faith, yet they bring with them such convincing credentials of their reality, as have an indisputable claim upon our most implicit assent. It will,

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I presume therefore, be deem'd an undertaking neither unseasonable in these days, nor improper for this place

*First,* To make a rational inquiry into the most fundamental articles of our holy Religion upon a scriptural foundation.

*Secondly,* To take a view of some Doctrines of particular importance, with an eye especially to such as have most perplex'd the understandings, or disturb'd the Consciences of Men, upon the same foundation.

*Thirdly,* To examine other Religious Matters relative to Church Polity and Government in the same light, with an hearty desire, and humble attempt to reconcile Christians of all denominations to the usages, customs and discipline of the Church of *England*; at least with a strong hope to settle and confirm ourselves in our just affection, and due zeal for the same.

The nature of this design will necessarily restrain me for the most part to the use of such arguments as are drawn from the Principles of common Reasoning, and allow'd to be of weight in ordinary, and temporal questions; and if in the prosecution of it, I may chance to contribute to the removal of any scruples, or the solution of any difficulties, by throwing new and additional light upon points already handled with great Learning and Judgement by much abler hands

hands than mine, I shall think the labour happily bestow'd, and entirely unneeding any farther apology.

The inquiries I am to make are, according to the scheme just propos'd, to be built upon a Scriptural Foundation; and therefore it will be proper in this place to lay before you some general rules, or maxims whereby I have been directed in the idea, and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, which, I trust, will readily be allow'd me as so many preliminary Truths, or reasonable *postulata*. — Taking it for granted then for the present, that the Scriptures contain all things necessary to Salvation, agreeably to the Doctrine of our excellent Church, it is 1st suppos'd, — That they are in general to be read and understood as all other writings are, i. e. that the literal sense is always the true one, except where the import of the words themselves, or the nature and force of the context evidently require a figurative one. 2dly, — That in the explanation of particular passages a proper regard is to be had to the visible tenor of the whole. 3dly, — That obscure and difficult places, are to be illustrated and explain'd by such as are more obvious, and intelligible. — 4thly, — That the scriptural accounts of the Divine Nature, Perfections, and Attributes are agreeable and correspondent to the ideas and apprehensions of the human mind, as far as its capacity extends; or in other words; that we attain to the conception and knowledge of sacred Truths, so far forth as they are cognisable by us, thro' the use of the  
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same common reason, and by the same methods of argumentation by which we come to the knowledge of any other speculative truths whatsoever.--5thly,--That as the scriptures were plainly design'd to be the universal rule not of faith only, but also of practice, to different ages and nations, and in many different cases, conditions, and circumstances, so, many doctrines and precepts are of course deliver'd in general terms and are capable either of amplification or restriction according to such differences of places, times, cases, conditions, and circumstances.--6thly, and lastly,--That the Scriptures are the only test by which all Tenets, Traditions, Rites, and Usages in the Church of Christ are to be tried; or that nothing is to be injoin'd therein as a Point of Doctrine, or even of Polity and Discipline, but what is either verbally express'd in Holy Scripture, or virtually implied, or manifestly, tho' tacitly, allow'd.

These Principles will, I apprehend, afford a solid and sure foundation for the inquiries I am to make; as the wilful neglect of, or artful deviation from them, has, I am perswaded, more or less given rise to the several breaches, confusions, and divisions which superstition and ignorance, passion and prejudice, vice and infidelity have made, and still continue to cherish and foment in the Christian World. To these rules and Principles therefore I shall adhere and refer in the course of the enquiries I am now proceeding to; the first branch of which is to consist in the rational examination of the most fundamental

mental Articles of our Holy Religion upon a scriptural foundation.

Now as the first and great fundamental article of all Religion whatever is the Belief of the Being of God, on this, it may be necessary to bestow a few words. For the Atheist, who will readily perhaps approve the general methods by which we interpret the Scriptures, consider'd as mere human compositions, does nevertheless impugn this grand hypothesis on which the whole depends; and indeed the very hypothesis of the Divine Existence in Holy Writ seems to be a material proof of the truth of it; and is a good argument both against the antiquity and reasonableness of Atheism. Because, if Notions absolutely atheistical had been prevalent in the first or succeeding ages of the World, it is highly improbable that the Author of the Jewish Religion, or of the Christian after him, whether they were impostors or not, should affect to look upon a controverted point as a truth universally receiv'd, and give themselves no trouble to combat and defeat an opinion directly and immediately subversive of their whole design. It seems reasonable therefore to resolve the principles of Atheism either into a certain degree of insensibility, or into an affectation of singular discernment, or into a dread of the consequences of the truth of God's Existence, or into a presumption of the falshood of all Religion grounded on the many Modes of Faith, and contradictory Systems of Theology that have prevailed in the World. But sure this last consideration should direct inquirers



quirers to the opposite conclusion ; because these diversities of Religion are so many different superstructures rais'd upon one common foundation, and it is natural to infer the reality, rather than the non-existence of a thing, from the variety of opinions that have been entertain'd about it.

Indeed, all mistakes in the nature of them suppose some original Principle ; and Religious, like Philosophical Error, is neither more nor less than Truth corrupted.—However if the Atheist believes his inability to form an adequate idea of the Divine Nature a sufficient ground to deny the Divine Existence, it is incumbent on him to give us a less chimerical, and more comprehensible account of things, than that which Religion has impos'd upon Mankind. It is an invariable rule of Reason, when any two or more propositions are propos'd to it, one of which must of necessity be true, and the rest false, to yield assent to that which upon the whole is most agreeable to our ideas, and apprehensions, is liable to the fewest cavils, and objections, and founded upon the most probable hypothesis. And surely, that there has been from all eternity (as represented in Holy Writ) a Self-existent, Independent Being, who was the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and the first Cause of all things, is a Theory, which, when duly propos'd, and stated in its full force to a mind prepar'd by proper instructions for the reception of any truth, appears at least to be as conceivable as any of those that have been invented, or substituted

tuted by Atheists in the room of it, to account for the Original of the World: as,--that the Universe was fram'd by a mere fortuitous concurrence of Atoms, or,--that there has been an infinite Succession of Causes from all Eternity. According to the tenor of all these Theories, and indeed every other that is or may be advanc'd upon the same article, something is suppos'd to have existed from Eternity, and so far every Atheistical Hypothesis is equally inexplicable with that of the Theist: The question is therefore; whether it be more noble, more rational, more agreeable to the general sentiments of mankind, and our own inward reflections and feelings, our hopes and fears, to suppose the Eternal Existence of an intelligent Being, or that of mere inanimate Matter: a point, which it requires a very small measure of penetration to determine. The almost total ignorance of some Nations may have led them into the most absurd persuasions; and the Wit and Learning of Men, unacquainted with Divine Revelation, may have devis'd many Principles and Hypotheses destructive of the Being of God, or prejudicial to his Honour; but all this while, neither ignorance nor fancy can possibly be more clear, or rational, in their respective accounts of things, than plain, unaffected, historical simplicity.

But to say no more on a topic so often clear'd up to the satisfaction of all reasonable inquirers; that there is a God, is a proposition so credible, so many ways demonstrable in itself, that it cannot meet with opposition from any but such  
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whose visible interest it is it should be false ; for it unfortunately for Some Persons happens, that on this simple and abstracted truth many others of a moral and practical nature, immediately, and necessarily depend. The very Existence of a Superiour Independent Being from all Eternity, supposes and implies all possible perfection in that Being : In the idea of Perfection the great Attributes of the Deity, his Justice, his Goodness, his Wisdom, his Truth, are most manifestly involved, and in these Attributes are plainly founded the great Obligations of all natural Religion.

And yet it is with Astonishment to be observed, that Difficulties are raised even on this head ; and from a pretence of our incapacity to form an adequate idea of what are called the Moral Attributes of God, a System of universal Scepticism, and practical Atheism has been introduced into the World. Nay every rational Attempt to vindicate these Attributes has been most preposterously interpreted into a combination of Divines with Atheists themselves. The natural Attributes of the Deity are, it is said, self-evident, and his Power is particularly demonstrated from the Works of his Hands : but for men to affect to regulate the Divine Proceedings, to ascertain the Measures of God's Justice, and upon certain occasions to refer us to a future State, is at best considered as unwarrantable folly and presumption. It is to no purpose to oppose the Authority of the Scriptures to such a theory as this, the Tendency of which is but too visible, 'till that Authority be fully evinced ; because the

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Scriptures are by this Casuistry exploded as mere Human Inventions : at present then let us briefly inquire whether it will bear a rational examination.

Now this fantastical theory unluckily depends upon a distinction, that has itself no foundation but in the weakness of the human understanding. There is really no distinction of Natural and Moral in the Divine Being ; for though the bare Idea of Power, as such, does not necessarily convey to us that of Justice, or Goodness, yet when applied to God it evidently supposes the concurrence of both ; unless we can imagine the Divine Power to have been exerted in a mechanical, or arbitrary manner, which is at once recurring to absolute Atheism, or, if possible, to something more terrible. Goodness and Justice are undoubtedly moral perfections in themselves ; and accordingly they must be essentially inherent in the Divine Nature, if there be any Divine Nature. Tho' therefore there may be a necessity for a sensible Demonstration that God is, yet if that be fully apparent from the visible effects of his Power, it must by immediate Consequence follow from the inseparable union of perfections in him, that he is a just, and a good Being : And if Justice and Goodness in the Human Nature be analogous to what they are in the Divine, it will follow, again, that tho' in particular cases the Divine Dispensations may not be agreeable to our rules and notions of Justice, and Goodness, they will all nevertheless finally and ultimately appear to be just and good : and the sense of this truth easily and naturally

turally leads us upon numberless occasions to the rational and comfortable Hypothesis of a future state. This Hypothesis alone is the sure Basis of all Natural Religion ; because, if the bare acknowledgement of the Power of God be allowed to be a sufficient motive of Adoration and fervile Reverence ; yet this alone can induce us to obey him chearfully, to love him sincerely, to depend on him stedfastly. Many of the wisest and best Heathens reasoned in a manner similar to this ; and if their sentiments were not absolutely clear, and explicit upon such important points, it is plainly to be imputed to the infectious nature of those notions which universal ignorance and idolatry had established in the World.

It was an attempt worthy only the refinements of modern Philosophy to assert the Honour of God, by denying, or at least disputing, his Attributes. However, 'tis to be hoped that neither the thin sophistry, nor the dogmatical positiveness, nor the unpolite raillery, nor even the elegant language, in which the main strength of a late noble Philosopher whom I have had in view, consists, will be able to shake the solid Foundations of Religion, and cancel in effect all Moral Obligations. For the support and farther confirmation of these, therefore, let us proceed to examine the Evidences for Revealed Religion ; for if this should appear to be true, this unsubstantial fabrick of Scepticism falls to pieces of course. And there is the greater occasion to do this, because many, who profess to entertain

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·suitable notions of the Deity, and readily acknowledge the force of all moral Obligations, do yet reject all Revelation as such, i. e. all the mysteries of it, and consider it as an absurd imposture tyrannizing over Nature and Reason. Let it here be observed then, that all infidelity must be grounded upon one or the other of the following presumptions; either, that the Holy Scriptures have no claim upon our regard or our belief any farther than the Matters therein propos'd are agreeable to our natural notions and apprehensions of things, and fairly reducible to the fix'd and standing Principles of Reason, the great and sole Test of all Religion; or, that these Scriptures, tho' they are to be held in the utmost esteem and reverence, as containing the perfect and final Revelation of the Divine Nature, and Will, are yet very far from being sufficiently full, clear, and explicit in certain particulars, to which our assent is required, and that therefore we may piously, as well as rationally, refuse our assent to such particulars. These are the capital pleas of infidelity, and therefore I shall endeavour to examine respectively the grounds and validity of each, and hereafter apply some general considerations not unsuitable to both. —

The first presumption is founded on the supposed Prerogative of Human Reason; with regard to which it may be remarked here; that tho' the readily acknowledged belief of a truth utterly incomprehensible in itself, as the Eternity of the Deity, cannot be urged as a Motive for our faith in any inconceivable Proposition propos'd to us,  
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(because of things incomprehensible in their own nature, some may plainly result from necessary rational deduction, and others not) yet thus much may and must be inferred from that consideration, that no Proposition (that is not self contradictory) can be concluded false, merely for want of our ability to comprehend it. The fundamental Doctrine of Christianity, therefore, that of the Blessed Trinity, is not incredible, purely because it is inconceivable. For if it be, then it will follow that it is impossible, and implies a contradiction, that there should be any Mysteries in the Divine Nature capable of, and cognisable only by, an especial Revelation supervenient to the Light of Human Reason. The Divine Nature is confessedly mysterious, and therefore a more full and ample Revelation of it is supposable in the nature of the thing. And yet in the case of a Revelation itself, the Divine Nature must be left mysterious still; because it is a Revelation of an infinite Being to a finite capacity. The mysteries, therefore, of our Religion are not, as such, any proofs against the truth of it; and much less are inferiour and imaginary Difficulties to be objected to its disadvantage. If the evidences of a Revelation are full and satisfactory, the cavils of infidels at the posteriority of its date, or the want of its universality, cannot be made without much impertinence, or perhaps answered without some presumption.

However we shall find another time to reconsider such objections as these; and in the meanwhile tis to be observed that the truth of the Doctrines

trines of Scripture must depend upon its Authority; the infidels with whom we are at present concerned, are supposed to acknowledge the sense and genuineness of the many passages, and the obvious import of the several texts that are declarative of a Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead; and yet thro' the reluctancy they feel in themselves to submit their understandings to what is written, they blindly conclude against the truth of the Christian Religion, as far as it is pretended to be of Divine Institution. If therefore we can rescue our Religion from this charge, or rather this supposition, of imposture, the infidel must give up the cause at once; because it is as irrational to dispute any sufficiently attested truth, or matter of fact, because we do not fully and adequately comprehend it, as it would be implicitly to believe a counterfeit matter of fact, merely because it might be credible in itself. For this purpose then, without entering into a recapitulation of the several standing, and often repeated, Proofs of the Truth of Christianity, it will, I trust, be sufficient to insist upon a few material points; in the discussion of which the unavoidable concessions of the enemy, will furnish us with very considerable advantages.

Now the infidel in the present Question is obliged to grant, that the Christian Religion, setting aside the peculiarities of its Theory, is a good Institution, and well adapted to the Welfare, and Benefit of Man in his social, relative, and personal Capacity; that it has a plain tendency



dency to promote the Love of God, and Virtue in the World; in short, that its Author, considered in the quality of a moral Law-giver at least, appears to have been a Person of much Piety, of great Probity, and of a competent Understanding. The great, and only, objection he has to make to the Christian System is, that in certain essential articles it eludes his Apprehensions, and obtrudes upon his Capacity. It does so — but the question is, whether this very circumstance may not be pleaded as one Argument for its Truth. For would a Person of common Sense and Prudence, who purposed to introduce a new Religion into the World, and to establish it upon sure Foundations, needlessly intermix with it Doctrines that must appear incredible upon their first Promulgation, and invent Mysteries only to obstruct the Reception, and retard the Progress, of the rational, and manifest Truths he designed to teach? The Doctrine of a Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead was not of a Nature to answer any imaginable purpose of deceit. There was no external pomp, or parade, in the novelty of it; it was, and is, entirely of a spiritual Importance, tending to rectify Mens Notions of the Deity, and ascertain the proper Objects of their Adoration. The Character Jesus Christ assum'd upon Earth, was so far from procuring him present honour, or advantage, that it visibly precluded all possible pretensions to both, and the eminent humility of his whole Life, and Conversation, supposing him to have been an Impostor, was most unreasonably,

bly, and preposterously affected, as it utterly ruin'd his cause, in the Judgment of the *Jews*, whom it was his first business to gain, by defeating their then sanguine expectations of a secular Prince. — We must therefore look out of this World for the supposed views of this Deceiver in propagating his Religion; and yet his Conduct will even then appear to be equally unaccountable from the above-mention'd Principles. For either he believed his own, and the generally received Doctrine of Mankind to be true, that the human Soul survives the Body, and consequently that there will be a future State of Rewards and Punishments in a Life to come; or that all this is utterly ideal, and fanciful, and nothing is subsequent to Death but Corruption, and Annihilation. In the latter case, it appears irreconcilable with the known principles and motives of all Human Actions, to imagine that any Man would necessarily subject himself to inconceivable Distresses, and certain Destruction, merely for the sake of a notional Recompence, a popular Fame, of which he supposed himself incapable of having the least Perception: And in the former case, the conduct of the Christian Founder, if a Counterfeit, is still more glaringly absurd, as he could not but be assured, that the misery reserved for him in the next life, would be proportioned to the success of his Imposture in this

And if it be impossible to account for his imposing upon mankind from the principles of ordinary prudence, so will it equally be to reconcile

concile the same with that Piety, and Integrity which make a conspicuous part of his character. How came it to pass that He, who, as we may reasonably collect from what we are told of him, was punctual in his private Devotions, a constant attendant on the Public Worship, and a zealous Promoter of God's Honour upon all occasions, should notoriously invade the Rights and Prerogatives he pretended to secure and maintain, and presumptuously exalt himself into an equality with the most High? How came it to pass that He, who has confessedly directed men to many branches of their Duty in the Relation they bare to one another, should yet deceive them into wrong notions of the Relation they bare to God? or, in other words, that He, who manifestly reformed the vitiated Morality both of Jews and Heathens, and establish'd a system of Religion equal, at least, in the judgment of Infidels themselves to any one that Human Wisdom has, or can produce, should yet lay the first principles of it in blasphemy and absurdity, and corrupt the Fundamental Article of all Religion whatsoever?

I think therefore there can be no other question in the present case, but this; whether we can depend on the sincerity and veracity of Those who have given us such clear accounts of the Life, Actions, and Doctrine, of Jesus Christ.

Now, not to enlarge upon the many Points that have been often urged upon this head, as the extreme folly and imprudence, the imminent hazard and danger, and the apparent impossibility

possibility of their supporting an Imposture, and obtruding it upon the World; I shall beg leave to take notice of one circumstance only, which I look upon to be equivalent to a Demonstration both of the Integrity of their Hearts, and the Strength of their Faith; I mean the Manner in which they generally relate several particulars of the life and actions of their Master.

It had been natural for men, who were chosen instruments of Imposture, to have magnified and extolled every thing that might derive Honour on their Leader, to have display'd to all possible advantage, the success of his Preaching, and the wonderful Propagation of his Gospel; and to have omitted, or, as much as in them lay, disguis'd every circumstance of the least reproach, or disparagement to his Person, and Authority; nor can it be denied that the Apostles were endued with sagacity equal to such obvious precautions as these; at least, that their Master was able to have given them instructions for such purposes. We find them nevertheless relating in the most minute, and exact manner, and with that unaffected simplicity, which is always the Handmaid of Truth, the many mean and humble circumstances that distinguished his life, and the ignominious ones that preceded his Death, together with several other particulars which the usual cunning of Impostors would have been industrious to conceal: inasmuch that by faithfully recording the many difficulties, and obstructions the Gospel originally met with from the world, they themselves furnish

nish Infidels at this very day, with objections, such as they are, to the Christian Dispensation. Thus, they tell us that our Saviour's own Countrymen, astonish'd as they were, as well at his Doctrines, as his Miracles, could not bring themselves to acknowledge the Force of them, or shake off the prejudice they had conceiv'd against the meanness of his family, and the obscurity of his worldly station. "<sup>a</sup> Many hearing him were astonished, saying, from whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? and they were offended at him."—In another place we are inform'd, that his own friends, upon observing the great Multitudes that continually surrounded him, resolved the whole of his conduct into the warmth of a strong imagination, and the flights of a blind enthusiasm: "<sup>b</sup> and the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread: and when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him; for they said, he is beside himself." I need not dwell here upon the still more ridiculous and wicked calumny of his enemies, the Scribes, and Pharisees, who, we know, ascribed the Power by which he cast out Devils to his correspondence with Evil Spirits, and a commission from Satan himself.

<sup>a</sup> Mark 6. 2, 3.

<sup>b</sup> Mark 3. 20, 21.

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Again, we are told that his pretensions to Divinity, notwithstanding the many proofs he gave of it, were generally received by the Jews with the highest resentment and indignation; thus when he plainly and peremptorily declared the reality of his existence before Abraham, "<sup>a</sup> *Before Abraham was, I am,*" they took up stones to cast at him." And when in answer to the solemn adjuration of the High Priest, he explicitly asserted his Power, and Godhead, he was immediately considered as a horrid Blasphemer by the whole infatuated assembly. — And lastly, to mention one particular more, when he abundantly confirmed all he had said, and done, by his Resurrection, the Chief Priests, we are told, endeavoured to stifle the splendour of so glorious a Truth, by encouraging a report "<sup>b</sup> *that his disciples came by night, and stole him away, while the soldiers slept.*" — These very accounts, I say, supply the Sceptic with hints, and supposed grounds of exception to the Christian Scheme; and it is morally certain, that the Sacred Historians, if concerned, in the propagation of a falshood of the last importance, would have been totally silent upon all, and every of these Articles, had they been conscious that all, or any one of them could fairly, and reasonably be objected to the disadvantage of their Master. And with regard to the last of them, his Resurrection from the Dead, they must either wilfully endeavour to deceive the World, which, whether we consider the Number, the Simplicity, the Probity, the pre-

<sup>a</sup> John 8. 58 &c.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. 28. 13.

sent, or future Interest of these Witnesses, it is scarce possible to conceive: or else, (which are the only remaining cases to be supposed) they themselves, and “*five hundred brethren at once*” were deceived by the Phantoms of their own Imaginations, or by diabolical delusion, and enchantment.

How far either of these cases might be absolutely impossible, I will not pretend to say; but surely if our Belief is to be determin'd by the Strength of Evidence, and the Force of Reason and Argument, it is infinitely more probable that the Apostles upon this Occasion spake forth the *words of truth and soberness*, than that they were combin'd in the publication of a falsehood, or were themselves under the influence of any delusion whatsoever: especially, if we consider, that in these cases, God Almighty must appear to have countenanc'd the craft and wickedness of Devils or Men, or to have suffer'd the visions of fancy to prevail, with no visible view, but to the diminution of his own Honour and Authority. — In short the evasions, aspersions, and objections, I have mentioned, tho' they most of them carry their own confutation with them, and serve only to prove the frenzy and infatuation of the objectors, would however have been recorded only by Persons who were assured, the facts they were telling would stand the most severe examination. For as real objections, in the case of Imposture, must demolish the whole System at once; so imaginary ones natu-

rally direct us to an enquiry after such as are real. Indeed they do no manner of disservice to the cause of truth ; and therefore, upon the whole, we have as good grounds as reasonable creatures could wish, to pay a due regard to the plain and manifest tenor, and design of Holy Writ, and acknowledge the avowed Divinity both of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It is true, many who subscribe to the Doctrine, and profess a Reverence for the Name and Authority of Jesus Christ, appear unwilling to ascribe to him that Fulness of the Godhead, and Perfection of Divinity, which we affirm upon Scriptural Authority to be manifestly his : It is true too, that they pretend to shelter themselves under the same Authority : and therefore to These I should now direct myself ; — but the trouble I have already given you, obliges me to bespeak the favour of your attention to this subject upon a future Occasion.



## S E R M O N II.

LUKE XII. 57.

*Yea, and why even of Yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

**H**AVING attempted in the former Discourse to secure, in some measure, our Holy Religion against the attacks which open and avowed Infidelity has made upon it; it is to be my present business to enquire after a proper Remedy for those secret wounds which have been given it by many who professedly fight under the banner of Christ himself. For it is certain that Numbers who call themselves Christians, and outwardly glory in that Calling, do yet by artificial glosses, ambiguous interpretations, reserved expositions, and all the arts of equivocation, undermine, weaken, and betray, the very cause they ever affect zealously to support.

Were it not for the inconveniences, and mischiefs that flow from such religious hypocrisy, it would be pleasant enough to observe a set of men, who perpetually proclaim and extol the Purity of the Precepts, and the Sublimity of the Doctrines of Christianity, and decry those of every other Institution, stumbling at the same time, at one common stumbling stone, with the  
 most

most notorious Infidels, and discovering by their reservedness of sentiment and expression, their inward unbelief of the fundamental Articles of the Religion they profess.

I do not think it at all material to my present purpose to divide into separate classes the Infidels I am now concern'd with, or to enquire how far one appears to breath the spirit and speak the sense, tho' not the precise language, of *Socinus*, or another of *Arrius*, as his humour, or his suppos'd judgment may have directed him; since the tenets of all terminate in a common point, and are only so many different evasions of the same great Truths, the Divinity of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost — If these great Truths may be sufficiently evinced by that very Authority of scripture which these our enemies pretend to submit to, and be judged by, (as indeed their above-mentioned Leaders, and other Hereticks have done before them) all tenets whatsoever, and in what manner soever impugning the Force of them, will equally, and utterly vanish into nothing; and therefore I shall proceed in a general method of enquiry, and only touch upon any particular Doctrine or Notion as the occasional review of it may serve to illustrate the subject matter before me.

The Question at present to be resolved then is — Whether the Holy Scriptures are not sufficiently clear, and explicit upon these great Articles of our Faith, to overthrow the pleas, and pretences of Scepticism, and Infidelity.

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Now without producing all the texts which have been repeatedly, and indeed unanswerably, quoted in support of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, they are, it may in general be remarked, so many and so express, that did they contain any thing but a Mystery, no possible disputes could arise about the sense and meaning of them. Most of the Passages in Scripture declarative of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead are so clear, that they are only liable to wilful misinterpretation: the usual Benedictions of St. Paul, particularly, and the Scripture Form of Baptism are as plain as words can make them; and therefore tho' a general and superficial view of the Doctrines of Religion, which require an implicit Faith, may dispose the Wisdom of this World, to call in question the Authority of Religion itself (which has been already, 'tis hoped, cleared up) yet for men to dispute, or tacitly to doubt, the Doctrines of our Religion, while they allow its Authority, seems to be as whimsical a kind of composition, as human pride can well be conceived to offer.

It is true, Infidels have attempted to explain away many places of Scripture which most infallibly prove the Divinity of the Son, or of the Holy Ghost; to charge some with corruption and unguineness; and to oppose to others, by way of counterbalance, certain passages which seem to imply the inferiority of the Second Person, and the impersonality of the Third in the Blessed Trinity.

But the first attempt may be obviated by observing, that if the texts appealed to in the present question can be explained away, the infidel is defyed to produce any passage in any author that cannot.

Granting further, for argument's sake, the truth of the second objection in every instance pretended, the accidental, or even design'd, corruption of particular places, cannot affect the sense and signification of those that are undeniably genuine and true; and lastly, tho' some expressions necessarily and visibly referring to the humanity of the son, or describing the operations and effects of the Holy Spirit, must be couch'd in terms correspondent to the ideas designed to be conveyed by them, yet they cannot possibly invalidate the force, or lessen the importance, of such, as directly and evidently express the Divinity of both: for in the present supposed case of a Revelation from God himself, all, and every article and passage must in some sense be true; and if any particular passage will bear no sense but a literal, though mysterious one, according to the general rules of understanding all writings, that sense is without doubt to be put upon it.

The texts relative to the Human Nature of Christ are easily reconcileable with those that declare his Divine; but the Properties, Powers, and Attributes of Divinity ascribed to him, cannot with any colour of propriety be affirmed of a mere Man, or any created Being.

After all, 'tis no uncommon thing to find men making mysteries, though they will not believe them, and industriously removing difficulties, by establishing impossibilities. If the Sacred Theory be in some essential particulars incomprehensible, the inventions and hypotheses of human wit to subvert it, are at least equally so, and require the same degree of Faith, without the same, or indeed any, foundation. It would be endless to enumerate the several schemes which the extravagance of imagination has devised to evade the force of the many clear passages which evince the Doctrine of the Trinity: And the absurdity of these schemes is equal to their presumption. They, who would make us believe with *Socinus* that Jesus Christ had no Existence before he was born of a Woman, should acquaint us in what possible sense he existed before Abraham, or by what means he made the World; or, if He himself was made for this purpose, and is only the Instrument, the Favourite, or the Deputy, of God Almighty (as some of his followers, and others have held) we ought to have explained to us the Nature of a Created Creator, or a God by Delegation — If the Holy Ghost be no more than a Quality, a Motion, or a Grace, let those whom it concerns ascertain to us the idea of a motion, <sup>a</sup> *teaching*, <sup>b</sup> *bearing witness*, <sup>c</sup> *making intercession*; or of a quality <sup>d</sup> *descending in a bodily shape from Heaven* — It is easy indeed, were it but as ratio-

a 1 Cor. 2. 13.

b Heb. 10. 15.

c Rom. 8. 26, &c.

d Luke 3. 22.

nal, to resolve every expression in Scripture that is either too excellent for our conceptions, or too delicate for our passions, into figure and allegory: But this is an expedient that plainly resolves away the very Principles and Vitals of Religion itself, and in its consequences must involve the scope and tendency not only of the speculative, but also of many of the practical, points of Christianity.

Besides, it is an expedient that the common modes of Scriptural Language will by no means warrant: Our Saviour usually delivers his great Doctrines with the plainness and perspicuity of ordinary conversation; and even when he speaks in a parabolical or mysterious manner, every difficulty is either cleared up by his own subsequent explication, or by the plain scope and import of the context itself. As many, and as strong, as the prejudices were, which the Jews had conceived against the Person of Jesus Christ, the most insuperable, no doubt, (as we have already hinted) was that which was raised in them by his repeated and manifest declarations of his Divinity. *"The Jews sought the more to kill him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.* And it was his explicit assertion to the same purpose, that was the immediate occasion of the sentence which was past upon him. 'Tis certain therefore the Jews understood our Saviour according to the literal signification of his expressions; and if he himself had not in-

<sup>a</sup> John 5. 18.

tended they should do so, it was not only his business, but his plain interest also, to have undeceived them. In truth, he who shall affect to doubt the sense of such expressions must be an enemy to intelligible language, and a Sceptic in matters of fact; he may with equal reason pretend that our Saviour suffered by Figure, and was allegorically nailed to the Cross. In short, either the Holy Scripture is to be understood in the same manner, and by the same rules with all other compositions, or it is not; if it is, the debate is ended at once; if it is not, the Anti-Trinitarian will be found to lend a very strong argument to Papists themselves; since nothing more is requisite than this concession, to prove not only the Desirableness, but even Necessity, of an Infallible Guide for the right understanding the true sense and purport of the Sacred Writings.

But it may notwithstanding be probably alleged that this matter is not so absolutely clear and express as we would have it thought, and as a fundamental Article of Faith ought to be; that as the term Trinity never once occurs in the Scriptures, so no text can be produced which precisely, and *totidem verbis*, speaks the language of the first Article of our Church, that “in the  
 “Unity of the Godhead there be Three Persons  
 “of one Substance, Power, and Eternity, the  
 “Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;” — or  
 “of the second — “That two whole and perfect  
 “Natures, that is to say, the Godhead, and  
 “Manhood, are joined together in one Person,  
 “never

“never to be divided, whereof is one Christ,  
 “very God, and very Man ;” — or of the Fifth,  
 “That the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the  
 “Father, and the Son, is of one Substance,  
 “Majesty, and Glory, with the Father, and the  
 “Son, very, and eternal God.”

Now, it is certain in the first place, that those who could argue, or, to speak more properly, cavil in this manner would not be less *slow of Heart to believe* the Holy Scriptures, tho' they spoke in the very identical terms of the above articles themselves ; because the original difficulty, which lies in the Mysterious Nature of the Doctrine, would still withhold their assent from it ; and secondly,

If there be any real Force in such reasoning, it will extend much farther by necessary consequence, than such Objectors could be suppos'd to design it should ; for it will supply the Atheist with pretences and exceptions, if not against the Being of God, at least against his Providence and Attributes, as far as they are asserted to be demonstrable from Scripture : There is no one passage in Holy Writ which literally tells us as the whole first article does, “that there is but  
 “one living and true God, everlasting, without  
 “Body, Parts, or Passions, of infinite Power, Wis-  
 “dom, and Goodness, the Maker, and Prefer-  
 “ver of all things both visible and invisible.” —  
 The truth is, though a very clear, and rational, scheme of Religion may be drawn from the obvious sense and import of the Holy Scriptures, yet, they themselves are not a Methodical, but  
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Historical System of Divinity. The great Truths they contain are not to be inferred from a particular clause, or a single section, but from the collective tendency and purport of the whole. Thus, the Attributes of the Deity are severally illustrated in the Old Testament by the occasional accounts therein given us of the Divine Dispensations to Mankind, to the Family of Noah, and of Abraham, to the Patriarchs, to the People of the Jews, and the neighbouring Nations. And in like manner the great Doctrines of the New Testament depend upon the truth of the narrations of our Saviour's Birth, Life, Conversation, Passion, and Resurrection, and of the Descent and Operations of the Holy Ghost, and upon the frequent references and allusions to some one or more of these in the Epistles of the Apostles to the Christian Converts. If these therefore are full and explicit as to their meaning, the Church has nothing to do but to deliver that meaning to her Members in any terms that are evidently significant of it; and if the Scriptural Representation of a Threefold Union of Persons in the Godhead be pertinently expressed by the word Trinity, we are certainly at liberty to make use of it.

It is further, ridiculous, as well as wicked, when we see that *these things are so* from the easy, natural, and unavoidable, construction to be put upon numberless expressions and passages, to ask, *how can these things be?* An Intelligible Mystery is a Contradiction in Terms, and difficulties are no objections, where difficulties must necessarily

necessarily be. Indeed, the non-attention of men to plain fact, and simple Scriptural Relation, and the perplexities they throw themselves into by their vain endeavours to reconcile spiritual truths, with natural ideas, or by their gross and literal acceptation of certain Scriptural Expressions, which are only true in an eminent and incomprehensible sense, contribute much to that prevailing Scepticism, which it is almost unfashionable to complain of in the present Age. There is in Scripture a clear and manifest distinction of Three Persons in the Divine Nature, the Second of which is repeatedly and emphatically stiled, the Son of God. — But tis to be remembered, that though this Title or Denomination belongs to him undoubtedly in a strictly true and proper sense, yet in respect of our notions of Paternity, and Sonship, which suppose the precedency of Cause, and the dependance of Effect, he is so called by analogy only, and *ὡς υἱοῦ Θεοῦ*. The relation the Second Person in the Holy Trinity bears to the other Two, and the part he voluntarily took in the great scheme of Man's Redemption, are most aptly conveyed to our Understandings (as far as they can be conveyed at all) by this appellation; which is the more proper and significant, because, while it denotes some degree of Subordination, as to manner of Subsistence, posteriority of order, or peculiarity of Office, it imports no sort of Inferiority or Inequality of Nature. — Instead therefore of amusing, or rather confounding, ourselves with fruitless attempts to ascertain the pre-  
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cise Idea of Father, Son, and Spirit in the Godhead, we should acquiesce in the declarations of Scripture which manifestly assert the Divinity of each. He, who made the World, <sup>a</sup> *He, who searcheth all things,* <sup>b</sup> *He, who is the dispenser of all spiritual Gifts,* *He, in whose name we are baptized, and solemnly blest,* must be truly and essentially God: and accordingly no expressions that seem to intimate the Generation of the Son by, or the Procession of the Holy Ghost from, a superiour or prior Being (expressions partly allusive only to the Gospel Dispensation, and partly significant, in some measure, of the threefold distinction in the Godhead to the Weakness of the human mind) can justly be understood to affect the Eternal Essence, and inherent Perfections of the Son, or of the Spirit, or direct us to consider them as Persons or Beings of a different Nature and Excellence from God the Father.

It is true, the Manner, the Ratio of the Existence of Three Persons in one Nature is utterly inexplicable; but this will by no means countenance the suggestions of those who, in order to undermine this great Doctrine of Christianity, farther insinuate, that the human mind in the contemplation of the Deity cannot distinguish without diminishing, and that the Idea of what they call absolute and indivisible is inseparable from that of Perfection.

Now that the Unity of the Divine Essence is indivisible, is agreed on all hands; but that the

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. 2. 10.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. 12. 11.

participation of this Essence of Three distinct Persons (which is the Scripture Doctrine) implies any thing derogatory to the Excellence of the Divine Nature, or the Perfection of Unity, we must absolutely deny. For we ascribe Unity to the Godhead primarily, because the Idea of Unity supposes such a full Independency of Power, and absolute Freedom of Will and Action, as is neither subject to the opposition or controul, nor requires the concurrence of any equal or inferior Being. The most material objection against the Multiplicity of Gods, or a distinction of Persons in one Godhead seems to be grounded on the possibility of their counter-acting one another, and on the precarious and contradictory System of Providence that must thereupon inevitably ensue. — But the Christian Theory obviates every objection of this kind, by manifestly representing to us the Holy Three as necessarily cooperating together, and to all intents and purposes One, with regard to the Mystery of man's Salvation. It exhibits to us the Three Persons of the Godhead in different Lights, and under the several denominations of Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; but notwithstanding such distinction of Denomination, Relation, and Office, (a distinction which, by the way, admits a reciprocal change of Characters) the Three are demonstrably in point of Will, Decree, Power and Excellency, One and the Same: So that as the *Athanasian Creed* well directs, “in all things the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.” — In short, if  
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any Doctrine is fairly deducible from Scripture, that of the Trinity is, and even if the passages produced in proof of it were less numerous or strong than they really are, they ought rather to incline us to the side of Faith, than to that of Infidelity: because it would be by no means credible, that Writers setting forth the great Truths of a Religion, of which God is confessedly the Author, should make use of expressions, which they could not but foresee would very probably misguide their successors in the same Faith, into many notions fundamentally erroneous. — Upon the whole, is it not wiser, as well as safer, to abide by the Authority of Scripture, and the generally received Doctrine of the Christian World, than by the extravagance of Fancy, and the subtlety of Wit? Or, have these mended the matter? are they more consistent, or less unintelligible? must we not have Faith in something? and if so, surely no notion or tenet whatsoever has a right to our attention or esteem merely because it is anti-scriptural. If the bare want of Comprehension be an argument against our Faith, we must be Infidels in a thousand instances. — What is the Ratio, the Foundation of Union between the Human Soul and Body? Is it not equally Mysterious, with regard to our capacity to explain it, as the Union of the Human Nature with the Divine? There is in fact a certain point in all enquiries at which Reason stops; in respect even of natural Truths, Knowledge is circumscribed, and Belief infinite; and therefore if the Authority of Scripture be valid,

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'tis absurd to measure the Truths of it by the extent of our own Understandings and Apprehensions; and 'tis dangerous to do so, because hereby we shall be found to fight against God.

But these reflections direct me to the considerations I before proposed to point out to those who are concerned in all, or any the foregoing enquiries

And 1st because every degree of Doubt and Infidelity is plainly owing to a certain Jealousy with which Human Reason is tenacious of its supposed Rights and Privileges, it is worth observing that this Jealousy in the present case is utterly without solid foundation. For the mystical Doctrines of Scripture do not invade or infringe the Rights and Prerogatives of Reason but evidently supersede them. Human Reason is indeed the Test of Truth to the full extent of its capacity, and the Judge of Religious Matters, as far as it is a Judge: but it has no pretence to decide in cases wherein it is not appealed to. Christianity, as to the general Characters of its Genuineness, and the Credentials of its Author's Divinity, invites and challenges a rational Examination; and if in some Points of Doctrine it exceeds the compass of our conceptions and understandings, 'tis to be remembered that it came recommended accordingly, and was established by proper Arguments, precluding all farther speculations by Signs, and Wonders, and Miracles. Supernatural Evidence, therefore, thus confirming Supernatural Doctrines, and satisfying Reason by putting it to silence, the credibility of them is demonstrable

monstrable from necessary inference, and we have all rational grounds, that can be wished, for an implicit Faith ; at least, we have more rational grounds than the Sceptic trusts to ; if the great Doctrines of Christianity are false, it will be hard to say what is true ; and yet Infidelity itself must fix on some System upon certain granted Principles, and those perhaps of a very unstable Nature, and resolve itself ultimately with the utmost acquiescence into some Hypothesis. But let it

2dly, be remarked that though the great Doctrine of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead be infinitely beyond the reach of our Comprehensions, it is however exquisitely adapted, and fully adequate to the spiritual wants and necessities of Mankind. That perfect and universal obedience is due from Man to God, (as far as his will may be known) is a natural truth, no less certain than that Man, through the corruption of his Nature, and his propensity to evil, is absolutely unable to pay it. Herein then visibly appears the necessity of a Satisfaction, an Atonement for every breach of Duty. This Atonement is readily to be had upon the Gospel Terms. The Sacrifice of the Death of Christ upon the cross, supposing him to be the Son of God, must undeniably be “ a full, perfect, and sufficient, oblation and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World.” — And what Sacrifice is in its own Nature fully propitiatory but this ? What expedient will the Infidel have recourse to in the room of it ? Will he plead the non-necessity

cessity of such an excellent Sacrifice, the efficacy of a sincere repentance, and the inexhaustible fund of Divine Mercy? — This supposed non-necessity might indeed be reasonably urged were there no proofs of the reality of the thing; and the Doctrines of Repentance and Infinite Mercy are, no doubt, rational and comfortable enough, where the name of Christ was never heard; but where it has been, there must at least be as much difference between the Christian Theory, and any the imagination of man can invent, as there is between the perplexity inseparable from Doubt, and the substantial satisfaction of Assurance. And, by the way, every Notion whatever, more or less derogatory to the Divine Nature of Jesus Christ, must be proportionably liable to the same inconveniences and defects, and by detracting from the merit and dignity of the Holy Victim, diminish the intrinsic value of the Sacrifice. — Again, such is the acknowledged Infirmary of our Nature, that we cannot do the things that we would; we not only need a Sacrifice for Sin, but also an Inciter to holy Life. The gracious Assistances of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Blessed Trinity, for this purpose are freely offered, and competently dispensed. How far the motions of this Holy Spirit are perceptible by good Men, or by what rules we may judge of the Certainty of his salutary Influence, I shall not enquire in this Place: Let it suffice to observe against all Gainsayers, who affect to laugh at the Notion of Divine Assistance, and preventing Grace, that they are by no means  
 qualified



qualified to determine this matter; for as their Unbelief is grounded on their want of personal Experience, so it is impossible in the Nature of things, that they, who do despight to the Spirit of Grace, by denying his Existence, or precluding his suggestions, should ever be favoured with an experimental conviction of their reality. Mean while it is

3dly, to be observed, that as no Sacrifice of less value than the Christian Passover could absolutely, and by its own intrinsic Merit, atone for the sins of Mankind, so the once offering of himself upon the Cross was an act of Goodness and Love, utterly undeserved indeed on our parts, but highly worthy the Divine Person that performed it. Indeed, the whole Christian œconomy bespeaks God for its Author. To recover lost Man from the darkness of Ignorance and Error; to loose the bands of sin and slavery, and to give us a law directing to Salvation and eternal Life, were Offices fit only for him, who, with the greatest propriety of allusion, is called the *Way, the Truth, and the Light*. — <sup>a</sup> *God was manifested in the Flesh to destroy the Works of the Devil*. An undertaking this, suitable to infinite Mercy, and to be accomplished only by infinite Power; An undertaking attended with Humiliation, Discomfort and Sorrow, but terminating in Victory and Triumph. The obscurity of our Saviour's Life, the insolence with which He was treated, the shame of his Cross, the anguish of his Wounds, and the agony of his

<sup>a</sup> 1 John 3. 8. 1 Tim. 3. 16.

Death,

Death, in this light are to be regarded only as shades to the splendour of his Character, and preludes to his Glory. — How does every absurd attempt to detract from the Excellence of the Person of Christ, and to bring it to a level with that of mere man, lessen and contract our Ideas, and impair not only the Efficacy, but the Dignity, of the Christian Dispensation? In truth, every such attempt is frustrated by this single consideration, that in Point of personal worth and quality, Jesus Christ cannot be compared with any Man that ever did, or possibly can, exist; for if he is not the Son of God, his pretensions to Divinity, notwithstanding the allowed Excellence of his moral Precepts, must sink him below the worst of mortals; and if he is the Son of God, he is infinitely above the greatest. And we may farther proceed to observe here, that the part the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Godhead, bears in the glorious Scheme of man's Salvation, is equally worthy the Divine Nature; and that, whether we consider the many miraculous Gifts and Graces by which he enabled the Apostles to preach and propagate the Gospel, or, his ordinary communications, and secret, but effectual, cooperations with the sincere endeavours of true Christians. In short, that the Son and Holy Ghost are Divine Persons, must reasonably be inferred even from the Propriety, the Amiability, and the Importance of the Provinces which the Scriptures manifestly assign to them. And

4thly, We may here pertinently take notice that the Doctrine of Redemption by Jesus Christ, as it is stated to us in the Holy Writings, is sufficient to silence the cavils that have been made (as it has been already remarked) against the posteriority of the date of the Christian Religion, or the want of its Universality. For the merits of the Sacrifice of Christ's death, whether decreed or accomplished, must be virtually and universally efficacious in all Ages and Places, from the beginning to the End of Time. They are by Divine Mercy imputable where they are entirely unknown: and though, for reasons hid from the *wise and prudent*, as well as *the ignorant and foolish*, the Divine Providence has permitted from the beginning Error and Superstition to engross the far greater part of the known World, yet we may, in reason and charity, suppose that all men (for all men, as such, are equally capable of mercy) will be saved by virtue of Christ's Satisfaction, who act agreeably to the real judgment of their Consciences, and the best information they can procure. There is, I think, no doubt but "all holy desires, all good counsels, "and all just works do proceed" from the imperceptible Suggestions and Inspirations of the Blessed Spirit in all sincerely good Men of whatever Faith or Denomination; and though the best human Actions have, upon the whole, such an Alloy of Imperfection, that, as to their own right and title to acceptance with God, they "have in them," as our Article expresses it, "the Nature of sin," yet every work shall surely

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have its just Reward, that can either derive any merit from faith in Christ, or from the unknown virtue of his Sacrifice. The Scriptures encourage us to hope that finally all Mankind shall be *one Fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ*, till which happy period of time, no man's invincible Error or involuntary Ignorance shall rise in Judgment against him. <sup>a</sup> *He that believeth and is baptized, our Blessed Saviour tells us, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned*: that is, as the word ἀπιστίας should rather be rendered, he that disbelieves the Gospel after sufficient means, and proper opportunities of embracing it, have been offered him: of which sufficiency God is, no doubt, the sole Judge. If it be asked, *what Advantage then hath the Christian?* We may answer in the words of St. Paul upon an almost parallel occasion, *much every way, but chiefly that unto them are committed the oracles of God*: They are directly and immediately in covenant with him, and the conditions of everlasting happiness are ascertained to them. But God forbid we should presume to limit the sufficiency of Christ's merits, by confining them to ourselves, or exclude those whom their own faults have not excluded from the noble and comprehensive scheme of Salvation. <sup>b</sup> *God is no respecter of Persons, but in every Nation he that feareth Him, and worketh Righteousness is accepted with him.*

Give me leave now to conclude with an occasional Word or two of Advice to ourselves.— Do then the Three Persons of the Holy, Blessed

<sup>a</sup> Mark 16. 16.

<sup>b</sup> Acts 10. 34, 35.

and Glorious, Trinity concur in the scheme, and concert the means of man's Salvation? — The consideration hereof should teach Us to set a proper value upon the dignity of Human Nature, and to act as becomes Creatures nearly interested in the œconomy of Heaven. We can never be too zealous to defend, or too careful to retain through Christ, the Preeminences and Advantages, which the profession of the Christian Faith intitles us to. Every other System of Religion supposes us of far less estimation in the sight of God, and (if I may so speak) removes Him to a greater distance from us. — If we are laudably anxious for our civil Rights and Liberties, we should, in justice to ourselves, and in point of the truest honour, be still more jealous of our religious privileges. The Infidel, as far as in him lies, robs the good man of the Anchor of his Soul, and the penitent sinner of his surest refuge, and therefore, as we should take care not to forfeit our Title to the Benefit of the Gospel covenant by our own folly or neglect, so should we be always upon our guard against the attacks and insinuations of those, who ignorantly or presumptuously, openly or covertly, endeavour to invalidate the reasons of the Hope that is in us, and deprive us of the comforts of Christianity.

And farther, let those of this place, who are more immediately entrusted with the Government and Direction of Youth, labour to instill religious principles into their minds, and instruct them in the Faith and Fear of God. The great end of Education is to make  
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men *wise unto Salvation* — *the wisdom of this World is, in itself, foolishness with God*, and all Philosophy, that excludes or is repugnant to the Theory of Christianity, is at best but *Science falsely so called*. Unlimited Freedom of Opinion is indeed the favourite Topic of Declamation in these our days; Notions subversive of the Truths of the Gospel are daily disseminated with indefatigable Diligence, and (which is to be lamented) without controul; but it will surely one day appear, that neither Scripture nor sober Reason will justify men in thinking, any more than in acting, licentiously. However, since things are in this Situation, we, who have the Honour to be *Stewards of the Mysteries of God*, shall be particularly *required to be found faithful*; and the more so, because the Sacred Order itself has been sometimes infected with the prevailing Infidelity of the times, and *our Foes have been they of our own Household*. That there is room for such complaints now, I will not presume to say: but if at any time hereafter, any Person of whatever rank or dignity in the Church of Christ, should lie under reasonable suspicions of secretly renouncing the Truths he publicly embraces, and of betraying the Sacred Cause he is in duty and gratitude bound to defend, the following question may neither unseasonably nor insolently be asked him — How he can reconcile it with the principles of common justice, honesty and sincerity, to enjoy the emoluments and preferments, which he took upon other terms, and with other professions? In the mean while may we of  
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this Place take heed, at least as far as our example or influence can reach, *that the Ministry be not blamed*: may we earnestly, conscientiously and avowedly, contend for the Faith which was once delivered unto the Saints, and for the Doctrines of our excellent Church.

And lastly, let us be ever thankful to God for the gracious Revelation of his Son Jesus Christ — *Let our Conversation be such as becometh his Gospel* — Let the great Truths of it be the constant objects of our love and veneration, and the Precepts, of our uniform and sincere, though imperfect, obedience; Let us not presume to try religious Doctrines by the Test of our inadequate Faculties, and confound mysteries by affected illustrations of them. *Lord, I believe, help thou mine Unbelief*, is a declaration worthy the Humility, and a Prayer expressive of the natural weakness, of the best Christian. The experiments and efforts of Reason in matters too high for it are sure to be vain, and may be dangerous: for from reasoning upon them there is a too gradual Descent to doubting, and from doubting to disbelieving. The Creeds of the Christian Church are not explanatory, but descriptive and declarative, of the fundamental Articles of Religion. That of St. *Athanasius* is most full and peremptory, and as it was framed in opposition to growing Heresy lays a particular stress upon the covenanted terms of Salvation — A stress that ought to be laid in every Age, wherein those terms are notoriously ridiculed and despised. But though in certain cases, by Scriptural Authority,  
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it does not apply the Mercy of God, and the Merits of Christ, yet it excludes not the unco-venanted interposition of both. In a word, if the Divinity of Christ may be clearly demonstrated from Scripture, all possible precautions to secure the belief of so essential a point, are not only defensible, but laudable; and that it may, has been often irrefragably, and, I hope, to day in some measure, evinced — for surely we need only to refer to the plain and obvious sense, of numberless passages, and to the universal tenour of the Sacred Volume, to be convinced with the Centurion at the Crucifixion, and to believe in the utmost latitude of his Expression, that *truly this Man was the Son of God.*

To Him therefore with the Father, &c.

*F I N I S.*