

CHRISTIANITY

AS OLD AS THE

CREATION:

OR, THE

G O S P E L,

A REPUBLICATION OF THE

RELIGION OF NATURE.

Est autem jus naturale adeo immutabile, ut ne quidem a Deo mutari potest.

Grot. de Jure Belli & Pacis, l. i. c. i. §. 10. 1. 5.

The Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law. Rom. ii. 14.

-- *God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. Acts x. 34, 35.*

Res ipsa quæ nunc Christiana Religio nuncupatur, erat & apud Antiquos, nec defuit ab initio generis humani, quousque ipse Christus veniret in carne; unde vera Religio quæ jam erat, cœpit appellari Christiana.

Aug. Oper. To. i. p. 17. c.-- Retract. l. i. c. 13.



L O N D O N,
M D C C. X X X I.

Proinde perfectam illam Religionem quæ Christi prædicatione nobis tradita est, non novam aut peregrinam, sed si verum dicere oportet, primam, solam, veramque esse liquido apparet.

Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. i. c. 4. Valesius's Transl.

The Religion of the Gospel, is the true original Religion of Reason and Nature. - - And its Precepts declarative of that original Religion, which was as old as the Creation.

Serm. for prop. the Gosp. in for. parts, by Dr. Sherlock, now Bp. of Bangor, p. 10. & 13.

God does nothing in the government of the World by mere Will and Arbitrariness. - - The Will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal Reason of Things. - - All rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in A L L their actions by the same eternal Rule of Reason.

Dr. S. Clark's Unchang. Oblig. of Nat. Relig. Edit. 4. pag. 47, 48, 49.



T H E P R E F A C E.

TH E Author of the following sheets, makes no apology for writing on a subject of the last importance, and which, as far as I can find, has no where been so fully treated. He builds nothing on a thing so uncertain as *Tradition*, which differs in most Countries, and of which, in all Countries, the bulk of Mankind are incapable of judging; but thinks he has laid down such plain & evident Rules, as may enable Men of the meanest capacity, to distinguish between *Religion*, & *Superstition*; and has represented the former in every part so beautiful, so amiable, and so strongly affecting, that they, who in the least reflect, must be highly in love with it; and easily perceive, that their Duty & Happiness are inseparable. Whether he has succeeded in this noble, and generous attempt, the Reader will be better able to judge, if he reads with the same freedom, and impartiality, as the Author has written.

THE PREFACE.

THE manner of debating a subject dialogue-wise, (as this between *A* & *B*) was esteem'd by the Ancients the most proper, as well as most prudent way of exposing prevailing absurdities ; & *Tully's* two Discourses, *de Natura Deorum*, & *de Divinatione*, both levell'd against the Superstition of his Country-men, are living monuments of the expediency, and usefulness of this way of writing : And certainly, the Reader may be better entertain'd thus, than by that dry way of Objection & Answer, with which Controversies are usually manag'd.

Care has been taken in this Edition to correct many typographical errors that had escaped in the former. And the pages not being the same in both Editions, I have left, in the Table of the Contents, after the Title of every Chapter, the number of the page of the quarto Edition in a parenthesis, (13) & then added the page of this new Edition; by comparing of which the Reader may easily find in this Edition any passage quoted from the 4to, which otherwise had been difficult & troublesome to find out.



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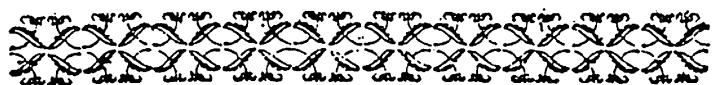
The Bulk of Mankind, by their Reason, must be able to distinguish between Religion & Superstition; otherwise they can never extricate themselves from that Superstition they chance to be educated in. p. (232.) 209.

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CHRI-



CHRISTIANITY

AS OLD AS THE CREATION: &c.

C H A P. I.

That God, at all times, has given Mankind sufficient means of knowing whatever he requires of them; and what those Means are.

A. **T**HIS early visit, Sir, gives me hopes it will not be a short one.

B. I come to talk with you on a subject, which may perhaps keep me longer with you than you desire.

A. YOUR uncommon temper and candor, in debating even the most important points, will always make your conversation agreeable, tho' ever so long; but pray, what is to be the subject of our morning's discourse?

B. I was yesterday in company with a great many Clergy-men, it being our Bishop's primary Visitation; where the Complaint was general, of the coldness & indifference, with which people receiv'd the speculative points of Christianity, and all its holy rites; for which formerly they had shewn so great a zeal. This coldness they chiefly imputed to those *Low Church-men*, who lay the main stress on *Natural Religion*; and withal so magnify the doctrine of *Sincerity*, as in effect to place all Religions on a level, where the Pro-

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fessors are alike sincere. The promoters of these notions, as well as the notions themselves, were expos'd with warmth; how justly I will not determine, till we have talk'd the matter over with our usual freedom: For which reason, I have made you this early visit, and wou'd be glad to know the sentiments of so good a Judge, on these two important points; viz. *Sincerity*, and *Natural Religion*.

A. I thank you for this favour, and shall freely tell you, I so little agree with those Gentlemen in relation to sincerity, that I think a sincere examination into religious matters can't be too much press'd; this being the only way to discover true Christianity. The Apostles thought themselves oblig'd, in making Proselytes, to recommend an impartial search; they both desir'd, and requir'd Men *to judge for themselves, to prove all things, &c.* this they thought necessary, in order to renounce a Religion, which the force of education had impress'd on their minds; and embrace another directly contrary to the notions, and Prejudices, they had imbib'd. Nay, even those very Men who most ridicule the doctrine of sincerity, never fail on other occasions to assert, that Infidelity is owing to the want of a sincere examination; and that whosoever impartially considers Christianity, must be convinc'd of its truth. And I might add, That cou'd we suppose, a sincere examination wou'd not always produce this effect, yet must it always make Men acceptable to God; since that is all God can require; all that it is in their power to do for the discovery of his will. These, in short, are my sentiments as to this point: and as to the other, I think, too great a stress can't be laid on *Natural Religion*; which, as I take it, differs not from *Reveal'd*, but in the manner of its being communicated: The one being the internal, as the other the external revelation of the same unchangeable will of a Being, who is alike at all times infinitely wise and good.

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B. SURELY, Sir, this must be extremely heterodox. Can you believe, that *Natural* and *Reveal'd* Religion differ in nothing, but the manner of their being convey'd to us?

A. As heterodox as I may seem at present, I doubt not, but by asking you a few questions, to let you see, I advance nothing in either of these points without reason; and in order to it, I desire to be inform'd, Whether God has not, from the beginning, given Mankind some Rule, or Law, for their conduct? And whether the observing that did not make 'em acceptable to him?

B. THERE can be no doubt, but the observing such a Law, must have answer'd the end for which it was giv'n; and made Men acceptable to God.

A. WHAT more can any external Revelation do, than render Men acceptable to God? Again,

IF God, then, from the beginning, gave Men a Religion; I ask, was that Religion imperfect, or perfect?

B. MOST perfect, without doubt; since no Religion can come from a Being of infinite wisdom and perfection, but what is absolutely perfect.

A. CAN, therefore, a Religion absolutely perfect, admit of any alteration; or be capable of addition, or diminution; & not be as immutable as the Author of it? Can Revelation, I say, add any thing to a Religion thus absolutely perfect, universal, & immutable? Besides, If God has giv'n Mankind a Law, he must have giv'n them likewise sufficient means of knowing it; he wou'd, otherwise, have defeated his own intent in giving it; since a Law, as far as it is unintelligible, ceases to be a Law. Shall we say, that God, who had the forming human understanding, as well as his own Laws, did not know how to adjust the one to the other?

If God, at all times, was willing all Men should come to the knowledge of his truth; cou'd not his infinite

wisdom and power, at all times, find sufficient means, for making Mankind capable of knowing, what his infinite goodness design'd they shou'd know?

B. I grant you, that God was always willing, that ALL Men shou'd come to the knowledge of true Religion; and we say, that the Christian Religion being the only true, and absolutely perfect Religion, was what God, from the beginning, design'd for all Mankind.

A. IF so, it follows, That the *Christian* Religion has existed from the beginning; and that God, both *then*, and *ever since*, has continu'd to give all Mankind sufficient means to know it; and that 'tis their duty to know, believe, profess, and practise it: so that *Christianity*, tho' the Name is of a later date, must be as old, and as extensive, as humane-nature; and as the Law of our creation, must have been then implanted in us by God himself.

B. IT wou'd be too presuming in us poor Mortals, to pretend to account for the methods Providence takes, in relation to the discovery of its will; and, therefore, a person of less moderation might condemn your questions as captious, presumptuous, & founded in heterodoxy.

A. IF God never intended Mankind shou'd at any time be without Religion, or have false Religions; and there be but one true Religion, which ALL have been ever bound to believe, and profess; I can't see any heterodoxy in affirming, that the means to effect this end of infinite wisdom, must be as universal and extensive as the end itself; or that all Men, at all times, must have had sufficient Means to discover whatever God design'd they shou'd know, & practise. I do not mean by this, that all shou'd have equal knowledge; but that all shou'd have what is sufficient for the circumstances they are in.

B. SINCE you have ask'd me questions, let me, in my turn, demand of you, What are your sentiments
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in this matter? Particularly, *What are those Means, which, you suppose, God has, at all times, given the whole race of Mankind, to enable them to discover what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise?*

A. I ask'd you those few questions at present, not to determine the point; but only to let you see, you had no reason to be surpris'd at my saying, *Natural and Reveal'd Religion only differ as to the manner of their being communicated.* I shall now readily answer your questions; and, as I think it my duty never to disown my religious sentiments, so I freely declare, that the use of *those faculties*, by which Men are distinguish'd from Brutes, is the only means they have to discern whether there is a God; and whether he concerns himself with human affairs, or has given them any Laws; and what those Laws are. And as Men have no other faculties to judge with, so their using these after the best manner they can, must answer the end for which God gave them, and justify their conduct: For,

If God will judge Mankind as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; the judgment must hold an exact proportion to the use they make of their Reason. And it wou'd be in vain to use it, if the due use of it wou'd not justify them before God; & Men wou'd be in a miserable condition indeed, if whether they us'd it, or not, they shou'd be alike criminal. And if God design'd all Mankind shou'd at all times know, what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise; and has giv'n them no other means for this, but the use of Reason; Reason, human Reason, must then be that Means: for as God has made us rational Creatures, & Reason tells us, that 'tis his Will, that we act up to the dignity of our natures; so 'tis Reason must tell when we do so. What God requires us to know, believe, profess, and practise, must be in itself a reasonable service; but whether what is offer'd to us as such, be really so, 'tis Reason alone which