





JOSEPH PRIESTLEY'S

**MELANCHTON**  
**TO**  
**MARTIN LUTHER**




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TO

**MARTIN LUTHER:**

three controversial religious tracts  
published in Birmingham in 1783

 AN APPEAL TO THE SERIOUS AND CANDID PROFESSORS OF  
CHRISTIANITY, by DR. JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, with an  
ACCOUNT OF THE TRIAL OF EDWARD ELWALL

 MARTIN LUTHER TO SOCINUS, AN ADDRESS TO THE HEARERS &  
ADMIRERS OF DOCTOR PRIESTLEY, by REV. JOHN RILAND

 MELANCHTON TO MARTIN LUTHER, OR, A SERIOUS,  
AFFECTIONATE REPLY AND ADDRESS, &c. in defence of  
DR. JOSEPH PRIESTLEY

*EDITED WITH NOTES &*

INTRODUCTION BY TONY RAIL



KASTELL

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## PORTRAITS

Joseph Priestley, detail from a portrait of Joseph Priestley, attributed to Ozias Humphrey (1742-1810), ca. 1792.

cover

Joseph Priestley, ca. 1797; detail from a pastel portrait by Ellen Sharples (1769-1849), probably after her husband James Sharples (1751?-1811)

frontispiece

John Riland, ca. 1796

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## INTRODUCTION

Joseph Priestley was one of the foremost scientists of his generation, corresponding with the leading savants of Europe and America, and regularly contributing to the Royal Society. He is particularly known for his discoveries in the chemistry of gases, the distinct study of which he commenced after accepting a ministry at Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds in 1767. For the first few months, Priestley and his wife lived in Meadow Lane, Hunslet, next to Jacques brewery, with smells redolent of the commercial malt-house and domestic brewery at his maternal grandfather Joseph Swift's farm at Shafton in Felkirk parish, between Grimethorpe and Barnsley. Priestley had happily spent his early years here—till he was almost seven—while his mother pursued the business of child-bearing. Maybe it was because of these early memories that Priestley was soon knocking on Jacques brewery door. For the next six years, after moving into Leeds town, he regularly walked out to Hunslet, employing many happy hours carrying out experiments amongst the tumbling vapours atop the brewer's vats.\*

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\* cf. Letter to Richard Price, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1771, in J. T. Rutt (Ed.); *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley*; London, 1817-32; **Ia**, 150 [Rutt]; and in D O Thomas & W B Peach (Eds.); *The Correspondence of Richard Price*; v. 1; Cardiff, Univ. Wales Press, 1983.

Priestley's modern biographer is too harsh when he describes as a *myth*, a causal connection between Priestley's brewery experiments and his later discoveries in gases. [Robert E Schofield; *The enlightenment of Joseph Priestley*; Penn. State Univ. Press. 1997; p 260] Priestley himself avers the link [*Memoirs*, ¶ 100]. Priestley had discussed the nature of fermentation and its gaseous emissions before this, as in 1754, when on holiday from college, he spent an evening with a Dr. Eddis at Thomas Haynes's, 1700-1758, minister of Upper Chapel Sheffield. [Tony Rail & Beryl Thomas (transcr.); "Joseph Priestley's journal while at Daventry Academy, 1754;" *Enlightenment and Dissent*; Aberystwyth, 1994, **13**, 49-113; 13<sup>th</sup> August.] And he had experimented with gases at Daventry, but only as specimens in his measurements of electrical conductivity. It was not until Leeds, when Priestley gained a hands-on feeling for those intriguing, palpable fumes, that he acquired the fervour to learn more of the nature of aeriform matter As well as studying carbon dioxide, inventing carbonated drinks and discovering photosynthesis (1771), Priestley discovered a further ten new gases, including oxygen.

If Priestley's experiments in pneumatic chemistry had been inspired by happy memories of childhood, then his theological and devotional enquiries acquired their impetus from his recollection of the spiritual anguish of his youth. Priestley's family were Calvinists,\* steeped in a Puritan tradition, and faithful to the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly.† His father prayed with his family morning and evening; as did his aunt, until he was seventeen, when that duty devolved upon him. Sunday was devotedly the Lord's Day; food was always prepared for the oven the day before. There was chapel in the morning, afternoon and evening; and quiet reading, meditation, and prayer in between.‡ Taking a "walk out for recreation" was strictly forbidden. We are told that Priestley could recite the entire Catechism by the age of four, and at age six would tell his younger brother, Timmy, to kneel with him while he prayed.§

From the age of nine to nineteen, Priestley lived with his father's elder sister, aunt Sarah Keighley. Mrs Keighley was a staunch but fair-minded Calvinist. Unlike others Priestley came across, she was "far from confining salvation to those who thought as she did on religious subjects." Many Dissenting ministers were her guests, "if she thought them honest and good men (which she was not unwilling to do)."\* Thus Priestley was able to debate, by mouth and by letter, sometimes in Latin, with some of the most "heretical" ministers in the neighbourhood,

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\* Priestley's paternal grandfather, Joseph Priestley, born February 1660/61 in the neighbouring parish of Hartshead, had been an Anglican until his marriage. [Joseph Priestley; *Familiar letters addressed to the inhabitants of Birmingham*; Birmingham, J. Thompson, 1790.]

† The Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1649), appointed by Charles's Long Parliament to restructure the Church of England, produced the templates for English Calvinism and Scottish Presbyterianism: the *Westminster confession of faith*, the *Westminster smaller and larger catechisms*, and the *Directory of public worship*.

‡ Chapel was Upper Chapel Heckmondwike, one of the most orthodoxly Calvinistic in Yorkshire.

§ Timothy Priestley; *A funeral sermon occasioned by the death of the late Dr Joseph Priestley*; London, Alex Hogg, 1804.

\*\* *Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley, to the year 1795 written by himself, &c.*; London, J Johnson, 1806; ¶ 10. These memoirs were first drafted in 1787.

including William Graham of Halifax (d. 1782), who questioned the doctrine of atonement; Thomas Whitaker (d. 1778), Minister of Call Lane Chapel, Leeds; and Thomas Walker, Minister of Mill Hill Chapel Leeds, an Arian who, as well as denying the Trinity, preached against the doctrine of the atonement and argued that all one had to do to be saved was repent.\* Arians in general, regard the divine nature in Christ as a second-level God, not coequal, coeternal and consubstantial with the Father; whereas Christian Unitarians regard the divine nature in Christ as a divine inspiration only—the man Jesus standing within the *light* of God our Father.

The young Priestley was an active *attende*e at chapel. Attentive to the Sunday services, he would go home to write down what he could remember of the sermons. He joined the weekly prayer meetings with the young men of the congregation; occasionally being invited to pray extempore. (He may have felt that he was not invited to lead the prayers frequently enough—else why would this find mention in his succinct memoirs; though the reason may have been his stammer rather than his unorthodoxy.) Nevertheless, even though his cousin Joseph Priestley was one of the two deacons, even though the aged minister John Kirby had sponsored him, and even though his aunt Sarah Keighley who was a generous supporter of the chapel, recommended him, the two ruling elders, Joseph Hodgson and Thomas Armitage,† refused to enter Priestley as a *member* of the chapel, because of his doubts concerning Original Sin.‡

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\* Walker ministered at Leeds from 1748 until his death 10<sup>th</sup> November 1764. He had previously served at Cockermouth, 1732 and Durham, 1736. He was the uncle of George Walker, 1734-1807. Charles Wicksteed; *Lectures on the Memory of the Just., being ... the lives and times of the ministers of Mill Hill Chapel*; London, Chapman, 1847.

† Thomas Armitage was a ‘gifted brother,’ who sometimes officiated in services during Rev. Kirby’s illnesses and after his death. Kirby died 16<sup>th</sup> February 1754, at the age of 77.

‡ *Memoirs*, ¶ 18.

An essential consequence was that, whilst living at home, Priestley was never allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. As a result, the nature of the Eucharist would form a significant part of Priestley's later devotional writings, and was the subject of one of his early publications at Leeds. Priestley came to regard Communion as a simple commemoration of Christ's death. He considered that it should be a natural part of a Christian service, partaken frequently, if not every Sunday, and open to *all* persons who have been baptized, children as well as adults. As there is nothing peculiarly sacred in the offices of baptism and the Lord's Supper, these services could be satisfactorily performed by the lay elders of the church.\*

However, it was his sense of the guilt of Original Sin, which hung heaviest on the young Priestley. Others may have been able to *indulge a pharisaical pride* in recounting their conversion experiences and *boasting how vile they had once been*,<sup>†</sup> but Priestley believed himself to be irretrievably destined to eternal damnation, because he hadn't *experienced* the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This was unutterable torment to him during his teenage years:

Believing that a *new birth*, produced by the immediate agency of the [Holy Spirit], was necessary to salvation, and not being able to satisfy myself that I *had* experienced anything of the kind, I felt occasionally such distress of mind as it is not in my power to describe, and, which I still look back upon with horror. Notwithstanding I had nothing very material to reproach myself with, I often concluded that God had forsaken me.<sup>‡</sup>

Although the Protestant Reformation found roots in fourteenth-century attacks on the wealth of the church and the arrogance of its bishops, by groups such as the Lollards and

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\* J. Priestley; *A free address...on...the Lord's Supper*; London, J. Johnson, 1768. J. Priestley; *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*; vol. 2; London J. Johnson, 1773; Pt. 3, ch. 2 § 3.5. J. Priestley; *Forms of prayer...for the use of Unitarian societies*; Birmingham, Pearson & Rollason, 1783

<sup>†</sup> *sub* p 40.

<sup>‡</sup> *Memoirs*, ¶ 13.

Hussites, its first flowering arose out of Martin Luther's abhorrence of professional pardoners selling indulgences. Luther declared that: *every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt even without letters of pardon.*\* Philipp Melancton (1497-1560), Luther's collaborator and mentor, provided the intellectual and theological muscle for the ensuing religious debates. Like other Reformers, Melancton sought scriptural evidence to discover what was necessary for the remission of sin. In his *Loci communes*, Melancton used ideas found in St Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, as pointers to an understanding of Scripture that was closer to Christianity's first-century origins.† Whereas Melancton sought to appease the Catholic Church through moderation, others were more antagonistic, John Calvin being the Reformation's most prolific polemicist. That is why the resulting reformist theology became known as Calvinism, even though Calvin himself, who seems not to have sustained a belief in the doctrine of limited atonement, was not a 'Calvinist.'<sup>‡</sup>

In 1618, a multi-national synod was convened at Dort in Holland, to examine the teachings of Arminius and others who had rejected Calvinism's doctrine of limited atonement.§ The synod, however, came out in favour of the doctrines of Calvinism, therethrough establishing a set of articles which

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\* "Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" [The ninety-five theses, 1517]; in James Atkinson [ed. trans.]; *Luther: Early Theological Works*; London, SCM Press, 1962.

Indulgences were supposed to reduce one's time spent in Purgatory. They had been introduced to replace the severe penances demanded by the early Church. In Catholic theology they call upon on a treasure-house of merit accumulated by Jesus's sacrifice and the penances of the saints.

† *Loci communes rerum theologicarum seu hypotyposes theologicae* ['Basic principles (lit. *common places*) of theology, or theological hypotheses']; per Philippum Melancthonem; Wittenberg, 1521.

‡ Alan C Clifford, *Atonement and justification: English Evangelical theology 1640-1790*; Oxford, Clarendon, 1990; p 73.

§ Jacobus Arminius, the Latinized name for the Dutch theologian James Harmensen, 1560-1609. Arminius pointed out that although there are no scripture texts dealing with unconditional election, there are several that assert a universal atonement.

formed a confession of faith of the Presbyterian Church in Holland. These were reinforced and developed by the later Westminster confession of faith in England, which defined the articles of religion for English 'Independent' and Scottish Presbyterian congregations. In 1660, with the restoration of Anglican episcopacy, the Church of England reverted to the thirty-nine articles of religion (1562) in the *Book of Common Prayer*, which may still be interpreted Calvinistically. The more pertinent points of Calvinism are:

1. Total inability, the idea that since Original Sin appears through all parts of a person's thinking, emotional responses, and will, we are spiritually helpless. Unless God chooses to intervene through the Grace of the Holy Spirit, we are irretrievably lost.

Priestley preferred to believe that everyone had the potential to attain perfect moral knowledge as exemplified in Jesus. Though as individuals we may not attain moral perfection, we can choose to lead a life pleasing to God, ever trying to repent and change our behaviour. This is the centre of Christian life, not Enthusiastic faith, nor Calvinistic *experience*, nor the fallacy of deathbed conversion. Priestley warned the Calvinists that the notion that they are justified by faith or predestination diminishes their individual power to do the will of God.

2. Unconditional Election (Predestination), that humanity is divided into the Elect, whom God has chosen to know Him, and the unelected or damned. This selection was made before humans existed. An individual's goodness or good works are absolutely ineffectual and even obstacles to salvation. Calvinists believe that a person has no responsibility for their own salvation, and that once a person has experienced the call of the spirit, heard the toll of Election, it is impossible for them to lose their salvation (the *once saved, always saved* thesis). Arminians, on the other hand, teach that humans have sufficient free will to accept or resist the call of God.

Priestley argued that this notion of predestination was irrational and unscriptural. God's manifest plan, he declared, is to produce the greatest happiness for His people. A system which condemns many to eternal torment and thereby produces exceptional misery cannot be part of this plan. Priestley became steadily drawn to the idea of universal salvation, as the only system able to ensure greatest happiness; though his Christian prejudices led him to seek universal salvation through the conversion especially of Jews and Muslims, whom he considered would be readier to embrace Christian Unitarianism than Christian Trinitarianism.\*

**3. Particular Redemption (Limited Atonement),** that Jesus died only for the sake of the sins of the Elect.

In disputing the divinity of Jesus, Priestley changed the interpretation of Jesus's death and resurrection. The death of Christ became a sacrifice only in a figurative sense; not a supernatural atonement for sin. Jesus is our living Saviour simply because his life in Earth was a demonstration of perfect moral duty, and his death the ineradicable demonstration of the truth of bodily resurrection.

Thus the validity of the divinity of Christ and the validity of the doctrine of Atonement are mutually dependent. Once the proper humanity of Christ is established, as in Christian Unitarianism, then the doctrine of Atonement which depends on the infinite sacrifice of the Second Person of the godhead ceases to have any meaning. Hence in his *Appeal*, Priestley argues for the proper humanity of Christ, before he deals with the Atonement for sin.

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\* Priestley's Universalism grew steadily during his life, and especially after his migration to America. It was complete by the end of his life, when, on his deathbed he commended to his son a copy of John Simpson's [1746-1812] *An Essay on the Duration of a Future State of Punishments and Rewards*, 1803, which argued for universal restoration.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Evangelical movement was in full swing. The writings of the Calvinist George Whitefield (1714-1770), one of the founders of Methodism, were avidly read, not least by Priestley's own father. Whitefield's theatrical arm-waving wailing sermons were all about inspiring zeal and fervour, rather than about imparting Christian understanding. His emphasis was on the emotional drama of conversion—the more ecstatic the joy that followed a conversion *experience*, the better. The great gifts of the Holy Spirit identified you as being amongst the Elect. It is not surprising that, as Priestley studied the subject more deeply, he came to detest the doctrine of Election and the drama of *experience*. Enthusiasm was abhorrent.\*

Priestley spent three years, 1752-1755, at Daventry Academy, in an environment that was *peculiarly favourable to the serious pursuit of truth*. Students were permitted to ask whatever questions, and to make whatever remarks they pleased.† In his late teens, Priestley had come to the Arminian view that Jesus had died as an atonement for all who *choose* to accept salvation. His three years at Daventry didn't take his doctrinal position much beyond that, but it did persuade him of the importance of free enquiry, the value of debate, and the indispensability of reason:

It is only by the help of that faculty which we call *reason* that we can distinguish between any two systems of religion that may be proposed to us. It is by reason alone that we can judge both of their previous probability, and also of the positive evidence that is produced in favour of them. Let us therefore, upon all occasions,

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\* Samuel Johnson, in his dictionary, defined *Enthusiasm* as 'a vain belief of private revelation; a vain confidence of divine favour or communication.'

† *Memoirs*, ¶ 26-28. It was also at Daventry that Priestley was introduced to David Hartley's (1705-1757) *Observations on man* (1749), which "produced the most favourable effect on my general turn of thinking through life. Indeed, I do not know whether the consideration of Dr. Hartley's theory contributes more to enlighten the mind or improve the heart: it affects both in so super-eminent a degree." Priestley corresponded with Hartley. ["Joseph Priestley's journal," *op. cit.* 25-6 Sep; 7, 9, 11 Oct; 9 Dec]



call to our aid that power which God has given to us to be the guide of life, and especially in matters of so great importance to us as those certainly are which relate to the will of God, what He requires of us, and what we have to expect from him.

The superficial knowledge...of the generality of youth in the present age, with respect to religion, is the subject of great and just complaint; and for want of being well established in the principles of *rational religion*, many of them are daily falling a prey to enthusiasm on one hand, and infidelity on the other.\*

Thus, as early as 1755, Priestley was referring to himself as a *Rational Christian*. The choice of adjective became in part one of his Trojan-Horse word-games, since *rationalism* was a catchword of the Deists.†

Priestley retained a puritan character of patience and Christian resignation in his domestic life and devotional activities, but now, in his theological studies, the hammer of *free enquiry* would steadily wrought a *reasoned* Christian Unitarianism, on the pyrophoric anvils of anti-Calvinism, anti-Enthusiasm and anti-Evangelism.

As is true for many students, Priestley's time at college bore something of a Damascene character. It is instructive that the authors of the pamphlet *Melanchton to Martin Luther* liken Priestley's authority and achievements in religion to those of St Paul. Although hyperbolic, the comment offers an insight into how his supporters viewed Priestley's commanding role in the development of liberal Christianity: "though brought up at the feet of Gamaliel [*viz.* the Pharisaical proponents of Calvinism], yet like another Paul, all his former tenets and notions are accounted by him as nothing, compared to the excellency of the

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\* Joseph Priestley; *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*; London, J. Johnson, 1772; pt. 2, c. 2, § 3 & pt. 1, Preface. *Institutes* was drafted in 1755.

† In the same way, later, when Priestley joined the mechanism-materialism debate as a *mechanist*, he sought to penetrate the materialism camp by innocently calling himself a *materialist*, *cf.* p xvii.

knowledge of Christ, which he has now attained.”\* Priestley, as also his friend Richard Price (1723-91), was now and then dignified by the epithet *Apostle of civil and religious liberty*,†

Priestley’s appeal to *reason*, however, did not diminish the value he placed on *revelation*. The author of *Melanchton to Martin Luther* assured us that “few men have endeavoured more to shew the insufficiency of reason, and the value and importance of the gospel.” Priestley himself insisted that: “No man can pay a higher regard to proper scripture authority than I do; but neither I, nor, I presume, yourself, believe implicitly every thing that is advanced by any writer in the Old or New Testament...Do not then say...that I do not allow of scriptural authority; for, if that were the case, I could not be a believer in revelation.”‡

In 1767, after ministries at Needham Market and Nantwich, and six years lecturing at Warrington Academy, Priestley accepted a ministry at Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds, once the pulpit of his late friend Thomas Walker. Thomas Whitaker, another friend from his younger days, was still minister of Call Lane

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\* *sub p* 107-8. Gamaliel was one of the most famous Jewish teachers of the time, who, we are told in Ac v, 34-40, persuaded the Sanhedrin not to execute St Peter and other Apostles. Priestley wrote that: *This Gamaliel was an eminent teacher of the law, and of great authority among the Jews, being mentioned by their own writers in that light; and it was he at whose feet Paul had been brought up a rigid Pharisee.* [Joseph Priestley; *Notes on all the books of scripture*, vol, iii; Northumberland, USA, Andrew Kennedy, 1804.], *cf.* Ac xxii, 3.

† E.g. *Addresses to Dr Priestley from the congregation at Birmingham and the young people in it*; Birmingham, J Thompson, 1792; “The Apostle, if not the High-Priest of his Profession,” in *Thoughts on the late riot at Birmingham*; London, John Sewell, 1791]; “Le patriotisme francais est digne de s’élever à la hauteur des vérités dont vous êtes l’apotre.” (*French patriotism is worthy of rising to the stature of those truths of whom you are the apostle.*) in Société des Amis de la Constitution de Bordeaux to Dr. Priestley; 21<sup>st</sup> May 1791; in Tony Rail; “Looted Priestley and Russell Correspondence in the Public Record Office;” *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.* 1993, **XX(3)**, 198-9.

‡ Joseph Priestley, *Defences of Unitarianism for the year 1787*; Birmingham, Pearson and Rollason, 1788, Letters to Dr. Price; Letter VII; Rutt, **XVIII**, 467.

chapel.\* Leeds was only six or seven miles from Priestley's family and acquaintance at Birstall and Heckmondwike. He would have undoubtedly visited there, with his wife and four-year old daughter, Sarah. His aunt Sarah Keighley, for whom his daughter had been named, had died three years before. Priestley would have been able to see for himself that the Calvinistic vehemence of Upper Chapel Heckmondwike had only increased under Kirby's replacement, James Scott (d. 1783). In 1756, Scott, with Priestley's cousins, Deacon Joseph Priestley and Edward Hitchin, had set up an academy for training Calvinistic ministers and itinerant Evangelical preachers, in the North of England. The Northern Education Society had appointed James Scott as tutor to the foundling *Heckmondwike Academy*, which accepted its first three students in August 1756, one of them being the eldest of Priestley's brothers, Timothy (1734-1814).†

There is no reason to suppose that religious differences caused any division with his family and friends. We certainly know that strong doctrinal differences did not cause a breach with Timothy. During Priestley's summer vacations from Daventry Academy, the two brothers read scientific articles from encyclopaedias, and probably carried out some simple electrical experiments together.‡ In 1766, Timothy, who had recently been appointed a minister in Manchester,§ visited Priestley at Warrington and helped him measure the strength of electrical discharges by melting different thicknesses of iron

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\* Where he had been since 1727. In 1772, the then elderly Whitaker, perhaps at Priestley's suggestion, unsuccessfully invited Thomas Belsham, then tutor at Daventry Academy, to become his assistant. [James G Miall; *Congregationalism in Yorkshire*; London, John Snow & Co. 1868]

† K W Wadsworth; *Yorkshire United Independent College*; London, 1954.

‡ For example in 1754, we find Priestley at his aunt's where Timothy now lived, reading the article on electricity in John Barrow; *New and universal dictionary of arts and sciences*; London 1751-54. ["Joseph Priestley's journal," *op. cit.* 1<sup>st</sup> July, 9<sup>th</sup> July]

§ At Cannon Street (formerly Hunter's Croft) Independent [Calvinist] Chapel. He had previously ministered at Kippis Chapel, Thornton near Bradford.

wire.\* The same year, Timothy, built a six-feet-four-inch wide electrical kite, to Priestley's design. Timothy, who was competent in working wood and brass on a lathe, also made some of Priestley's early electrostatic machines, which the brothers marketed together.†

On his arrival at Leeds, Priestley was disappointed at the small proportion of his congregation who joined in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Remembering his own anguish at being denied access to the Eucharist at Heckmondwike, and what must have been his exultancy at first receiving in the chapel at Daventry, Priestley gave his congregation a devotional lecture on the subject, which he subsequently published as a *Free address on the Lord's Supper*. Priestley sought to derive the genuine Scripture doctrine, and then trace the corruptions of it historically:

If I be asked, What is the Lord's Supper? I answer, It is a solemn, but chearful rite, in remembrance of Christ, and of what he has done and suffered for the benefit of mankind. Like other customs, which stand as records of past events, it preserves the memory of the most important of all transactions... This custom of celebrating the Lord's Supper may, therefore, be considered as a proof of the most important facts relating to Christianity. If they be not true, how could this custom have arisen? Nay, this custom is the only record that Christ expressly appointed, of his death and sufferings.‡

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\* Timothy Priestley; *A funeral sermon; op. cit.* pp. 42-43.

† Timothy was responsible for shipping the machines; being charged by his congregation with irreverence, for having made packing cases on a Sunday night. [William Arthur Shaw; *Manchester Old and New*; London, Cassell, 1894, vol 3, p 11.]

‡ Joseph Priestley; *A free address to Protestant Dissenters on the subject of the Lord's Supper*; London, J. Johnson, 1768. He later wrote "I am now, upon mature consideration, fully satisfied, that infant communion, as well as infant baptism, was the most ancient custom in the Christian church; and therefore that the practice is of apostolical, and consequently of divine authority." [Joseph Priestley; *An address to Protestant Dissenters on giving the Lord's Supper to children*; London, J. Johnson, 1773.]

We can see in this pamphlet the beginnings of Priestley's pioneering approach to theological science. By adopting an historical method of interpreting doctrine, Priestley sought to glean, not only what the words of Scripture mean (he was competent in Latin, Greek and Hebrew), but what the words, allusions and figurative expressions signified to first-century Christians within their various cultural contexts. In this way, Priestley was able to identify and weed out later corruptions, for "it will be an unanswerable argument, *à priori*, against any particular doctrine being contained in the Scriptures, that it was never understood to be so by those persons for whose immediate use the Scriptures were written, and who must have been much better qualified to understand them, in that respect at least, than we can pretend to be at this day."<sup>\*</sup>

Priestley's *Free address on the Lord's Supper* attracted a blistering retort from Henry Venn (1725-97), rector of Huddersfield.<sup>†</sup> Venn had been a Cambridge blue in cricket, and in 1747 batted for Surrey against an All England side. He had been a friend to the Wesley brothers, and to George Whitefield.<sup>‡</sup> After leaving university, Venn travelled with Whitefield, on a preaching tour, also visiting Selena Hastings, Countess Huntingdon (1707-91). About 1758, the Countess wrote Venn, telling him he was not really a Christian, that he had *zeal without knowledge*, and that he was teaching *the false idea that holiness and self-denial will save us* by influencing God to accept us on the basis of our own religious efforts, whereas *the gospel required us to regard our own holiness as filthy rags* and that only Christ could save us and give us real righteousness.<sup>§</sup> Venn promptly converted from low Arianism to high Calvinistic

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<sup>\*</sup> Preface to Joseph Priestley; *An history of the corruptions of Christianity*; v. 1; Birmingham, Piercy and Jones, 1782.

<sup>†</sup> Henry Venn; *A free and full examination of the Rev. Dr. Priestley's free address on the Lord's supper*; London, E. and C. Dilly, 1769.

<sup>‡</sup> Whereas Whitefield was a confirmed Calvinist, John Wesley was opposed to Calvinism, particularly in regard to the extent of the Atonement.

<sup>§</sup> Quoted in Henry Venn B.D. [Ed.]; *The life of Rev Henry Venn M.A.*; London, John Hatchard, 1834.

Evangelism: “elevating the grace of God, rather than the power of free will.” He would no longer exhort people to be holy in order to be right with God. Soon afterwards, in 1759, Venn removed from a curacy at Clapham to the rectorate at the parish church in Huddersfield. He subsequently acquired a new curate and collaborator in John Riland of Sutton Coldfield. Venn’s rectory and pulpit in Huddersfield now frequently welcomed other Evangelicals.\* “T’ old trumpet”, as he was known from his thundering sermons, persuaded his keener supporters—“the Venn people”—to patrol the streets on Sundays to urge those they met to go to church. At Venn’s behest, wealthier members of his congregation even paid their apprentices up to sixpence a week to attend his church.†

Priestley happily responded to Venn’s polemical pamphlet attack. He saw no reason why the kind of open and free debate that had so inspired him in his student days, should not be continued now on a wider playing field. Priestley was a dialectician at heart, and relished disputations of this kind—though he regretted discussions that became acrimonious.

By 1770, Priestley was finally ready to lay to rest his bitter memories from Upper Chapel Heckmondwike, and convincingly to counter the Calvinism and Evangelical Enthusiasm that were rampant in the West Riding. His *Appeal to the serious and candid professors of Christianity* would prove the most popular of his tracts. There was no hint of resentment or hostility in his writing, only a quiet and calmly reasoned declaration of his Unitarian faith. Written for men of plain and simple understanding, it was lovingly crafted to inculcate and inspire in its readers an indefatigable desire to do but the will of a loving and merciful Father. The work is tabulated under clear headings, as a proficient teacher would, with the separate points being explained; and at a later stage supported by clearly

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\* Including George Whitefield, 1714-70; John Henry Newton, 1725-1807; William Romaine, 1714-95; Thomas Adams, 1701-84, rector of Wintringham; & Abraham Booth, 1734-1806, a Calvinistic Baptist. [James G Miall *op. cit.*]

† Henry Venn B.D. *op. cit.*

delineated historical evidence. The *Appeal* rejected the esoteric and mysterious theology of Calvinism and Trinitarianism, portraying in its stead a plain and simple Gospel truth. The work is conversionary, intending to persuade people of the error of the Calvinistic view of Atonement both directly, by showing that it was unscriptural, and indirectly by changing the status of our Saviour from being the source of redemption, to being its emblem through the historical fact of his bodily resurrection:

In the resurrection of a *man*, that is, of a person in all respects like ourselves, we have a more *lively hope* of our own resurrection; that of Christ being both a *proof* and a *pattern* of ours. We can therefore, more firmly believe, that *because he lives, we, who are the same that he was, and who shall undergo the same change by death that he did, shall live also.*

The *material* resurrection of Christ was Priestley's *sine qua non*—as fundamental to his vision of the world as was the constancy of the velocity of light to Albert Einstein's theories of relativity. In the mechanism-materialism debate, Priestley was able to truthfully describe himself as a *materialist*, though going on to argue in Boscovichean vein that matter is just a balanced bundle of nonmaterial *mechanical* forces.

The *Appeal* is Unitarian, with the explicit intention of enabling Jews and Muslims to accept Jesus of Nazareth as a figurative Saviour; and thereby to enable their conversion into Christian Jews and Christian Muslims, respectively. Priestley wrote severally to the Jews, assuring them that after accepting the evidences of Christianity, they were “still to be distinguished as Jews, no less than as Christians...and to keep your Sabbath as you do now.”\* Priestley stressed that Mosaic Law had not been abrogated by Christian revelation, and that Christianized Jews might continue to observe obedience to it.† There is every reason to suppose that had there been a Muslim presence in

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\* Joseph Priestley; *Letters to the Jews*; Birmingham, 1786.

† Hermas [pseud. = Joseph Priestley]; “Of the perpetuity of the Jewish ritual;” *Theological Repository*; 1786, V, 403-444 & 1788, VI, 1-21.

England at that time, Priestley would have written to them in a comparable vein.

During his earlier exchange of pamphlets, Priestley had been warned that some of his writings contravened the Blasphemy Act. There may be a hint of defiance therefore, in Priestley attaching an account of the trial of Edward Elwall to his *Appeal*. Priestley would have known that Elwall's acquittal of the charges of heresy and blasphemy could not be considered legal precedent, so it may be that Priestley included Elwall's *Trial* because it had influenced him personally. We don't know when Priestley first came upon the *Trial*, but it is possible that Elwall's clear delineation of Unitarianism, and even comments such as "the Holy Ghost...is evidently no distinct person from God, *any more than a man's spirit is a distinct person from the man*," may have stimulated Priestley to examine these questions more closely.

Edward Elwall (1676-1744) was a mercer and grocer, Unitarian and Sabbatarian, who came from Sedgley near Wolverhampton. He had published some anti-Trinitarian tracts, for which the Anglican clergy brought him before Judge Denton at the Stafford Summer Assizes, 1726. Denton appears to have been eager to find a means to acquit Elwall, because, after the charge sheet had been read, the judge, unusually, raised the legal technicality of whether or not Elwall had been provided with a copy of the indictment; he hadn't. By way of form, the judge asked Elwall if he wanted the case postponed until the next Assizes, but Elwall took the hint and declined. Contrary to procedure, Elwall was still allowed to plead his case, after which the case was summarily dismissed on the aforementioned technicality, without being referred to jury.\*

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\* R B Aspland; "Some account of Edward Elwall and his writings," *Christian Reformer*; 1855, 11, 329-45.

Five years later, Elwall tried to recover some of his papers and copies of his "banned book on the Trinity" that had been "seized by Lord Townshend's order at the request of William Wake, the Arch-Priest of Canterbury." He wanted to distribute them "as gifts." On 31<sup>st</sup> March 1731, he wrote to John Eden that they "all lie at the Secretary of State's Office...so I would intreat thee to ask the Duke



Like many Dissenters, Elwall objected to the Tithe system that maintained the Church of England. In the seventeenth century, some Dissenters had advocated their comprehension into the Church of England, and by implication their inclusion in the Tithe system; whilst others, like the Quakers simply refused to pay tithes, and went to prison for it. Elwall was one of the first to go as far as advocating disestablishment. In 1738 he published a tract in which he wrote: “As Christ has declared that his kingdom is not of this world, so there never ought to be any worldly force to bring men into it, nor any forced maintenance to support it. All must be free and not forced. We read of Christ's whipping the buyers and sellers out but never in. All Christ's followers must be volunteers. He calls and they follow.”\*

The publication of Priestley's *Appeal* prompted numerous responses, from Thomas Morgan,<sup>†</sup> Thomas Reader,<sup>‡</sup> Ambrose Serle,<sup>§</sup> and William Hey.<sup>\*\*</sup> Hey was a surgeon at Leeds General

of Newcastle's secretary if he thinks the Duke will give the sheets to thee. Thou mayst promise him that not one of them shall be sold, but only given to some friends...I have forgot his name but I have been told that he is a very bright and ingenious person, and is so it's very like he is a Brother Unitarian.” [National Archives, Kew; State Papers; SP 36/22, ff. 208.] Thomas Pelham-Holles, 1693-1768, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Newcastle, was then Secretary of State for the Southern Department. See similarly: Edward Elwall to Charles Delafaye [Under-secretary of State], 27<sup>th</sup> April 1731. [National Archives, Kew; State Papers; SP 36/23, ff 57.]

\* E Elwall; *The true and sure way to remove hirelings out of the church, by freeing mankind from the forced maintenance of priests ...*; London, printed for the author, 1738

† Thomas Morgan [1720-99; minister of Old Chapel, Morley, near Leeds]; *An Appeal to the Common Sense of plain and common Christians in behalf of the old Christianity of the Gospel*, &c. Leeds, J. Bowling, 1771. *Letters to the Rev. Dr. Priestly, of Leeds, in defence of an Appeal to the common-sense of plain and common Christians, in behalf of the Old Christianity of the Gospel*; Leeds, G. Wright, 1772.

‡ Thomas Reader [1725-94; minister of Paul's Meeting, Taunton, Som.]; *A letter to a lover of the Gospel occasioned by his Appeal*, &c. London, J. W. Pasham, 1772.

§ Ambrose Serle [1742-1812, private secretary to Sir William Howe, then lieutenant governor of the Isle of Wight.]; *An Address to the serious and candid Professors of Christianity*, &c. London, J. Buckland, 1773.

\*\* Biblicus [pseud = William Hey, 1736-1819]; *A short defence of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ; with some remarks upon a late Appeal to the serious and*

Infirmary from its opening in 1776, until 1812, and a friend of Henry Venn of Huddersfield, and his curate John Riland, whose church he frequented. Indifferent to their religious divergence, Priestley maintained a friendship with Hey. The two men collaborated in scientific matters, and in 1775, Priestley nominated Hey for fellowship of the Royal Society.

In 1773, Priestley resigned his pastorate at Leeds to become an occasional personal assistant to William Petty, second Earl of Shelburne (1737-1805) at a large salary of £250 p.a., homes in Calne and London, and a pension of £150 for life. Priestley stayed with Shelburne seven years, before moving to Birmingham in December 1780, where he accepted a pastoral position at the New Meeting chapel.

Evangelistic Calvinism was as rampant in Birmingham as it had been at Leeds; but in addition there was a shameful bigotry. Dissenting ministers were treated with contempt by the Anglican clergy. For example, at funerals, Dissenting ministers were neither allowed to ride in the same carriage as the officiating clergyman nor to walk in front of the coffin. In 1771, for example, Charles Newling, Rector of St Philip's, refused to attend William Russell's sister-in-law's funeral. The funeral proceeded without Anglican clergy, Newling's curate, Wright, attending only at the graveside to officiate the interment. Wright later described the Presbyterians as "a Time-serving, cringing, Set of Tools, who are not content under the best of Churches with being tolerated, but wish to push yourselves to rule where you are only suffered."<sup>\*</sup> Priestley later wrote of his experience in Birmingham:

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*candid professors of Christianity*; Leeds, John Binns, 1772. The second edition, in the same year included a supplement, containing observations upon Priestley's *Familiar illustration of certain passages of Scripture*.

<sup>\*</sup> [anon. = William Russell], [n.t.] *As many of Mr. Russell's Friends have lately applied to him for the Perusal of some Letters that passed between him and the Rev. Mr Wright, Lecturer of the New Church [St Philip's] in Birmingham, &c.* [n.i. = Birmingham], [n.d. = 1771]; Birmingham City Archives. William Russell was a leading member of the New Meeting chapel, Birmingham. See also, Rutt,

Having in every former situation, been upon terms of intimacy with some or other of the clergy of the Church of England, men of liberal minds, and lovers of science, I should have been happy to have found those at Birmingham with whom I could have formed a similar connexion. But the spirit of party, I saw with regret, ran higher there than in most other places in the kingdom.\*

Priestley's spent his first two years at Birmingham writing a nine-hundred-and-twenty-one page *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. The work is grounded in massive scholarship, using principles of historical and contextual linguistic study that Priestley was the first to employ. The *Corruptions* is in a real sense the precursor of all modern historic treatments of biblical and theological questions. Priestley took account of the figurative and metaphysical language of the Scriptures, and considered the cultural and religious background against which those ancient texts were written. Up until then, the leaders of liberal theology had supposed the primitive doctrine of the church to have been Arian. Priestley reversed this judgement, showing that primitive Christianity was Unitarian.

Priestley's *Corruptions* were first advertized in Birmingham's weekly newspaper, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December 1782. Four weeks earlier, on 18<sup>th</sup> November, Priestley advertized a new edition of his *Appeal to the serious and candid professors of Christianity*. Though the author of this pamphlet was no secret, the *Appeal* was again published under the authorship of *A lover of the Gospel*, lest his name turn potential readers away. The following spring, on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1783, a vitriolic attack on the *Appeal*, and malicious personal attack on Priestley, appeared in a threepenny pamphlet: *Martin Luther to Socinus*. This work, which references the writings of both William Hey of Leeds and Thomas Morgan of

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XIX, 455-6. For Russell, *vide* Tony Rail; "William Russell (1740-1818)"; *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.* 1998 XXI(4), 285-295.

\* Rutt, XIX, 361.

Morley, is attributed to John Riland, former curate to Henry Venn of Huddersfield, now minister at St Mary's Chapel, Birmingham. Using evangelical terminology, Riland accuses Priestley, amongst other things, of seeking to *rob the saints of their angels, and rid the sinners of their devils: these of their comforts, and those of their fears.*

John Riland (1736-1822), was born in the Rectory at Sutton Coldfield, where his father Richard Riland (1695-1757) was both rector and patron, John's three-fold-great-grandfather having purchased the advowson in 1586.\* John Riland was educated at Queen's College Oxford, where he is said to have acquired a "disposition for controversy, which amounted almost to pugnacity." In 1759, at the age of only twenty-two, he published an acerbic anti-Calvinistic pamphlet.† In the autumn of the same year, he was ordained as curate to his brother Richard Bisse Riland, at Holy Trinity, Sutton Coldfield. Soon

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\* Holy Trinity, the parish church of Sutton Coldfield had been built about 1300 by the Earls of Warwick. The property and advowson passed to the crown by escheat in 1499, on the execution of Edward Plantagenet, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl Warwick and nephew of Edward IV. The advowson, with considerable property, was sold by the Crown in 1559, and subsequently bought by John Shilton, Mercer, of Birmingham, in 1586. John Riland II (c. 1657-1720); son of John Riland I (c. 1619-1673), Rector of St Martin's, Birmingham; was appointed Rector at Sutton in 1689. John Riland II married Katherine Shilton, great-granddaughter of John Shilton, Mercer, and purchased the advowson off his father-in-law in 1710. This John Riland was a Jacobite, writing in the margins of a copy of Bishop Prideaux's *Compendium of History*, beside the comment *Henry the First, surnamed Beauclark, for his learning, was wont to say that an unlearned king was a crowned ass!*, "If so, what is our K. George?" Elsewhere he listed the English monarchs as: "James; Charles Martyr; Charles the 2<sup>nd</sup>; James the 2<sup>nd</sup>; Queen Mary [ignoring William]; Queen Anne; James the 3<sup>rd</sup>, now in Scotland." John Riland II bequeathed the advowson to a younger son, Richard Riland (8<sup>th</sup> October 1695-30<sup>th</sup> July 1757), who succeeded to the Rectory in 1720. This Richard Riland had two sons, Richard Bisse Riland (29<sup>th</sup> December 1733-17<sup>th</sup> February 1790) and John Riland IV (4<sup>th</sup> November 1736-23<sup>rd</sup> March 1822), who succeeded successively in 1757 and 1790. [W K Riland Bedford; *Three hundred years of a family living, being a history of the Rilands of Sutton Coldfield*; Birmingham, Cornish Brothers, 1889]

† Academicus [pseud. = John Riland]; *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Elliot ... relating to his Sermon...entitled: Encouragement for Sinners; or Righteousness attainable without works, &c.* Oxford, Parker, 1759.

afterwards, however, John Riland underwent a conversion to high Evangelical Calvinism; publishing two of his Calvinistic sermons.\* Now discomfited with his elder brother's Arminianism, Riland moved to Huddersfield, as curate to Henry Venn. He was thus in Huddersfield, during the pamphlet controversy between Venn and Priestley, and the pamphlet barrage that followed the publication of Priestley's *Appeal*. Riland quickly earned the esteem and friendship of Venn, who praised his diligence in parochial visitation and in catechising. In 1768, Riland married Ann Hudson, daughter of one of the principal supporters of the church in Huddersfield. Later, Venn became godfather to Riland's daughter Priscilla.

John Riland moved back to the West Midlands on the opening of St Mary's Chapel, Birmingham, in 1774. The living was a perpetual curacy within the parish of St Martin's, so its minister was technically still a curate. He remained there until, on his brother's death in 1790, he inherited the advowson and rectorate of Sutton Coldfield, under the terms of his father's will. Riland produced several more Evangelical publications.† In his discourse on *The sinful state of the nation*, Riland argued that the underlying cause of the breach with America was *sin*. "You may," he said, "talk of the Stamp Act and other Acts of Parliament...but you are wide of the mark. *Sin* is the cause: repeal this act of the nation and all will be well. A reconciliation will take place between the colonies and us." The Presbyterians' style of preaching wouldn't do, it was "so merely

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\* *The Christian a new creature in Christ; a sermon on 2 Cor. v, 17*; Birmingham, 1762. *Ignorance the destruction of God's people; and the ways and means to prevent it; being the substance of two discourses on Hos. iv, 6...Preached in the parish church of Sutton-Coldfield...in...1763*; Birmingham, 1764.

† John Riland; *The sinful state of the nation, and the expectation of God's judgment upon it*; Birmingham, Pearson and Rollason, sold by ... Brooke, in Huddersfield, 1776. John Riland; *The scriptural preservative of women from ruin ... for the particular use of young unmarried persons*; Birmingham, Pearson and Rollason, 1782. John Riland (Ed.) *Extracts from various devotional writings of J. H.* [i.e. Joseph Hall, 1574-1656, Calvinist, Bishop of Norwich]; Birmingham, 1785. Anon. [John Riland]; *The Rights of God, occasioned by Mr. Paine's Rights of Man*; Birmingham, E. Jones, 1792.

moral...so devoid of evangelical truth.” The only way forward would, “under the influence of the eternal spirit, be produced by the doctrines of free grace and justification through a redeemer’s righteousness.” Riland made special mention of the Dissenters, all of whom, he absurdly reasoned, were tainted with “atheism” and “fanatical republicanism:”

If these gentlemen...enjoying all the civil liberties and all the religious toleration that men of any reason could possibly wish to be indulged with, yet allow themselves to appear as inimical to our constitution in Church and State, their spirit and behaviour, in all malignity of it, exceeds the reach of any pencil, much more mine, to paint in its proper colours. I therefore leave them...only with this remark, that if GOD for the transgression of our land...thus permits the overthrow of our Church and State, we shall have in this century, in a very considerable degree, to thank the deistical and factious dissenters for this great evil, as in the last, to thank their forefathers, the puritans, for the very same.

Thus, fifteen years before the fateful events of 1791, Riland was already gathering kindling for the Church and King riots that would burn the Meetings and annihilate Priestley’s home and laboratory. Riland wrote in similar vein in 1783 when he wrote of Priestley:

amongst the solemn consequences of your minister’s teaching...there is one respecting the *nation*...What can we expect, if the infidel spirit continues, and increases, but to find it will bring on *national ruin*! The doctrines of the established Church are denied; and what does this lead to, but the overthrow of the Church; and if the ecclesiastical state goes, the civil will go...We are plainly taught in the scriptures, to fear this ruin, when we there read, that the Jewish Church and Polity were destroyed for the same sin, which now threatens ours, namely, the *rejection* of the *Son* of God...What an *enemy* to his *country* must he be, in his so earnestly forwarding that evil system, which directly tends to ruin!\*

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\* *sub* pp 86-7.

From 1781, Riland's coadjutor was the young rector of St Martin's, his parent church, twenty years his junior. Charles Curtis (1756-1829) was the youngest of seven brothers. Known as the 'hunting rector,' he was a pluralist who also held the rectorate of St Alphege, Solihull. His family were Dissenters, Charles having been baptized by Rev. Dr. David Jennings at Old Gravel Lane Independent chapel, Stepney, East London. The most noted of his brothers was William, Sir William first baronet Curtis, M.P., Lord Mayor of London. Charles Curtis and John Riland introduced the Sunday School movement to Birmingham,\* presumably as an evangelical exercise; though the Dissenters, led by Radcliffe Scholefield of the Old Meeting, soon joined in with their own Sunday schools.

Curtis was petty and malevolent, infamously deleting the 'Rev.' from before the names of Priestley and other dissenting clergymen in the Register of the Birmingham Library.† When Curtis had the duty of officiating at the funeral of a Dissenter, the Dissenting minister, Rev. Radcliffe Scholefield, sought permission to walk in front of the coffin with him. Curtis, like his predecessors, blithely refused. At the time of the 'Church and King' riots, when Priestley's house was destroyed, Curtis managed to acquire some of Priestley's correspondence, including a letter in French from the Société des Amis de la Constitution de Bordeaux. Most of Priestley's mail was ripped to shreds in the riots, so it is unclear how these few letters survived, how they reached Curtis's hand, and whether or not it was by prior commission.‡ In his *Martin Luther to Socinus*, Riland signs himself "Lovers of the truth as it is in Jesus." It

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\* Robert K Dent; *Old and new Birmingham*; Birmingham, Houghton and Hammond, 1880; p 443.

† Charles Parish; *History of the Birmingham Library*; London, The Library Association, 1966; p 16.

‡ Curtis sent the letters to his brother in London, who handed them to the then Home Secretary Henry Dundas, with the apparent intention of implicating Priestley in some seditious intent. [Tony Rail; "Looted Priestley and Russell Correspondence in the Public Record Office;" *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.* 1993, **XX(3)**, 187-202, 1997, **XXI(3)**, 191-204.]

may be assumed that the plural represents Charles Curtis, whom Riland would have undoubtedly consulted.

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> May 1783, exactly two weeks after the publication of *Martin Luther to Socinus*, an advertisement in *Aris* informed the public that “This afternoon is published *Melanchton to Martin Luther, or a serious, affectionate reply and address to those who under the title of lovers of the truth as it is in Jesus, have addressed the hearers and admirers of Doctor Priestley.*”

Priestley later averred that though he was aware of the pamphlet *Martin Luther to Socinus*, and knew who the author was, he neither read the pamphlet nor replied to it.\* Given the hint of youthful exuberance in the writing; it may be that the small thirteen-page pamphlet was written by a member of Priestley’s senior lecture class.† The quality of the writing, certainly, outstrips Riland’s. Though Priestley did not write *Melanchton to Martin Luther*, his indirect influence is apparent. It is instructive that, whereas Riland waffled about Priestley’s thesis of a material soul, and is wrong concerning Priestley’s ideas of resurrection, the author of *Melanchton* hits the nail on the head in a single sentence: “whatever inconsistency you found between materiality and a future resurrection, it was your province to have shewn this inconsistency, and not draw consequences for him which you know he disavows.” The author, with some irony, adds that Priestley’s notion of a material soul ought to have pleased Riland’s ‘fire and brimstone’ depictions of hell, since “matter, we know, will burn; but how fire...can affect a spirit, we leave you to determine!”

The author of *Melanchton* stresses that, in describing Jesus of Nazareth as a mere man, Priestley does not intend to diminish his stature as Christ and Saviour: “The Doctor

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\* Rutt, XIX, 361.

† During his pastorates at Leeds, Birmingham and Hackney, Priestley held several weekly classes in natural and revealed religion, for young ladies as well as young men.



believes this man to have been replenished and filled with all the fullness of the divine Spirit, so as to be furnished in the amplest manner for the performing his father's will, and accomplishing\* the salvation of mankind.”

The choice of the title *Melanchton to Martin Luther* is significant. Philipp Melanchton was the first systematic theologian of the Protestant Reformation. He was the friend and colleague of Martin Luther, and also his theological and intellectual superior. He was politically shrewder, too, persuading Luther to suppress the Reformers' opposition to the adoration of the Host, in the Augsburg Confession, in order to appease the Catholic Church. Priestley had pointed out in his *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, that Melanchton came to believe that man has free-will in *spiritual righteousness*, opposing the Lutheran view that man only has free-will in matters of *civil righteousness*, that is, in *things subject to reason*.<sup>†</sup> Far more significantly, Priestley suspected that Melanchton had Unitarian sympathies, in recognising the strength of evidence that the divine nature in Christ and the Holy Spirit are immanent *Subsistences*, perceived by and acting within Jesus and mankind respectively; rather than distinct *Persons*. In his *General History of the Christian Church*, Priestley translates a letter written by Melanchton in 1533 to Joachim Camerarius (1500-1574):

You know that I was always afraid that these disputes about the Trinity would break out some time or other. Good God, what tragedies will this question excite among our posterity, whether the Logos<sup>‡</sup> be a subsistence or a person, and whether the Holy Spirit be a subsistence or a person! I have recourse to those words of Scripture which command me to worship Christ, that is, to ascribe to him the honours of divinity, which is full of

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\* *accomplishing* in the sense of *bringing to fruition*.

† Rutt, V, 175

‡ *Logos* (Greek) = *Word, reason* or the *manifestation of thought*, as in the phrase *And the Word was made flesh*, Jn i, 14.

consolation; but it is by no means expedient to examine accurately into the ideas of *subsistence* or *person*.\*

Riland's pamphlet *Martin Luther to Socinus* had associated Calvinistic Riland with *Martin Luther*, and Unitarian Priestley with *Socinus*.<sup>†</sup> In the reply, *Melanchton to Martin Luther*, the author cleverly associates both Priestley and Unitarianism with *Melanchton*, as well as implying that just as *Melanchton* was the theological and intellectual superior of *Martin Luther*, Priestley is the theological and intellectual superior of Riland.

A few weeks after the appearance of *Melanchton to Martin Luther*, Priestley re-issued his *Appeal* in a larger-type edition with marbled card covers, which was sponsored by one of his supporters;<sup>‡</sup> and he wrote a new twopenny pamphlet under his own name: *A general view of the arguments for the unity of God*.  
§

The following tracts are printed *literatim*.

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\* Joseph Priestley; *A general history of the Christian church from the fall of the Western Empire to the present time*; volume 3; Northumberland (USA), 1803. Rutt, X, 268.

† Faustus Socinus (Fausto Paolo Sozzini), 1539-1604, Polish theologian, who maintained a form of Unitarianism. In eighteenth century England, Unitarians were popularly designated *Socinians*.

‡ Mrs Rayner, a wealthy Unitarian widow, financed the reprints of Priestley's *Appeal* in a 'better type.' Priestley's friend, Lindsey, wrote: 'It seems most calculated to diffuse the true knowledge, if persons can be prevailed to read it.' [Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur of Shrewsbury, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1783; John Rylands Library MSS]

§ Joseph Priestley; *A general view of the arguments for the unity of God; and against the divinity and pre-existence of Christ, from reason, from the scriptures, and from history*; Birmingham, Piercy & Jones, 1783.

An  
**APPEAL**

to

**The ferious and candid Professors of Christianity**

[PRICE TWO-PENCE]



An  
**APPEAL**

to

**The ferious and candid Professors of Christianity**

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- I. The use of reason in matters of religion,
- II. The power of man to do the will of God,
- III. Original sin,
- IV. Election and reprobation,
- V. The divinity of Christ, And,
- VI. Atonement for sin by the death of Christ.

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And

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*To us there is a God, the FATHER ; and one mediator, the MAN  
CHRIST JESUS.                      1 Cor. viii.6. 1 Tim. ii.5*

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MY CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

**P**ERMIT one who professes obedience to the same Lord, and faith in the precious promises of the same gospel with yourselves, to address himself to you, with all freedom and plainness of speech, on subjects relating to our common salvation. I need not tell you that these subjects are interesting. In reality, nothing else is interesting in comparison with them. For, what is this world compared with the future? What is time compared with eternity? Believe me, my brethren, it is nothing but the deepest concern for the honour of a religion which is the most valuable inheritance of the human race, and which sets us above all the follies and vices, all the weaknesses and troubles of life, by giving us the most solid hope in death, that has induced me to solicit your attention. But I am confident that you will not think it ill-bestowed, because it is upon a subject that is near and dear to you, and the consideration of which cannot but please and profit you.

If, by the blessing of God upon our common endeavours to *lead* and to *be led into all truth*, I shall be so happy as to bring you to entertain the same views of these things with myself, we shall rejoice together; and if, after all that I may be able to advance, you should still think differently from me, I trust you will, at least, be disposed to think with more candour of some of your fellow-christians, who love the Gospel, and are zealous for its honour, though you may think them mistaken in their conceptions concerning it. Let me intreat you, therefore, my brethren, to give me a patient and candid hearing. Attend, in the spirit of meekness, to what I shall say from the earnestness of my heart; and exercise the reason which God has given you upon this occasion, which is the noblest on which it can be exercised, and for which you may, therefore, conclude that it was principally given you.

## I. Of the Use of Reason in Matters of Religion.

Be not backward, or afraid, my brethren, to make use of your reason in matters of religion, or where the Scriptures are concerned. They both of them proceed from the same God and Father of us all, who is the giver of *every good and every perfect gift*.<sup>\*</sup> They cannot, therefore, be contrary to one another, but must mutually illustrate and enforce one another. Besides, how can we distinguish one scheme of religion from another, so as to give the preference to that which is the most deserving of it, but by the help of our reason and understanding? What would you yourselves say to a Mahometan, whom you would persuade to abandon the imposture<sup>†</sup> of Mahomet, and embrace christianity, but bid him use his reason, and judge by the help of it, of the manifest difference between the two religions, and the great superiority of yours to his? Does not God himself appeal to the reason of man, when he condescends to ask us, *Whether his ways be not equal?* Ezek. xviii, 29. Does not the apostle exhort us that *in understanding we be men?* 1 Cor. xiv, 20. Are we not expressly commanded to *prove all things*, and then *hold fast that which is good?* 1 Thess. v, 21. Also, when we are commanded to *search the Scriptures*, John v, 39, more must be meant than merely *reading* them, or *receiving implicitly* the interpretations of others. *Searching* must imply an earnest endeavour to find out for ourselves, and to understand the truths contained in the Scriptures; and what faculty can we employ for this purpose, but that which is commonly called *reason*, whereby we are capable of thinking, reflecting, comparing, and judging of things?

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<sup>\*</sup> Jas i, 17.

<sup>†</sup> *imposture* = *offering*, in the innocent sense of *that* [system of religion] *which is offered* [to his followers.] There is no intent or implied intent to disrespect the Prophet of Islam or his followers, other than the implication of relative error.—At that time, there could have been no concept of religion as a theological *model*; even less that several apparently contradictory *models* might *equally* represent, though not comprehend, a higher unknowable truth.



Distrust, therefore, all those who decry human reason, and who require you to abandon it, wherever religion is concerned. When once they have gained this point with you, they can lead you whither they please, and impose upon you every absurdity which their sinister views may make it expedient for them that you should embrace. A popish priest would require nothing more than this, to make you believe the doctrine of transubstantiation, and that a man is infallible; or to persuade you to commit the most flagrant wickedness, as a means of *doing God service*. For the first of these articles they do not fail to urge the words of Scripture, which expressly say, concerning the bread that is used in the Lord's Supper, that it *is the body of Christ*, Matt. xxvi, 6; and there is no possibility of replying to them, but by appealing to reason, as the necessary and proper judge of the sense of Scripture. The Papist, therefore, as might well be expected, is forward, on all occasions, to vilify human reason, and to require men to abandon it; but true Protestants will not part with it. It is by the help of reason, in conjunction with the Scriptures, that we guard ourselves against the gross delusions of the Papists, who, after relinquishing reason, have been *made to believe a lie*; and by the diligent and continued use of the same power, let us endeavour to combat every remaining error, and trace out and reform every corruption of christianity, till we hold the *pure truth as it is in Jesus*, and *obey it in the love thereof*.

Do not think that, by recommending the use of reason, I am about to decry the Scriptures. My appeal shall be to both, upon every subject on which I address you; and I think you cannot but see that the plainest and most obvious sense of the Scriptures is in favour of those doctrines which are most agreeable to reason. A good man will rejoice to see them thus go hand in hand, mutually illustrating and enforcing one another.

## II. Of the Power of Man to do the Will of God

One of the subjects with respect to which I earnestly wish that you would attend to the voice of reason and the Scriptures, and with respect to which, one mistake will be followed by many others, and mistakes of great consequence, is concerning *the power of man to do the will of God*. It is a favourite opinion with many teachers of religion, that men have *naturally* (or by that constitution and frame which God their maker hath given them) no power at all to do any thing that is good, not even to think a good thought, much less actually to obey any of the commands of God; so that, if men were left to themselves, they could do nothing but sin, and must be under a necessity of aggravating their condemnation, by every thought, word, and action of their lives. But, my brethren, how does this doctrine agree with the Scriptures, and particularly with the manner in which the Divine Being constantly expostulates with the sinful sons of men; as when he says to the Jews, *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Ezek. xxxiii, 11. Wash ye, make you clean.—Cease to do evil, learn to do well? &c. &c. &c. Isa. i, 16, 17.*

Is it not plain from this, that it depends upon men themselves, whether they will repent and turn to God, or not? And how can it depend upon themselves, if they have not, naturally a sufficient power to do it? You cannot think that God would command, and expect obedience, when he had not given power to obey; and much less that he would urge men to provide for their own safety and happiness, when himself had put an effectual bar in the way of it.

Suppose that any man's children were shut up in a building that was on fire, while he himself was without, and had the key; and that, instead of opening the door, to favour their escape, he should only call out to them to flee out of the place in order to avoid instant destruction; and that, as the necessary consequence of this, they should all perish in the flames before his eyes; what would you think of such a father? You would want words to express your abhorrence of his cruelty; and yet

in this very light do many christian divines represent the conduct of that God *whose tender mercies are over all his works*, and who has solemnly declared, *that he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his way and live*, Ezek. xxxiii, 11; yea, *who would have all men to be saved*. 1 Tim. ii, 4.

The conduct of our *merciful God and Father* is certainly far different from this, and more agreeable to reason and equity. If he designed us to be accountable creatures, and treats us as such, we must have *talents* given us, which we may either improve or misimprove. If we be the subjects of his *moral government*, we must be in a condition either to *observe* or to *break* his laws. A power to do the one necessarily supposes a power to do the other; and without this power we should not be the proper subjects of religion; as, in that case, it would be vain to propose to us either rewards for obedience, or punishments for disobedience.

Nor is the supposition of a power in man to do the will of God, any foundation for *pride*. For we must still say, with the apostle, *What have we that we have not received; and how then can we glory, as if we had not received it? Every good and every perfect gift comes from God;*<sup>\*</sup> and knowing this, the more we receive of his bounty, the more thankful and the more humble, we should be. I shall, certainly, be more solicitous to exert myself in doing the will of God, when I believe that I have a talent to improve, than if I believe that I have no talent intrusted with me at all; so that I cannot do even so much as the *wicked and slothful servant, who hid his talent in a napkin*.<sup>†</sup>

Some of those persons who believe that all mankind are absolutely incapable of doing any good, are sometimes heard to invite sinners of all kinds to come to Christ, *as they are*; and to say, that the viler they are, the more welcome they will be to

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\* 1Co iv, 7 and Jas i, 17.

† The parable of the talents, Lk xix, 12-27; cf. Mt xxv, 14-30.

him; as if he was, after this, to cleanse them by some miraculous power. But, my brethren, the invitation of the gospel runs in very different terms. It is, Repent, and *bring forth—fruits meet for repentance*. Matt. iii, 8. *Repent and be converted—that your sins may be blotted out*. Acts iii, 19. And none are invited *to come to Christ*, but those who *labour and are heavy-laden*; nor can they *find rest for their souls*, till they have actually learned of him to be *meek and lowly in heart*. Matt. xi, 28.

What can be more contrary to the maxims above-mentioned, than the whole tenour of that serious exhortation with the children of Israel in the prophet Isaiah, part of which I quoted above? *Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now (and not before) and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*. Isa. i, 16–18.

Others, who entertain the same opinion of the utter inability of man to do the will of God, act more consistently with those sentiments, but far more inconsistently with the Scriptures, in never preaching to sinners at all, though to *call sinners to repentance* was the chief end of Christ's coming into the world. Matt. ix, 13.

Whatever represents a state of acceptance with God, as a thing that may be brought about without any efforts of our own, and especially if it may be done in a moment, or in a very short space of time, is sure to be a popular doctrine. Mankind in general care not how little is expected of them, or how little they themselves have to do, in order to get to heaven. But true religion, that alone which affords solid ground of hope towards God, consists in a change of heart, affections, and habits; which can only be brought about by serious resolution, and a vigorous and constant exertion of our powers. Nay, unless a course of virtue be begun, and good habits formed early in life,

there is very great danger that the *thorns*, *briars*, or *bad soil*, will prevent the good seed from ever coming to maturity.

To believe, as the same persons do, that faith and repentance are nothing that we ourselves are capable of, but altogether the miraculous operation of the Spirit of God in us and upon us, supposes that this great and sudden change may as well take place at the *last* hour of life as at any other: which certainly encourages the most unwarrantable and most dangerous presumption, and is far from having any countenance in the Scriptures. The word of God always represents a safe and *happy death* as the consequence of nothing but a good and *well-spent life*. Some, indeed, are said to have been called at the *eleventh* hour, but none at the *twelfth*, when the time for labouring in the vineyard was quite over; and not one of the foolish virgins, who had neglected to provide themselves with oil, was admitted to the marriage-supper.

### III. Of Original Sin

As a foundation for this strange doctrine, of the utter inability of men to do what God requires of them, a doctrine so injurious both to our Maker and ourselves, it is said that, by his first offence our first parent, Adam, and all his posterity, lost all power of doing any thing acceptable to God for the future; that he was the representative of all his posterity; so that when he sinned we all sinned; and every sin being an offence against an infinite God, we all became, from that moment, liable to an infinite punishment, even the everlasting wrath and curse of our Maker. And they say, that, on this account only, it would have been just in God to have made us all suffer the most exquisite and endless torments in hell, even though we had never sinned in our own persons.

But, my brethren, you find nothing like any part of this in your Bibles. For there you read, *the soul that sinneth, it shall die*. Ezek. xviii, 4. And long after the transgression of Adam,

and to this very day, God is continually calling upon men to *cease to do evil*, and *learn to do well*; which certainly supposes that men always have had, and that we now have, a power to do so. It is allowed that we *suffer* by the sin of Adam, as any child may suffer in consequence of the wickedness of his ancestor; but it is not possible that we should have *sinned* in him. Wherever there is *sin*, there is *guilt*; that is, something that may be the foundation of *remorse* of conscience; something that a man may be *sorry for*, and *repent of*; something that he may wish he had not done; all which clearly implies, that sin is something that a man has given his *consent* to, and therefore must be convinced of the reasonableness of his being punished for. But how can any man repent of the sin of Adam, or feel any thing like remorse of conscience for it; when he cannot but know that he never gave his consent to it, and could not possibly have been, in the least degree, accessory to it? Good and bad conduct are, in their own nature, personal, and cannot possibly be transferred from one to another. Whatever some divines pretend, nothing of this kind can be *imputed* in this sense of the word. We may receive harm by means of one person, and benefit by means of another; but no sin of the former, or righteousness of the latter, can be considered as ours, in the eye of an equitable and just God. The contrary is as much the language and the plain meaning of the Scriptures throughout, as it is agreeable to the common sense and reason that God has given us.

#### IV. Of Election and Reprobation.

Supposing that all mankind became liable to the everlasting wrath and curse of God for the sin of one man, some divines say, that it was mercy in God to save any, though by an *arbitrary decree*, which left all the rest of the human race under an inevitable necessity of perishing. But certainly, my brethren, such *tender mercy is cruelty*. All the creatures of God must look up to him as the author of their being, since it was, undoubtedly, in his power to give, or to withhold it, at his

pleasure; and, surely, a good and merciful God would have put a stop to the propagation of such a race of creatures, rather than suffer them to be born in such shocking circumstances; in which he infallibly foresaw, that the greatest part of them must be exposed to, and even actually suffer, remediless destruction. As surely as I derive my being from a just and merciful God, I conclude that the terms on which I came into the world are advantageous to me; and therefore, that it must be my own fault only, if I have not reason to rejoice in it, and to be thankful for it. But, indeed, I can hardly think that any man seriously believes, that the greatest part of his fellow-creatures are born into the world under a predetermined necessity of being for ever miserable. For, in that case, it must appear probable that any children which he himself may be the means of bringing into the world will be for ever miserable; and surely no man of real goodness or compassion would wish to have children, or be accessory to their being born in such circumstances.

If this doctrine be true, what motive can any man have to endeavour to *flee from the wrath, to come*, Matt. iii, 7; when, if it is to be his lot at all, nothing that he can do will enable him to escape it; or what motive can a man have to exert himself to *lay hold on eternal life*, 1 Tim. vi, 12; when, if he is to enjoy it at all, he cannot possibly miss of it, or of any thing belonging to it, or that is necessary to prepare him for it? What reason had the apostle Paul to exhort christians to *take heed lest they should fall*, 1 Cor. x, 12, when none that ever did stand could possibly fall? And what reason had he to *labour, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away*, 1 Cor. ix, 27, when, being certain of his conversion, he must have known that that consequence was impossible?

This doctrine, of absolute election and reprobation, is certainly a doctrine of *licentiousness*, and not a *doctrine according to godliness*; and let divines employ all the ingenuity they are masters of, it is impossible for them to clear this opinion from being the cause of fatal despair in some, and

as fatal a security in others. If this opinion were true, and men were really aware of their situation, I should think it impossible to prevent their falling into absolute distraction, through terror and anxiety. It would be like a man having his *all*, his *life*, nay, infinitely more than his life, depending upon the cast of a die; the decree of God being a thing that he has little power to command. Besides, this doctrine certainly represents the God and Father of us all in such a light, as no man would choose that he himself should appear in.

### V. Of the Divinity of Christ.

So fatal have the consequences of the sin of Adam been represented, that you have been told that nothing but the blood of God himself could reverse them; and therefore you have been taught to believe, that Jesus Christ, whose proper title is *the Son of Man*, as well as *the Son of God*, was not merely *man*, but very and eternal *God* himself; without considering that, by thus making more Gods than one, you are guilty of a breach of the first and most important of all the commandments, which says expressly, *Thou shalt have no other Gods before me*, Exod. xx, 3. But whatever such divines may say, the apostle Paul says, in direct contradiction to them, that *to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things;—and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him*. 1 Cor. viii, 6. And again, after saying that we have *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*, he adds, *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*. Eph. iv, 5, 6. The creed of all christians, therefore, ought to be, *There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*, 1 Tim. ii, 5.

The *Father* is frequently styled *God*, even with respect to Christ, as well as other beings. *The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory—give unto you—that ye may know—the exceeding greatness of his power—which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set*



him at his own right hand, &c. Eph. i, 17-23. Christ himself uses the same language: *I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God.* John xx, 17. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Matt. xxvii, 46.

Christ, who was *the image of the invisible God*, and the *first-born (or most excellent) of every creature*, Col. i, 15, and in whom dwelt *all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*, Col. ii, 9, acknowledged that his Father was *greater* than he, John xiv, 28; and indeed, upon all occasions, and in the clearest terms, he expressed his dependence upon God his Father, for all his power and glory; as if he had purposely intended to guard his disciples against forming too high an opinion of the dignity of their Master. *Verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself.* John v, 19. *I can of my own self do nothing. As I hear I judge, and my judgement is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.* v, 30. *The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.* xiv, 10. *I live by the Father.* vi, 57. *The Father—hath given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgement.* v, 26, 27. *All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth.* Matt. xxviii, 18. He even calls his Father *the only true God.* John xvii, 3: *that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* It appears to me not to be in the power of language to exclude the idea of the Divinity of Christ more expressly than by these solemn words.

Notwithstanding the divine communications with which our Lord was favoured, some things are expressly said to be withheld from him. For he himself, speaking of his second coming, says, Mark xiii, 32, *But of that day, and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son; but the Father.* In Matt. xxiv, 36, where the same observation is repeated, it is, *but my Father only.*

The apostles, notwithstanding their attachment to their Lord and Master, always preserve the idea of his subordination

to the Father, and consider all his honour and power as derived from him. *He received from God the Father, honour and glory.* 2 Pet. i, 17. *It pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell.* Col. i, 19. *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him.* Rev. i, 1. *Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.* 1 Cor. iii, 23. *The head of Christ is God.* 1 Cor. xi, 3.

The reason why Christ was so much distinguished by God the Father, is frequently and fully expressed in the Scriptures, viz. his obedience to the will of God, and especially in his submitting to die for the benefit of mankind. *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life.* John x, 17. *He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth;—and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Phil. ii, 8–11. *Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Heb. xii, 2.

Our Lord says, that *he and his Father are one*, John x, 30; but he sufficiently explains himself, when he prays that all his disciples may be *one with him, and his Father, even as they are one*, John xvii, 11; and *he gives them the same glory which God had given to him*, ver. 22. Besides, at the very time that our Lord says that he and his Father are one, and in the very sentence preceding it, ver. 29, he says, that *his Father is greater than all*. But how could the Father be greater than all, if there was any other, who was so much *one* with him, as to be, in all respects, *equal* to him?

The mere term God is, indeed, sometimes used in a lower and inferior sense in the Scriptures, denoting dominion only; as when the Divine Being himself says, that he will make Moses a god to Pharaoh, Exod. vii, 1; but, surely, there can be no danger of our mistaking the sense of such phrases as these;

or, if it were possible, our Lord himself has sufficiently guarded against any misconstruction of them when applied to himself, by the explanation he has given of them; informing us, that, if, in the language of Scripture, they are called *gods unto whom the word of God came*, John x, 35, (though, in fact, they were no other than mere men,) he could not be guilty of blasphemy in calling himself only *the Son of God*. Now, if Christ had been conscious to himself that he was the *true and very God*, and that it was of the utmost consequence to mankind that they should regard him in that light, this was certainly a proper time for him to have declared himself, and not to have put his hearers off with such an apology as this.

But even this power and dominion, to which Christ is advanced by God his Father, who gave all power into his hands, and who *gave him to be the head over all things to the church*, Eph. i, 22, this *mediatorial kingdom* of Christ (as it is sometimes, and with sufficient propriety, termed\*) is not to be perpetual. For the apostle Paul, speaking, no doubt, under immediate inspiration, expressly says, that when the end shall come, that God shall have subdued all things to his Son (in which he observes, that He must be excepted who did subdue all things unto him) he must deliver up the kingdom to God, even the *Father*, and be himself subject to him who had *put all things under him, that God may be all in all*. 1 Cor. xv, 24-28. Nay, he himself says expressly, that he had not the disposal of the highest offices of his kingdom, Matt. xx, 23: *To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father*.

So clear, my brethren, so full, and so express, is the uniform testimony of the Scriptures to the great doctrine of the proper unity of God, and of the subordination of Christ, and all other beings to him, that the prevalence of so impious a doctrine as the contrary must be, can be ascribed to nothing

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\* E.g. Caleb Fleming [1698-1779, Unitarian minister of Pinner's Hall]; *A survey of the search after souls, ... with an essay to ascertain the condition of the Christians during the mediatorial kingdom of Jesus*; London, 1758.

but to that *mystery of iniquity*,\* which, though it *began to work* in the times of the apostles themselves, was not then risen to so enormous a height as to attack the supremacy of the *one living and true God*, and *give his peculiar glory to another*.† This, my brethren, among other shocking corruptions of genuine christianity, grew up with the system of popery; and to show that nothing is impossible to the superstition and credulity of men, when they are *become vain in their imaginations*,‡ after exalting a man into a god, a creature into a creator, they made a piece of bread into one also, and then bowed down to, and worshiped, the work of their own hands.

But though it seemed fit to the unsearchable wisdom of God, that all the errors and abuses of popery should not be reformed at once; and though this great error was left untouched by the first Reformers, blessed be God the Bible is as open to us as it was to them; and by the exertion of the same judgement and spirit, we may free christianity from the corruptions which they left adhering to it; and then, among other excellencies of our religion, our Lord will be one, *and his name one*. Zech. xiv, 9.

If you ask *who*, then, is Jesus Christ, if he be not God; I answer, in these words of Peter, addressed to the Jews, after his resurrection and ascension, that *Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God—by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him*. Acts ii, 22. If you ask what is meant by *man*, in this place; I answer, that *man*, if the word be used with any kind of propriety, must mean the same kind of being with yourselves. I say, moreover, with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that *it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things—to make the captain of our salvation* in all respects, *like unto us his brethren*, that he

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\* 2Th ii,7, which Priestley saw as nascent misconceptions that later grew into corruptions of Christianity. Modern commentators see the phrase as referring to sins that we do not recognize as such until it is revealed to us.

† cf. Isa xlii, 8.

‡ Ro i, 21.

might be made *perfect through sufferings*, Heb. ii, 10, 17, and that he might have a *feeling of all our infirmities*, iv, 15. For this reason it was that our Saviour and deliverer was not made of the nature of an *angel*, or like any super-angelic being, but was of *the seed of Abraham*, ii, 16, that is (exclusive of the divinity of the Father, which resided in him, and acted by him) a mere *man*, as other Jews, and as we ourselves also are.

Christ being made by the immediate hand of God, and not born in the usual course of generation, is no reason for his not being considered as a man. For then Adam must not have been a man. But in the ideas of St. Paul, both *the first and second Adam* (as Christ, on this account, is sometimes called) were equally men: *By man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead*: 1 Cor. xv, 21. And certainly, in the resurrection of a *man*, that is, of a person in all respects like ourselves, we have a more *lively hope* of our own resurrection; that of Christ being both a *proof* and a *pattern* of ours. We can therefore, more firmly believe, that *because he lives, we, who are the same that he was, and who shall undergo the same change by death that he did, shall live also*. John xiv, 19.

Till this great corruption of christianity be removed, it will be in vain to preach the Gospel to Jews, or Mahometans, or, indeed, to any people who retain the use of the reason and understanding that God hath given them. For how is it possible that *three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, should be separately, each of them, possessed of all Divine perfections, so as to be *true, very, and eternal God*, and yet that there should be but *one God*; a truth which is so clearly and fully revealed, that it is not possible for men to refuse their assent to it; or else it would, no doubt, have been long ago expunged from our creed, as utterly irreconcilable with the more favourite doctrine of a *Trinity*, a term which is not to be found in the Scriptures. Things *above* our reason may, for any thing that we know to the contrary, be true; but things expressly *contrary* to our reason, as that *three* should be *one*, and *one three*, can never appear to us to be so.

With the Jews, the doctrine of the Divine Unity is, and indeed justly, considered as the most fundamental principle of all religion. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord*; Deut. vi. 4. Mark xii. 29. To preach the doctrine of the Trinity to the Jews, can appear to them in no other light, than an attempt to seduce them into *idolatry*, a thing which they dare not entertain the most distant thought of.

The great creed of the Mahometans is, that *there is one God, and Mahomet is his prophet*. Now, that Mahomet is not the prophet of God, it is to be hoped, they may, in time, be made to believe;\* but we must not expect that they will so easily give up their faith in the unity of God. To make the Gospel what it was originally, *glad tidings of great joy*; and as at last it certainly will be to all the nations of the world, we must free it from this most absurd and impious doctrine, and also from many other corruptions which have been introduced into it. It can no otherwise appear worthy of God, and favourable to the virtue and happiness of mankind.

Lest some common objections should hinder the reception of the great truth here contended for, I shall briefly consider and reply to the principal of them. It is often said that Christ speaks of his *humanity* only, whenever he represents himself as inferior to the Father, and dependent upon him. But the Scriptures themselves are far from furnishing the least hint of any such method of interpretation, though, according to the Trinitarians, it is absolutely necessary to the true understanding of them.

Besides, when it is applied to the passages in question, it is far from making them either true in themselves, or agreeable to the obvious purport and design of the places in which they are introduced. I shall just mention a few. Could our Lord say with truth, and without an unworthy prevarication, that the Father is *the only true God*, John xvii, 3, if any other person, not implied in the term *Father*, was as much the true God as

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\* *supra* p 6n

himself? Now the term *Father* being appropriated to what is called the *first* person in the godhead, cannot comprehend the *Son*, who is called the *second*. This key, therefore, is of no service in this case, and our Lord, by expressing himself as he has done, could not but lead his hearers into what is called a dangerous mistake.

When our Lord said that his Father was greater than he, did he make any reserve, and secretly mean, not his *whole self*, but only *part*, and the inferior part of himself, the other part being equal in power and glory with the Father? How mean the prevarication, and how unworthy of our Lord!

When our Lord said that the time of the day of judgement was not known to himself, *the Son*, but to *the Father only*,\* could he mean that his *humanity* only did not know it, but that his *divinity* (which is supposed to be intimately united with his humanity) was as well acquainted with it as *the Father* himself? If the human nature of Christ had been incapable of having that knowledge communicated to it, the declaration would have been needless: but as that was not the case, his hearers must necessarily understand him as speaking of himself in his highest capacity; as he certainly must do, if at all, when he speaks of himself as *the Son*, corresponding to *the Father*.

If Christ had not satisfied the Jews that he did not mean to make himself equal with God, would they not have produced it against him at his trial, when he was condemned as a blasphemer, because he confessed that he was the Christ only: and yet no Jew expected any thing more than a man for their Messiah, and our Saviour no where intimates that they were mistaken in that expectation. It is plain that Martha considered our Lord as a different person from God, and dependent upon God, when she said to him, John xi, 22, *I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.*

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\* Mk xiii, 32

## VI. Of Atonement for Sin by the Death of Christ.

You have been taught by divines, that if Christ be not God, he could not have made an infinite satisfaction for the sins of mankind. But, my brethren, where do you learn that the pardon of sin, in a finite creature, requires an infinite satisfaction; or, indeed, any satisfaction at all, besides repentance and reformation on the part of a sinner? We read in the Scriptures that we are *justified freely* by the grace of God, Rom. iii, 24; but what free grace, or mercy, does there appear to have been in God, if Christ gave a full price for our justification, and bore the infinite weight of Divine wrath on our account? We are commanded to forgive others, as we ourselves hope to be forgiven, Matt. vi, 14, and to *be merciful, as our Father, who is in heaven, is also merciful*, Luke vi, 36. But surely we are not thereby authorized to insist upon any atonement, or satisfaction, before we give up our resentment towards an offending and penitent brother. Indeed, how could it deserve the name of forgiveness if we did? If he only repent, we are commanded to forgive him, Luke xvii, 4.

You read in the Scriptures that Christ died a *sacrifice for our sins*, Heb. ix, 26. So he did, and a *sacrifice* it was *to God, for a sweet-smelling savour*, Ephes. v, 2. To die, as Christ did, in the glorious cause of truth and virtue; to die, as he did, in order to shew us an example of patiently suffering death for our religion, and the good of mankind, and in a firm hope of a resurrection to a future and eternal life; to die, as he did, in express attestation of his own divine mission, by his manifest resurrection from the dead, and as the fullest proof of that doctrine, by means of which sinners are continually reconciled unto God, was a noble sacrifice indeed. We also are commanded to *present our bodies a living sacrifice*, Rom. xii, 1. And we are required to *offer the sacrifice of praise continually*, Heb. xiii, 15. But it is plain that all these are only figurative expressions, and used by way of comparison. Neither our bodies nor our prayers can be considered as real sacrifices; nor are we, therefore, obliged to suppose that Christ was a real



sacrifice. And though we, like him, should be called actually *to lay down our lives for our brethren*, 1 John iii, 16, which, in imitation of him, we are enjoined to be ready to do, we should be sacrifices only in the figurative sense of the word.

It is true, that no man who is a sinner (and all men have sinned) can be justified by his works. We all stand in need of, and must have recourse to, free grace and mercy; but it is a great dishonour to God to suppose that this mercy and grace takes its rise from any thing but his own essential goodness; and that he is not of himself, and independent of all foreign considerations whatever, what he solemnly declared himself unto Moses, at the time of the giving of the law, to be, namely, *a God merciful and gracious, long suffering, abundant in goodness and in truth*, Exod. xxxiv, 6; or that he requires any other sacrifices than the sacrifices of *a broken spirit—and a contrite heart*, which he will *not despise*. Ps. li, 17.

Can we wish for a more distinct and perfect representation of the manner in which God forgives the sins of his offspring of mankind, than our Saviour has exhibited to us in that most excellent parable of the *prodigal son*; in which the good father no sooner sees his child, who had abandoned him, and wasted his substance in riotous living, returning to him and to his duty; but without waiting for any atonement or propitiation, even *when he was yet a great way off*, he *ran and fell upon his neck, and kissed him*? Luke xv, 20. The same representation we see in the parable of the creditor, who freely forgave his servant, because he humbly desired him. Let us not then, my brethren, deprive the ever-blessed God of the most glorious and honourable of all his attributes, and leave him nothing but justice, or rather vengeance, which is expressly said to be *his strange work*. Isa. xxviii, 21.

It is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of the satisfaction for sin by the death of Christ, with the doctrine of free grace, which, according to the uniform tenour of the Scriptures, is so fully displayed in the pardon of sin, and the justification of sinners. When, therefore, the apostle says, Rom. iii, 24, that

we are *justified freely* by the grace of God, *through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ*, the latter clause must be interpreted in such a manner as to make it consistent with the former; and it is far from requiring any force or straining of the text to do it. For it is only necessary to suppose that our redemption (or, as the word properly signifies, and is indeed frequently rendered by our translators, our deliverance) from the power of sin, i.e. our repentance and reformation, without which there is no promise of pardon, is effected by the gospel of Jesus Christ, who came to call *sinners to repentance*; but still God is to be considered as the giver, and not the receiver, with respect to our redemption; for we read that he *spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all*. Rom. viii, 32.

To say that God the Father provided an atonement for his own offended justice is, in fact, to give up the doctrine. If a person owe me a sum of money, and I choose to have the debt discharged, is it not the same thing, whether I remit the debt at once, or supply another person with money wherewith to pay me in the debtor's name? If satisfaction be made to any purpose, it must be in some manner, in which the offender may be a sufferer, and the offended person a gainer; but it can never be reconciled to equity, or answer any good purpose whatever, to make the innocent suffer the punishment of the guilty. If, as Abraham says, it be far from God *to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked*, Gen. xviii, 25, much farther must it be from him to slay the righteous instead of the wicked.

I wish the zealous advocates for this doctrine would consider, that if it be necessary, in the nature of things, that the justice of God be satisfied before any sin can be pardoned, and Christ be God as well as the Father, whether the justice of Christ ought not to have been satisfied in the first place. If so, what other Infinite Being has made satisfaction to him? But if the divine nature of the Son, required no satisfaction, why should the Divine nature of the Father require any?

If it had been inconsistent with the divine justice to pardon sin upon repentance only, without some farther satisfaction, we might have expected to have found it expressly said to be so in the Scriptures; but no such declaration can be produced either from the Old or the New Testament. All that can be pretended is, that it may be inferred from it. Though good works are recommended to us in the strongest manner, it is never with any salvo\* or caution, as if they were not *of themselves* acceptable to God. The declarations of the divine mercy to the penitent are all absolute, without the most distant hint of their having a reference to any consideration on which they are made. *Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive*, Psalm lxxxvi, 5. *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him*, Dan. ix, 9. When David and other penitents confess their sins, and entreat for pardon, they refer themselves to the Divine mercy only, without seeming to have the least idea of any thing farther. *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord*. Psalm xxv, 7.

It is particularly remarkable, that when sacrifices under the law are expressly said not to be sufficient for the pardon of sin, we are never referred to any *more availing* sacrifice; but to good works only. *Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*. Psalm li 16, 17. If any of the Jews had had the least notion of the necessity of any atonement for the sins of mankind, they could not but have expected a suffering Messiah; and yet it is plain that the very best of them had no such idea. And though our Saviour frequently explains the reason of his coming, and the necessity of his suffering, it is never on any such account. If he had done it any where, it might have been expected in those discourses by which he endeavoured to reconcile his disciples to his death, in his

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\* *salvo* = *reservation; saving clause* (Law).

solemn prayer before his sufferings, at the time of his agony in the garden, or when he was upon the cross; yet nothing of this kind drops from him on any of these occasions.

When our Lord describes the proceedings of the day of judgement, he doth not represent the righteous as referring themselves to the sufferings or merit of their Judge for their justification; and the Judge himself expressly grounds it on their good works only. Though Peter, in his discourse to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, speaks of their sin in murdering Christ as of a heinous nature, he says not a word of the necessity of any atonement; or that an ample satisfaction had just been made, by means of their very wickedness.\* How would a modern divine have harangued upon the occasion, and what advantage might he have taken of the cry of the Jews; *his blood be upon us, and upon our children!* But Peter only exhorts to repentance, and speaks of the death of Christ as an event that took place according to the fore-knowledge of God.

All the discourses of Paul upon various occasions in the book of Acts are intirely moral. In his celebrated speech at Athens, he only urges his hearers to repentance, from the consideration of a future judgement. He says not a word of what is now called the true gospel of Jesus Christ. In short, it is only from the literal interpretation of a few figurative expressions in the Scriptures, that this doctrine of atonement, as well as that of transubstantiation, has been derived; and it is certainly a doctrine highly injurious to God: and if we, who are commanded to imitate God, should act upon the maxims of it, it would be subversive of the most amiable part of virtue in men. We should be implacable and unmerciful, insisting upon the uttermost farthing.

These, my brethren, are the principal heads on which I proposed to expostulate with you, in the plain and free manner in which I have done. Do you yourselves, *search the Scriptures*, and *see whether these things be so*. Pray to the

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\* cf. Ac ii

God of truth to lead you into all truth; and may he give you *understanding in all things*.

## VII. Practical Consequences of the above Doctrines

The sound knowledge of christianity is not of importance as a matter of speculation merely; though abstract truths, especially truths that relate to God, and the maxims of his moral government, are not without their utility and obligation: but the truths that I here contend for, nearly affect the sentiments of our hearts, and our conduct in life; as indeed has been shewn in many respects already. Considering God as possessed of the character in which some divines represent him, it is impossible, while human nature is what it is, that he should appear in an amiable or respectable light. Such a God may, indeed, be the object of dread and terror to his creatures; but by no means of their love or reverence. And what is obedience without love? It cannot be that of the heart, which, however, is the only thing that is of any real value in religion. Also, how can a man love his fellow-creatures in general, when he considers the greatest part of them as the objects of the Divine abhorrence, and doomed by him to an everlasting destruction, in which he believes that he himself must for ever rejoice? And what can remain of virtue, when these two great sources of it, the love of God and of mankind, are thus grossly corrupted? Lastly, how must the genuine spirit of mercy and forgiveness, which so eminently distinguishes the gospel of Christ, be debased, when God himself (whose conduct in this very respect is particularly proposed to our imitation) is considered as never forgiving sin without some previous atonement, satisfaction or intercession?

On the other hand, loving God, as the compassionate Father of all his offspring, as willing that *all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of his truth*; and also loving all mankind as our brethren, as, together with ourselves, the children of the same gracious Father, we cannot want the most

generous and powerful motives to do the will of God, and *to provoke one another unto love and to good works*; being in no fear of counteracting the secret designs of the Almighty, which we believe are aimed not at the destruction, but the happiness of all his creatures.

Think not, however, that I am so uncharitable as to suppose that all those who profess to maintain the doctrines I have been arguing against, are universally destitute of the genuine love of God, or of their fellow-creatures. I am sensible, and truly thankful, that it is not always the consequence; but it is because the hearts of such persons are really influenced by better principles than those which they avow. They by no means habitually regard the Divine Being in the light, in which their principles represent him, but as the true *Father* of all the creatures that he has made, and, as such, sincerely desirous to promote their best interests.

Also, notwithstanding, if they be asked, they will not hesitate to say that Christ is God; the supremacy of the Father, even with respect to the Son, is, at the same time, the real sentiment of their minds; and when they lift up their hearts to God, it is only *God the Father*, that is the proper object of their adoration. The constant tenour of the Scriptures is so contrary to their professed creed, that though they dare not call it in question, it is not able to counteract the plainer, the more consistent, and the better principles which will force themselves upon their minds from conversing with the Bible.

Besides, it requires more subtlety and refinement to enter into the principles above-mentioned, than the common people are masters of. They cannot conceive how one man should sin, and another person, six thousand years after,\* be guilty of that sin, and punishable for it; how one person's righteousness should be considered the righteousness of another; or that three

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\* James Ussher, 1581-1656, Archbishop of Armagh, proposed a date for the creation of Adam as Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October 4004 BC, based upon his reading of the Greek Septuagint.

distinct persons should each of them be God, and yet that there shall be no more Gods than one.

Men of plain understandings, in fact, never do believe any such thing; nor can it be supposed that the gospel, which was intended to be the solid foundation of the faith, hope and joy of common people, should require so much acuteness, as is necessary to give even a plausible colour to these strange assertions. The attempt to explain them (and, till they be explained, they can no more be believed than a proposition in an unknown tongue) can lead to nothing but endless and unprofitable controversy. It is happy, therefore, that so many persons make a better use of the Gospel than their tenets would lead them to do, and that they consider it chiefly as a rule of life, and the foundation of hope after death. But, as far as the principles I have been arguing against are believed, they cannot but do harm to those who entertain them, as well as bring disgrace upon the christian name; both which every lover of the gospel should endeavour to prevent.

## A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE ABOVE-MENTIONED DOCTRINES,

### I. A concise History of Opinions concerning Jesus Christ.

You will say, if Christ be not really *God*, but merely a man, though inspired and assisted by God, how came the christian world to fall into so great an error? In return, I might ask, how, if Christ be truly God, equal to the Father, so many christians, and especially the Jewish christians, and many others in the very early ages of the christian church, came to think him to be merely a man; when it may be easily conceived that, on many accounts, christians, who were continually reproached with the meanness\* of their Master, would be

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\* *meanness* in the sense of *lowly estate*.

disposed to add to, rather than to take from his dignity? But it is not difficult to shew by what means, and by what steps, christians came to think as the generality of them now do.

It was the universal opinion of philosophers, at the time of the promulgation of christianity, that the souls of all men had existed before they were sent to animate the bodies that were provided for them here, and also that all souls were emanations, or parts detached from the Deity. For at that time there was no idea of any substance being properly immaterial and indivisible. When these philosophers became christians, and yet were ashamed of being the disciples of a man who had been crucified, they naturally gave a distinguished rank to the soul of Christ before he came into the world. They even went one step farther, and maintained that Christ had a body in appearance only, and not in reality, and therefore that he suffered nothing at all when he was scourged and crucified.

This opinion the apostle John reprobates with great severity, and even calls it Antichristian, 1 John iv, 3; whereas, though it is acknowledged that the other opinion, viz. that of Christ being merely a man, existed in the times of the apostles, it is remarkable that this apostle takes no notice of it. It was plainly the doctrine of those only who maintained that Christ was not truly a man that gave this apostle any disturbance, or he would never have said as he does, 1 John iv, 2, *Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (that is, was truly a man,) is of God.*

After this, philosophizing christians began to add to the pre-existent dignity of Christ in another way, and at length, carried it much higher than those upon whom this apostle animadverted with so much severity. They said that Christ was originally in God, being his reason or *logos*, which came out of him, and was personified before the creation of the world, in which he was the immediate agent; and that this new personage was henceforth the medium of all the Divine communications to mankind, having been the person who spake to Adam in paradise, to Noah, to Abraham, and all the



patriarchs; who delivered the law from mount Sinai, and, lastly, inhabited the body of Jesus of Nazareth.

On this principle they explained many passages in the Old Testament, in which *the word of God* is spoken of, as that of the Psalmist, *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, &c.*, making this word to be a person, distinct from God, whose word it was; whereas nothing can be more plain, than that by *the word of God* in this place, is meant the *power* of God exerted with as much ease as men utter words.

These philosophizing christians took great pains to explain how the reason or wisdom of God could thus become a person, distinct from God, and yet God continue a reasonable Being; but their account of it is too trifling to be recited in this place. However, it was far from being pretended, in general, that the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ was such a mystery as could not be explained. For by mystery they only meant something of a solemn nature, which was unknown till it was revealed or explained. And indeed this is plainly the use of the word mystery in the New Testament; and it was also the usual meaning of the word when the present translation of the Bible was made; the mysteries of any particular trade being the secrets of that trade, which yet every master taught his apprentices.

In this state the doctrine continued till after the council of Nice, in the year of our Lord 325; but in all this time a real superiority was always acknowledged in the Father, as the only source of divinity; and it was even explicitly acknowledged that there was a time when the Son of God had no separate existence, being only the reason of God, just as the reason of man is a part, or a property of man. One of the most eminent of the christian Fathers says, *There was a time when God was neither a Father nor a judge; for he could not be a Father before he had a son, nor a judge before there was sin.*\*

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\* The first part of this expression is attributed to Arius and his fellow apostates from the Church, in Alexander (Arius was Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria 313 till

So far were they from supposing the Son of God to be equal to the Father, that when they were charged, as they frequently were, with making two Gods, they generally replied, that the Son was only God of God, as having proceeded from a superior God, which is the language of the Nicene Creed; whereas the Father was God of himself (αυτοθεος)\* by which they meant underived, which they held to be the prerogative of the Father only.

In all this time the Jewish christians, who were not tainted with the Heathen philosophy, maintained the doctrine of the proper and simple humanity of Christ. Athanasius himself was so far from being able to deny this, that he says all the Jews were so fully persuaded that their Messiah was to be a man like themselves, that the apostles were obliged to use great caution in divulging the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ. He says that the reason why Peter, Acts ii, 22, only calls him *a man approved of God*, and why, on other occasions, in the course of that book, and other parts of the New Testament, he is simply called a man, was, that at first the apostles did not think proper to do more than prove that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah, and that they thought it prudent to divulge the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ by degrees. He likewise

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his death in 326). In his *Catholic Epistle*, 319 AD, he says: “God was not always the Father; but there was a time when God was not the Father. The Word of God was not always, but was made ‘from things that are not’...For the Son is a thing created, and a thing made: nor is He like to the Father in substance; nor is He the true and natural Word of the Father; nor is He His true Wisdom; but He is one of the things fashioned and made. And He is called, by a misapplication of the terms, the Word and Wisdom, since He is Himself made by the proper Word of God, and by that wisdom which is in God, in which, as God made all other things, so also did He make Him. Wherefore, He is by His very nature changeable and mutable, equally with other rational beings.”

\* Elsewhere, Priestley tells us that the antenicene fathers distinguished the Father by the epithet of αυτοθεος, [autotheos] God of himself, and the Son by the inferior title of θεος εκ θεου, [theos ek theoy] God of God, or a derived God. [Joseph Priestley; *A general view of the arguments for the unity of God*; Birmingham, Piercy and Jones, 1783; §1] The epithet *true God from true God* was added to the Creed of Nicea, AD 325.

says, that the Jews of those times, meaning the Jewish christians, being in this error themselves, drew the Gentiles into it. Athanasius greatly commends the apostles for this address in their circumstances. But what the apostles scrupled to teach, we should be scrupulous in believing. Chrysostom\* gives the same account of the situation of the apostles with respect to the Jews.

It also clearly appears from ecclesiastical history, that the unlearned among the christians were exceedingly averse to the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, even in the qualified sense above-mentioned, opposing what they called the supreme *monarchy* of the Father to the novel doctrine of the Divinity of the Son; and the philosophizing christians were obliged to make laboured apologies to these early Unitarians, acknowledging the perfect inferiority of the Son to the Father. But at length these Unitarians, who are expressly said to have been the majority of christians in the third century, were overborne by the superior influence and popularity of their adversaries, who, from believing Christ to be God in an inferior and qualified sense of the word, came, in the natural course of things, to believe him to be God equal to the Father himself, and to have existed from all eternity independently of him. But it was several centuries before this doctrine was fully established. And the Holy Spirit was generally considered either as the same thing with the *power* of God, that is, God himself, (just as the spirit of a man is a man) or else a superangelic being, inferior both to the Father and the Son, till after the council of Nice.

In the mean time, Arius and his followers, shocked at the doctrine of Christ being of the *same substance* with the Father, maintained that, though he had pre-existed, and had been the medium of all the dispensations of God to mankind, he was, like all other derived beings, created out of nothing; the

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\* John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Archbishop of Constantinople, and an important Early Church Father.

opinion of all souls having been emanations from the Supreme Mind being then generally denied by christians.

Thus did it please God, for reasons unknown to us, to permit the rise and general spread of the Trinitarian and Arian opinions, as he permitted the rise and amazing power of *the man of sin*, and many corruptions and abuses of christianity, utterly subversive of the genuine purity of the Gospel, till the full time for the reformation of this and other gross corruptions of christianity was come.

## II. A concise History of the Doctrines of Grace, Original Sin, and Predestination.

It was a controversy about the nature and use of baptism that occasioned the starting of the doctrine of the *natural impotence* of man to do what God requires of him, of the imputation of the sin of Adam to all his posterity, and of the arbitrary *predestination* of certain individuals of the human race to everlasting life, while the rest of mankind were left in a state of *reprobation*; and this was so late as four hundred years after Christ. Before that time it had been the universal opinion of christians, and of Austin\* himself, who first advanced the doctrines above-mentioned, that every man has the power of obeying or disobeying the laws of God, that all men may be saved if they will, and that no decrees of God will be the least obstruction in the way of any man's salvation.

But Pelagius,† a man of good understanding, and exemplary morals, in his declamations against some abuses of

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\* Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD). Many Protestants, especially Calvinists, consider him to be one of the theological fathers of Reformation teaching on Salvation and Divine Grace.

† Pelagius was born ca. 354 AD, with family connections to the numerous Johannine monastic communities and Christian settlements in Brittany and at Behethlem St Gluvias and around the Lizard peninsular in West Cornwall. He supported the principle of free will, opposing Augustine's theology of original sin and salvation through divine grace alone. Pelagianism was denounced as heretical at the Council of Carthage, 418. Pelagius died in Cornwall ca. 430.

baptism, asserting that baptism itself does not wash away sin, as was then generally supposed, (on which account it was the custom with many to defer it till near death,) nor could have been appointed for that purpose, because infants, which have no sin, are baptized; Austin in opposition to him maintained that, though infants have no *actual* sin of their own, they have the stain of *original* sin in which they were born; though he was far from asserting that Adam was the federal head of all his posterity, and that his sin was properly imputed to them. This was an improvement upon the doctrine in after-ages. What Austin maintained was, that men derive a corrupt nature, or a proneness to sin, from Adam.

Also, having been led, in the course of this controversy, to assert that by means of original sin, no man had it in his power to attain to salvation, he was obliged to maintain that it depended upon the will of God only, who should be finally saved, and that he predestinated whom he thought proper for that purpose, independent of any foresight of their good works, which it was not in their power to perform without his immediate assistance, and in which he must be the first mover.

But notwithstanding this doctrine of the corruption of human nature, of the necessity of divine grace for the production of every good thought or action, and of predestination to eternal life without regard to good works, advanced by Austin, prevailed in the West, chiefly through the authority of his name; it was never received in the Eastern church, and was much controverted, and held with various modifications, in the Western. Also, together with this doctrine of grace, the divines of the Roman-catholic church held the doctrine of human merit, founded on the right use of the grace of God to man. And the present doctrines of *grace*, *original sin*, and *predestination*, were never maintained in their full extent till after the reformation by Luther, who was a friar of the order of Austin, had been much attached to his doctrines, and made great use of them in opposing the popish doctrines of *indulgence*, founded on that of *merit*.

### III. A concise History of the Doctrine of Atonement.

The doctrine of *atonement*, or of the necessity of *satisfaction* being made to the justice of God by the death of Christ, in order to his remitting the sins of men, arose from an abuse of the figurative language of Scripture, as the doctrine of *transubstantiation* also did. But for several centuries these figurative expressions were understood and applied in a manner very different from what they now are.

It was granted by some pretty early writers, that we were *bought (or redeemed) with a price*; but then, as we had been the slaves of sin, and were redeemed by God, who ransomed us by the death of his Son, it was maintained till after the time of Austin (the principal author of all the rigid doctrines that are now called *Calvinistic*) that the price of our redemption was paid not to God, but by God, to the Devil, in whose power we were. Of this opinion was Austin himself, who wrote largely on the subject in his treatise on the doctrine of the Trinity. It was long after his time before we find any traces of its being generally thought that the price of redemption was paid to the offended justice of God; and the present doctrine of atonement, founded on the idea of the absolute necessity of an infinite satisfaction being made by one Infinite Being for offences of an infinite magnitude, as committed against another Infinite Being, is subsequent to the Reformation. This doctrine was advanced by the Reformers in the course of their controversy with the Papists, about the doctrine of human merit, works of penance, and the power of granting indulgences. Now, can it be supposed that a doctrine of so much importance as this is always represented to be, should have been unknown so many ages?

Thus all these boasted ancient doctrines are in fact of late date, either having arisen from the principles of heathen philosophy, or having been started and extended in the course of controversy, one false position making another necessary for its support; and an air of awful and deep mystery has been

no small recommendation of them to many of the more ignorant.

The doctrine of the *trinity*, having been one of the earliest corruptions of christianity, will probably be one of the last to be completely eradicated. But the time, I trust, is fast approaching, when, by means of the zeal of truly enlightened and good men in this great cause, this fundamental error, which gives such great and just cause of offence to Jews and Mahometans, will be removed, and all that has been built upon it will fall to the ground.

### The Conclusion.

Mr Christian Brethren, if the reading of this address give rise to any *doubts* or *scruples* in your minds, with respect to some doctrines which you have been used to consider as true and *fundamental* in the christian religion, inquire farther; and if you be *satisfied* that you have hitherto been mistaken, dare to avow the truth, and act consistently with it. Dread the consequences of joining, with an enlightened mind, in the *idolatrous worship of any creature*, though enjoined by any human authority; remembering the words of Christ, *thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*. Matt. iv. 10. and also that awful voice from heaven respecting all antichristian corruptions of the gospel, in mystical Babylon: *Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues*. Rev. xviii. 4.

Think not to avail yourselves of the wretched equivocation of many divines, who imagine that they may safely ascribe all divine honours to Jesus Christ, on account of his *union with the Father*, when they believe no more of his *proper divinity* than professed Arians or Socinians. By this artifice they secure the reputation and emoluments of orthodoxy; but let them consider the value of the purchase, and the price they give for it. To mere worldly considerations, to the *praise of*

*men*, and *filthy lucre*, they sacrifice that *integrity*, for the loss of which worlds cannot compensate.

The publisher of these tracts does not conceal his name through the fear of any thing that *men* can *say of him*, or *do to him*, but merely to give what he has written a better chance of being read without prejudice. What he has done is out of a sincere good-will and compassion to the multitude, who believe *they know not what*, or *why*, and what is of more consequence, who *know not what spirit they are of*; but instead of *speaking the truth in love*, mistake bitterness and rancour for a zeal for God and his truth; and also for the sake of a better sort of people, who are unhappily drawn into the same delusions.

Considering the deference which the common people always pay to the judgement of men of learning, there can be little doubt but that, if those persons who, having studied this subject, have been convinced that Christ is not God, and ought not to be worshipped as God, had openly avowed their opinion, and had had recourse to no mean subterfuge or equivocation, this fundamental article of true and rational christianity had long ago been the prevailing belief; and our religion appearing more worthy of its divine author, there would have been, at this time, fewer unbelievers in all christian countries, and many more converts made to it from other religions. And, compared with this glorious advantage, what has been gained by all the arts and sophistry of ministers, who have concealed their real meaning under ambiguous expressions, lest, as they pretend, they should too much shock the prejudices of their hearers?

That some regard should be paid to the prejudices of the *weak* is allowed; but let not this lead men to criminal dissimulation, or extend to things of so much importance as this, respecting the *unity of God*. In this case, let us keep at the greatest distance from every thing that is *disingenuous*; let the truth be spoken in the most explicit manner, and let the consequences be left to the *power of truth*, and the *God of*



*truth*. Besides, it is impossible that while men retain depraved and unworthy notions of God, their devotion should be such as God requires; so that this pretended tenderness injures those who are the objects of it, as well as bears an unfavourable aspect on the interests of christianity more at large. Such are the effects of the *wisdom of this world*, when it is put in the place of *sincerity*, and a regard to the plain *truth of the gospel* of Jesus Christ!

Professing the purity of the christian faith, let us be careful, my brethren, to adorn it by a blameless and exemplary life. More especially let us beware that we do not wear *the form of godliness*, when our hearts are destitute of the *power* of it; and that we indulge no secret hope, that by any peculiar strictness and austerity of life, by frequent or long prayers, or by attending on much preaching, and using other *means* of religion, we shall atone for a neglect of *the weightier matters of the law, righteousness, mercy, and truth*. Let the integrity of our hearts appear in the cheerfulness of our countenances, and let us shew that we *love God whom we have not seen*, by loving our *brethren whom we do see*, and by being always ready to do them every kind office in our power.

To judge of our love to God, or of our love to Christ, directly, by what we *feel* when we think of them, especially when we are excluded from the world, as is the custom with many, is to expose ourselves to the grossest and most dangerous delusions. We find in the scriptures a much plainer and safer method of judging in both these cases. *This*, says the apostle John, *is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. If ye love me*, says our Lord, *keep my commandments. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you; and this is my commandment, that ye love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*\*

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\* 1Jn v, 3; Jn xiv, 15; Jn xv, 14; Jn xv, 12; Jn xiii, 34

Remember that true christian charity is humble, modest, and diffident; and that he is pronounced to be happy, who *feareth always*, so as to be circumspect in thought, word, and deed; and that, for this purpose, we are to *put on the whole armour of God*, that we may withstand the temptations of the world.

Rather than indulge a pharisaical pride, in recounting your *experiences*, boasting how vile you have once been, or thought yourselves to be, in order to make others believe how holy and sanctified you are now, content yourselves with the language and practice of the humble publican, who, speaking to God and his own heart only, cried, *God be merciful to me a sinner*.\*

Rejoice in all the real good you see done by others whatever may be their ill will, or opposition to you; and be especially upon your guard, lest your just aversion to what is corrupt in the principles or practices of others, lead you to dislike what is good in them. Let not the *pharisaical rigour* of some throw you into the opposite extreme of *levity*; and let not their laying an undue stress upon praying, preaching, and other means of religion, make you neglect them, as we are too apt to do, with respect to any thing that has been much abused.

Having enough to do with our own hearts, let us be particularly upon our guard against that spirit of *ensoriousness* which many professing christians indulge with too little restraint. Let us remember that the true christian *beareth all things and hopeth all things*; and let us never forget the awful warning of our Lord, *Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again*.†

Be not moved, my Brethren, by the rash censures and reproaches of others. *Persecution*, of some kind, is what *all who live godly in Christ Jesus must expect to suffer in this*

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\* Lk xviii, 9-14

† 1Co xiii, 7; Mt vii, 1-2

*world*. To their *wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice*, answer with *the wisdom that is from above*; which is *pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*. Let us even rejoice that we are *counted worthy to suffer shame, and insult, for the sake of Christ*, though our sufferings come not from the professed enemies of Christ, but from *false brethren*; and let us not be concerned at being counted *deceivers*, if we be conscious to ourselves that we truly love the gospel, and that we labour to promote and adorn it.

You will be called *Arminians* and *Socinians* by your adversaries, or something else that shall express more of their hatred and dislike. But let not this offend you. If there be any proper meaning in those epithets, it can only be that you hold certain opinions which they deem to be false, but which you cherish, as the only genuine doctrines of the gospel. If nothing more is meant by those terms, besides mere *reproach* and abuse, think yourselves happy, as being *reproached for the name of Christ*: 1 Peter iv, 14. With many the appellation of *Lutheran* or *Calvinist* is reproachful, and with many also, that of *Christian* is much more so. Besides, both Arminius and Socinus were men who loved the gospel, and who suffered more for their adherence to it than most others of the Reformers, especially Socinus.\*

If we be Christians indeed, we shall consider ourselves as *not of this world*, but as *citizens of heaven*. *The friendship of this world*, therefore, together with popularity, and success in it, ought not to be considered as any object for us. If we *abide in Christ, and walk even as he also walked, not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds*, we are *heirs of a far nobler inheritance, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us*; and when *Christ, who is our*

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\* In 1598 a mob in Kraków attacked and battered Socinus, demolishing his home, forcing him to seek refuge with friends at Lusławice, 30 miles east of Kraków; where he died 4<sup>th</sup> March 1604.

*life*, and for whom we suffer reproach, *shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory.*\*

I shall conclude this address with a word of advice and exhortation to all *unitarians*, whether they be members of the established church, or of any society of *dissenters* in this country.

Of such great importance is the doctrine of the *divine unity*, that nothing will more fully justify a separation from any christian church that does not openly profess it, and much more from those that avow the contrary doctrine, directing prayers, and paying supreme worship, to any other than the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

It was for the preservation of this great and fundamental doctrine, that Abraham, and his family by Isaac and Jacob, were separated from the rest of the world, and made a distinct people, as it were to be the depositaries of the true religion, which consists principally in the sole worship of the one true and living God, the maker and preserver of all things. The same important doctrine was uniformly taught by Christ and the apostles; though christians in after times, like the Israelites after the time of Joshua, relapsed into that idolatry which has generally prevailed to this day.

If it was a sufficient justification of the first reformers, that they considered the church from which they separated as worshipping saints and angels; will it not justify your separation from their partial reformations, that you consider them as praying to and worshipping one whom you consider as a *man* like yourselves, though honoured and distinguished by God above all other men?

To join habitually in public worship with trinitarians, is countenancing that worship, which you must consider as *idolatrous*; and which, however innocent in them, is highly criminal in you. If they think it a point of conscience not to go

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\* cf. Ro xii, 2; 1Pe i. 4; Col iii, 4.

to mass in popish churches because, in their opinion, it is idolizing a *piece of bread*, you ought to make a point of conscience of not worshipping with them, because in your opinion it is idolizing a *man*, who is as much a creature of God as a piece of bread, and just as improper an object of worship.

Besides, the great offence to Jews, Mahometans, and the world at large, being the doctrine of the *trinity*, it is highly necessary that societies of christians should be formed expressly on this principle of the *divine unity*, that it may be evident to all the world, that there are christians, and societies of christians, who hold the doctrine of the trinity in as much abhorrence as they themselves can do. For the conversion of Jews or Mahometans to christianity, while it is supposed to contain the doctrine of the Trinity, no person who knows, or has heard of Jews or Mahometans, can ever expect.

You will say, We unitarians are but few, even in large towns, and still fewer in villages, and there are no men of leisure or learning among us. But was not this the case with the primitive christians, and yet this circumstance was no obstruction to the forming of a christian church in any place? We read of churches in private houses.

Assemble together, therefore, in the name and in the fear of God, and according to the order of the gospel, every Lord's-day; if there be no more than *two* or *three*, or even a single family of you in a place, read the Scriptures and pray together. Also read sermons, or other works of moral instruction, of which there is happily no want at this day. Baptize and administer the Lord's Supper among yourselves; and as you grow more numerous, form yourselves upon some regular plan of church discipline, that it may be the means of uniting and keeping you together; and rigorously exclude all persons whose conduct would be a reproach to you.

As to *learned ministry*, it is acknowledged to be desirable where it can be had, but it is by no means necessary. The gravest and most respectable persons among you, and those

who have the most leisure will, in the character of *elders*, select and read proper prayers and discourses, and perform all the offices of christian societies, just as well as the elders in the primitive churches, who had no such helps as you now have; and miraculous powers were not of long continuance with them.

If you be at present members of the established church, you will find a *reformed liturgy* ready prepared for your use by Mr. Lindsey.\* But if you should prefer the mode of worship among the Dissenters (but men of sense will not make much account of such distinctions), you may in many authors, especially at the end of Mr. Holland's Sermons,† find forms of such prayers as you have been used to: or you may apply to dissenting ministers of your acquaintance, who will cheerfully give you any assistance in their power.

All these are trifling obstacles to a great design. It requires, indeed, a proper degree of christian zeal; but the object is worthy of it. The example has been already set in Scotland, where it was least of all to be expected;‡ and the success has been such as should abundantly encourage similar attempts in this country.

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\* Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808); *The Book of Common Prayer reformed according to the plan of the late Dr. Samuel Clarke together with the Psalter or Psalms of David and a collection of hymns for public worship*; London, J. Johnson, 1774. And, Theophilus Lindsey; *A Sermon* [on Eph. iv. 3] *preached at the opening of the Chapel in Essex-House, Essex-Street, Apr. 17, 1774. To which is added, a summary account of the Reformed Liturgy on the plan of...Dr S. Clarke*; London, 1774.

[In the introduction to his *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*; London, James Knapton, 1712, Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) had outlined his manner of practising the articles and liturgy of the Church of England.]

† Rev. John Holland of Mobberly (1720-1751), Dissenting Minister, had been a student at Dr. Rotheram's Academy in Kendal. Two volumes of sermons, printed from his manuscripts, were published in 1753.

‡ A reference to William Christie of Montrose, who founded the first Unitarian Church in Scotland in 1781, and who emigrated to the USA in 1795. [L Baker Short; "William Christie and the first Unitarian church in Scotland"; *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.*; 1967-70, **14**, 10-27, 78-92.]

The Baptists and Methodists, not laying much stress upon a learned ministry, flourish greatly, the Independents are now taking the same methods and with the same success; while the rational Dissenters, fancying they would be disgraced by the want of a learned ministry, are dwindling away almost every where.

Whatever inconvenience may arise from mere *novelty*, it is soon over; and as the Methodists are collecting into bodies in all places; a thing of this kind will excite much less surprize. But what impression ought the censure of the world to make upon those who, as christians, profess to be *above the world*, and to *rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame* in the cause of Christ, and to think themselves *happy* if they be *reproached* on that account. You should imagine that you hear that awful *voice from heaven*, recorded in the book of Revelation ch. xviii, 4.\* *Come out of her* (i.e. of mystical Babylon, the great source of all the corruptions of christianity), *my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*

Be careful, however, to do this in the spirit of christian charity, which should be extended to all men, but especially to all that bear the christian name. Consider them as men who are in an error which is always involuntary. Endeavour to remove the prejudices they unhappily lie under, but forbear all angry reproaches, all insult, and even ridicule; for religion is a serious thing, and *brotherly love* is the very essence of it. And if this love is to be extended even to *enemies*, much more should it be indulged towards our merely *mistaken friends*.

The author of this address intirely approves of *Mr. Lindsey's Liturgy*, or that which was used at the Octagon Chapel in Liverpool;† and he would recommend *responses*

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\* *cf.* p 35.

† On 16th October 1760, a committee of Dissenters in Liverpool, headed by Josiah Wedgwood's partner Thomas Bentley (1731-80), invited several dissenting ministers to prepare a prayer book for a new chapel they had planned: [Richard Godwin (1722-87), Philip Holland (1721-89), & John Seddon (1725-70)

especially to societies formed in this manner, in which it is particularly desirable that the members, being nearly on a level, should each bear his part in the service. But lest some, from the force of habit, should not be able to reconcile themselves to the use of a liturgy, and object to the scheme on that account, he intends, if it should appear to be wanted, to draw up, or compile and publish, a set of *Forms for all the occasions of a christian society*.\*

THE END.

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(ed.); *A Form of Prayer, and a New Collection of Psalms for the use of a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Liverpool*; London, 1762. The book was used in the Octagon Chapel, Liverpool, from its opening on 5 June 1763, until it closed in 1776. {The scheme for a new liturgy was strongly opposed by John Taylor (1694-1761) *The Scripture Account of Prayer, in an address to the Dissenters in Lancashire; occasioned by a new Liturgy some Ministers ... are composing for the use of a congregation at Liverpool*; London, 1761. Taylor [sub p 81n] had previously disputed with Seddon on the utility of a separate liturgy. [Padraig O'Brien; *Warrington Academy 1757-86*; Wigan, 1989; pp. 52-3]}

\* Joseph Priestley; *Forms of prayer and other offices for the use of Unitarian societies*; Birmingham, Pearson & Rollason, 1783.



THE  
**TRIUMPH OF TRUTH ;**

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF  
**THE TRIAL OF MR. ELWALL**

FOR  
**HERESY AND BLASPHEMY, AT STAFFORD ASSIZES**

[ 1726. ]

THE PREFACE\*

This Trial is printed from the Author's Second Edition, even without altering such phrases as are peculiar to that denomination of christians with whom he generally associated, and whose style he adopted; and certainly the Quakers ought to think themselves honoured even by this kind of relation to Mr. Elwall. Such firmness in the cause of truth, and such presence of mind in asserting and vindicating it, as appear in this Trial, are truly apostolical, and have had but few examples since the first promulgation of christianity. It is impossible for an unprejudiced person to read this account of it, (which is written with so much true simplicity, perspicuity, and strength of evidence) without feeling the greatest veneration for the writer, the fullest conviction and love for the truth, and a proportional zeal in maintaining it. I should even think it impossible for the most prejudiced person to read it attentively, but, if he use no violence with his own mind, he will receive some favourable impressions both of the Author, and of that cause which he supports with such becoming dignity, and with a temper and disposition of mind, in every respect worthy of a true christian.

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\* by Joseph Priestley.

So great was the force of truth on this memorable occasion, that a reputable and honest jury, directed by a good-natured and sensible judge, acquitted the criminal, contrary to the express laws of this country, according to which this glorious man ought to have been sentenced to a severe punishment, as a convicted and avowed blasphemer. What must a lover of truth and of free inquiry, as subservient to truth, think of such laws, and of the ecclesiastical constitution of the countries in which they are in force!

It is to be wished that such a monument of the *triumph of truth* might be constantly held out to the view of all mankind, and particularly in this country where it was exhibited.

The dedication of the treatise, on account of which Mr. Elwall was prosecuted, is dated the eighth day of the second month 1724; he speaks of his Trial in a treatise entitled, "A Declaration against all Kings and Temporal Powers under Heaven, shewing that they have no Authority over their Subjects in Spiritual Things; but that Jesus alone is King in his Church;" printed in 1732: and Judge Denton, before whom he was tried, went to the Oxford circuit in 1726 and 1728. From these circumstances it may be concluded, that the former of these years is the date of this remarkable Trial, especially as in some part of the same year, 1726, Mr. Elwall published another defence of the Unitarian system, in a treatise which he entitled "Dagon fallen before the Ark of God, or the Inventions of Men not able to stand before the first Commandment, *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*, with the case of the Seventh-day Sabbath;" which would probably have been mentioned in the course of the Trial, if it had been published at that time.

THE TRIAL  
OF  
Mr. E. ELWALL.

Because so many persons have earnestly desired to read this Trial, I have here published a second edition of it, in order to encourage all honest men, who have the eternal law of God on their side, not to fear the faces of priests, who are generally the grand adversaries of liberty and truth, and the bastions and bulwarks of all ceremonies, fopperies and absurd doctrines that are in the world.

I do this for the glory of the Most High God, and for the honour of his sacred law, and for the good of all my fellow-creatures; that they may obey God, and not man; Christ, and not the Pope; the prophets and apostles, and not prelates and priests; and God knoweth this is my sincere desire, that all religion and spiritual things may be perfectly free, neither forced nor hindered; this being the true liberty of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who said, *The kings of the Gentiles exercise authority, but it shall not be so with you.*\*

About fourteen years ago, I wrote a book entitled, "A True Testimony for God and his Sacred Law; being a plain, honest Defence of the First Commandment of God, against all the trinitarians under Heaven, *Thou shalt have no other gods but me.*" I lived then at Wolverhampton in Staffordshire, where my ancestors have lived above eleven hundred years, ever since the Saxons conquered the Britons.

When this book was published, the priests in the country began to rage, especially the priests of Wolverhampton; who had a great hand in the several troubles I underwent. In short, they never ceased till they had procured a large indictment

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\* cf. Mt xx, 25-26; Lk xxii, 25-26.

against me at Stafford assizes;\* where I felt the power of God, enabling me to speak before a very great number of people; being accused of heresy, &c. But I truly answered, as my beloved brother *Paul* did in his day, viz. *In that way which some call heresy, so choose I to serve the God of my fathers, believing all that is written in the law and the prophets.*

After the long indictment was read, I was asked if I pleaded guilty, or not guilty. I said I was not guilty of any evil that I knew of, in writing that book; but if they meant whether I wrote the book or not (for they had quoted many pages of the book in that indictment), I owned I did write it; and that if I might have liberty to speak, I believed I should make it manifest to be the plain truth of God.

Then the judge stood up, and said, “Mr. Elwall, I suppose you have had a copy of your indictment?” I told him I had not had any copy of it. Upon which he turned towards the priests, and told them that I ought to have had a copy of it. But they not answering, he turned to me, and said that if I would give bail, and be bound to appear at the next assizes, he would defer my trial till then. But I told him, I would not give bail, neither should any man be bound for me; that if the Prince of Wales himself would, he should not; for, said I, “I have an innocent breast, and I have injured no man; and therefore I desire no other favour, but that I may have liberty to plead to the indictment myself.”

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\* Elwall would have been charged with the Common Law offences of Heresy and of Blasphemous Libel, the latter offence involving the publication of material which exposes the Christian religion to ‘scurrility, vilification, ridicule and contempt.’ Unitarianism and heresy had been considered illegal under Common Law since the reduction in power of ecclesiastical courts in the sixteenth century. (The Blasphemy Act, 1698, related only to persons who, being educated in or having made profession of the Christian religion, should by writing, preaching, teaching or advised speaking, deny that the three persons of the Holy Trinity were God, or should assert that there is more than one god, or deny the Christian religion to be true, or the Holy Scriptures to be of divine authority. Preaching against the Trinity remained illegal until the Doctrine of the Trinity Act 1813.)

Upon which he said, very courteously, "You may." The judge having given me liberty of pleading to the indictment, I began my speech with the sacred first commandment of God, viz. *Thou shalt have no other gods but Me*. I insisted upon the word *Me* being a singular; and that it was plain and certain, that God spake of himself, as one single person or being, and not three distinct persons. And that it was manifest, that all the church of God, which then heard those words, understood it in the same plain, obvious sense as I do; as is most evident from the words of the prophet Moses: who said to Israel thus; *Unto thee it was shewed that thou mightest know, that the Lord he is God; there is none else besides him; out of heaven he made thee hear his voice, &c.* I told them, that from the words *he*, and *him*, and *his*, it was certain God was but one single person, one single *he*, or *him*, or *his*. I told them that all the patriarchs from the beginning of the world did always address themselves to God, as one single Being. O thou *Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth*; and Abraham said to the king of Sodom, *I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, &c.* They knew nothing of a trinity, nor of God's being a plurality of persons; that monstrous doctrine was not then born, nor of two thousand years after, till the apostacy and popery began to put up its filthy head.

Then I told them, that all the prophets witnessed to the truth of the same pure, uncorrupted Unitarian doctrine of one God, and no other but he: *Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?* Then I told them the words of God to Abraham, *I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect*; and by the prophet Isaiah, *To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal, saith the Holy One?* Not the Holy *Three*. I told them that the words *Me* and *One* did utterly exclude any other person's being God, but that *One* single *Me*; and that God himself often testifies the same truth, by saying, *Is there any God besides Me?* And then tells us plainly, *There is no God, I know not any: I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God besides me.* Isaiah xlv, 5.

Now, said I, *let God be true, but every man a liar*, that is, every man that contradicteth him; for he is the God of truth; he says, *I lift up my hand to heaven, I say, I live for ever*.\*

After I had pleaded many texts in the Old Testament, I began to enter the New; and told them, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the prophet like unto Moses, held forth the same doctrine that Moses had done; for when a certain ruler came to ask him which was the first and great commandment, (or how he expounded it,) he told him the same words that Moses had said: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord, not three, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c.* And the scribe said, *Thou hast answered right, for there is but one God, and there is no other but he, &c.* Then I mentioned the words of Christ in the xviith of John and ver. 3, as very remarkable, and worthy of all their observation: *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* And then I turned my face directly towards the priests (my prosecutors, who all stood on the right side of the judge). Now, said I, since the lips of the blessed Jesus, which always spake the truth, say his Father is the only true God; who is he, and who are they that dare set up another, in contradiction to my blessed Lord, who says, his Father is *the only true God*?

And I stopped here, to see if any of them would answer; but the power of God came over them, so that all their mouths were shut up, and not one of them spake a word. So that I turned about over my left shoulder, and warned the people, in the fear of God, not to take their religious sentiments from men, but from God: not from the Pope, but from Christ; not from prelates nor priests, but from the prophets and apostles.

And then I turned towards the judge, and told him, that I was the more convinced of the truth of what I had said from the words of my blessed Lord; who said, *Call no man Father here upon earth; for one is your Father even God. And call no*

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\* Dt xxxii, 40

*man Master for one is your Master, even Christ.\** For hence, said I, I deduce this natural inference, that in all things that are of a spiritual nature, we ought to take our religion from God and his prophets, from Christ and his apostles. It will be too long to mention all the texts and proofs that I made use of; I will only add one or two, as that of Paul, 1 Cor. viii. 4-6, where the apostle tells us, *There is none other God but one; for though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things;* so that I told them, here was a plain demonstration; for he says, *there is but one God:* and he tells us who that one God is, that is, *the Father.* And therefore no other person could be God but the Father only; and what I had written in my book was the plain truth, and founded on God's own words, *Thou shalt have no other gods but me.*

In short, I could plainly perceive there was a general convincement through the court. The judge and justices of the peace did not like the prosecution; but saw plainly, that out of envy the priests had done it. I then began to set before them the odious nature of that hell-born principle of persecution, and that it was hatched in hell; that it never came from Jesus Christ; that he and his followers were often persecuted themselves, but they never persecuted any; that we had now a very flagrant instance of it in the Papists at Thorne; where they first took away the schools where our brethren the Protestants educated their children; then they took away the places of their religious worship; then they put them in prisons; then confiscated their estates, and, last of all, took away their lives.†

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\* Quoted from: Edward Elwall; *Dagon fallen upon his stumps: or the Inventions of men, not able to stand before the first commandment of God, Thou shalt have no other gods but me;* [Wolverhampton] 1726. Cf. Mt xxiii, 8-10

† Thorn (Toruń) is a city in northern Poland, on the river Vistula. In 1557, during the Protestant Reformation, the city adopted Protestantism, while most Polish cities remained Roman Catholic. There were many attempts to re-Catholicize the area. In 1724, there was rioting between Protestants and Catholics, during which

Now we can cry out loud enough against this, and shew the inhumanity, cruelty and barbarity of it; but, said I, if we, who call ourselves Protestants, shall be found acting in the same spirit, against others, the crime will be greater in us than in them; because we have attained to greater degrees of light than they.

However, I told them, that I had put my house in order, and made up my accounts with all men as near as I could; and that as I owed no man here any thing, so I would not pay a penny towards this prosecution: and that I was sure of it, that whatever fine they laid on me, or “whatever hole or prison,” said I, “you thrust me into, I shall find God’s living presence with me, as I feel it this day:” and so ended my speech.

Upon this a justice of the peace, one Rupert Humpatch,\* got up, went to the judge, laid his hand upon the judge’s shoulder, and said, “My lord, I know this man to be an honest man; and what I say, I speak not by hear-say, but experience; for I was his next-door neighbour three years.” Also, another justice spake to the same effect. Then the judge spake to me: “Mr. Elwall, I perceive you have studied very deeply into this controversy; but have you ever consulted any of our reverend clergy and bishops of the church of England?” I answered, “Yes, I have; and among others, the Archbishop of Canterbury† himself, with whom I have exchanged ten letters, viz. four I have had from him, and six he has had from me,” (at which words all the priests stared very earnestly). “Well,” says the judge, “and was not the Archbishop able to give you some satisfaction in these points, Mr. Elwall?” I said, “No; but rather quite the reverse; for that in all the letters I sent to the Archbishop, I grounded my arguments upon the words of

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a Jesuit college was attacked by Protestants. The mayor and nine leading Protestant citizens were blamed for neglect of duty and were executed on 7th December 1724; more than a dozen rioters who attacked the Jesuit College were also beheaded; a number more had their right hands removed for defiling an image of the Virgin, before being drawn, quartered and burned at the stake.

\* a.k.a. Rupert Huntbach

† William Wake, 1657-1737.



God and his prophets, Christ and his apostles; but in his answers to me, he referred me to acts of parliament, declarations of state, &c., whereas I told the Bishop, in one of my letters, that I wondered a man of his natural and acquired abilities, should be so weak as to turn me over to human authorities, in things of a divine nature; for though in all things that are of a temporal nature, and concern the civil society, I will "be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, even from the king upon the throne down to the meanest officer in the land; yet in things that are of a spiritual nature, and concern my faith, my worship of God, and future state, I would *call no man father here upon earth*, nor regard either popes or councils, prelates or priests of any denomination, nor convocations, nor assemblies of divines, but obey God and his prophets, Christ and his apostles." Upon which the judge answered, "Well, if his grace of Canterbury was not able to give you satisfaction, Mr. Elwall, I believe I shall not;" and so sat down and rested him, for I think he had stood up for near an hour and a quarter.

Then he stood up again, and turning to the priests talked softly to them. I did not hear what he said, or what they said to him; but I guessed from what the judge said next; for, says he, "Mr. Elwall, you cannot but be sensible that what you have written, being contrary to the commonly received doctrines of the church, it has given offence to some of your neighbours, and particularly to the clergy; are you willing to promise, before the face of the country here, that you will not write any more on this head?" I answered, "God forbid that I should make thee any such promise; for when I wrote this book, I did it in the fear of God, and I did not write to please the Church of Rome, nor the Church of England, nor the Church of Scotland, but to please that God who gave me my breath; and therefore, if at any time I find myself drawn forth to write in defence of this sacred first commandment, or any other of the ten, I hope I shall do it in the same spirit of sincerity as I have done this." And I perceived the judge was not in any wise displeased at my honest, plain, bold answer; but rather his

heart seemed to be knit in love to me; and he soon declared me acquitted: and then the clerk of the arraigns, or assizes, stood up, and said, "Mr. Elwall, you are acquitted; you may go out of court when you please."

So I went away through a very great crowd of people (for it was thought there was a thousand people at the trial), and having spoke long I was a-thirst, so went to a well and drank. Then I went out of town by a river-side, and looking about, and seeing no one near, I kneeled down on the bank of the river, and sent up my thank-offering to that good God who had delivered me out of their hands.

By the time that I returned to the town, the court was up and gone to dinner: a justice of peace and another person met me, and would have me to eat and drink with them, which I did; and afterwards, as I was walking along the street, some persons hove up a great sash-window, and invited me up to them; and when I entered the room, I found ten or a dozen persons, most of them justices of the peace; and amongst them a priest, whom they called Doctor. One of the justices took me by the hand, and said, "Mr. Elwall, I am heartily glad to see you, and I was glad to hear you bear your testimony so boldly as you did." "Yea," says another justice, "and I was glad to see Mr. Elwall come off with flying colours as he did:" upon which the priest said (in a very bitter manner), "He ought to have been hanged." I turned unto him, and said, "Friend, I perceive thou dost not know what spirit thou art of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy, but to save; but thou wouldest have me destroyed." Upon which one of the justices said, "How now Doctor, did not you hear one of the justices say, that he was an honest man, and that what he said was not by hearsay, but by experience; and would you have honest men hanged, Doctor? Is this good doctrine?" So that the priest said but little more for some time: so I took leave of the justices, and took horse for Wolverhampton, for I knew there would be great joy in my family, for the common people all expected to hear of my being fined and imprisoned. But a farmer that

lived near, who had been upon the jury at Stafford, got to town before me, and the people went all up and asked him, "What have they done to Mr. Elwall?" "Have they put him in prison?" He answered "No, he preached there an hour together, and our parsons could say never a word. What must they put him in prison for? I told our foreman of the jury Mr. Elwall was an honest man, and his father was an honest man, I knew him very well." So they were all damped; but there was great joy in my family, and amongst all my friends: praises, living praises be attributed to that good God who delivered me out of their hands!

Christ never told us of that scandalous popish invention, of his human nature praying to his Divine nature; but, like a true, obedient Son of God, submitted to death, even that cruel death which the hatred and envy of persecuting, wicked priests inflicted on him, because he had so plainly and truly told them all of their blindness, covetousness, pride and hypocrisy. And therefore "God raised him from the dead;" and for his faithfulness "God has exalted him—to be a prince and a saviour" to all those that obey that pure doctrine which God gave him to teach; "that denying ungodliness and sinful lusts, we should live soberly and righteously in this world." *Then are we his disciples indeed, when we do those things that he hath commanded.* Then shall we be saved, not by the merits of Christ, that is another popish invention, for he never did any thing but what it was his duty to do, and therefore could not merit any thing for others; but he taught us the true way to find acceptance with God, and that was by *doing the will of his Father which is in heaven: and therein he is the way, the truth, and the life, because no one cometh unto the Father, but by that way.*

Neither did he make satisfaction unto God for us. It was impossible; and what God never required: but *he who had no pleasure in the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn from their wickedness and live,* out of the immeasurable height and depth of his love, directed our Lord Jesus Christ to

teach mankind a never-failing way of being reconciled to God; and that was by sincere repentance and reformation. This was the gospel or good tidings of Jesus Christ, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. He tells us, *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*; and by that beautiful, excellent parable of the prodigal son, he illustrates the tender mercy of his God and our God, of his Father and our Father, without any satisfaction. The compassionate Father required none at all, but humble confession and submission, with sincere repentance and reformation; and then comes *the best robe, the ring, the shoes, and the fatted calf*, to demonstrate the paternal acceptance without satisfaction or sacrifice, *but a broken and a contrite heart which he will never refuse*; for he can as soon cease to be God, as cease to be merciful.

And as to the trinitarians, nothing is more plain, than that they feed upon ashes; *a deceived heart hath turned them aside*, because they will not make use of those rational faculties which God hath given them; nor say, *Is there not a lie in my right-hand?*\* Otherwise they would never flatter the humble Jesus, nor make the most high God to be a plurality of persons.

For as to the Holy Ghost (their third God) it is evidently no distinct person from God, any more than a man's spirit is a distinct person from the man; so that the spirit of God is God's spirit, as is manifest from scripture and reason. Gen. vi. 3: My spirit shall not always strive with man.—And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters: And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters.—And God made all things by the word of his power.† So that the word of God, and the spirit of God, are not distinct persons from God, but the power of God, and the energy of God. So the word of a man and the spirit of a man, are not distinct persons from the man,

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\* Is xlv, 20

† cf. Heb i, 3; Col i, 16.

but the man himself; if his word be false, or his spirit be wicked, the man is false and wicked.

The same degree of stupidity that leads trinitarians to call the word of God, and the spirit of God, distinct persons, would lead them to call the wisdom of God, the goodness of God, the love of God, the peace of God, the power of God, and the mercy of God, distinct persons; and make God to be a trinity of trinities; for it is certain God is expressly called by all those names.

But whosoever goes about to farther this absurd and horrid doctrine of the trinity upon Jesus Christ, does egregiously abuse him; who told us plainly, *his Father was greater than he; and that he could do nothing of himself*, which is a demonstration that he is not God: For we are sure God is omnipotent, and can do all things of himself; being self-existent and independent, the Supreme Creator of the universe; and in this it is, that the Unitarians triumph as unanswerable, believing in Jesus Christ, who told us his Father was *the only true God*; John xvii. 3.

P.S. By these last words of Christ, I myself was convinced many years ago.



MARTIN LUTHER

TO

S O C I N U S.

[PRICE THREE-PENCE.]





# MARTIN LUTHER

TO

S O C I N U S :

OR, A

Serious and Affectionate ADDRESS

TO THE

HEARERS AND ADMIRERS

OF

DOCTOR PRIESTLEY.

By LOVERS of the TRUTH, as it is in JESUS.

*Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares?*

Dr. PRIESTLEY'S motto to his "History of the  
"Corruptions of Christianity."

*It is our duty to speak, and write (if we can) as well as live, against  
the enemies of our Christian faith.—Dr. Young's "Centaur."*

B I R M I N G H A M.

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MDCCLXXXIII.



M A R T I N L U T H E R

T O

S O C I N U S

*Friends and Fellow-Mortals*

**F**INDING the blessedness of Gospel-Salvation for our own souls, we feel ourselves tenderly concerned for yours. To promote yours, we write to you. And what we write we earnestly entreat you, for your own good, your greatest good, particularly to read, and seriously, as fairly, to examine. We write, not to grieve, but to profit you; desiring to breathe the same spirit as the Apostle, who said, in his epistle to the Corinthians, "I write not these things to *shame* you, but as beloved sons, I *warn* you." You are deeply interested in the subject. God give you to weigh it, according to its importance, and your great concern in it! We have no doubt, but are thoroughly persuaded; you are greatly mistaken, yea, sadly deluded, in an article of the last moment, namely, your *religion*: and this affects your eternal state: And we are as much persuaded, that this is owing to the *teacher* you sit under, and by whom you are so fatally led astray: Therefore we address you on the subject of his teaching. We remark, that it is not only openly from the pulpit, but more publicly from the press, he publishes the fatal system of his, and your religion. And you seem to hear, and to read what he says, with as much fondness and earnestness, as he speaks and writes. His publications are open to us as to you; and what he so avowedly proclaims, we may as strictly examine. To do this is our present purpose. And in accomplishing it, we will,

1. Remark and examine *what doctrines* your minister teaches; and then lay before you,

2. The *awful consequences* of such teaching.

Concerning the first of these particulars, we remark, in the first place,

1. That the everlasting welfare of the soul is, of all important concerns, the most important. No care is to be compared to that, which relates to this most interesting matter. Your concern here is for *eternity*. Solemn word! But, Sirs, have you, as sinners, *any souls at all*, to be cared for, and to be saved? If you believe what your teacher says, and understand what he means, you must believe you have *none*. He appears expressly and avowedly to teach, that man has no spiritual part in him, distinct from the body, to live in a conscious state, after death, in another world.\* Man, with him, and as characterized by him, is *all matter*, and *no spirit*. (See his “Institutes;” his “Disquisitions;” and his “History of the Corruptions of Christianity”). This your minister tells you: Will you believe him? If so, what need has he to persuade you, and you to attend to such and such faith, or such and such practice, when on neither one, nor the other, any lasting concern depends? And, indeed, it is pretty observable, that in none of his publications does the Doctor appear with that earnestness to labour the point of people’s caring for their eternal welfare, as do those ministers, who, in distinction from his heterodoxy, are maintainers of orthodoxy; and in distinction from his self-righteous form, are faithful preachers of the evangelical power of godliness. This is consistent. But, by this means, we are led to remark to you, that he opens to you, and to others, a wide door of soul-neglect, which may well follow the soul’s non-existence. Thousands, without such teaching, live as if they believed that they had no souls at all here, or any which would exist in an eternal state hereafter; and though these sinners do not *want*, yet they *have* a good helping hand from your teacher; and where they are already, his path will lead you. “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way,

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\* Priestley, following a hint from David Hartley (1705-57), proposed that it wasn’t necessary for man to have a separate, immaterial soul. Notwithstanding, he had an unshakeable belief in life after death on the ‘Christian doctrine of a resurrection from the dead.’ [Introductory essays in Joseph Priestley (Ed.); *Hartley’s theory of the human mind*; London, J. Johnson, 1775; Essay I.]

that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat,"\* we are told already; but lest the one should not be wide, and the other broad *enough*, the Doctor makes an addition to the width and breadth.—To say no more, we only ask you, whether the *scriptures* teach what he teaches, unless wrested and perverted, as his manner is, being unlearned and unstable, to wrest them to his own, and your own, and others destruction?

2. In the next place, we observe, that your minister teaches, what is as good as, or rather what is as bad as this, and what may be coupled with it, that there is *no devil*, and *no hell*. (See the above-named publications). Here, Sirs, is another wide, very wide door opened to let you, and other sinners in; a door which shuts sin in, and salvation out. Surely there must be a hell, where else could such a door be made? And a devil, who else could make it?—But, friends, notice, we beg you, the consequences of such doctrine. Many profligate abandoned mortals, slaves to sin, protest they believe, “there is neither God nor devil.” We remark, these miserable men are helped *one* half way in their creed by your teacher; and why cannot they be helped the *other* half by him, and so receive from his ingenuity the completing of the whole Piece? For we see not, but that, if the Doctor has the ability and dexterity of interpretation sufficient to shew from the scripture, that there is no *devil*, he may as easily shew, from the same fountain of instruction, that there is no *God*. And he that can demonstrate there is no *hell*, may demonstrate there is no *heaven*. (And what proof can the Doctor bring, that there is such a place as heaven?) For, if the word *Satan*, or *devil*, means not a *bad* being, the word *God* or *Lord* may mean not a *good* one; and if the word *hell* means no *bad* place, the word *heaven* may mean no *good* one (and then, in case there is no God, what becomes of the Doctor’s *Deity*, or *Supreme Being* ?) And we add too, that he who can prove that there are no evil spirits (for the Doctor denies that there ever were such *fallen angels* as St.

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\* Mt vii,13; a favourite evangelical text.

Peter and St. Jude speak of; but says, these were *spies*, sent from the wilderness to spy the land of *Canaan*)\* may, being an ingenious expositor, when his hand is in, at the same time, and from the same authority, prove there are no *good* ones; and so, at one stroke, rob the saints of their angels, and rid the sinners of their devils: these of their comforts, and those of their fears. “O rare Doctor, may the latter say, well done, go on; for we need not mind now how we live in what is called *sin*, for there is no hell to go to; and we need not be afraid of the devil, for there is none to fetch us.”—But, Sirs, we ask, what can we, or you, possibly think that book, the *bible*, to be, which gives us so clear accounts and various descriptions of the devil (and all consistent too) when, in fact, there is no such spirit; and of the eternal torments of the damned in hell, when there is no such state, and no such beings? Surely it will follow, will it not? that there can be no such God as we have been used to look upon our God to be, from whom such a book can come. And the scriptures cannot be a divine revelation, but some poor strange human composition. Indeed, this particular leads us to observe,

3. That the bible, one would think, being led by your teacher to think, cannot be revelation to be trusted (not, however, in his estimation of it) when we observe, that, the books which we call *inspired*, are represented by him as if they were *un-inspired*, *not* written *by inspiration*. For, not to mention in what a slight manner, and in what ambiguous, equivocal terms, he speaks of the holy scriptures, respecting our dependence upon them, as infallible, in his “Institutes,” &c. and more openly, and less equivocally, in his “History of the Corruptions of Christianity;” We see, that in his “catechism for children and young persons,”† he puts this question, “What is the bible?” and the answer is, “the bible is a collection of books, written by *good men*.” And in his

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\* Modern commentators of 2Pe ii, 4 and Jude ver. 6, suggest that the angels who sinned were cast into darkness, i.e. into the grave.

† 1767, initially for Priestley’s junior religious instruction class at Leeds.

Sermon, preached, printed, and sold in Birmingham, soon after his first coming to it, speaking of the scriptures, he says, “they contain the history of all the dispensations of God to mankind, the pious sentiments of men devoted to God, and honoured by him,” &c.\* And in his sermon, entitled “The Doctrine of Divine Influence on the human Mind,” he repeatedly calls the writers of the scriptures only “*pious* writers.”† This is the lessening way, Sirs, in which the Doctor speaks, when he describes those sacred books, which one apostle says, are *given by inspiration of God*; and another that *holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. Whilst we believe this apostolical account of the sacred volume, we may trust the whole of it; but if the Doctor’s account be the true one, can we trust any part of it? Any mere good men, who write books, but are fallible, and the Holy Ghost alone is infallible; the comparisons of the first to be examined, altered, and rectified; those of the latter to be read, left unaltered, and believed; else the over-wise creature (becoming wise above what is written) may presume to declare he has detected, and then proceed to rectify the errors of the Creator. Here, in this case, the Doctor should draw the lines for us; and he, concluding himself in understanding to be the superior of the Apostles, should tell us what parts are fallible, and what infallible; lest, when we imagine we are trusting the writers in the latter view, we may actually be misleading ourselves with the former. We add too, that if your teacher believes so much, if not the whole of the scriptures to be fallible, and what, for that reason, may not be depended upon for divine truth, why does he, or why need he take so much pains as he does, to interpret them in his own way; that is, as he thinks, in the one true meaning, and then labour to force that interpretation on us? Because, sayings which are very dubious, and of suspicious authority, or false in themselves, need not, and ought not to be urged on any of us; and, as undoubted truths,

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\* *The use of Christian societies*: In xvii, 6: *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*. [Rutt 15, 28-45]

† Rutt 15, 82-100

they cannot. And if we, being determined to admit of no pretended revealed religion, but what, with our pre-conceived ideas of the fitness of things, we look upon as a *rational* one, may insist on the right to reject what our *reason* may make us think we see cause to disapprove of, then it will follow, that the foolishness of the Creator may be discovered by the wisdom of the creature; and so the mistakes of the former may be rectified by the latter; and then also, we think it will follow, as a strange, and till now unheard of, and perhaps unthought of notion, even by the wisest of us all, that the Creator has, for once, if not oftener, missed the matter, and over-shot the mark, by making *man*, a *creature*, of a superior judgement and understanding to *himself*, the *Creator*; and sent this wonderfully wise being into the world, amongst other things, to examine, new-model, and amend his own imperfect productions. How can these consequences be avoided, if the writers of the sacred books are, in some things quite right, but in others, may be quite wrong?—This leads us to another observation of what your teacher tells us, relative to what may, or may not be revealed, and depended on, and which is,

4. That man's *reason* is sufficient to guide him in spiritual matters; and is the one fit judge, whether such and such proposed doctrines, as taught in the scriptures, are to be believed, and received, or not. (See his "Appeal.")

Here then, Sirs, at one stroke, go all that real Christians are taught, and all that they find to be true, respecting the divine teaching of the *Holy Spirit*. But in what part of the scriptures, on the supposition that the Doctor believes them to be true, does he say that this is taught? And in what parts do the sacred writers teach, that the Holy Spirit cannot, and must not be depended upon, as teaching us the sense of the words, who taught the words themselves? That the Spirit of God is to teach, and that he alone can teach, the Application and true sense of his word, is clearly taught in some places, and taken for granted in all, is as plain as plain can be: (See, particularly, 1 Cor ii.) but in what parts is this as plainly



contradicted? That in some parts of the scripture we are taught, that man is spiritually blind, is very clear; but in what other parts have the writers as plainly told us, that they mistook the matter, and the truth is, man can see, his eyes are good, they are not blind? The Doctor should shew this, or he fails in his argument. If a man has a spirit within him equal, if not superior to the Spirit of God, he may then say yes, or no, as he pleases, to what God takes upon him to propose; and may give for answer to any particular matter urged upon him, "God is my equal, if not my superior, and I shall not be dictated to by him." But where is this taught? If the Doctor cannot shew, he fails again.—We go on to remark, that as your minister teaches you, that man has a spirit within him sufficient to guide him, and be his own judge, in matters revealed from God, and therefore needs not the divine teaching of the Holy Spirit, so,

5. Has he the power in himself to do the will of God? (See the Appeal) Then God need not have offered his. Grace might have been spared, if nature will do. And here the inspired writers have exposed themselves again, and shewn their fallibility indeed: for they teach the sufficiency of grace, and the insufficiency of human nature, for whatever good is to be done. We wonder not at the Doctor's saying, that the Apostles were not right in every punctilio. These punctilios are so many, so thick, and so plain in the scriptures, that he that runs may read them; and whilst the Doctor, with his rational spectacles, reads them, and finds them corruptions, we, with our glasses, read them, and find them energetic truths. He that can see, that the branch can bear fruit in itself, though it does not abide in the vine, though our Lord says it cannot, and that St. Paul meant without Christ strengthening me I can do all things, though he said, through, can see indeed. Those see aright, who see this, if what the Doctor says be true. Man has power in himself to do the will of God, to be virtuous and good, and to procure God's favour, and God's heaven. And as man has, it seems, a power to reclaim himself, the wonder now is, not that the *Redeemer* converted the Apostle of

the Gentiles, but that the Apostle did not convert *himself*. To which we add, how observable afterwards, in some distant period from his conversion, is this same Apostle's mistake, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy:" for he meant the contrary.—But, keeping our eyes, and yours, on the scriptures, and keeping your teacher's on the same object, we go on to take notice, that, on a profession of his belief in what is there written, he denies,

6. That the Son of God was *equal* to his Father in the *Godhead*; but teaches that he was a *mere man*, a *mortal creature* (See the "Appeal.") This is one of the Doctor's *corruptions*; what he calls a *material*, a *great*, a most *absurd* corruption, an *impious Doctrine*, which at present *deforms, disgraces, defiles, and confines* the Church.\*

To this teaching of his, of the mere humanity of Christ, and denial of his divinity, we answer, if this be the truth of the case, why then is Christ called and described in the scriptures, as GOD, *Jehovah*, the *Lord*, the *Lord of Hosts*, *Immanuel*, I AM, the *first*, and the *last* &c. Why is worship paid him? Prayer made to him? Why are believers baptized into his name, as well as into the Father's? (Is not this baptism an act of adoration?) Why are divine attributes and perfections ascribed to him, to which none but God can have a title? Things said by him, which none but *Jehovah*, as such, could say? Works done by him, which none but *Jehovah* could do? With other particulars, all plainly demonstrative of Godhead; and yet, all this time, and after all this, Christ is not God, but a human being only, like to, though better than ourselves, a mere mortal creature! Here, we must ask you, Sirs, What must a man of a plain understanding, and a fair enquiring mind, make of the book of God, if no more than what your minister says of

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\* The Doctor has lately published two volumes, entitled, "An History of the Corruptions of Christianity." To which title, we fancy, no real Christian, that has a right knowledge of inspired and uninspired history, will object, provided that after the words, "An History of," and before the words, "Corruptions of Christianity," there be inserted, *his own*. [JR]

Christ, be true of him? How can he possibly think, that it is revealed by the wisdom of God? And what can he look upon the bible to be, but a book full of artfully contrived doctrines to perplex, or of ambiguous words to beguile, and therefore full of traps to catch, instead of truths to guide the fair reader? Surely, a subtle foe, and not a trusty friend, a secret hater, and not an open-hearted lover of mankind, has palmed the bible upon the world.—But, if Christ was but a *mere* man, what *sort* of a man could he be but a *sinful* one? And were not the Jews and Pharisees right, (in John ix.) who said of him, “We know that this man is a *sinner*?” And were not the devils wrong, when they said, “We know thee, who thou art, the *Holy One* of God?” And was not Ananias also wrong, when he called Christ “that *Just One*?” But will you, or your teacher say this? Can you, or he, prove this? Can you disprove the judgement of the Jews and Pharisees, and the devils, and Ananias? But you must do both one and the other of these; because it is undeniable, that the scriptures speak of no mere man, but what is a sinner. And Jesus spoke right, in every view, when he said to the young man, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.” And his enemies spake right, in their view, when they said, “We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted;” that is, as a sinner for his own sins.—Further, if Christ was a mere mortal, who was his father? Mortals are begot by mortals. Who then begat Christ? Mary was with child before Joseph and she came together. And how could he be born of a *virgin*? No children are born of *virgins*.—Besides, if the Doctor denies the divinity of the *Son*, we would ask him, how he proves the divinity of the *Father*? For, in our bible, plainly revealed, and plainly understood, and as taken together, scripture being compared with scripture, it is very evident, that the same things, which demonstrate the latter, demonstrate the former. And again, we cannot but remark, how amazing it is, that if we may be allowed to call that person a *man*, to whom peculiar and distinguishing properties, and essential qualities are ascribed, as *human*; yet, at the same time, we must not call that being,

GOD, to whom peculiar and distinguishing properties, and essential qualities are ascribed, as *divine!*—Once more, we say, that if Christ, the Saviour, was but a mere creature, and so a finite, imperfect mortal; of what greater value was, or could be, his death, as an atonement for sin, than would have been the death of his fellow-mortals and creatures, Paul, or Peter, or Martin Luther, or any ministering servant of God? Is a mere man to be depended upon by a penitent sinner, who feels what sin is, for salvation from it? Would Paul depend on Peter, and Peter on Paul, as each other's saviour? Would the trembling jailer have been satisfied, and disburdened of his soul-distress, had the Apostle said "Believe on *us*, and thou shalt be saved? And do the scriptures speak of Christ's death, in no more extraordinary senses and circumstances, than of the death of his followers? See, and then say. And who can believe this?

To what we have here briefly said, with a view to shew you, and the Doctor, the strangeness of denying the deity of the Son of God, we have only to add, that before you and he proceed any further in that denial, please to read the "Short Defence" of this doctrine (second edition) written against what the Doctor has advanced, in his *Appeal*, and in his *Familiar Illustration*, to overturn it, by an able hand, Mr. H—, of Leeds in Yorkshire.\* Answer this, and you will convince us.—But the mention of Christ's *death*, as an *atonement* or *sacrifice* for *sin*, to the justice of God, and as bearing the *curse* of the *law*, and doing this for us in our room and stead, leads us,

7. To speak now of this, as a *capital doctrine*, which your minister is a professed, strenuous *opposer* of, but which we are as earnest *contenders* for (See his *Appeal* and *History of Corruptions*). This doctrine, with the Doctor, is a *horrid corruption* of Christianity, a *modern thing*, a *novel doctrine*, an *innovation*, and a *popish invention*. Your teacher avowedly and professedly contends, that it was not the intention of Christ to die, and by his death, as a sacrifice, to make any satisfaction

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\* William Hey (*supra* pp xix-xx).

to the justice of God for our sins, but only to assure us of a future life, and our resurrection to it, and as an example of patient suffering and submission to the will of his Father, and as a martyr in the glorious cause of virtue, confirming his own doctrine with his own blood. What, then, like as we observed before, must a man of a plain understanding, and a fair enquiring mind, make of the bible which speaks expressly of *atonement, ransom, propitiation, price, offering for sin, died for our sins, redemption through his blood, bear our sins, bought with a price, purchased with his blood, putting away sin, by the sacrifice of himself, made a curse for us, &c.* Must his plain understanding suffer such imposition by interpretations of a teacher, which interpret away the common sense of common words? What must he think of the design and the phraseology of the scriptures? And what must this honest man say, when he reads the account of Christ's sufferings in the 53<sup>d</sup> chapter of Isaiah? Can he possibly believe them to be, what the Doctor says they are, the sufferings only of any *good man in like circumstances?* (But what other good man ever was there in the like circumstances?) And when he reads the accounts of Christ's death in the Gospels, can he say, this is only the death of a common sufferer? What! Was the agony in the garden, the treatment at the trial, and the cry on the cross, the feelings only of a mere brother in Christ, occasioned by nothing uncommon with him, but what was common to others? Could all this be any thing but a most severe punishment for *sin?* And did Christ suffer, to satisfy his Father for his *own* sins? Were they right, his enemies, who said, "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," for *his* sins? And were they, his friends, wrong, who said, "But he was wounded for *our* transgressions; he was bruised for *our* iniquities." Were the immediate circumstances, and immediate consequences of the death of the Son of God, the darkening of the sun, the rent of the vail, the rending of the rocks, the quaking of the earth, the opening of the graves, the rising of the saints,—were these striking prodigies, like the common circumstances and

consequences of the exit of a common martyr for Christ's sake?—We add, and what can this same honest-minded man think and say, when he reads about the nature and use of the various sacrifices under the *law*, and, after this, reads the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, but, at once discover, that they represented what the Redeemer fulfilled, his own death, as a sacrifice for sin, by a vicarious punishment? What could he call the first but types, and the other but anti-types? Such must be the acceptation, which these scriptural accounts of Christ's death will meet with, when read by the unlearned, as well as learned readers. The Doctor allows, to use his own words, that “the lower class of people are as capable of judging concerning the important truths of religion, as the most learned.” But how can this be? How can he admit this, when he so imposes upon their understanding, and interprets away that sense of the scriptures, which their plain senses are capable of receiving, and do receive? And why does he send them to the *original*, and not confine them to the English *translation*? But it may yet be observed, that what the Doctor says about the capability of the common people to understand the scriptures, when they speak of the important truths of religion, is very true, and they can see, and also prove his errors, and his corruptions of Christianity. But, to add a word or two more, relative to the Doctor's manner of interpreting away the plain sense of plain scriptures, which describe the death of Christ, as a propitiatory sacrifice for sin, we would ask, whether text, or contex[t], sense, and other scriptures, can afford him the least fair plea to the world, to do away the evident meaning of the above quoted expressions, by his calling them “bold figures of speech, figurative expressions, allegories, metaphors,” &c. This man might say, and he would have good cause for saying, “If I lose all this in a figure, I may lose *heaven* in a figure; as the Saviour may be but a *figurative* saviour, his salvation may be but a *metaphorical* salvation; and then what becomes of my soul? *That*, I am sure, is no figure; And what will become of my sins? *They*, I feel, are no metaphors?” To speak earnestly—if the Doctor lay on his bed,

wreathing his body for agony, in a fit of the stone or cholic, would it relieve him to remark, This is only a figurative pain? Or, to speak jocosely—If he was to have his house burnt down, would it prove as good as rebuilding it again, to remark to him, The fire, Doctor, is only a figure? Or, if a highwayman took his purse, the robbery was only a bold metaphor? Or, the thief, who stole his watch, displayed only an allegorical theft, and the thief must only be hung on a metaphorical gallows? We mention these particulars, in this jocular strain, only to shew the Doctor his folly, when he endeavours, with the dextrous sallies of his pen, and the artful language of his tongue, to expound away the serious and plain sense of the inspired writers, when they treat upon the subject of the end of Christ's death. After which we would not omit to remark, that one of the *answers* to the Doctor's *Appeal*, is entitled (and very properly) "An Appeal to the *common sense* of *plain* and *common* Christians, in behalf of the old Christianity of the Gospel."<sup>\*</sup> This title itself, in our judgement, without the contents in the book itself, is almost, if not quite, answer sufficient to the Doctor's interpretations of the scripture account of the design of the Redeemer's sufferings. And now, to what we have said, we have only to add this word of advice, both to you and to him, That before either of you open your mouths again to speak of Christ's death, in the mere figurative stile, and so to do away the one grand design of it, please to read a pamphlet, which the above-mentioned gentleman in Yorkshire has put forth, in answer to the Doctor's arguments against Christ's death being an atonement for sin, entitled, "A short defence of the doctrine of atonement for sin by the death of Christ."<sup>†</sup> And of the last, so of this performance we say, Answer this, and you will convince us.

8. As your minister labours to do away the grand and one meaning of the death of the *second* person of the Trinity, so we observe him acting to the like purpose relative to the office of

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<sup>\*</sup> By Thomas Morgan (*supra* p. xix n.).

<sup>†</sup> By William Hey, Leeds, 1774.

the *third person*, in denying the *personality* and *operations* of the *Holy Ghost*. This point we have spoken to before; and therefore we are satisfied with only mentioning it here; purposing only, by this manner of mentioning it in this place, that it may be noticed as a capital doctrine, interpreted away by the Doctor.—And now having briefly remarked, and having briefly objected against *what doctrines* your minister teaches, we proceed, as we proposed, in the next place, by way of making further objections against them.

2. To consider the *awful consequences* of such teaching—And awful indeed they are, respecting the Doctor *himself*.

For, when we consider the number of years, in which he has persisted to maintain the heterodox, soul-ruining cause, and also his remaining unchanged in his principles and practices, after all that has been, by able and godly men, written against him; and, when, along with this, we reflect, with what effrontery he still goes on, openly and avowedly to propagate his pernicious scheme, as if no pen had been ever taken in hand, or mouth opened against him, as a man past feeling himself, or being made to feel by others; what can we be ready to conclude, but that he seems to be *given up* of God, as an invincible enemy to the Cross of Christ;\* who has justly and judiciously sent him strong delusion, that he should believe a lie, his own lies, and had given him the spirit of slumber, eyes that he should not see; and so he that sees, and says, “I see,” as the Pharisees, the enemies of Christ of old, should be made blind. And as Elymas the sorcerer was struck blind by the hand of the Lord upon him,† as one “full of

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\* In the title-page of the *Appeal*, the Doctor calls himself “a lover of the *Gospel*.” When we are in the enquiring mood, we say, *What Gospel?* Christ’s, or Socinus’s? When we speak in a jocular strain, we say, The Doctor means, the Gospel turned upside down, or what St. Paul calls, “*another Gospel*.” When we indulge to irony, we suppose he means a *hater* of it, when we are for answering, we say, We know the man; and when we are for rebuking sharply, we say, Behold, a *Jesuit*. [JR] [*Jesuit* is used in the sense of a *dissembler* or *concealer of the truth*.]

† Ac xiii, 8-12



subtilty, and all mischief, a child of the devil, an enemy of all righteousness, who would not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord, withstanding the Apostle, and seeking to turn away the Deputy from the Faith;" so, what is there in this language inapplicable and unsuitable for your teacher; whilst, at the same time, the corporal blindness of this foe to the truth of God, figures out to us the more awful blindness, with which the eyes of his understanding are darkened? And what has the Doctor done, and is doing, but exhibiting, in his own person, by his own conduct, an awful verifying of those awful scriptures of God, written, 2 Tim iii, 13; Heb x. 26-31; 2 Pet ii, 1, 2. And some others such-like? We dare not, we want not, we would not positively pronounce thus upon your teacher, but express, as we have cause, our fearful apprehensions, and dreadful expectations concerning him. He maintains in his views, and teaches others, that there is no hell, as the scriptures, untortured, speak of it; but may he reflect upon, what we are afraid of, that an insulted God may make him feel in person, what he denies in word, and convince him of it, like many others, not till he is in it? Sure we are, for writers, inspired by God, have told us, speaking of the deluded, "The devil that deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the FALSE PROPHET are, and shall be tormented, day and night, for ever," Rev xx, 10. And St. Peter, speaking of "*false prophets*, who privily bring in damnable heresies," says, "They bring upon themselves swift DESTRUCTION, and their DAMNATION slumbereth not," 2 Pet ii. St. Paul declares the *end* of the "enemies of the cross of Christ" to be DESTRUCTION: and again, in 2 Cor xi. Speaking of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ," being, as he describes them, "Satan's ministers," declares that their "*end* shall be according to their works." Who can read these solemn texts, and not think of, and then tremble for your minister? This is the end he merits, and such the punishment, we fear, he will meet with; but yet it is what we wish him to escape. He hesitates not to teach, that there is no devil. That he, who

denies there is one here, may not meet with one hereafter, we wish him to be “delivered, that he may learn not to blaspheme, unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”\*—Then he will find one here; and, so, none hereafter. And therefore, whilst with hearts that bleed, and hands that tremble, we cast before him such awful scriptures as the above, we would, at the same time, with hearts bleeding with love, and hands quite lifted up, and earnestly stretched out, fling him out, before he is quite sunk, and gone to rise no more, as a rope to catch at (if so be, through God’s marvellous forgiving mercy, he may yet be saved from drowning in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death) one that is most likely to save him, in Matt xii, 31. with Mark iii, 28. “All manner of sins and BLASPHEMIES, against the Son of Man, wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme, shall be FORGIVEN unto the sons of men.” All hope of his being yet saved is not utterly, and for ever gone: seeing there is, what rejoices our very souls to see, a difference between blasphemy against the *second* and against the *third* Person in the Holy Trinity; the former pardonable, the latter unpardonable. With this like view it is, and to shew our cordial desire to rescue him from destruction (for our hearts desire and prayer to God for him is, that he may be saved; and we would remember, for his encouragement, and our own, that the Apostle says, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”)† We fling him out another rope, hoping he may, sooner or later, catch hold of it; “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death, I do not say he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death,” 1

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\* 1Co v, 5.

† Jas v, 20.

John v, 16, 17. Hoping that the Doctor's sin is that which is not unto death, we do earnestly pray our God to give him grace to see it, and savingly to repent of it. Our wish being, not to send him into, but to keep him from destruction, and being very unwilling to count him as an enemy, but heartily willing to admonish him as a brother, we exhort him to ponder the above scriptures; and with the like aim that we wish him to read the grand inspired book, we wish him also to read an uninspired, but a very affecting one, entitled, "The Arian's and the Socinian's Monitor;"\* with the desire, not that he may read a solemn representation of his fate, but a striking admonition to warn him against it, that he may avoid it.

2. The next consequence, we observe, of your minister's manner of teaching, respecting himself, is one that is peculiarly *mortifying* both to him, and to his admirers; in that his interpretations of the scriptures are such, as they afford us an undeniable display of the impaired state of his *senses*, or rather, as appears, the *great poverty* of his *understanding*. When we read the Doctor's philosophical publications, we see the man of sense;† but when we read his scriptural ones, we see the boy at school, a mere novice. When he lectures us upon electricity, perspective, fixed air, &c. he shines; but when he lectures us on divinity, he is beclouded, and enveloped in darkness. Here his poor abilities are exposed indeed. As a professor of philosophy, we give our vote for him (provided he does not spoil us through it, and vain deceit); but as a professor of divinity, we cannot. The first we wish him to go on with, but the other we wish him to let alone. A seat in the schools is a seat for the Doctor, but not a stand in the pulpit.

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\* Antisocinus [pseudo = John MacGowan, 1726-80, Baptist minister]; *The Arians and Socinians Monitor; being a vision that a young Socinian teacher lately had. In which he saw, in the most exquisite torments, his tutor...and had from his own mouth the fearful relation of what befell him at and after his death, &c.* London, 1761. An indecent and scurrilous attack on a recently deceased non-Trinitarian lecturer, John Taylor (1694-1761) of Norwich and Warrington, by a recent convert to Calvinism.

† Referring to Priestley's publications in *natural philosophy*, what we now style *the sciences*.

For, if a man of professed literary education,\* can deliberately, and after long study, allow himself to maintain, and actually publish for the inspection of the learned world, as the Doctor really has done, in the following observable, and very remarkable instances, viz. That when Thomas expresses his faith in the Lord Christ, and, in his adorable acknowledgement of his deity, cries out with holy rapture, “My LORD, and my GOD,” he only gives such an idle *abrupt exclamation* (as the Doctor calls it) as the prophane do; when, upon every turn almost, they are apt to express their surprize, by saying, “O Lord, O God; Lord have mercy upon us.”—That when the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah gives us an account of the sufferings of the Redeemer, as a sacrifice for sin, it only gives an account of the sufferings of *any good man*;—That when St. Peter says, “The devil is like a roaring lion, going up and down, seeking whom he may devour,” he means only *Nero, the Roman Emperor, or some other known adversary, or accuser*;—That when St. Peter and St. Jude speak of the fallen angels, that sinned &c. they mean, probably, the *messengers, who were sent from the wilderness, to spy out the land of Canaan*;—That when St. Paul expresses his having a desire to go to the Thessalonians, but that “Satan hindered him,” he might mean any *human adversary, or some of his friends, influenced by worldly considerations*;—That when the same Apostle says, in Phil ii. that Christ, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” he means (so strangely in itself, and so inconsistent with the context) that Christ was far from thinking of such an *impious robbery*, as that of being equal with God: (the Doctor saying, it was an impious robbery, the Apostle, that it was no robbery at all);—And that which may be really meant by Jesus being “tempted by the devil,” in Matt iv. may be that the *improper thoughts* (as the Doctor calls them) mentioned in the course of the narrative, either occurred to *himself, in his private meditations,*

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\* Priestley’s doctorate was LLD, Doctor of Laws, awarded by the University of Edinburgh in 1764.

or were suggested by some *other person*;—That when the wicked and vicious die, as such, they go some where (but who call tell where?) and are punished, and, in a sort of purgatory, are purified and made better, in order to be virtuous, and so to be good, and happy for ever: We say, that when we see the Doctor can exhibit, for the examination of the public, such foreign interpretations of the holy scriptures, as these are, and others such like, that we see not only the wretched shifts, the ignorant and hard-driven expositor is put to, in order to maintain his uncooth system, but we discern plainly the exposure he affords of the *smallness* of his *abilities*, as to his understanding of spiritual subjects. So true is it, that God “destroys the wisdom of the wise, and brings to nothing the understanding of the prudent; and he taketh the wise in their own craftiness.”\* What a laugh must this afford to a man of sense, and what grief to a man of charity! After this, who in the world can trust the Doctor, as an interpreter of scripture? He must now be, both as a preacher and a writer, always suspected, closely watched, and narrowly searched, when he offers to expound the scriptures, as a mere novice, or empiric† in religion. Can we trust a man, who professes himself an apothecary, who is only a smatterer in medical knowledge, and but a dabbler in medicine, and in making up the physicians prescriptions, has been guilty of capital blunders? If we do, we must thank ourselves, more than blame him, whose judgement we have sufficient cause to mistrust, if we take deadly poison instead of healing medicine, and so find his word eating as doth a canker, and not, as it ought, curing the destructive malady. Yet this, Sirs, *this* is the man, to whom you hearken, as your interpreter of the scriptures, in matters of the very greatest importance, in concerns momentous to the last degree. This is the unskilful practitioner, whom you make choice of, as the physician of your souls.

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\* 1Co i, 19 & 1Co iii, 19, quoting from Isa xxix, 14 & Job v, 13

† *empiric*, a pejorative of the same sense as *quack doctor*.

3. A third solemn consequence, respecting the Doctor himself, which follows from his principles and teachings, is, what he little thinks of, but which is as great in its truth, as it is little in his thoughts, viz. That he teaches *idolatry*, and is himself an *idolater*. He has the face to call our worship “idolatrous and blasphemous;” because we serve (as he says) more Gods than one. But, this is not true. This we deny professedly and openly. As for the Church of England, her Ministers say, “We are *forbidden* by the Catholic religion, to say there be three Gods.” Again, “They are *not* three Gods, but one God.”\* Our God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Three *persons*, not three *Gods*; one God only. Yet the three Persons are divine. This is the mystery to be believed; because it is the scripture account of Jehovah; and therefore we have scriptural worship. We, as Trinitarians, are true worshippers of the one true God; but you and your teacher, as Unitarians, are worshippers of a *false* God: for you worship a God of your own making, and not of the bible’s revealing. You think of God, as he does not think of himself; and speak of God, as he does not speak of himself. But surely, his own account of himself, in his scripture character, is the right one, and not the unscriptural one of the Doctor’s. If there be common sense in common words, and which may be comprehended by men of common understandings, the bible describes our triune Jehovah to be three persons, but one God, yet each person divine and adorable. But this is not the God, which the Doctor worships, but his is *another* God; and therefore he is an idolater, and a real breaker of the first commandment, which says, “Thou shalt have no *other* Gods before me.” And, consequently, like the Athenians of old, he may set up an altar, with this inscription, “To the *unknown* God,”† whom he ignorantly worships. And how the Doctor can free himself from the charge of being as real an idolater as the Jew, the Turk, or the Pagan (all of whom worship *one* God, to the

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\* Athanasian creed.

† The Greek god *Agnostos Theos*. Paul describes seeing at Athens an altar inscribed ‘to the unknown god;’ cf. Ac xvii, 22.

exclusion of the Son and the Spirit) our understandings cannot comprehend; but we can comprehend, that a Unitarian is no better than a Jew, a Turk, or a Pagan. We would go on to observe, that the Doctor says, we Trinitarians are idolaters, and have no better than idolatrous worship. But will the Doctor say, that thousands and thousands of God's faithful servants, martyrs for the truth, ministers, and others, in the Christian church, in every age, men of sense and learning too, as well as of grace (all Trinitarians) have mistaken the object of their worship; and after all their studious pains in searching the scriptures, with prayer for the divine teaching of the Spirit, have never been able to understand, who, and what that Being is, who is adorable; and have all their lives been idolatrous worshippers? We ask your teacher, and you, how you all *account* for this? And what must we think of your God, that Divine Person, whom you call, *Father*, and represent as a God of *love*, and whom the Doctor calls "the most compassionate Father of all his offspring,"\* and whose mercies are over all his works, who yet has permitted this idolatrous worship to his own dishonour, and left all these his servants to live, and also to die in this state of sinful idolatry; and, with the bible in their hands, expressly teaching them by it, what is a false, and what alone is the true worship of the one true God? And, additionally to this, we ask, Are they guilty of idolatry in *heaven*, where they worship the Lamb, as they worship the Father; daring to worship the creature with the very same worship, and in the very face of the Creator? Are Saints and Angels there, all idolaters? If so, what becomes of St. Paul's repeated declarations, that "idolaters shall not inherit the kingdom of God?"† Declarations these, as alarming to the Doctor, respecting his own future state, as contradictory to the conclusion of his doctrine, that the worshipping of Christ is idolatry.

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\* In the *Appeal*, *supra* p 27.

† 1Co vi, 9-10.

4. One other particular, as a consequence of your minister's teaching, and which relates to himself, in a very disheartening point of view, is the great *disappointment* met with in the *acceptance* of his services paid to, and as expected to be received by God the *Father*. The Doctor professes great reverential regard to the *Father*, speaks highly of him, and adorably to him; and appears to apprehend not the least disapprobation, or refusal of such services. But here he is greatly mistaken. Here is a terrible disappointment. He has a zeal for God; but, to speak the best of it, it is a zeal not according to knowledge. God the Father accounts himself, not honoured, as the unitarian worshipper expects, but dishonoured, as the truth of the matter is, by such a person with such a service. For, if he sees his Son degraded, he cannot see himself exalted. Were we to see our sons scandalized, could we possibly imagine ourselves honoured? Shall the man, who despises my children, tell me he loves me? To prove what we say, we bring three or four particular scriptures: and we believe the Doctor's dexterity at interpretation cannot figure away their plain and true meaning; viz. our Lord's words, in John v, 17-23. and xv, 23. His servant's, St. Paul, 2 Tim ii, 12. and his servant's St. John, 1 epistle ii, 23. and 2 John verse 9. The Doctor thinks that the Father is a lover of him, and himself a lover of the Father; but these plain scriptures plainly teach, that they are haters, and not lovers of one another. God, in his word, tells him this now, and will cause him to find it so hereafter, unless he recants and repents. We would here just mention, amongst the solemn consequences of your minister's teaching, that there is one respecting the *nation*. The concern is a *national* one; the cause a *public* cause, respecting *Great Britain*. The spread of infidelity, in various shapes and degrees, of late years has been, and is now, rapid; and the people of the land, in their solemn days of fasting, have acknowledged this as one of the *national sins*, and have deprecated the judgements of God respecting it. According, then, to our acknowledgements, what can we expect, if the infidel spirit continues, and increases, but



to find it will bring on *national ruin*! The doctrines of the established Church are denied; and what does this lead to, but the overthrow of the Church; and if the ecclesiastical state goes, the civil will go: as it has been, so it will be; they will stand or fall together. And we would further observe, that we are plainly taught in the scriptures, to fear this ruin, when we there read, that the Jewish Church and Polity were destroyed for the same sin, which now threatens ours, namely, the *rejection* of the *Son* of God. This is written for our learning. O that we may learn from it, and be wise in time! To this we would add another thought, respecting your teacher, namely, What an *enemy* to his *country* must he be, in his so earnestly forwarding that evil system, which directly tends to ruin!—Such, Sirs, so particular, so true, and so exceedingly awful are the consequences of your minister's principles, respecting himself.—And now, after all this, we earnestly entreat, and call upon you to consider, what the solemn consequences are respecting *yourselves*, by his propagating his soul-ruining principles amongst *you*. We have shewed you, and surely you cannot but see, what a pastor your shepherd is; and what is the food, with which he feeds you; or, rather, the poison with which he destroys you. And now we seriously ask you, Sirs, Will you still follow him? Still be led by him? Still hear him, and still believe him? What, when he strikes at the very foundation, labouring to undermine the Christian edifice? What, when he labours, as he has *said* he would not cease to labour, “till he had banished that *idol, Christ*, out of the world?” What, when this his endeavour to effect this awful purpose, is but a comment on those words of the prophet of old, but applicable now, “Get ye out of the way, turn aside out of the path; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.” What, when you are warned by Christ himself, in one place, “Take heed *what* you hear;” in another, “Beware of *false prophets*;” &c. By Solomon, “Cease, my son, to hear the instruction, that causeth to err from the words of knowledge;” By St. Paul, “Though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that we have preached unto you,

let him be accursed;” and again, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such TURN AWAY. Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers;” and again, “Beware, lest any man spoil your philosophy, and vain deceit;”<sup>\*</sup> &c. and again, “A man that is an heretic,<sup>†</sup> after the first and second admonition, REJECT:” and again, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine, which ye have learned; and AVOID them;” By St John, “Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world;” and still more expressly, more strikingly, and more pertinently, by the same Apostle, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine” (that is the true doctrine of Christ as God, and Saviour by his atonement) “receive him not into your house, neither bid him, God speed. For he that biddeth him, God Speed, is partaker of his evil deeds.”<sup>‡</sup> What, Sirs, will you dare, in direct opposition to what the God of truth says, and when it tends to your own never ending, and never to be counted loss, to go on to regard what the man of falsity says (preaching lies in God’s name) receiving his doctrine, and fondling<sup>§</sup> his person?—If you

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\* These seven quotations: Isa xxx, 11; Mk iv, 24; Mt vii, 15; Pr xix, 27; Gal i, 8; 2Ti ii, 5 with Php iii, 2; Col ii, 8; respectively.

† That the Doctor is an heretic, and a promoter of heresy, is very clear, not only from the scripture account of such, but from this particular also, namely, that he is reviving the old exploded heresies, with which the Church of Christ was pestered and torn, in former ages, by the ancient heretics, the *Ebionites*, *Cerinthians*, *Gnostics*, *Samosetianians*, *Photinians*, *Pelagians*, and others; all of whom, and their pernicious tenets, were triumphed over by that Church, which they themselves laboured to triumph over. An account of all which damnable heresies and a complete answer to, and overthrow of which, may be fully seen in two particular masterly works of that truly evangelical, and as truly learned writer, in the last century, Dr OWEN; and entitled, “*Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*; or, *The Mystery of the Gospel vindicated, and Socinianism examined, in answer to John Biddle, the Socinian;*” [Oxford, 1655] and the other, entitled, “*An Exposition on the Epistle to the Hebrews.*” [*Exercitations on the epistle to the Hebrews*; 4 vol, 1668-84] [JR]

John Owen, D.D. 1616-83, was a politically active Puritan and Calvinist.

‡ These four quotations: Tit iii, 10; Ro xvi, 17; 1Jn iv, 1; 2Jn i, 11.

§ *fondling* = *pampering*.

follow him, where, where, we ask you, do you imagine he will lead you; Where he ventures will you? Of old it was said, "The leaders of this people have caused them to err, and they that are led of them, are *destroyed*."\* Will you venture the not verifying such words now? What can you possibly be thinking of, as to suffer yourselves to be so blinded, as you are, by this guide, himself blinded. Will you not "BOTH fall into the ditch?"† When both you, and your teacher, stand, at the last awful day, before the judgement-seat of Christ, all of you to give an account of yourselves to God, Will it be with you, that he will be your rejoicing, even as ye also will be his, in the last day of the Lord Jesus? No, Sirs, we believe it will be the opposite. O then, think of it, before it is too late. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we would persuade you. Let us further ask you, What evidence have you of your minister being a teacher sent of God? What are the fruits to sinners of this preacher of salvation, as you think him? The Doctor appears to wield the sword of the Spirit, and seems to fight, but what does he, but, with it, "beat the air?"‡ The sword, then, is of his *own* making, not of the *Spirit's*. But what is *done* by him? How many vain, ungodly men have, by him, been turned from the error of their ways, and their souls saved from death? Can you produce yourselves, or others around you, that can tell what God has done for their souls by his ministry? Any that are seals to his ministry, and will prove his joy and crown of rejoicing in the great day of the Lord Jesus? No, you have none. But we have many. Our ministers are sent from God; and they are owned by God. We are their epistles, known and read of all men. Our ministers can, each of them, say, as St. Paul does to the Corinthians, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."§ We bless God now, and believe we shall bless him more in eternity, that we ever heard them. Now, Sirs, which ministry is it, think you, yours or ours, that the Father makes

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\* Isa ix, 16.

† Mt xv, 14.

‡ 1Co, ix, 26.

§ 1Co iv, 15.

most, or any use of? To which does he give, and from which does he withhold his blessing? Therefore, we add, which is according to his mind and will? Here, Sirs, we have brought the plain and serious subject to a plain and serious point. Whether there be a failure with your teacher in other particulars, or not, there is a great and a fatal one here. If sinners are not converted, and so souls are not saved, it is as clear, as it is an awful certainty, the teaching is materially defective, yea, soul-ruining. If God gives no increase, does it not look as if it was not a Paul that planted, nor an Apollos\* that watered? If the sheep are not called and fed, does it not appear that the shepherd, so called and supposed, is but an hireling, a stranger, or a wolf, and not a true shepherd? We speak as unto wise men; judge ye what we say. In this case, what then is the worth of, or, rather, how dreadfully destructive is your religion, and your teacher's? What can you do for yourselves, or what can he say to you, with his religion, should you come to feel horrors, because you felt your fatal mistakes on your *death bed*? What, for instance, would your teacher have said to dispel the despair of the dying profligate *Altamont*, as related by Dr. *Young*, in his "Centaur?"<sup>†</sup> What to the late Fr. N—t, whose awful death we have lately had an affecting account of in the *Gospel Magazine*?<sup>‡</sup> What to the still more heart-rending case of *Francis Spira*?<sup>§</sup> What would

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\* Apollos, diminutive of Apollonius, was a first century Jewish Christian, and a leading member of the Christians at Corinth. He is mentioned several times in Acts. Melancthon and some modern scholars suggest him as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

† *The centaur not fabulous*, 1755, is a poem by Edward Young, 1683-1765, in which Young defines centaurs as 'men of pleasure, the licentious, and profligate.' It includes a description of the death-bed of the 'gay, young, noble, ingenious, accomplished and most wretched Altamont,' whose last words were: 'My principles have poisoned my friend, my extravagance has beggared my boy, my unkindness has murdered my wife.'

‡ The *Gospel Magazine, or treasury of divine knowledge*, is an evangelical Calvinist magazine founded in 1766. The death-bed spiritual torments of the Hon. Fr[ancis] N—t were serialized over five issues between October 1782 and January 1783.

§ Francis Spira, 1502-1548, whose life story was told by Nathaniel Bacon, 1593-1660, in *The fearefull estate of Francis Spira* (1638), was an Italian lawyer and

he have said to the trembling jailer (in Acts xvi.) Not, surely, what the Apostle said. In these, and in such like cases, when the conscience is stabbed, can Socinianism heal? When Satan accuses, can the Unitarian comfort? When Heaven is out of sight, and hell in, can the free enquirer reverse the prospect? When conviction creates pangs, can self-repentance change them for applause?—O Sirs, for God’s sake, stop, and consider the awful solemnness of such cases as these. We leave them upon your minds. Do not shake them off.—But a little more; let us ask again, what are the good effects of your minister’s preaching? Speaking of *false prophets*, the infallible Divine Teacher says, “Ye shall know them by their fruit.”\* Yes: Our true, and your false ones are, indeed, easily, and soon, and fully known. But what fruits are observable in your lives and conversations? Your instructor lifts you up very high indeed; we can see you more plainly. He actually represents you as “the most exemplary of men,” whilst he charges us with “pride and bigotry:” and this, he says, “your enemies must acknowledge.” Indeed your enemies do not, and cannot. Because it is notorious, that however moral some of you may be, yet numbers of the Socinians and Unitarians are loose in their lives, and exemplary in the love of the world, and are vain followers of it, and earnest compliers with it, in its vain ways; and this, the Doctor himself being judge; for he allows, “there is, in you Unitarians, a greater conformity to the world, than is observable in the Trinitarians.” This witness is true; for it is that of a prophet of your own. Where now, Sirs, is the honesty and consistency of your teacher, in painting this matter in such false colours? Is he not condemned of himself? And, we ask, What is this but “calling evil good, and good evil, putting darkness for light, and light for darkness?”† And

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Lutheran preacher who later renounced his Protestantism under pressure from the Venetian inquisition in June 1548. He subsequently became convinced that he was a reprobate, destined for hell.

\* Mt vii, 16.

† Isa v, 20.

what a *wo*\* is there denounced against such!—Again, Sirs, we say to you: What, will you yet continue to follow, and not forsake your leader? Suffer us to reason with you. And, hoping for your attention, we would say, particularly, feeling it compassionate, look, as upon the present, so towards the generation beyond the present, What, will you who are *parents*, send your *children*, your younger, or grown up sons and daughters, to be *catechetically instructed* by such an instructor, when his “Catechism for Children and young Persons,” published by him for this very purpose, like the Racovian of John Biddle,† is, to speak the best of it, a plain, avowed system of mere morality, self-righteousness, and legal salvation; and, to speak the worst of it, full of heterodox, anti-christian, and soul-ruining doctrine? At the same time, also, we observe, the author speaks against other (orthodox, evangelical) catechisms. What, Sirs, shall the parents encounter such instruction, and the children be sent on purpose to learn it? How awful, then, is the case of the present rising generation, and how awful will be the case of the next, yea, the generations to come! Will the parents, by this means, get ready, before they are born, a road paved for their children, in the broad way, to lead them to destruction, stopping up the narrow, the only true one, which would lead them to eternal life? Will your children, will “generations to come,” as you speak, and express your fervent wishes, may be the case, “will rise up and call you blessed?” No. They will, it is to be feared, sink down in hell, and call you cursed. They shall follow the generations of their fathers, and shall never see

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\* *woe*, in the sense of *great distress*.

† The Polish Unitarian Racovian catechism, developed from a draft by Faustus Socinus, 1539-1604, was published in 1605 at Raków in south-central Poland, home to the Socinian Akademia Rakowska. An English translation, generally attributed to John Biddle, 1615-1662, was printed in Amsterdam in 1652: *The Racovian Catechisme: or, the substance of the confession of those Churches, which in the kingdom of Poland, the Great Dukedom of Lithuania, and other provinces appertaining to that kingdom, do affirm that no other save the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is that one God of Israel, and that the man Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of the virgin, and no other besides or before him, is the onely begotten Sonne of God.*

light. O, Sirs, for the sake of your children's souls, as well as your own, stop and consider what is with you, what is around you, and whither you are going. Examine, and weigh with fairness, and without prejudice, our addresses to you, and our pleadings for you. We are much moved ourselves, and would move you much. Our aim is to convince you, for your good, not to grieve you, for your hurt. Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, we have written unto you with many tears; not that you should be grieved, but that ye might know the love, which we have more abundantly to you. We are friends, acting a friendly part, not foes, acting an hostile one: and we are not your enemies, but your friends, because we tell you the truth. Yea, we are the same respecting your teacher. Of him we are ready almost to despair, but not of you. Of his being convinced there is a possibility; not, we fear, a probability: but of you, we have hopes. God grant they may not be disappointed! May he be with you! May he give you a right understanding in all things; guiding you out of all destructive error, and into all saving truth!

F I N I S





M E L A N C H T O N

TO

M A R T I N L U T H E R.

[ P R I C E   T H R E E   -   P E N C E . ]



M E L A N C H T O N

TO

M A R T I N L U T H E R ;

O R,

A S E R I O U S , A F F E C T I O N A T E R E P L Y ,  
A N D A D D R E S S ,

T O T H O S E W H O U N D E R T H E T I T L E O F

L O V E R S O F T H E T R U T H ,

A S I T I S I N J E S U S ,

H A V E A D D R E S S E D T H E H E A R E R S A N D A D M I R E R S O F

D O C T O R P R I E S T L E Y ,

O H I B E A R T H E M W I T N E S S . T H E Y H A V E A Z E A L O F G O D ,  
B U T N O T A C C O R D I N G T O K N O W L E D G E .

L E T N O T H I N G B E D O N E T H R O U G H S T R I F E A N D V A I N G L O R Y . B U T  
I N L O W L I N E S S O F M I N D L E T E A C H E S T E E M O T H E R S B E T T E R  
T H A N T H E M S E L V E S .

B I R M I N G H A M ,

P R I N T E D B Y P E A R S O N A N D R O L L A S O N ,  
A N D S O L D B Y A L L T H E B O O K S E L L E R S .

M D C C L X X X I I I



## M E L A N C H T O N

TO

## M A R T I N L U T H E R.

*Christians and Brethren,*

W e address you by these endearing and affectionate titles, though you seem purposely to have withheld them from us. While you profess faith in Christ Jesus, such (however weak) we think ourselves bound to receive, though we could have wished it had not been to doubtful disputations; and, as becomes his disciples, we would look upon you as brethren. In reply to yours, be assured, we entirely concur with you in your opinion of the importance of the soul, the necessity of seeking its eternal welfare; and had your fervent wishes and zealous concern for our salvation been attended with such a spirit, or expressed after such a Manner as our common faith requires, we should have prayed, that they might have abounded more and more. But on the contrary, if we would not be unkind and unfaithful in our answer to your address, or would wish to act the same brotherly part on our side, which you think you have done to us, we must say that there appears such a design to mislead your readers, such a degree of self-importance and claim to infallibility, such a mixture of bitterness and acrimony along with your expressions of love; and lastly, such an evident willingness to take the power from your Saviour's hands, and sit on the throne of judgement yourselves, as fill us with the deepest sorrow and regret upon your account. We hope, therefore, brethren, you will bear with our friendly expostulations in return. We mean no more than you did, to grieve; we earnestly wish to reform; for we must needs say,

that without a farther examination into yourselves of what spirit you are of, a discernment of it, and true repentance, we cannot but entertain the strongest fears for you. As men, therefore, subject to like passions with ourselves; nay, as christians who profess outwardly to be acquainted with the gospel, we beseech you not to think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but with patience hear, and be attentive to those criterions for knowing the human heart, which from your address we think ourselves called to lay before you. Nay, we may with great truth adopt your own words, "That with hearts which bleed with love, and hands lifted up," we request you to consider to what a length the deceitfulness of your own hearts has carried you, and what need you have, while pulling the mote out of your brother's eye, to consider the beam in your own.

We have been taught, and we must think it right, "that we should be careful of judging concerning others, least we ourselves be judged." "Judge not, saith our great Master, according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment." "Why dost thou judge thy brother?" Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother, was the complaint of the apostle Paul, "for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up;" &c. and, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father." These, brethren, with innumerable other passages of scripture, are so clear and express, so absolutely essential to form the christian character, and such a tribute due from one man to another, that we cannot scarce forbear trembling for the soul, where they appear deficient and wanting.\*

We mean not, therefore, in this reply and address, to enter upon an enquiry into the peculiar doctrines of christianity. We will neither attempt to shew and expose the weakness and absurdity of your religious sentiments, or the truth of our own;

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\* Jn vii, 24; Ro xiv, 10; 1Co xiii, 4; 1Ti v, 1

they will even be touched upon as slightly as possible. Believe me, my brethren, a far more important enquiry lieth before us. Such a one as I believe few instances in this protestant country have given occasion for, and which we hope, for the honour of christians and protestants, never to see or hear again. You have not only attacked sentiments (which you have an undoubted right to do) but characters themselves. You have not spoke of sects and parties in general, amongst whom a private individual might have been screened from public censure, but have selected a private individual, to hold him up, as much as lay in your power, to public contempt and abhorrence. You have not confined your zeal to the guarding the members of your own body from contagion, or in private, with the spirit of meekness, to admonishing this individual himself, but have openly and professedly called upon his friends and congregation to desert and avoid him, as they would the pestilence; and had he no other means of subsistence, and your desires were effectual, it would be difficult to say, whether there could be found one friendly house to harbour, or one hand to bestow a morsel of bread.

We have farther to plead, that not only might these effects have arisen from your intemperate zeal (we would hope, for your souls sake, undesignedly upon you part) but that, on the whole, would have been produced by very false as well as injurious representations. This, brethren, we mean to prove; and while we hold up the evidence, or present the picture, we beseech the Lord to convince you of its truth, and grant you true and unfeigned repentance.

We therefore ask you, with all plainness and sincerity, whether your representation of the Doctor's sentiments, concerning the materiality of the soul, and the nature of Hell, is not intended to make your readers think that he believes in no resurrection from the dead, or a future state of rewards and punishments? Do you not, in express terms, affirm that "his hearers, if they believe what their teacher says, and understand what he means, they must believe they have no soul." "That

he has taken away hell, and may as easily take away heaven; that he has banished the devil, and may equally take away God.” But do you profess to have read his works, and will you openly and publicly declare that the Doctor has no belief in a future state? Because you infer that a material soul cannot exist hereafter, have you any right, or has he given you any reason to think that he believes so? If he should have denied a local hell, does it follow, that he has asserted there will be no punishment for the wicked, or do you in your conscience think he has done it? You must have known from all his writings directly the reverse, and whatever inconsistency you found between materiality and a future resurrection, it was your province to have shewn this inconsistency, and not draw consequences for him which you know he disavows. Nay, we must confess, for our parts (whatever may be thought of the doctrines by others) we should rather concluded it so coincided with your ideas of hell, as to have met with a cordial reception from you. For matter, we know, will burn; but how fire (for it seems you are for no figurative expressions) can affect a spirit, we leave you to determine. With no little triumph and merriment do you dwell upon the interpretation of the word Satan, and particularly the fallen angels mentioned by Jude; but surely it would have been only candid and fair to have shown that the word Satan and Devil have in every passage precisely the same signification, or that the former only meant an adversary or opposer.—As to the angels in Jude, we are even at a loss, upon your own principles to know what injury the Doctor’s interpretation has done to the souls of men, or what advantage you hope to gain. The same apostle declares they are reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day. If the Doctor has dismissed them his service, it is out of your power to hire them; and, however you may work upon the fears and credulity of the ignorant, and make them more attentive to that inward lust, from whence St. James declares all sin proceeds, you must excuse us from being influenced by such remonstrances, till you have proved that they are set at liberty, and have a power to come and fetch us.



Example, you see, is catching—your jocularly has occasioned ours.

Your three next observations concerning the inspiration of the scriptures, the sufficiency of man's reason, and his power to do the will of God, all appear to breathe the same spirit, and lead your readers to equally wrong and false conclusions. We again ask, whether you do not more than intimate, that because the Doctor's idea of inspiration differs from yours, that he is setting aside the authority of revelation, thinks he has a power to new model it at his pleasure, and is leading his hearers to total apostasy? We wish to know whether you mean to make the world believe he is designedly undermining the Christian Religion, and setting up the light of his own reason and understanding in opposition to it, or you would only argue, that from his principles, this will be the natural effect. Here we must own your expressions are rather doubtful and ambiguous. Candour is willing to put the most favourable construction, but Justice required you to be open and explicit; for, in the one case you make him as a Christian Minister, the most detestable of characters; in the other, you ought to have shewn by what other means (except the exercise of that reason you seem to despise) the nature and degree of this inspiration is to be determined. You will certainly believe the Apostle Paul, with respect to those passages, which he declares he did not write by divine commandment;\* and we hope that you will not think he required its influence in writing for his cloak, books and parchments at Troas.† You see therefore, that you yourselves must have recourse to that very reason, for the exercise of which you blame and censure the Doctor. But we appeal to you whether he has denied any of the facts, or opposed any of the received doctrines of Christianity, by an arbitrary opposition of his reason to revelation. Has he

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\* Refers to Paul's advice on marriage and on the role of women, 1Co vii, where Paul uses phrases such as *speak I, not the Lord* (v 12), *I have no commandment of the Lord* (v 25).

† Part of Paul's so-called personal remarks to Timothy, 2Ti iv, 9-18.

omitted to assign reasons for the opinions he has embraced, or in submitting them to the judgement of others to appeal to the law and to the testimony. If these reasons are before you, weigh and attend to their justice and strength. Oppose them if you think proper; but except you believe him to have knowingly and wilfully wrote, contrary to your own convictions, calumniate not the man. Again, Do you after his open and avowed attachment to Christianity, wish to assert that he has no regard to the teaching of the divine spirit, as granted in the gospel of Christ, or that he is not thankful for the light and knowledge conveyed by it. Few men have endeavoured more to shew the insufficiency of reason, and the value and importance of the gospel; but if under this ambiguous phrase you mean (as seems to be the case) immediate supernatural illumination from God, to teach the sense of the words, as well as the words themselves, we readily allow that he makes no such claims, and greatly as we are supposed to admire him, they are such claims, brethren, as we shall neither allow to him or you, without you prove your right by that power of working miracles, which attended Christ and his Apostles. You ask where reason is mentioned as a sufficient guide to lead us to an acquaintance with the scripture: we will lay before you a few passages: “Yea, why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? I speak as unto wise men, understand ye what I say?” We will give you an example too: “These were more noble than those of Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether these things were so.”\*

We have only to add, that if you confine your views to these means of information, under the influence of the divine blessing and direction which every good man enjoys, Candour and Truth must have led you least of all to object a deficiency here to the Doctor’s character, since from his avowed

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\* Lk xii, 57; 1Co x, 15; Ac xvii, 11, respectively.

principles, it is well known, that all his thoughts and actions are resolved into the sovereign agency and will of God.

We mean not (as was hinted above) to enter upon the disquisition of speculative and controverted points. This is more proper for a different kind of reply and address. We shall therefore take no further notice of your two following observations concerning the Trinity, or the atonement of Christ, than as they appear connected with the great aim you have in view, to detach the Doctor's hearers from him, and render him obnoxious to others. To accomplish this end, with what frequency and marks of distinction do you repeat and dwell upon the terms, mere man, a mortal creature, a sinful man. Would not any of your readers, unacquainted with the Doctor's writings, immediately conclude that he considered him as no higher, wiser, and better than himself, or when they began to consider his high and distinguished reputation in the republic of letters, imagine that pride might make him think himself the better man of the two. But what must they now think of you, or your pretensions to that love, which is the fulfilling of the law, when they find you have omitted to inform them that the Doctor believes this man to have been replenished and filled with all the fullness of the divine Spirit, so as to be furnished in the amplest manner for the performing his father's will, and accomplishing the salvation of mankind.

What must they think when he believes every thing to have been as effectually done, as if committed to the highest seraph, or effected by his own immediate hand. Would your readers, however they might pity his ignorance, or reject his principles, have entertained the same horrid ideas as your omission leaves them to entertain. Your idle declamation about Christ's birth and origin, or about Paul, Peter, and Martin Luther, would have lost all its effect. A man of plain common sense would have thought and said (when God is brought into the question) without doubt he can save by or through what agent or instrument he sees proper, and if my salvation is equally secured, I can feel no distress of mind

upon this account. I have only to enquire what is the evidence which supports either side of a question, for my own honour, happiness, and satisfaction, the end as to others upon whom the like valuable effects in life and conduct are produced (though from different sentiments) is the same. As to the other doctrine the atonement of Christ, which you consider as a satisfaction made to the justice of God, we shall leave you to enjoy your jocularities without the least desire of imitation. We are obliged to own that we cannot find where the arguments lie. The whole consists of a number of texts and facts brought together without any order or explanation, and general declamation upon them; and as to the wit, it is of too coarse and horrid a nature to entertain any, we trust, but the writer or writers themselves. We shall only say, that if there is one circumstance clearly and plainly revealed in Christianity, without any metaphor or figure, it is that we are saved by the free grace and love of God, "That God so loved the world," previous to any satisfaction being made, as to send his only son into it, and that the word satisfaction never once occurs through the whole of the New Testament; we will join issue with you upon this point, and if you can find one passage in which the word is used, or can reconcile the doctrine itself with the innumerable declarations of God's sending his own son, and this from his own unsolicited and unpurchased mercy, we shall then be convinced.

We have done, brethren, with remarking upon the too apparent design, by omissions or half representations, to mislead your readers, but of your self-importance, seeming claim to infallibility, acrimony, and assumption of the throne of your final judge, there remains such proof and evidence, as we think (when reflexion comes) must cover you with shame and confusion. We wish much to be informed by what deputed authority, or by what licence from scripture you take upon you to determine in so arbitrary and peremptory a manner, the present or final state of any man, merely for errors in opinion? Who is it that has informed you that you are so right in all your religious sentiments, and he so wrong, as that

you can apply to him those texts of scripture, which were addressed only to men of vitious\* and abandoned characters? You address us as Admirers of Doctor Priestly, we do and must ever admire his great talents, his constant indefatigable diligence, his honest plainness and integrity, his undissembled piety, humility, meekness, and zeal. We have known Calvinists and persons of all sects and parties both admire and love him. Numbers whom we hope to be godly men, have written against him, and he has replied in the spirit of godliness. Numbers have passed the most unjust, harsh, and severe reflections upon him, but it has been reserved for you, brethren, professedly to address his hearers, in order to starve him into conviction in this world, and to decree (as if you sat in the seat of judgement) that he merits Hell in the next. Remember these are your words, "This is the end he merits, and such the punishment we fear he will meet." Such declarations from the head of the Romish sect (who lays claim to infallibility) would be in character, and we have seen the same expressions of love, with which you accompany your sentence, joined to a commission for fixing a man to the stake; but for protestants, who from liberty of enquiry might know how various the sentiments of mankind are, and how the best of men differ, to doom one another to destruction, merely on that account, can scarcely consist with what is of infinitely greater importance, a good heart.

Such acrimony will leave the world to suspect that you rather fear a desertion from your own party in his favour, than to draw any from him; for, surely, never persons who had the least knowledge of human nature, took such unlikely means to effect the last. His hearers know that if the Doctor is deceived, he is not wilfully so; they are certain, that it doth not arise from indolence and neglect of enquiry; that he hath not been warped by early prejudices, but through the whole of life has had to combat with, and overcome them; and though brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, yet like another Paul, all his former

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\* *vitious*, modern *vicious*, in the sense of *impaired* or *spoiled*.

tenets and notions are accounted by him as nothing, compared to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, which he has now attained. They know, that with unwearied zeal he labours amongst them in word and doctrine, and constantly enforces the great duties of christianity, by that love to Christ, and regard to future rewards and punishments, which you would insinuate that he denies; they know that he endeavours with all plainness, to appeal to their understandings, and convince their judgements; that he uses no mean arts to strike upon their passions, and to appear preaching himself instead of the Lord Jesus. *In fine*, they behold him ardently solicitous for the interests of the rising generation, and unwearied in forming their minds to a love of virtue and religion. We say, that they know all these things, and did you hope (whatever compliments you pay him as a philosopher) to gain their attention and regard, by representing him in divinity as impaired in his senses, “of great poverty of understanding: A boy at school; a mere novice; as beclouded and enveloped in darkness; his poor abilities exposed;” and taking upon you to fix his proper situation—and all this, because his religious sentiments do not coincide with yours? Do you imagine, that the pastor of their choice is to be shaken in their opinion by such mere declamation, and on your side, assumed importance? Turn but the scales, and suppose them equally inclined, all that you have uttered would apparently be retorted upon yourselves with much greater force and propriety. The world, we are certain, would give them much greater credit for it. We shall pursue your awful consequences no farther, as they respect the Doctor’s hearers and the relation he stands in to them; but a few things of a more miscellaneous nature will require out remarks.

We own they are such as have excited our highest astonishment. Is it possible, when you again bring forth that wicked lying story of the Doctor’s never ceasing his labours until he has banished that idol Jesus Christ out of the world, that you have never heard of its being diligently traced and publicly contradicted? In what part of the world have you

retired, not to know these things? It has appeared in the public papers; been printed and dispersed in a separate half sheet. For your honour and credit we hope, however, some secluded situation has kept it from coming under your inspection; for otherwise we must not only pity the heads, but condemn the hearts of those that could revive it. What hearts must they have, who not merely, in the first instance, with pleasure take up an evil report against their neighbours, but cease not to repeat and spread it after full conviction of its falsehood. Were we so disposed, brethren, in what a light could we place your curious arguments, to prove the Doctor an idolater, and the weakness of the inference drawn from numbers of pious worthy men having died with a firm belief in the Trinity; but we forbear and spare you. We only suggest one remark, to shew that all wisdom will not die with you, and that is, by your own comparison of Unitarians to Jews, it must follow, that God before the appearance of his Son, left them all along in a state of idolatry; for we believe they worshipped the same God then which they do now. But what must we say to your “plain and serious subject brought to a plain and serious point?” We will say, we pity, we grieve for you. You have our sincere and fervent prayers. That God would give you to see to what a height of spiritual pride and self-sufficiency you are arrived, and grant that as you so much resemble the Pharisees in their tempers, their woes and judgments may, through sincere repentance, never come upon you.

The paragraph is too extraordinary to be passed by; and when it is held up as a mirror by others, you may see those deformities which the veil of vanity and presumption have concealed: “What evidence have you, of your minister being a teacher sent from God? What is done by him? How many vain and ungodly men have been turned from the errors of their ways, and their souls saved from death? Can you produce yourselves, or others around you, that can tell what God has done for their souls by his ministry? Any that are seals to his ministry, and will prove his joy and crown of rejoicing in the great day of the Lord Jesus? No, you have

none. But we have many. Our ministers are sent of God, and owned of God. We are their epistles known and read of all men.” So this is your serious subject brought to a plain point. Your address was to tell the world, that all they who differ from you in sentiments are sinners, and you are the excellent of the earth.

Give us leave to say, that if we may judge of the teachers by the epistles to which we are referred, we would not be so taught, or so read, for what thousands of worlds could bestow upon us. We have not, brethren, so learnt Christ. Before we conclude, suffer us to draw the contrast betwixt the different effects of such teaching, and that which you condemn, is likely to have upon the morals of men, and the peace and happiness of the world; the prevention of infidelity, or our final salvation hereafter. Which is the most likely to afford us joy in believing? That, which informs and refers us to clear and express passages of scripture in proof of what is delivered, so as to convince and fix our judgments, or that, which merely rouses and affects our passions; that, which shows us that the Father of all mercies has sent his son to turn us from darkness into light, to change our hearts, and to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; or that, which is continually employed in treating upon controverted subjects, which they profess they do not understand, and never can explain. Which is the most likely to influence the morals of mankind? that which represents Christ as having come to redeem iniquity, and by a sense of his dying love working upon all the generous affections of the heart; or that, which represents him as having made full satisfaction for us, and thereby rendering an attention to the other less necessary. That, which represents faith as working by love, and dead without good works; or that, which represents all good works as filthy rags, and of no service and avail in the sight of God to our final justification; that which makes one the spring, and the other the stream which flows from it; or that, which places them as antagonists to each other, as in the act of running a race, to see which will excel. Which is the most likely, or



which does christianity most recommend, as necessary to the true improvement, peace, and happiness of mankind? That, which teaches us to put on as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, &c. To add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, &c. Or that, which would lead us by partial and unjust representations (when other means had failed, to bring over men to our way of thinking) to make a flock shun and detest their pastor, and by a parity of reason to set one religious society against another, families against families, and even children against their parents. Which is the most likely to stop the progress of infidelity? That which shews the christian religion to be the most amiable and excellent system of faith and practice, worthy of God, suited to every power and condition of men, requiring nothing to be believed as necessary to salvation, but what we can understand, or to be practised, but what it affords us assistance to perform; that it is adapted to form us to the highest resemblance of God here, and a capacity for enjoying him hereafter; or that, which asserts, that we are liable to everlasting misery for the sins of our first parents, that only a few from the absolute decrees of God can be saved, whilst the rest are left without mercy to final perdition, that the more we believe things, which we do not understand, the more meritorious is our faith; that the righteousness of Christ is strictly imputed to us, and though we are exhorted in the strongest terms to turn, and this from the pathetic consideration, why will you die? yet man has no power till by an irresistible impulse he is even forced to become holy and happy. Which in time is the most likely to fit and prepare the mind for the joys of a future world? that, which insists like the Apostle Paul, that even now we are daily to lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset us, and run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus, as the author and finisher of our faith; that, which insists upon our seeking, by a patient continuance in well doing, for glory, honour, and immortality; or that, which gives in any manner encouragement to sinners, to hope that

after a life of vice and profligacy, a firm reliance upon the atoning blood of Christ, or a few violent expressions of sorrow, will introduce them to his eternal kingdom. We know upon which (from a serious enquiry into christianity) we wish to rely; if we are mistaken, God knows it is not wilfully so; and when we do appear before the judgment seat of our great Master, how shall we rejoice to find (if we have been right) that your mistakes have been those of the head and not of the heart. We join in the same prayer with which you conclude your address. May God give you a right understanding in all things, guiding you out of all destructive error, and into all saving truth.

F I N I S



