

Background for Hume on miracles

I Protestants and miracles

The handout is from a sermon given by John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury, meaning he was the head of the Church of England. It is taken from his collected *Works*, published in 1696.

I.1 The Royal Touch

James [I, King of England] ... had proclaimed the now familiar doctrine: Since the establishment of Christ's "Church by the Apostles, all miracles, visions, prophecies and appearances of Angels of good Spirits, are ceased: which served only for the first sowing of faith, and planting of the Church". [Marc] Bloch quotes an anonymous letter, sent by an Italian to Rome in October 1603, which clearly shows the painful conflicts produced by the rite of touching for a monarch who believed firmly both in the divine right of kings ... and in the cessation of miracles. While his scrofulous subjects were waiting in an antechamber, James, before touching them, had a sermon preached by a Calvinist minister.

"Then he himself said that he found himself perplexed about what he had to do, that, on the one hand, he did not see how he could cure the sick without a miracle, and miracles had now ceased and were no longer wrought; and so he was afraid of committing some superstition; on the other hand, since this was an ancient custom and beneficial to his subjects, he was resolved to try it, but only by way of prayer, in which he begged everyone to join him. He then touched the sick. ... It was noticed that while the king was making his speech he often turned his eyes towards the Scots ministers who were standing nearby, as if expecting their approval of what he was saying, having beforehand conferred with them on the subject."¹

¹A. P. Walker, "The Cessation of Miracles", in: Allen G. Merkel, Ingrid Debus, editor, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: intellectual history and the occult in early modern Europe* (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988), p. 121.

1.2 Reverend John Welch [1590s]

Quite apart from his many prophecies, which ‘made the people begin to think Mr Welch was an oracle’, that he ‘walked with God, and kept close with him’, Welch won renown for raising the dead. He was living in France when a young Scottish gentleman fell ill and died in his house, at least ‘to the apprehension and sense of all spectators’. ... [After three days, the man’s friends] called doctors who ‘pinched him with pincers in the fleshy parts of his body and twisted a bow-string about his head with great force’. No signs of life being forthcoming, ‘the physicians pronounced him stark dead’, but Welch ‘fell down before the pallet and cried to the Lord with all his might for the last time ... till at length the dead youth opened his eyes and cried out to Mr Welch ...

To one ‘popish young gentleman’ who made fun of his godly discourse at a dinner party in Edinburgh castle, Welch announced, ‘observe the work of the Lord upon that profane mocker’ and ‘immediately [he] sank down and died beneath the table, but never returned to life again, to the great astonishment of the company’.²

2 Arguments that God exists

2.1 Miracles

John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 3:2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

2.2 Design

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 1:19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

²Mary Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (Yale University Press, 2002), p. 397.

3 What Hume means by “proof”

3.1

Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Footnote §6.

Mr. Locke divides all arguments into demonstrative and probable. In this view, we must say, that it is only probable all men must die, or that the sun will rise to-morrow. But to conform our language more to common use, we ought to divide arguments into *demonstrations*, *proofs*, and *probabilities*. By *proofs* meaning such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition.

3.2

Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* Book I Pt. 3 Sec. 11 Par. 2.

Those philosophers who have divided human reason into *knowledge* and *probability*, and have defined the first to be *that evidence which arises from the comparison of ideas*, are obliged to comprehend all our arguments from causes or effects under the general term of *probability*. But though every one be free to use his terms in what sense he pleases; and accordingly, in the precedent part of this discourse, I have followed this method of expression; it is however certain, that in common discourse we readily affirm, that many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be received as a superior kind of evidence. One would appear ridiculous who would say, that it is only probable the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must die; though it is plain we have no further assurance of these facts than what experience affords us. For this reason it would perhaps be more convenient, in order at once to preserve the common signification of words, and mark the several degrees of evidence, to distinguish human reason into three kinds, *viz. that from knowledge, from proofs, and from probabilities*. By knowledge, I mean the assurance arising from the comparison of ideas. By proofs, those arguments which are derived from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty. By probability, that evidence which is still attended with uncertainty. It is this last species of reasoning I proceed to examine.

3.3

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book 4, Ch. 15.

As demonstration is the showing the agreement or disagreement of two ideas, by the intervention of one or more proofs, which have a constant, immutable, and visible connexion one with another; so probability is nothing but the appearance of such an agreement or disagreement, by the intervention of proofs, whose connexion is not constant and immutable, or at least is not perceived to be so, but is, or appears for the most part to be so, and is enough to induce the mind to judge the proposition to be true or false, rather than the contrary. For example: In the demonstration of it a man perceives the certain immutable connexion there is of equality between the three angles of a triangle, and those intermediate ones which are made use of to show their equality to two right ones; ... And thus he has certain knowledge that it is so. But another man, who never took the pains to observe the demonstration, hearing a mathematician, a man of credit, affirm the three angles of a triangle to be equal to two right ones, assents to it, i.e. receives it for true. In which case the foundation of his assent is the probability of the thing, the proof being such as for the most part carries truth with it: The man, on whose testimony he receives it, not being wont to affirm any thing contrary to, or besides his knowledge, especially in matters of this kind.

man to say thus to God in a dying hour; "Lord, now the world leaves me, "I come to thee. I pray thee give me eternal life, who could never afford "to give thee one good day of my life: Grant that I may live with thee "and enjoy thee forever, who could never endure to think upon thee. I "must confess that I could never be persuaded to leave my sins out of love "to thee, but now I repent of them for fear of thee: I am conscious to my "self that I would never do any thing for thy sake, but yet I hope thy "goodness is such that thou wilt forgive all the ungodliness and unrighteous- "ness of my life, and accept of this forced submission which I now make "to thee. I pray thee do not at last frustrate and disappoint me in this de- "sign which I have laid, of sinning while I live and getting to Heaven "when I dye. Surely no man can think it fit to say thus to God; and yet I am afraid this is the true interpretation of many a man's repentance who hath deferred it till he comes to dye. I do not speak this to discourage repentance, even at that time. It is always the best thing we can do. But I would by all means discourage men from putting off so necessary a work till then. 'Tis true indeed when 'tis come to this and a sinner finds himself going out of the world, if he have been so foolish and so cruel to himself as to put things upon this last hazard, repentance is now the only thing that is left for him to do; this is his last remedy and the only refuge he has to fly to: And this is that which the Minister in this case ought by all means to put the man upon, and earnestly to persuade him to. But when we speak to men in other circumstances, that are well and in health, we dare not for all the world encourage them to venture their souls upon such an uncertainty. For to speak the best of it, it is a very dangerous remedy, especially when men have designedly contriv'd to rob God of the service of their best days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable sighs and tears at the hour of death. I desire to have as large apprehensions of the mercy of God as any man, but withal, I am very sure that he is the hardest to be imposed upon of any one in the world. And no man that hath any worthy apprehensions of the Deity can imagine him to be so easy, as to forgive men upon the least word and intimation of their minds, and to have such a fondness for offenders as would reflect upon the prudence of any Magistrate and Governor upon Earth. God grant that I may sincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life, and may have the comfort of that when I come to dye: And that I may never be so unwise as to venture all my hopes of a blessed eternity upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with those excellent sayings of the Son of Syrach (Eccclus. 5. 6, 7. 16, 11, 12. 18, 21, 22.) *Say not, God's mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins. For mercy and wrath is with him; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out displeasure: And as his mercy is great, so are his corrections also. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: For suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed. Humble thy self before thou be sick, and in the time of sins shew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be justified.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XI.

The Hazard of being Saved in the Church of Rome.

I C O R. III. 15.

But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

THE Context is thus. *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise Master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon: but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

In these words the Apostle speaks of a sort of persons, who held indeed the foundation of *Christianity*, but built upon it such *doctrines or practices* as would not bear the trial; which he expresses to us by *wood, hay, and stubble*, which are not proof against the *Fire*. Such a person, the Apostle tells us, hath brought himself into a very dangerous state, though he would not deny the possibility of his salvation; *He himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

That by *fire* here is not meant the fire of *Purgatory*, as some pretend (who would be glad of any shadow of a Text of Scripture to countenance their own dreams) I shall neither trouble you nor my self to manifest; since the *particle* of similitude [*ὡς*] plainly shews that the Apostle did not intend an escape out of the fire *literally*, but like to that which men make out of a House or Town that is on fire. Especially since very learned persons of the Church of *Rome* do acknowledge that *Purgatory* cannot be concluded from this *Text*, nay all that *Estius* contends for from this *place* is, that it cannot be concluded from hence that there is no *Purgatory*; which we never pretended, but only that this *Text* doth not prove it.

It is very well known that this is a Proverbial phrase used not only in Scripture, but in prophane Authors to signify a narrow escape out of a great danger. He shall be saved, yet so as by fire, *διὰ πυρός*, out of the fire. Just as *δι' ὕδατος* is used 1 Pet. 3. 20. where the Apostle speaking of the eight persons of *Noah's* family who escap'd the flood, *διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος*, they escap'd out of the water. So here this phrase is to be rendred in the *Text*, *he himself shall escape, yet so as out of the fire*. The like expression you have, *Amos* 4. 11. *I have pluck'd them as a firebrand out of the fire*. And *Jude* 23. *Others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire*. All which expressions signify the greatness of the danger and the difficulty of escaping it; as one who when his house at midnight is set on fire, and being suddenly wak'd leaps out of his bed, and was naked out of the doors, taking nothing that is within along with him, but

but employing his whole care to save his body from the flames, as S Chryostom upon another occasion expresseth it. And so the Roman Orator* (who it is likely did not think of Purgatory) useth this phrase; *Quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, manus effugit*; From which Judgment or Sentence he escaped naked, as it were out of a burning. And one of the Greek Orators † tells us, That to save a man out of the fire, was a common proverbial speech.

From the words thus explained, the Observation that naturally ariseth is this, That men may hold all the Fundamentals of Christian Religion, and yet may superadd other things whereby they may greatly endanger their salvation. What those things were which some among the Corinthians built upon the foundation of Christianity, whereby they endanger'd their Salvation, we may probably conjecture by what the Apostle reproves in this Epistle, as the tolerating of incestuous marriages, communicating in Idol Feasts, &c. And especially by the doctrine of the false Apostles, who at that time did so much disturb the peace of most Christian Churches, and who are so often and so severely reflected upon in this Epistle. And what their Doctrine was, we have an account, Acts 15. viz. that they imposed upon the Gentile Christians Circumcision, and the observation of the Jewish Law, teaching that unless they were circumcised, and kept the Law of Moses, they could not be saved. So that they did not only build these doctrines upon Christianity, but they made them equal with the Foundation, saying, that unless men believed and practis'd such things they could not be saved.

In speaking to this Observation, I shall reduce my discourse to these two Heads.

1. I shall present to you some Doctrines and Practices which have been built upon the Foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens salvation. And to be plain, I mean particularly the Church of Rome.
2. I shall enquire, whether our granting a possibility of salvation (tho with great hazard) to those in the communion of the Roman Church, and their denying it to us, be a reasonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himself to that Church.

And there is the more reason to consider these things, when so many seducing Spirits are so active and busy to pervert men from the truth; and when we see every day so many men and their Religion so easily parted. For this reason these two Considerations shall be the subject of the following discourse.

I. First, We will consider some Doctrines and Practices which the Church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens salvation. It is not denied by the most judicious Protestants, but that the Church of Rome do hold all the Articles of the Christian Faith which are necessary to salvation. But that which we charge upon them, as a just ground of our separation from them, is the imposing of new Doctrines and Practices upon Christians as necessary to salvation, which were never taught by our Saviour, or his Apostles; and which are either directly contrary to the Doctrine of Christianity, or too apparently destructive of a good life. And I begin,

1. With their Doctrines. And because I have no mind to aggravate lesser matters, I will single out four or five points of Doctrine, which they have added to the Christian Religion, and which were neither taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, nor own'd in the first Ages of Christianity. And the First which I shall mention, and which being once admitted makes way for as many errors as they please to bring in, is their Doctrine of Infallibility. And

And this they are very stiff and peremptory in, tho they are not agreed among themselves where this Infallibility is seated; whether in the Pope alone, or a Council alone, or in both together, or in the diffuse body of Christians. But they are sure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice against it? Can any man think that this privilege was at first conferred upon the Church of Rome, and that Christians in all Ages did believe it, and had constant recourse to it for determining their differences, and yet that that very Church which hath enjoyed and used it so long should now be at a loss where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there should be such differences among them about that which they pretend to be the only means of ending all differences.

There is not the least intimation in Scripture of this Privilege confer'd upon the Roman Church, nor do the Apostles, in all their Epistles, ever so much as give the least direction to Christians to appeal to the Bishop of Rome for a determination of the many differences which even in those times happen'd among them. And it is strange they should be so silent in this matter, when there were so many occasions to speak of it, if our Saviour had plainly appointed such an Infallible Judge of controversies for this very end to decide the differences that should happen among Christians. It is strange that the Ancient Fathers in their disputes with Heretics should never appeal to this Judge; nay, it is strange they should not constantly do it in all cases, it being so short and expedite a way for the ending of controversies. And this very consideration to a wife man is instead of a thousand arguments to satisfy him that in those times no such thing was believed in the world.

Now this Doctrine of Infallibility, if it be not true, is of so much the more pernicious consequence to Christianity, because the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it in all their other errors; and gives them a pretence of assuming an authority to themselves to impose their own fancies and mistakes upon the whole Christian world.

2. Their Doctrine about Repentance, which consists in confessing their sins to the Priest; which if it be but accompanied with any degree of contrition, does upon absolution received from the Priest put them into a state of salvation, tho they have lived the most lewd and debauch'd lives that can be imagin'd; than which nothing can be more plainly destructive of a good life. For if this be true, all the hazard that the most wicked man runs of his salvation is only the danger of so sudden a death as gives him no space for confession and absolution. A case that happens so rarely, that any man that is strongly addicted to his lusts will be content to venture his salvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very insignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remission of sins may be had upon such cheap terms.

3. The Doctrine of Purgatory; By which they mean an estate of temporary punishments after this life, from which men may be released and translated into Heaven by the prayers of the living, and the Sacrifice of the Mass. That this Doctrine was not known in the Primitive Church, nor can be proved from Scripture, we have the free acknowledgment of as learned and eminent men as any of that Church; which is to acknowledge that it is a superstructure upon the Christian Religion. And tho in one sense it be indeed a building of gold and silver upon the foundation of Christianity, considering the vast revenues which this Doctrine (and that of Indulgences, which depends upon it) brings into that Church; yet I doubt not, but in the Apostles sense, it will be found to be hay and stubble. But how groundless soever it be, it is too gainful a Doctrine to be easily parted withal.

4. *The Doctrine of Transubstantiation.* A hard word, but I would to God that were the worst of it; the *thing* is much more difficult. I have taken some pains to consider other Religions that have been in the world, and I must freely declare, that I never yet in any of them met with any Article or Proposition, imposed upon the belief of men, half so unreasonable and hard to be believed as this is: And yet this in the *Romish* Church is esteemed one of the most principal Articles of the Christian Faith; tho' there is no more certain foundation for it in Scripture, than for our Saviour's being substantially changed into all those things which are said of him, as that he is a *rock*, a *vine*, a *door*, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This Doctrine hath not only *no certain Foundation* in Scripture, but I have a far heavier charge against it, namely, that it undermines the very foundation of Christianity it self. And surely nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the *Christian Doctrine* which destroys the reason of our belief of the whole. And that this Doctrine does so, will appear evidently, if we consider what was the main argument which the Apostles used to convince the world of the *truth of Christianity*; and that was this, *That our blessed Saviour, the Author of this Doctrine, wrought such and such miracles, and particularly that he rose again from the dead.* And this they proved because they were eye-witnesses of his miracles, and had seen him and conversed with him after he was risen from the dead. But what if their senses did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied but that the main proof of Christianity falls to the ground.

Well! We will now suppose (as the Church of *Rome* does) *Transubstantiation* to have been one principal part of the Christian Doctrine which the Apostles preached. But if this Doctrine be true, then all mens senses are deceived in a plain sensible matter, wherein 'tis as hard for them to be deceived as in any thing in the world: For two things can hardly be imagin'd more different, than a *little bit* of wafer and the *whole body* of a man.

So that the Apostles persuading men to believe this Doctrine persuaded them not to trust their senses, and yet the argument which they used to persuade them to this was built upon the direct contrary principle, that *mens senses are to be trusted.* For if they be not, then notwithstanding all the evidence the Apostles offer'd for the resurrection of our Saviour, he might not be risen, and so the faith of Christians was vain. So that they represent the Apostles as absurd as is possible, *viz.* going about to persuade men out of their senses by virtue of an argument, the whole strength whereof depends upon the certainty of sense.

And now the matter is brought to a fair issue; If the testimony of *sense* be to be relied upon, then *Transubstantiation* is false; If it be not, then no man is sure that Christianity is true. For the utmost assurance that the Apostles had of the truth of Christianity was the testimony of their own senses concerning our Saviour's Miracles, and this testimony every man hath against *Transubstantiation.* From whence it plainly follows, that no man (no not the Apostles themselves) had more reason to believe *Christianity* to be true, than every man hath to believe *Transubstantiation* to be false. And we who did not see our Saviour's Miracles (as the Apostles did) and have only a credible relation of them, but do see the *Sacrament*, have less evidence of the *truth of Christianity* than of the *falsehood of Transubstantiation.*

But cannot God impose upon the senses of men, and represent things to them otherwise than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? Most certainly. But then we ought to be assured that he hath made such a Revelation; which *Assurance* no man can have, the certainty of sense being taken away.

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I shall press the business a little farther. Supposing the *Scripture* to be a *Divine Revelation*, and that these words (*This is my Body*) if they be in Scripture, must necessarily be taken in the strict and literal sense; I ask now, what greater evidence any man has that these words (*This is my Body*) are in the Bible, than every man has that the Bread is not chang'd in the Sacrament? Nay no man has so much; for we have only the evidence of *one* sense that these words are in the Bible, but that the Bread is not chang'd we have the concurring testimony of *several* of our senses. In a word, if this be once admitted that the *Senses* of all men are deceived in one of the most plain sensible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a *Divine Revelation* to men; nor is there any way to confute the grossest impostures in the world: For if the clear evidence of all mens senses be not sufficient for this purpose, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will instance but in one *Doctrine* more; And that shall be, their *Doctrine of deposing Kings* in case of Heresy, and absolving their Subjects from their Allegiance to them. And this is not a mere *speculative doctrine*, but hath been put in practice many a time by the Bishops of *Rome*, as every one knows that is vers'd in History. For the troubles and confusions which were occasion'd by this very thing make up a good part of the History of several Ages.

I hope no body expects that I should take the pains to shew that this was not the Doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles, nor of the Primitive Christians. The *Papists* are many of them so far from pretending this, that in some times and places, when it is not seasonable and for their purpose, we have much a-do to persuade them that ever it was their Doctrine. But if *Transubstantiation* be their Doctrine, *this* is; for they came both out of the same Forge, I mean the Council of *Lateran* under Pope *Innocent* the Third. And if (as they tell us) *Transubstantiation* was then establish'd so was *this*. And indeed one would think they were Twins and brought forth at the same time, they are so like one another, both of them so monstrously unreasonable.

II. I come now in the *second* place to consider some *Practices* of the Church of *Rome*, which I am afraid will prove as bad as her *Doctrines*. I shall instance in these five.

1. Their celebrating of their Divine service *in an unknown tongue.* And that not only contrary to the practice of the Primitive Church, and to the great end and design of Religious Worship, which is the edification of those who are concerned in it, (and it is hard to imagine how men can be edified by what they do not understand) but likewise in direct contradiction to *St. Paul*, who hath no less than a whole Chapter wherein he confutes this practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain that this practice was not condemned by *St. Paul*, or that it was allowed and used in the first Ages of Christianity, need not be ashamed to set up for the defence of any paradox in the World.

2. The Communion *in one kind.* And that notwithstanding that even by their own acknowledgment our Saviour instituted it in both kinds, and the Primitive Church administr'd it in both kinds. This I must acknowledge is *no addition* to Christianity but a *sacrilegious taking away* of an essential part of the Sacrament. For the *Cup* is as essential a part of the institution as the *Bread*; and they might as well, and by the same authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

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3. Their

3. Their worshipping of *Images*. Which practice (notwithstanding all their distinctions about it, which are no other but what the *Heathens* used in the same case) is as point-blank against the *second commandment*, as a *deliberate and malicious killing* of a man is against the *sixth*. But if the case be so plain, a man would think that at least the Teachers and Guides of that Church should be sensible of it. Why, they are so, and afraid the people should be so too, and therefore in their ordinary *Catechisms* and *Manuals* of Devotion they leave out the *second Commandment*, and divide the *tenth* into two to make up the number; lest if the common people should know it their Consciences should start at the doing of a thing so directly contrary to the plain command of God.

4. The worshipping of the *bread and wine* in the Eucharist, out of a false and groundless persuasion, that they are *substantially changed into the body and blood of Christ*. Which if it be not true (and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the most incredible things in the whole World) then by the confession of several of their own learned Writers, they are guilty of *gross Idolatry*.

5. The worship and invocation of *Saints* and *Angels*; and particularly of the Virgin *Mary*, which hath now for some Ages been a principal part of their Religion. Now a man may justly wonder that so considerable a part of Religion as they make this to be should have no manner of foundation in the Scripture. Does our Saviour any where speak one word concerning the worshipping of Her? Nay, does he not take all occasions to restrain all extravagant apprehensions and imaginations concerning honour due to Her, as foreseeing the degeneracy of the Church in this thing? When he was told that his Mother and Brethren were without; *Who* (says he) *are my mother and my brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother.* And when the Woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the blessed Mother of our Lord, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck!* Our Saviour diverts to another thing, *Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.* Does either our Saviour or his Apostles in all their particular Precepts and Directions concerning Prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to address our selves to God, give the least intimation of praying to the Virgin *Mary*, or making use of her Mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the practice of the Church from the beginning, our Saviour and his Apostles would have been so silent about so considerable a part of Religion; inasmuch that in all the Epistles of the Apostles I do not remember that her name is so much as once mentioned? And yet the worship of her is at this day in the Church of *Rome*, and hath been so for several Ages, a main part of their publick worship, yea and of their private devotions too; in which it is usual with them to say *ten Ave Marias* for *one Pater Noster*; that is, for one Prayer they make to Almighty God, they make ten addresses to the blessed Virgin; for that is the proportion observed in their *Rosaries*. He that considers *this*, and had never seen the *Bible*, would have been apt to think that there had been more said concerning Her in Scripture, than either concerning God, or our blessed Saviour; and that the New Testament were full from one end to the other of precepts and exhortations to the worshipping of Her; and yet when all is done, I challenge any man to shew me so much as one sentence in the whole Bible that founds that way. And there is as little in the Christian Writers of the first three hundred years. The truth is, *this practice* began to creep in among some superstitious people about the middle of the *fourth Century*: And I remember particularly,

that

that *Epiphanius* who lived about that time calls it the *Heresy of the Women*.

And thus I have given you some Instances of several *Doctrines* and *Practices* which the Church of *Rome* hath built upon the Foundation of *Christianity*. Much more might have been said of them, but from what hath been said any man may easily discern how dangerous they are to the salvation of men.

I proceed now in the Second place,

II. To consider, Whether our granting a *possibility of salvation*, though with great hazard, to those in the Communion of the *Roman Church*, and their denying it to us, be a sufficient argument and encouragement to any man to quit our Church and go to theirs. And there is the more need to consider this, because this is the great *popular argument* wherewith the *emissaries* and *agents* of that Church are wont to assault our people. *Your Church* (say they) *grants that a Papist may be saved; Ours denies that a Protestant can be saved; therefore it is safest to be of our Church, in which salvation by the acknowledgment of both sides is possible.*

For answer to this I shall endeavour to shew, that this is so far from being a *good argument* that it is so intolerably *weak* and *sophistical* that any considerate man ought to be ashamed to be catch'd by it. For either it is good of it self and sufficient to persuade a man to relinquish our Church, and to pass over to theirs, without entering into the merits of the cause on either side, and without comparing the *Doctrines* and *Practices* of both the Churches together, or it is not. If it be not sufficient of it self to persuade a man to leave our Church, without comparing the *Doctrines*, on both sides, then it is to no purpose, and there is nothing got by it. For if upon examination and comparing of *Doctrines* the one appear to be *true* and the other *false*, this alone is a sufficient inducement to any man to cleave to that Church where the true *Doctrine* is found; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be said that this argument is good in it self without the examination of the *Doctrines* of both Churches; this seems a very strange thing for any man to affirm, *That it is reason enough to a man to be of any Church, whatever her Doctrines and Practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, and if the Church that differs from her do but allow a possibility of salvation in her Communion.*

But they who use this *argument*, pretend that it is sufficient of it self; and therefore I shall apply my self to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable *weakness* and *insufficiency* of it to satisfy any man's conscience or prudence to change his Religion. And to this end I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies.

2. Give some *parallel instances* by which it will clearly appear that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded.

And

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

I. I shall shew the weakness of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies; And that is this, *That whatever different parties in Religion agree in, is safest to be chosen.* The true consequence of which *principle* if it be driven to the head, is to persuade men to forsake *Christianity*, and to make them take up in the principles of *natural Religion*, for in these all Religions do agree. For if this *principle* be true, and signify any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the several parties in Religion differ; because that only is safe and prudent to be chosen wherein all agree. So that this *argument*;

ument, if the foundation of it be good, will persuade farther than those who make use of it desire it should do; for it will not only make men forsake the *Protestant Religion*, but *Papery* too; and which is much more considerable, *Christianity* itself.

II. I will give some *parallel instances* by which it will clearly be seen that this *argument* concludes false. The *Donatists* denied the Baptism of the *Catholics* to be good, but the *Catholics* acknowledged the Baptism of the *Donatists* to be valid. So that both sides were agreed that the Baptism of the *Donatists* was good, therefore the safest way for *St. Austin* and other *Catholics* (according to this *argument*) was to be baptized again by the *Donatists*, because by the acknowledgment of both sides Baptism among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the Church of *Rome*. Several in that Church hold the *personal Infallibility of the Pope*, and the *lawfulness of deposing and killing Kings for Heresy* to be *de fide*, that is, necessary Articles of Faith, and consequently, that whoever does not believe them cannot be saved. But a great many *Papists* though they believe these things to be no matters of Faith, yet they think those that hold them may be saved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this *argument*, they ought all to be of their opinion in these points because both sides are agreed that *they that hold them may be saved*; but one side positively says that *men cannot be saved if they do not hold them*.

But my Text furnishes me with as good an instance to this purpose as can be desired. *St. Paul* here in the Text acknowledgeth the *possibility* of the *salvation of those who build hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity*; that they might be saved, tho' with great difficulty, and as it were out of the fire. But now among those builders with hay and stubble there were those who denied the possibility of *St. Paul's* salvation and of those who were of his mind. We are told of some who built the *Jewish Ceremonies* and observances upon the foundation of *Christianity*, and said that unless men were Circumcised and kept the Law of *Moses* they could not be saved. So that by this *argument* *St. Paul* and his followers ought to have gone over to those *Judaizing Christians*, because it was acknowledged on both sides that they might be saved. But these *Judaizing Christians* were as uncharitable to *St. Paul* and other *Christians*, as the Church of *Rome* is now to us, for they said positively that they could not be saved. But can any man think that *St. Paul* would have been moved by this *argument*, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The *argument* you see is the very same, and yet it concludes the wrong way; which plainly shews that it is a *contingent argument*, and concludes uncertainly and by chance, and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

III. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it. I shall mention but these two.

1. According to this *principle* it is always safest to be on the *uncharitable side*. And yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true *Christian*, or a true Church, as a man would wish. *Charity* is one of the most essential marks of *Christianity*, and what the *Apostle* saith of particular *Christians* is as true of whole Churches, that though they have all Faith, yet if they have not *Charity* they are nothing.

I grant that no *Charity* teacheth men to see others damned and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be considered that the dam-

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ing of men is a very hard thing, and therefore whenever we do it the case must be wonderfully plain. And is it so in this matter? They of the Church of *Rome* cannot deny but that we embrace all the *Doctrines* of our *Saviour* contain'd in the *Apostles Creed*, and determined by the four first *General Councils*; and yet they will not allow this and a good life to put us within a possibility of *Salvation*, because we will not submit to all the innovations they would impose upon us. And yet I think there is scarce any *Doctrine* or *Practice* in difference between them and us, which some or other of their most learned *Writers* have not acknowledged either not to be sufficiently contained in *Scripture*, or not to have been held and practised by the primitive Church; so that nothing can excuse their uncharitableness towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this *argument*, for they do what in them lies to make themselves no *Christians* that they may prove themselves the truer and more *Christian Church*. A *medium* which we do not desire to make use of.

2. If this *argument* were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error which another does not account damnable, whatever it be, provided he do but damn all those that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but *confidence* and *uncharitableness* to do this. But is there any sense, that another mans boldness and want of charity should be an argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illustrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful *Physician* and a *Mountebank*. A learned and a skilful *Physician* is modest, and speaks justly of things: he says, that such a method of cure which he hath directed is safe, and withal, that that which the *Mountebank* prescribes may possibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it; But the *Mountebank*, who never talks of any thing less than *Infallible cures*, (and always the more *Mountebank* the stronger pretence to *Infallibility*) he is positive that that method which the *Physician* prescribes will destroy the Patient, but his receipt is infallible and never fails. Is there any reason in this case, that this man shall carry it merely by his *confidence*? And yet if this *argument* be good, the safest way is to reject the *Physician's* advice and to stick to the *Mountebank's*. For both sides are agreed, that there is a possibility of cure in the *Mountebank's* method, but not in the *Physician's*; and so the whole force of the *argument* lies in the *confidence* of an ignorant man.

IV. This *argument* is very unfit to work upon those to whom it is proposed: For either they believe we say true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reason to be moved by what we say. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we say in this matter? Namely, that though it be possible for some in the *Communion of the Roman Church* to be saved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a safe condition already in our Church. And why then should a bare possibility, accompanied with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger?

Lastly, This *argument* is very improper to be urged by those who make use of it. Half of the strength of it lies in this, that we *Protestants* acknowledge that it is possible a *Papist* may be saved. But why should they lay any stress upon this? What matter is it what we *Hereticks* say, who are so damnably mistaken in all other things? Methinks if there were no other reason, yet because we say it, it should seem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive when it serves for their purpose we have some little credit and authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in some measure satisfied of the weakness of

of this argument, which is so transparent that no wise man can honestly use it, and he must have a very odd understanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a *casual and contingent argument*, and sometimes it concludes right, and oftner wrong; and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one case, when all things are so equal on both sides that there is nothing else in the whole world to determine him; which surely can never happen, in matters of Religion, necessary to be believed. No man is so weak, as not to consider in the change of his Religion the *merits* of the *cause it self*; as not to examine the *Doctrines* and *Practices* of the Churches on both sides; as not to take notice of the *confidence* and *Charity* of both Parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conscientious and a prudent man: And if upon enquiry there appear to be a clear advantage on either side, then this argument is needless and comes too late, because the work is already done without it.

Besides, that the great hazard of salvation in the *Roman Church* (which we declare upon account of the *Doctrines* and *Practices* which I have mentioned) ought to deter any man much more from that Religion, than the acknowledged possibility of salvation in it ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it; Never did any Christian Church build so much *hay* and *strubble* upon the foundation of Christianity, and therefore *those that are saved in it must be saved*, as it were, *out of the fire*. And tho' *Purgatory* be not meant in the Text, yet it is a Doctrine very well suited to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a fire to try their work what it is, and to *burn up their hay and strubble*. And I have so much Charity (and I desire always to have it) as to hope, that a great many among them who lived piously, and have been almost inevitably detain'd in that Church by the prejudice of education and an invincible ignorance, will upon a *general Repentance* find mercy with God; and *though their works suffer loss, and be burnt, yet they themselves may escape, as out of the fire*. But as for those who had the opportunities of coming to the knowledge of the truth, if they continue in the errors of that Church, or apostatize from the truth, I think their condition so far from being safe that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case to give a man hopes of their salvation.

I have now done with the *two things* I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry that the *necessary defence* of our Religion, against the *restless importunities* and *attempts* of our adversaries upon all sorts of persons, hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dispute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witnesses that I have constantly made it my business, in this great Preference and Assembly to plead against the *impieties* and *wickedness* of men, and have endeavoured by the best arguments I could think of to gain men over to a *firm belief* and *serious practice* of the main things of Religion. And I do assure you, I had much rather persuade any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Christians whatsoever. For I doubt not but *the belief of the ancient Creed*, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, *together with a good life, will certainly save a man*; and without this no man can have reasonable hopes of salvation, no not in an infallible Church, if there were any such to be found in the world.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent observer of the *genius* and humour of the several Sects and Professions in Religion; and upon the whole matter, I do in my conscience believe the Church of *England* to be the best constituted Church this day in the world; and that

as to the main, the *Doctrine*, and *Government*, and *Worship* of it, are excellently framed to make men *soberly Religious*: Securing men on the one hand, from the wild freaks of *Enthusiasm*; and on the other, from the gross follies of *Superstition*. And our Church hath this peculiar advantage above several Professions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and just subordination to the *civil Authority*, and hath always been untainted in its *Loyalty*.

And now shall every trifling consideration be sufficient to move a man to relinquish such a Church? There is no greater disparagement to a man's understanding, no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than rashly to change one's Religion. *Religion* is our greatest concernment of all other, and it is not every *little argument*, no nor a great noise about *infallibility*, nothing but very *plain* and *convincing evidence*, that should sway a man in this case. But they are utterly inexcusable who make a change of such concernment upon the insinuations of one side only, without ever hearing what can be said for the Church they were baptized and brought up in before they leave it. They that can yield thus easily to the impressions of every one that hath a design and interest to make *Profelytes*, may at this rate of discretion change their Religion twice a day, and instead of *morning* and *evening Prayer*, they may have a *morning* and *evening Religion*.

Therefore for God's sake, and for our own Souls sake, and for the sake of our Reputation let us consider and *show our selves men*; Let us not suffer our selves to be shaken and carried away with every wind. Let us not run our selves into danger when we may be safe. Let us stick to the *foundation of Religion*, the *Articles* of our *common belief*, and build upon them gold, and silver, and precious stones, I mean, the *virtues* and *actions* of a *good life*; and if we would do this, we should not be apt to set such a value upon *hay* and *strubble*. If we would sincerely endeavour to live *holy* and *virtuous lives*, we should not need to cast about for a Religion which may furnish us with easy and indirect ways to get to Heaven.

I will conclude all with the Apostle's Exhortation, *Wherefore my beloved brethren be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

Now the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.