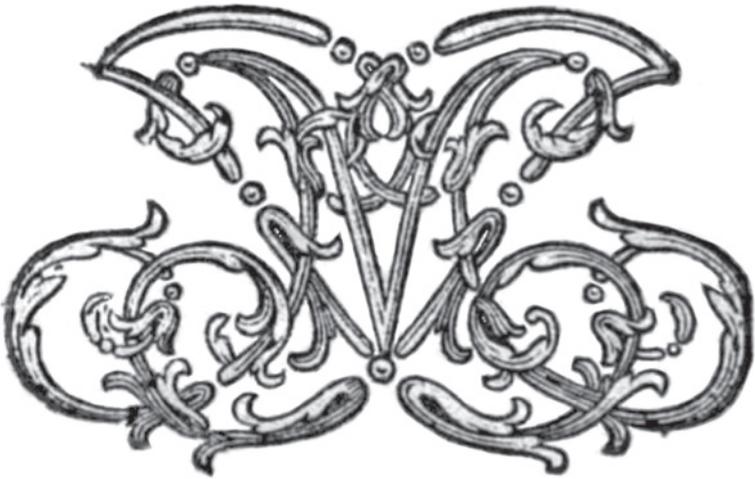


AN ARGUMENT  
AGAINST ABOLISHING  
CHRISTIANITY



JONATHAN SWIFT

(diverse sermons & pamphlets)

QUEBEC

Samizdat, below Cap-Rouge  
Year of the Lord, MMXIX



*An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity.* Jonathan Swift (1667-1745).  
Originally published 1708.

Source: (1898) *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, Vol. III* - Temple Scott editor.  
eBooks@Adelaide (University of Adelaide, South Australia 5005)

*On the Wisdom of this World*

Source: (1898) *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, Vol. IV* Chiswick Press (Project Gutenberg)

*On Sleeping in Church*

Source: (1898) *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, Vol. IV* Chiswick Press (Project Gutenberg)

Samizdat 2019

*Fonts:*

JSL Ancient [Jeffery Lee]

IM Fell English Roman and Italic [Igino Marini]

IM Fell Double Pica [Igino Marini]





# AN ARGUMENT AGAINST ABOLISHING CHRISTIANITY

*An argument to prove that the abolishing of Christianity in England may, as things now stand, be attended with some inconveniences, and perhaps not produce those many good effects proposed thereby.*



I AM very sensible what a weakness and presumption it is to reason against the general humour and disposition of the world. I remember it was with great justice, and a due regard to the freedom, both of the public and the press, forbidden upon several penalties to write, or discourse, or lay wagers against the — even before it was confirmed by Parliament; because that was looked upon as a design to oppose the current of the people, which, besides the folly of it, is a manifest breach of the fundamental law, that makes this majority of opinions the voice of God. In like manner, and for the very same reasons, it may perhaps be neither safe nor prudent to argue against the abolishing of Christianity, at a juncture when all parties seem so unanimously determined upon the point, as we cannot but allow from their actions, their discourses, and their writings. However, I know not how, whether from the affectation of singularity, or the perverseness of human nature, but so it unhappily falls out, that I cannot be entirely of this opinion. Nay, though I were sure an order were

issued for my immediate prosecution by the Attorney-General, I should still confess, that in the present posture of our affairs at home or abroad, I do not yet see the absolute necessity of extirpating the Christian religion from among us.

This perhaps may appear too great a paradox even for our wise and paradoxical age to endure; therefore I shall handle it with all tenderness, and with the utmost deference to that great and profound majority which is of another sentiment.

And yet the curious may please to observe, how much the genius of a nation is liable to alter in half an age. I have heard it affirmed for certain by some very odd people, that the contrary opinion was even in their memories as much in vogue as the other is now; and that a project for the abolishing of Christianity would then have appeared as singular, and been thought as absurd, as it would be at this time to write or discourse in its defence.

Therefore I freely own, that all appearances are against me. The system of the Gospel, after the fate of other systems, is generally antiquated and exploded, and the mass or body of the common people, among whom it seems to have had its latest credit, are now grown as much ashamed of it as their betters; opinions, like fashions, always descending from those of quality to the middle sort, and thence to the vulgar, where at length they are dropped and vanish.

But here I would not be mistaken, and must therefore be so bold as to borrow a distinction from the writers on the other side, when they make a difference betwixt nominal and real Trinitarians. I hope no reader imagines me so weak to stand up in the defence of real Christianity, such as used in primitive times (if we may believe the authors of those ages) to have an influence upon men's belief and actions. To offer at the restoring of that, would indeed be a wild project: it would be to dig up foundations; to destroy at one blow all the wit, and half the learning of the kingdom; to break the entire frame and constitution of things; to ruin trade, extinguish arts and sciences, with the professors of them; in short, to turn our courts, exchanges, and shops into deserts; and would be full as absurd as the proposal of Horace, where he advises the Romans, all in a body, to leave their city, and seek a new seat in some remote part of the world, by way of a cure for the corruption of their manners.

Therefore I think this caution was in itself altogether unnecessary (which I have inserted only to prevent all possibility of cavilling), since every candid reader will easily understand my discourse to be intended only in defence of nominal Christianity, the other having been for some time wholly laid aside by general consent, as utterly inconsistent with all our present schemes of wealth and power.

But why we should therefore cut off the name and title of Christians, although the general opinion and resolution be so violent for it, I confess I cannot (with submission) apprehend the consequence necessary. However, since the undertakers propose such wonderful advantages to the nation by this project, and advance many plausible objections against the system of Christianity, I shall briefly consider the strength of

both, fairly allow them their greatest weight, and offer such answers as I think most reasonable. After which I will beg leave to show what inconveniences may possibly happen by such an innovation, in the present posture of our affairs.

First, one great advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity is, that it would very much enlarge and establish liberty of conscience, that great bulwark of our nation, and of the Protestant religion, which is still too much limited by priestcraft, notwithstanding all the good intentions of the legislature, as we have lately found by a severe instance. For it is confidently reported, that two young gentlemen of real hopes, bright wit, and profound judgment, who, upon a thorough examination of causes and effects, and by the mere force of natural abilities, without the least tincture of learning, having made a discovery that there was no God, and generously communicating their thoughts for the good of the public, were some time ago, by an unparalleled severity, and upon I know not what obsolete law, broke for blasphemy. And as it has been wisely observed, if persecution once begins, no man alive knows how far it may reach, or where it will end.

In answer to all which, with deference to wiser judgments, I think this rather shows the necessity of a nominal religion among us. Great wits love to be free with the highest objects; and if they cannot be allowed a god to revile or renounce, they will speak evil of dignities, abuse the government, and reflect upon the ministry, which I am sure few will deny to be of much more pernicious consequence, according to the saying of Tiberius, *Deorum offensa diis curæ*'. As to the particular fact related, I think it is not fair to argue from one instance, perhaps another cannot be produced: yet (to the comfort of all those who may be apprehensive of persecution) blasphemy we know is freely spoke a million of times in every coffee-house and tavern, or wherever else good company meet. It must be allowed, indeed, that to break an English free-born officer only for blasphemy was, to speak the gentlest of such an action, a very high strain of absolute power. Little can be said in excuse for the general; perhaps he was afraid it might give offence to the allies, among whom, for aught we know, it may be the custom of the country to believe a God. But if he argued, as some have done, upon a mistaken principle, that an officer who is guilty of speaking blasphemy may, some time or other, proceed so far as to raise a mutiny, the consequence is by no means to be admitted: for surely the commander of an English army is like to be but ill obeyed whose soldiers fear and reverence him as little as they do a Deity.

It is further objected against the Gospel system that it obliges men to the belief of things too difficult for Freethinkers, and such who have shook off the prejudices that usually cling to a confined education. To which I answer, that men should be cautious how they raise objections which reflect upon the wisdom of the nation. Is not everybody freely allowed to believe whatever he pleases, and to publish his belief to the world whenever he thinks fit, especially if it serves to strengthen the party which is

1 - Editor's note: Roughly translated - *Only the gods should care about offenses against the gods.*

in the right? Would any indifferent foreigner, who should read the trumpery lately written by Asgil, Tindal, Toland, Coward, and forty more, imagine the Gospel to be our rule of faith, and to be confirmed by Parliaments? Does any man either believe, or say he believes, or desire to have it thought that he says he believes, one syllable of the matter? And is any man worse received upon that score, or does he find his want of nominal faith a disadvantage to him in the pursuit of any civil or military employment? What if there be an old dormant statute or two against him, are they not now obsolete, to a degree, that Empson and Dudley themselves, if they were now alive, would find it impossible to put them in execution?

It is likewise urged, that there are, by computation, in this kingdom, above ten thousand parsons, whose revenues, added to those of my lords the bishops, would suffice to maintain at least two hundred young gentlemen of wit and pleasure, and free-thinking, enemies to priestcraft, narrow principles, pedantry, and prejudices, who might be an ornament to the court and town: and then again, so a great number of able [bodied] divines might be a recruit to our fleet and armies. This indeed appears to be a consideration of some weight; but then, on the other side, several things deserve to be considered likewise: as, first, whether it may not be thought necessary that in certain tracts of country, like what we call parishes, there should be one man at least of abilities to read and write. Then it seems a wrong computation that the revenues of the Church throughout this island would be large enough to maintain two hundred young gentlemen, or even half that number, after the present refined way of living, that is, to allow each of them such a rent as, in the modern form of speech, would make them easy. But still there is in this project a greater mischief behind; and we ought to beware of the woman's folly, who killed the hen that every morning laid her a golden egg. For, pray what would become of the race of men in the next age, if we had nothing to trust to beside the scrofulous consumptive production furnished by our men of wit and pleasure, when, having squandered away their vigour, health, and estates, they are forced, by some disagreeable marriage, to piece up their broken fortunes, and entail rottenness and politeness on their posterity? Now, here are ten thousand persons reduced, by the wise regulations of Henry VIII, to the necessity of a low diet, and moderate exercise, who are the only great restorers of our breed, without which the nation would in an age or two become one great hospital.

Another advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity is the dear gain of one day in seven, which is now entirely lost, and consequently the kingdom one seventh less considerable in trade, business, and pleasure; besides the loss to the public of so many stately structures now in the hands of the clergy, which might be converted into play-houses, exchanges, market-houses, common dormitories, and other public edifices.

I hope I shall be forgiven a hard word if I call this a perfect cavil. I readily own there hath been an old custom, time out of mind, for people to assemble in the churches

every Sunday, and that shops are still frequently shut, in order, as it is conceived, to preserve the memory of that ancient practice; but how this can prove a hindrance to business or pleasure is hard to imagine. What if the men of pleasure are forced, one day in the week, to game at home instead of the chocolate-house? Are not the taverns and coffee-houses open? Can there be a more convenient season for taking a dose of physic? Is not that the chief day for traders to sum up the accounts of the week, and for lawyers to prepare their briefs? But I would fain know how it can be pretended that the churches are misapplied? Where are more appointments and rendezvouses of gallantry? Where more care to appear in the foremost box, with greater advantage of dress? Where more meetings for business? Where more bargains driven of all sorts? And where so many conveniences or incitements to sleep?

There is one advantage greater than any of the foregoing, proposed by the abolishing of Christianity, that it will utterly extinguish parties among us, by removing those factious distinctions of high and low church, of Whig and Tory, Presbyterian and Church of England, which are now so many mutual dogs upon public proceedings, and are apt to prefer the gratifying themselves or depressing their adversaries before the most important interest of the State.

I confess, if it were certain that so great an advantage would redound to the nation by this expedient, I would submit, and be silent; but will any man say, that if the words, whoring, drinking, cheating, lying, stealing, were, by Act of Parliament, ejected out of the English tongue and dictionaries, we should all awake next morning chaste and temperate, honest and just, and lovers of truth? Is this a fair consequence? Or if the physicians would forbid us to pronounce the words pox, gout, rheumatism, and stone, would that expedient serve like so many talismen to destroy the diseases themselves? Are party and faction rooted in men's hearts no deeper than phrases borrowed from religion, or founded upon no firmer principles? And is our language so poor that we cannot find other terms to express them? Are envy, pride, avarice, and ambition such ill nomenclators, that they cannot furnish appellations for their owners? Will not heydukes and mamalukes, mandarins and patshaws, or any other words formed at pleasure, serve to distinguish those who are in the ministry from others who would be in it if they could? What, for instance, is easier than to vary the form of speech, and instead of the word church, make it a question in politics, whether the monument be in danger? Because religion was nearest at hand to furnish a few convenient phrases, is our invention so barren we can find no other? Suppose, for argument sake, that the Tories favoured Margarita, the Whigs, Mrs. Tofts, and the Trimmers, Valentini, would not Margaritians, Toftians, and Valentinians be very tolerable marks of distinction? The Prasini and Veniti, two most virulent factions in Italy, began, if I remember right, by a distinction of colours in ribbons, which we might do with as good a grace about the dignity of the blue and the green, and serve

z - Editor's note: medecine.

as properly to divide the Court, the Parliament, and the kingdom between them, as any terms of art whatsoever, borrowed from religion. And therefore I think there is little force in this objection against Christianity, or prospect of so great an advantage as is proposed in the abolishing of it.

It is again objected, as a very absurd, ridiculous custom, that a set of men should be suffered, much less employed and hired, to bawl one day in seven against the lawfulness of those methods most in use towards the pursuit of greatness, riches, and pleasure, which are the constant practice of all men alive on the other six. But this objection is, I think, a little unworthy so refined an age as ours. Let us argue this matter calmly. I appeal to the breast of any polite Free-thinker, whether, in the pursuit of gratifying a pre-dominant passion, he hath not always felt a wonderful incitement, by reflecting it was a thing forbidden; and therefore we see, in order to cultivate this test, the wisdom of the nation hath taken special care that the ladies should be furnished with prohibited silks, and the men with prohibited wine. And indeed it were to be wished that some other prohibitions were promoted, in order to improve the pleasures of the town, which, for want of such expedients, begin already, as I am told, to flag and grow languid, giving way daily to cruel inroads from the spleen<sup>3</sup>.

'Tis likewise proposed, as a great advantage to the public, that if we once discard the system of the Gospel, all religion will of course be banished for ever, and consequently along with it those grievous prejudices of education which, under the names of conscience, honour, justice, and the like, are so apt to disturb the peace of human minds, and the notions whereof are so hard to be eradicated by right reason or free-thinking, sometimes during the whole course of our lives.

Here first I observe how difficult it is to get rid of a phrase which the world has once grown fond of, though the occasion that first produced it be entirely taken away. For some years past, if a man had but an ill-favoured nose, the deep thinkers of the age would, some way or other contrive to impute the cause to the prejudice of his education. From this fountain were said to be derived all our foolish notions of justice, piety, love of our country; all our opinions of God or a future state, heaven, hell, and the like; and there might formerly perhaps have been some pretence for this charge. But so effectual care hath been since taken to remove those prejudices, by an entire change in the methods of education, that (with honour I mention it to our polite innovators) the young gentlemen, who are now on the scene, seem to have not the least tincture left of those infusions, or string of those weeds, and by consequence the reason for abolishing nominal Christianity upon that pretext is wholly ceased.

For the rest, it may perhaps admit a controversy, whether the banishing all notions of religion whatsoever would be inconvenient for the vulgar. Not that I am in the least of opinion with those who hold religion to have been the invention of politicians, to keep the lower part of the world in awe by the fear of invisible powers; unless man-

3 - Editor's note: Irritation, bad temper.

kind were then very different from what it is now; for I look upon the mass or body of our people here in England to be as Freethinkers, that is to say, as staunch unbelievers, as any of the highest rank. But I conceive some scattered notions about a superior power to be of singular use for the common people, as furnishing excellent materials to keep children quiet when they grow peevish, and providing topics of amusement in a tedious winter night.

Lastly, it is proposed, as a singular advantage, that the abolishing of Christianity will very much contribute to the uniting of Protestants, by enlarging the terms of communion, so as to take in all sorts of Dissenters, who are now shut out of the pale upon account of a few ceremonies, which all sides confess to be things indifferent. That this alone will effectually answer the great ends of a scheme for comprehension, by opening a large noble gate, at which all bodies may enter; whereas the chaffering with Dissenters, and dodging about this or t'other ceremony, is but like opening a few wickets, and leaving them at jar, by which no more than one can get in at a time, and that not without stooping, and sideling, and squeezing his body.

To all this I answer, that there is one darling inclination of mankind which usually affects to be a retainer to religion, though she be neither its parent, its godmother, nor its friend. I mean the spirit of opposition, that lived long before Christianity, and can easily subsist without it. Let us, for instance, examine wherein the opposition of sectaries among us consists. We shall find Christianity to have no share in it at all. Does the Gospel anywhere prescribe a starched, squeezed countenance, a stiff formal gait, a singularity of manners and habit, or any affected forms and modes of speech different from the reasonable part of mankind?<sup>4</sup> Yet, if Christianity did not lend its name to stand in the gap, and to employ or divert these humours, they must of necessity be spent in contraventions to the laws of the land, and disturbance of the public peace. There is a portion of enthusiasm assigned to every nation, which, if it hath not proper objects to work on, will burst out, and set all into a flame. If the quiet of a State can be bought by only flinging men a few ceremonies to devour, it is a purchase no wise man would refuse. Let the mastiffs amuse themselves about a sheep's skin stuffed with hay, provided it will keep them from worrying the flock. The institution of convents abroad seems in one point a strain of great wisdom, there being few irregularities in human passions which may not have recourse to vent themselves in some of those orders, which are so many retreats for the speculative, the melancholy, the proud, the silent, the politic, and the morose, to spend themselves, and evaporate the noxious particles; for each of whom we in this island are forced to provide a several sect of religion to keep them quiet; and whenever Christianity shall be abolished, the Legislature must find some other expedient to employ and entertain them. For what imports it how large a gate you open, if there will be always left a number who place a pride and a merit in not coming in?

4 - Editor's note: Allusion to Puritains?

Having thus considered the most important objections against Christianity, and the chief advantages proposed by the abolishing thereof, I shall now, with equal deference and submission to wiser judgments, as before, proceed to mention a few inconveniences that may happen if the Gospel should be repealed, which, perhaps, the projectors may not have sufficiently considered.

And first, I am very sensible how much the gentlemen of wit and pleasure are apt to murmur, and be choked at the sight of so many daggled parsons that happen to fall in their way, and offend their eyes; but at the same time, these wise reformers do not consider what an advantage and felicity it is for great wits to be always provided with objects of scorn and contempt, in order to exercise and improve their talents, and divert their spleen from falling on each other, or on themselves, especially when all this may be done without the least imaginable danger to their persons.

And to urge another argument of a parallel nature: if Christianity were once abolished, how could the Freethinkers, the strong reasoners, and the men of profound learning be able to find another subject so calculated in all points whereon to display their abilities? What wonderful productions of wit should we be deprived of from those whose genius, by continual practice, hath been wholly turned upon raillery and invectives against religion, and would therefore never be able to shine or distinguish themselves upon any other subject? We are daily complaining of the great decline of wit among us, and would we take away the greatest, perhaps the only topic we have left? Who would ever have suspected Asgil for a wit, or Toland for a philosopher, if the inexhaustible stock of Christianity had not been at hand to provide them with materials? What other subject through all art or nature could have produced Tindal for a profound author, or furnished him with readers? It is the wise choice of the subject that alone adorns and distinguishes the writer. For had a hundred such pens as these been employed on the side of religion, they would have immediately sunk into silence and oblivion.

Nor do I think it wholly groundless, or my fears altogether imaginary, that the abolishing of Christianity may perhaps bring the Church in danger, or at least put the Senate to the trouble of another securing vote. I desire I may not be mistaken; I am far from presuming to affirm or think that the Church is in danger at present, or as things now stand; but we know not how soon it may be so when the Christian religion is repealed. As plausible as this project seems, there may be a dangerous design lurk under it. Nothing can be more notorious than that the Atheists, Deists, Socinians, Anti-Trinitarians, and other subdivisions of Freethinkers, are persons of little zeal for the present ecclesiastical establishment: their declared opinion is for repealing the sacramental test; they are very indifferent with regard to ceremonies; nor do they hold the *jus divinum*<sup>5</sup> of episcopacy: therefore they may be intended as one politic step towards altering the constitution of the Church established, and setting up Pres-

5 - Editor's note: *divine justice*.

bytery in the stead, which I leave to be further considered by those at the helm.

In the last place, I think nothing can be more plain, than that by this expedient we shall run into the evil we chiefly pretend to avoid; and that the abolishment of the Christian religion will be the readiest course we can take to introduce Popery. And I am the more inclined to this opinion because we know it has been the constant practice of the Jesuits to send over emissaries, with instructions to personate themselves members of the several prevailing sects amongst us. So it is recorded that they have at sundry times appeared in the guise of Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Independents, and Quakers, according as any of these were most in credit; so, since the fashion hath been taken up of exploding religion, the Popish missionaries have not been wanting to mix with the Freethinkers; among whom Toland, the great orator of the Anti-Christians, is an Irish priest, the son of an Irish priest; and the most learned and ingenious author of a book called the "Rights of the Christian Church," was in a proper juncture reconciled to the Romish faith, whose true son, as appears by a hundred passages in his treatise, he still continues. Perhaps I could add some others to the number; but the fact is beyond dispute, and the reasoning they proceed by is right: for supposing Christianity to be extinguished the people will never be at ease till they find out some other method of worship, which will as infallibly produce superstition as this will end in Popery.

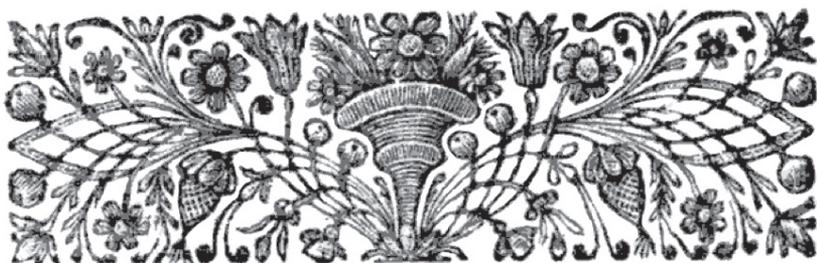
And therefore, if, notwithstanding all I have said, it still be thought necessary to have a Bill brought in for repealing Christianity, I would humbly offer an amendment, that instead of the word *Christianity* may be put *religion* in general, which I conceive will much better answer all the good ends proposed by the projectors of it. For as long as we leave in being a God and His Providence, with all the necessary consequences which curious and inquisitive men will be apt to draw from such promises, we do not strike at the root of the evil, though we should ever so effectually annihilate the present scheme of the Gospel; for of what use is freedom of thought if it will not produce freedom of action, which is the sole end, how remote soever in appearance, of all objections against Christianity? and therefore, the Freethinkers consider it as a sort of edifice, wherein all the parts have such a mutual dependence on each other, that if you happen to pull out one single nail, the whole fabric must fall to the ground. This was happily expressed by him who had heard of a text brought for proof of the Trinity, which in an ancient manuscript was differently read; he thereupon immediately took the hint, and by a sudden deduction of a long Sorites, most logically concluded: why, if it be as you say, I may safely drink on, and defy the parson. From which, and many the like instances easy to be produced, I think nothing can be more manifest than that the quarrel is not against any particular points of hard digestion in the Christian system, but against religion in general, which, by laying restraints on human nature, is supposed the great enemy to the freedom of thought and action.

Upon the whole, if it shall still be thought for the benefit of Church and State that

Christianity be abolished, I conceive, however, it may be more convenient to defer the execution to a time of peace, and not venture in this conjuncture to disoblige our allies, who, as it falls out, are all Christians, and many of them, by the prejudices of their education, so bigoted as to place a sort of pride in the appellation. If, upon being rejected by them, we are to trust to an alliance with the Turk, we shall find ourselves much deceived; for, as he is too remote, and generally engaged in war with the Persian emperor, so his people would be more scandalised at our infidelity than our Christian neighbours. For they are not only strict observers of religions worship, but what is worse, believe a God; which is more than is required of us, even while we preserve the name of Christians.

To conclude, whatever some may think of the great advantages to trade by this favourite scheme, I do very much apprehend that in six months' time after the Act is passed for the extirpation of the Gospel, the Bank and East India stock may fall at least one per cent. And since that is fifty times more than ever the wisdom of our age thought fit to venture for the preservation of Christianity, there is no reason we should be at so great a loss merely for the sake of destroying it.





## ON SLEEPING IN CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

*“And there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and while Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.” - Acts xx. 9.*



have chosen these words with design, if possible, to disturb some part in this audience of half an hour's sleep, for the convenience and exercise whereof this place, at this season of the day, is very much celebrated.

There is indeed one mortal disadvantage to which all preaching is subject, that those who, by the wickedness of their lives, stand in greatest need, have usually the smallest share; for either they are absent upon the account of idleness, or spleen, or hatred to religion, or in order to doze away the intemperance of the week; or, if they do come, they are sure to employ their minds rather any other way than regarding or attending to the business of the place.

The accident which happened to this young man in the text hath not been sufficient to discourage his successors; but because the preachers now in the world, however they may exceed St. Paul in the art of setting men to sleep, do extremely fall short of him in the working of miracles, therefore men are become so cautious as, to choose more safe and convenient stations and postures for taking their repose without hazard of their persons, and upon the whole matter choose rather to trust their destruction to a miracle than their safety. However, this being not the only way by which the lukewarm Christians and scorners of the age discover their neglect and contempt of preaching, I shall enter expressly into consideration of this matter, and order my discourse in the following method:

First, I shall produce several instances to show the great neglect of preaching now

<sup>1</sup> - Sermon published in 1776. Likely preached at St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

among us.

Secondly, I shall reckon up some of the usual quarrels men have against preaching.

Thirdly, I shall get forth the great evil of this neglect and contempt of preaching, and discover the real causes whence it proceedeth.

Lastly, I shall offer some remedies against this great and spreading evil.

First, I shall produce certain instances to show the great neglect of preaching now among us.

These may be reduced under two heads. First, men's absence from the service of the church; and secondly, their misbehaviour when they are here.

The first instance of men's neglect is in their frequent absence from the church.

There is no excuse so trivial that will not pass upon some men's consciences to excuse their attendance at the public worship of God. Some are so unfortunate as to be always indisposed on the Lord's day, and think nothing so unwholesome as the air of a church. Others have their affairs so oddly contrived as to be always unluckily prevented by business. With some it is a great mark of wit and deep understanding to stay at home on Sundays. Others again discover strange fits of laziness, that seize them particularly on that day, and confine them to their beds. Others are absent out of mere contempt of religion. And lastly, there are not a few who look upon it as a day of rest, and therefore claim the privilege of their cattle, to keep the Sabbath by eating, drinking, and sleeping, after the toil and labour of the week. Now in all this, the worst circumstance is that these persons are such whose company is most required, and who stand most in need of a physician.

Secondly, Men's great neglect and contempt of preaching appear by their misbehaviour when at church.

If the audience were to be ranked under several heads, according to their behaviour when the Word of God is delivered, how small a number would appear of those who receive it as they ought! How much of the seed then sown would be found to fall by the wayside, upon stony ground, or among thorns! and how little good ground would there be to take it! A preacher cannot look round from the pulpit without observing that some are in a perpetual whisper, and by their air and gesture give occasion to suspect that they are in those very minutes defaming their neighbour. Others have their eyes and imagination constantly engaged in such a circle of objects, perhaps to gratify the most unwarrantable desires, that they never once attend to the business of the place; the sound of the preacher's words do not so much as once interrupt them. Some have their minds wandering among idle, worldly, or vicious thoughts; some lie at catch to ridicule whatever they hear, and with much wit and humour, provide a stock of laughter by furnishing themselves from the pulpit.

But of all misbehaviour, none is comparable to that of those who come here to sleep. Opium is not so stupefying to many persons as an afternoon sermon. Perpetual custom hath so brought it about that the words of whatever preacher become only a

sort of uniform sound at a distance, than which nothing is more effectual to lull the senses. For that it is the very sound of the sermon which bindeth up their faculties is manifest from hence, because they all awake so very regularly as soon as it ceaseth, and with much devotion receive the blessing, dozed and besotted with indecencies I am ashamed to repeat.

I proceed, secondly, to reckon up some of the usual quarrels men have against preaching, and to show the unreasonableness of them.

Such unwarrantable behaviour as I have described among Christians in the house of God in a solemn assembly, while their faith and duty are explained and delivered, have put those who are guilty upon inventing some excuses to extenuate their fault; this they do by turning the blame either upon the particular preacher or upon preaching in general. First, they object against the particular preacher: his manner, his delivery, his voice, are disagreeable; his style and expression are flat and slow, sometimes improper and absurd; the matter is heavy, trivial, and insipid, sometimes despicable and perfectly ridiculous; or else, on the other side, he runs up into unintelligible speculation, empty notions, and abstracted flights, all clad in words above usual understandings.

Secondly, They object against preaching in general. It is a perfect road of talk; they know already whatever can be said; they have heard the same a hundred times over. They quarrel that preachers do not relieve an old beaten subject with wit and invention, and that now the art is lost of moving men's passions, so common among the ancient orators of Greece and Rome. These and the like objections are frequently in the mouths of men who despise the foolishness of preaching. But let us examine the reasonableness of them.

The doctrine delivered by all preachers is the same: "So we preach, and so ye believe." But the manner of delivering is suited to the skill and abilities of each, which differ in preachers just as in the rest of mankind. However, in personal dislikes of a particular preacher, are these men sure they are always in the right? Do they consider how mixed a thing is every audience, whose taste and judgment differ, perhaps, every day, not only from each other, but themselves? And how to calculate a discourse that shall exactly suit them all, is beyond the force and reach of human reason, knowledge, or invention. Wit and eloquence are shining qualities that God hath imparted in great degrees to very few, nor any more to be expected in the generality of any rank among men than riches and honour. But further, if preaching in general be all old and beaten, and that they are already so well acquainted with it, more shame and guilt to them who so little edify by it! But these men, whose ears are so delicate as not to endure a plain discourse of religion, who expect a constant supply of wit and eloquence on a subject handled so many thousand times, what will they say when we turn the objection upon themselves, who, with all the rude and profane liberty of discourse they take upon so many thousand subjects, are so dull as to furnish nothing but tedious repetitions, and

little paltry, nauseous commonplaces, so vulgar, so worn, or so obvious, as, upon any other occasion but that of advancing vice, would be hooted off the stage? Nor, lastly, are preachers justly blamed for neglecting human oratory to move the passions, which is not the business of a Christian orator, whose office it is only to work upon faith and reason. All other eloquence hath been a perfect cheat, to stir up men's passions against truth and justice for the service of a faction, to put false colours upon things, and, by an amusement of agreeable words, make the worst reason appear to be the better. This is certainly not to be allowed in Christian eloquence, and therefore St. Paul took quite the other course. He "came not with the excellency of words, or enticing speech of men's wisdom, but in plain evidence of the Spirit and power." And perhaps it was for that reason the young man Eutychus, used to the Grecian eloquence, grew tired and fell so fast asleep.

I go on, thirdly, to set forth the great evil of this neglect and scorn of preaching, and to discover the real causes whence it proceedeth.

I think it is obvious that this neglect of preaching hath very much occasioned the great decay of religion among us. To this may be imputed no small part of that contempt some men bestow on the dergy, for whoever talketh without being regarded is sure to be despised. To this we owe in a great measure the spreading of atheism and infidelity among us, for religion, like all other things, is soonest put out of countenance by being ridiculed. The scorn of preaching might perhaps have been at first introduced by men of nice ears and refined taste, but it is now become a spreading evil through all degrees and both sexes; for, since sleeping, talking, and laughing are qualities sufficient to furnish out a critic, the meanest and most ignorant have set up a title, and succeeded in it as well as their betters. Thus are the last efforts of reforming mankind rendered wholly useless. "How shall they hear," saith the Apostle, "without a preacher?" But if they have a preacher, and make it a point of wit or breeding not to hear him, what remedy is left? To this neglect of preaching we may also entirely impute that gross ignorance among us in the very principles of religion, which it is amazing to find in persons who very much value their own knowledge and understanding in other things; yet it is a visible, inexcusable ignorance, even in the meanest among us, considering the many advantages they have of learning their duty. And it hath been the great encouragement to all manner of vice; for in vain we preach down sin to a people "whose hearts are waxed gross, whose ears are dull of hearing and whose eyes are dosed." Therefore Christ Himself in His discourses frequently rouseth up the attention of the multitude, and of His disciples themselves, with this expression, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." But among all neglects of preaching, none is so fatal as that of sleeping in the house of God. A scorner may listen to truth and reason, and in time grow serious; an unbeliever may feel the pangs of a guilty conscience; one whose thoughts or eyes wander among other objects may, by a lucky word, be called back to attention; but the sleeper shuts up all avenues to his soul; he is "like the deaf ad-

der, that hearkeneth not to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely;" and we may preach with as good success to the grave that is under his feet.

But the great evil of this neglect will further yet appear from considering the real causes whence it proceedeth, whereof the first I take to be an evil conscience. Many men come to church to save or gain a reputation, or because they will not be singular, but comply with an established custom, yet all the while they are loaded with the guilt of old rooted sins. These men can expect to hear of nothing but terrors and threatenings, their sins laid open in true colours, and eternal misery the reward of them; therefore, no wonder they stop their care and divert their thoughts, and seek any amusement rather than stir the hell within them.

Another cause of this neglect is a heart set upon worldly things. Men whose minds are much enslaved to earthly affairs all the week cannot disengage or break the chain of their thoughts so suddenly as to apply to a discourse that is wholly foreign to what they have most at heart. Tell a usurer of charity, and mercy, and restitution - you talk to the deaf; his heart and soul, with all his senses, are got among his bags, or he is gravely asleep and dreaming of a mortgage. Tell a man of business, that the cares of the world choke the good seed; that we must not encumber ourselves with much serving; that the salvation of his soul is the one thing necessary; you see, indeed, the shape of a man before you, but his faculties are all gone off among clients and papers, thinking how to defend a bad cause or find flaws in a good one; or he weareth out the time in drowsy nods.

A third cause of the great neglect and scorn of preaching ariseth from the practice of men who set up to decry and disparage religion; these, being zealous to promote infidelity and vice, learn a rote of buffoonery that serveth all occasions, and refutes the strongest arguments for piety and good manners. These have a set of ridicule calculated for all sermons and all preachers, and can be extremely witty as often as they please upon the same fund.

Let me now, in the last place, offer some remedies against this great evil.

It will be one remedy against the contempt of preaching rightly to consider the end for which it was designed. There are many who place abundance of merit in going to church, although it be with no other prospect but that of being well entertained, wherein if they happen to fail, they return wholly disappointed. Hence it is become an impertinent vein among people of all sorts to hunt after what they call a good sermon, as if it were a matter of pastime and diversion. Our business, alas! is quite another thing; either to learn, or at least be reminded of, our duty; to apply the doctrines delivered, compare the rules we hear with our lives and actions, and find wherein we have transgressed. These are the dispositions men should bring into the house of God, and then they will be little concerned about the preacher's wit or eloquence, nor be curious to inquire out his faults and infirmities, but consider how to correct their own.

Another remedy against the contempt of preaching is that men would consider whether it be not reasonable to give more allowance for the different abilities of preachers than they usually do. Refinements of style and flights of wit, as they are not properly the business of any preacher, so they cannot possibly be the talents of all. In most other discourses, men are satisfied with sober sense and plain reason; and, as understandings usually go, even that is not over-frequent. Then why they should be so over-nice in expectation of eloquence, where it is neither necessary nor convenient, is hard to imagine.

Lastly, The scornors of preaching would do well to consider that this talent of ridicule they value so much is a perfection very easily acquired, and applied to all things whatsoever; neither is anything at all the worse because it is capable of being perverted to burlesque; perhaps it may be the more perfect upon that score, since we know the most celebrated pieces have been thus treated with greatest success. It is in any man's power to suppose a fool's-cap on the wisest head, and then laugh at his own supposition. I think there are not many things cheaper than supposing and laughing; and if the uniting these two talents can bring a thing into contempt, it is hard to know where it may end.

To conclude: These considerations may perhaps have some effect while men are awake; but what arguments shall we use to the sleeper? What methods shall we take to hold open his eyes? Will he be moved by considerations of common civility? We know it is reckoned a point of very bad manners to sleep in private company, when, perhaps, the tedious impertinence of many talkers would render it at least as excusable as the dullest sermon. Do they think it a small thing to watch four hours at a play, where all virtue and religion are openly reviled; and can they not watch one half hour to hear them defended? Is this to deal like a judge (I mean like a good judge), to listen on one side of the cause and sleep on the other? I shall add but one word more. That this indecent sloth is very much owing to that luxury and excess men usually practise upon this day, by which half the service thereof is turned to sin; men dividing their time between God and their bellies, when, after a gluttonous meal, their senses dozed and stupefied, they retire to God's house to sleep out the afternoon. Surely, brethren, these things ought not so to be.

“He that hath ears to hear let him hear.” And God give us all, grace to hear and receive His Holy Word to the salvation of our own souls.





## ON THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD'

*"The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." - I Cor. iii. 19.*



It is remarkable that about the time of our Saviour's coming into the world all kinds of learning flourished to a very great degree, insomuch that nothing is more frequent in the mouths of many men, even such who pretend to read and to know, than an extravagant praise and opinion of the wisdom and virtue of the

Gentile sages of those days, and likewise of those ancient philosophers who went before them, whose doctrines are left upon record, either by themselves or other writers. As far as this may be taken for granted, it may be said that the providence of God brought this about for several very wise ends and purposes; for it is certain that these philosophers had been a long time before searching out where to fix the true happiness of man; and not being able to agree upon any certainty about it, they could not possibly but conclude, if they judged impartially, that all their inquiries were in the end but vain and fruitless, the consequence of which must be not only an acknowledgment of the weakness of all human wisdom, but likewise an open passage hereby made for letting in those beams of light which the glorious sunshine of the Gospel then brought into the world, by revealing those hidden truths which they had so long before been labouring to discover, and fixing the general happiness of mankind beyond all controversy and dispute. And therefore the providence of God wisely suffered men of deep genius and learning then to arise, who should search into the truth of the Gospel now made known, and canvass its doctrines with all the subtilty and knowledge they were masters of, and in the end freely acknowledge that to be the true wisdom only "which cometh from above."

1 - Editor's note: a sermon, preached in 1726.

However, to make a further inquiry into the truth of this observation, I doubt not but there is reason to think that a great many of those encomiums given to ancient philosophers are taken upon trust, and by a sort of men who are not very likely to be at the pains of an inquiry that would employ so much time and thinking. For the usual ends why men affect this kind of discourse appear generally to be either out of ostentation, that they may pass upon the world for persons of great knowledge and observation, or, what is worse, there are some who highly exalt the wisdom of those Gentile sages, thereby obliquely to glance at and traduce<sup>2</sup> Divine revelation, and more especially that of the Gospel; for the consequence they would have us draw is this: that since those ancient philosophers rose to a greater pitch of wisdom and virtue than was ever known among Christians, and all this purely upon the strength of their own reason and liberty of thinking; therefore it must follow that either all revelation is false, or, what is worse, that it has depraved the nature of man, and left him worse than it found him.

But this high opinion of heathen wisdom is not very ancient in the world, nor at all countenanced from primitive times. Our Saviour had but a low esteem of it, as appears by His treatment of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who followed the doctrines of Plato and Epicurus. St. Paul likewise, who was well versed in all the Grecian literature, seems very much to despise their philosophy, as we find in his writings, cautioning the Colossians to “beware lest any man spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit;” and in another place he advises Timothy to “avoid profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called;” that is, not to introduce into the Christian doctrine the janglings of those vain philosophers, which they would pass upon the world for science. And the reasons he gives are, first, that those who professed them did err concerning the faith; secondly, because the knowledge of them did increase ungodliness, vain babblings being otherwise expounded vanities or empty sounds; that is, tedious disputes about words, which the philosophers were always so full of, and which were the natural product of disputes and dissensions between several sects.

Neither had the primitive fathers any great or good opinion of the heathen philosophy, as is manifest from several passages in their writings; so that this vein of affecting to raise the reputation of those sages so high is a mode and a vice but of yesterday, assumed chiefly, as I have said, to disparage revealed knowledge and the consequences of it among us.

Now, because this is a prejudice which may prevail with some persons so far as to lessen the influence of the Gospel, and whereas, therefore, this is an opinion which men of education are likely to be encountered with when they have produced themselves into the world, I shall endeavour to show that their preference of heathen wisdom and virtue before that of the Christian is every way unjust, and grounded upon

2 - Editor's note: to defame, slander or misrepresent.

ignorance or mistake; in order to which I shall consider four things:-

First, I shall produce certain points wherein the wisdom and virtue of all unrevealed philosophy in general fell short and was very imperfect.

Secondly, I shall show, in several instances, where some of the most renowned philosophers have been grossly defective in their lessons of morality.

Thirdly, I shall prove the perfection of Christian wisdom from the proper characters and marks of it.

Lastly, I shall show that the great examples of wisdom and virtue among the heathen wise men were produced by personal merit, and not influenced by the doctrine of any sect; whereas, in Christianity, it is quite the contrary.

First, I shall produce certain points wherein the wisdom and virtue of all unrevealed philosophy in general fell short and was very imperfect.

My design is to persuade men that Christian philosophy is in all things preferable to heathen wisdom; from which, or its professors, I shall, however, have no occasion to detract. They were as wise and as good as it was possible for them to be under such disadvantages, and would have probably been infinitely more so with such aids as we enjoy; but our lessons are certainly much better, however our practices may fall short.

The first point I shall mention is that universal defect which was in all their schemes, that they could not agree about their chief good, or wherein to place the happiness of mankind; nor had any of them a tolerable answer upon this difficulty to satisfy a reasonable person. For to say, as the most plausible of them did, "That happiness consisted in virtue," was but vain babbling, and a mere sound of words to amuse others and themselves; because they were not agreed what this virtue was or wherein it did consist; and likewise, because several among the best of them taught quite different things, placing happiness in health or good fortune, in riches or in honour, where all were agreed that virtue was not, as I shall have occasion to show when I speak of their particular tenets.

The second great defect in the Gentile philosophy was that it wanted some suitable reward proportioned to the better part of man - his mind, as an encouragement for his progress in virtue. The difficulties they met with upon the score of this default were great, and not to be accounted for; bodily goods, being only suitable to bodily wants, are no rest at all for the mind; and if they were, yet are they not the proper fruits of wisdom and virtue, being equally attainable by the ignorant and wicked. Now human nature is so constituted that we can never pursue anything heartily but upon hopes of a reward. If we run a race, it is in expectation of a prize; and the greater the prize the faster we run; for an incorruptible crown, if we understand it and believe it to be such, more than a corruptible one. But some of the philosophers gave all this quite another turn, and pretended to refine so far as to call virtue its own reward, and worthy to be followed only for itself; whereas, if there be anything in this more than the sound of the words, it is at least too abstracted to become a universal influ-

encing principle in the world, and therefore could not be of general use.

It was the want of assigning some happiness proportioned to the soul of man that caused many of them, either on the one hand, to be sour and morose, supercilious and untreatable, or, on the other, to fall into the vulgar pursuits of common men, to hunt after greatness and riches, to make their court and to serve occasions, as Plato did to the younger Dionysius, and Aristotle to Alexander the Great. So impossible it is for a man who looks no further than the present world to fix himself long in a contemplation where the present world has no part; he has no sure hold, no firm footing; he can never expect to remove the earth he rests upon while he has no support besides for his feet, but wants, like Archimedes, some other place whereon to stand. To talk of bearing pain and grief without any sort of present or future hope cannot be purely greatness of spirit; there must be a mixture in it of affectation and an alloy of pride, or perhaps is wholly counterfeit.

It is true there has been all along in the world a notion of rewards and punishments in another life, but it seems to have rather served as an entertainment to poets or as a terror of children than a settled principle by which men pretended to govern any of their actions. The last celebrated words of Socrates, a little before his death, do not seem to reckon or build much upon any such opinion; and Caesar made no scruple to disown it and ridicule it in open senate.

Thirdly, the greatest and wisest of all their philosophers were never able to give any satisfaction to others and themselves in their notions of a deity. They were often extremely gross and absurd in their conceptions, and those who made the fairest conjectures are such as were generally allowed by the learned to have seen the system of Moses, if I may so call it, who was in great reputation at that time in the heathen world, as we find by Diodorus, Justin, Longinus, and other authors; for the rest, the wisest among them laid aside all notions after a deity as a disquisition vain and fruitless, which indeed it was upon unrevealed principles; and those who ventured to engage too far fell into incoherence and confusion.

Fourthly, Those among them who had the justest conceptions of a Divine power, and did also admit a providence, had no notion at all of entirely relying and depending upon either; they trusted in themselves for all things, but as for a trust or dependence upon God, they would not have understood the phrase; it made no part of the profane style.

Therefore it was that, in all issues and events which they could not reconcile to their own sentiments of reason and justice, they were quite disconcerted; they had no retreat, but upon every blow of adverse fortune, either affected to be indifferent, or

grew sullen and severe, or else yielded and sunk like other men<sup>3</sup>.

Having now produced certain points wherein the wisdom and virtue of all unrevealed philosophy fell short and was very imperfect, I go on, in the second place, to show, in several instances, where some of the most renowned philosophers have been grossly defective in their lessons of morality.

Thales, the founder of the Ionic sect, so celebrated for morality, being asked how a man might bear ill-fortune with greatest ease, answered, "By seeing his enemies in a worse condition." An answer truly barbarous, unworthy of human nature, and which included such consequences as must destroy all society from the world.

Solon lamenting the death of a son, one told him, "You lament in vain." "Therefore," said he, "I lament, because it is in vain." This was a plain confession how imperfect all his philosophy was, and that something was still wanting. He owned that all his wisdom and morals were useless, and this upon one of the most frequent accidents in life. How much better could he have learned to support himself even from David, by his entire dependence upon God, and that before our Saviour had advanced the notions of religion to the height and perfection wherewith He hath instructed His disciples!

Plato himself, with all his refinements, placed happiness in wisdom, health, good fortune, honour, and riches, and held that they who enjoyed all these were perfectly happy; which opinion was indeed unworthy its owner, leaving the wise and good man wholly at the mercy of uncertain chance, and to be miserable without resource.

His scholar Aristotle fell more grossly into the same notion, and plainly affirmed, "That virtue, without the goods of fortune, was not sufficient for happiness, but that

3 - Editor's note: In his letters, the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman senator Pliny the younger discussed suicide among his contemporaries. While reading Pliny, there are revealing parallels between the attitudes of Roman pagan civilization and those in the postmodern West. Clearly attitudes in the postmodern West are now quite close to those of Roman paganism. But there remains a significant difference between these two civilizations. In the Roman Empire, as in our time, suicide was justified by the pretext that it makes it possible to shorten suffering. Among Romans suicide was also justified when an individual suffered great social humiliation, but in all cases the initiative of suicide rests **ONLY** with the individual. No one imposes it. But in the West of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the State is **VERY** involved in this issue, particularly because in most Western countries the State controls health care, while among the Romans the State held no interest in such matters. Among the Romans, health care was totally under the administration of the family. And among doctors of ancient times, the Hippocratic oath was an obstacle to the temptation of euthanasia. Today the Hippocratic oath is little more than a historical footnote, a dead letter... In the postmodern West this protection no longer exists as our postmodern elites are hard at work to eliminate any trace of Judeo-Christian influence in Western civilisation. And since the State now controls health care and the Hippocratic oath is obsolete, those who control the State are free to impose suicide on those deemed *not deserving to live*. Today doctors and nurses are both health care providers and executioners...

a wise man must be miserable in poverty and sickness." Nay, Diogenes himself, from whose pride and singularity one would have looked for other notions, delivered it as his opinion, "That a poor old man was the most miserable thing in life."

Zeno also and his followers fell into many absurdities, among which nothing could be greater than that of maintaining all crimes to be equal; which, instead of making vice hateful, rendered it as a thing indifferent and familiar to all men.

Lastly, Epicurus had no notion of justice but as it was profitable; and his placing happiness in pleasure, with all the advantages he could expound it by, was liable to very great exception; for although he taught that pleasure did consist in virtue, yet he did not any way fix or ascertain the boundaries of virtue, as he ought to have done; by which means he misled his followers into the greatest vices, making their names to become odious and scandalous even in the heathen world.

I have produced these few instances from a great many others to show the imperfection of heathen philosophy, wherein I have confined myself wholly to their morality. And surely we may pronounce upon it, in the words of St. James, that "This wisdom descended not from above, but was earthly and sensual." What if I had produced their absurd notions about God and the soul? It would then have completed the character given it by that Apostle, and appeared to have been devilish too. But it is easy to observe from the nature of these few particulars that their defects in morals were purely the flagging and fainting of the mind for want of a support by revelation from God.

I proceed, therefore, in the third place, to show the perfection of Christian wisdom from above; and I shall endeavour to make it appear from those proper characters and marks of it by the Apostle before mentioned, in the third chapter, and 15th, 16th, and 17th verses.

The words run thus -

*"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.*

*"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

*"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."*

"The wisdom from above is first pure." This purity of the mind and spirit is peculiar to the Gospel. Our Saviour says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." A mind free from all pollution of lusts shall have a daily vision of God, whereof unrevealed religion<sup>4</sup> can form no notion. This is it that keeps us unspotted from the world, and hereby many have been prevailed upon to live in the practice of all purity, holiness, and righteousness, far beyond the examples of the most cel-

4 - Editor's note: or philosophy...

ebred philosophers.

It is "peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated." The Christian doctrine teacheth us all those dispositions that make us affable and courteous, gentle and kind, without any morose leaven of pride or vanity, which entered into the composition of most heathen schemes: so we are taught to be meek and lowly. Our Saviour's last legacy was peace, and He commands us to forgive our offending brother unto seventy times seven. Christian wisdom is full of mercy and good works, teaching the height of all moral virtues, of which the heathens fell infinitely short. Plato indeed (and it is worth observing) has somewhere a dialogue, or part of one, about forgiving our enemies, which was perhaps the highest strain ever reached by man without Divine assistance; yet how little is that to what our Saviour commands us, "To love them that hate us, to bless them that curse us, and to do good to them that despitefully use us."

Christian wisdom is "without partiality;" it is not calculated for this or that nation of people, but the whole race of mankind. Not so the philosophical schemes, which were narrow and confined, adapted to their peculiar towns, governments, or sects; but "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him."

Lastly, It is "without hypocrisy;" it appears to be what it really is; it is all of a piece. By the doctrines of the Gospel we are so far from being allowed to publish to the world those virtues we have not, that we are commanded to hide even from ourselves those we really have, and not to let our right hand know what our left hand does, unlike several branches of the heathen wisdom, which pretended to teach insensibility and indifference, magnanimity and contempt of life, while at the same time, in other parts, it belied its own doctrines.

I come now, in the last place, to show that the great examples of wisdom and virtue among the Grecian sages were produced by personal merit; and not influenced by the doctrine of any particular sect, whereas in Christianity it is quite the contrary.

The two virtues most celebrated by ancient moralists were fortitude and temperance, as relating to the government of man in his private capacity, to which their schemes were generally addressed and confined, and the two instances wherein those virtues arrived at the greatest height were Socrates and Cato. But neither these, nor any other virtues possessed by these two, were at all owing to any lessons or doctrines of a sect. For Socrates himself was of none at all; and although Cato was called a Stoic, it was more from a resemblance of manners in his worst qualities, than that he avowed himself one of their disciples. The same may be affirmed of many other great men of antiquity. Whence I infer that those who were renowned for virtue among them were more obliged to the good natural dispositions of their own minds than to the doctrines of any sect they pretended to follow.

On the other side, as the examples of fortitude and patience among the primitive Christians have been infinitely greater, and more numerous, so they were altogether

the product of their principles and doctrine, and were such as the same persons, without those aids, would never have arrived to. Of this truth most of the Apostles<sup>5</sup>, with many thousand martyrs, are a cloud of witnesses beyond exception. Having, therefore, spoken so largely upon the former heads, I shall dwell no longer upon this.

And if it should here be objected, Why does not Christianity still produce the same effects? it is easy to answer, first, that, although the number of pretended Christians be great, yet that of true believers, in proportion to the other, was never so small; and it is a true lively faith alone that, by the assistance of God's grace, can influence our practice.

Secondly, We may answer that Christianity itself has very much suffered by being blended up with Gentile philosophy. The Platonic system, first taken into religion, was thought to have given matter for some early heresies in the Church. When disputes began to arise, the Peripatetic forms were introduced by Scotus as best fitted for controversy. And however this may now have become necessary, it was surely the author of a litigious vein, which has since occasioned very pernicious consequences, stopped the progress of Christianity, and been a great promoter of vice; verifying that sentence given by St. James, and mentioned before, "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." This was the fatal stop to the Grecians in their progress both of arts and arms; their wise men were divided under several sects, and their governments under several commonwealths, all in opposition to each other, which engaged them in eternal quarrels among themselves, while they should have been armed against the common enemy. And I wish we had no other examples, from the like causes, less foreign or ancient than that. Diogenes said Socrates was a madman; the disciples of Zeno and Epicurus, nay, of Plato and Aristotle, were engaged in fierce disputes about the most insignificant trifles. And if this be the present language and practice among us Christians no wonder that Christianity does not still produce the same effects which it did at first, when it was received and embraced in its utmost purity and perfection; for such wisdom as this cannot "descend from above," but must be "earthly, sensual, devilish, full of confusion and every evil work," whereas, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." This is the true heavenly wisdom, which Christianity only can boast of, and which the greatest of the heathen wise men could never arrive at.

Now to God the Father, &c.

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5 - These Apostles were, for the most part, uneducated and untrained in philosophy.

