

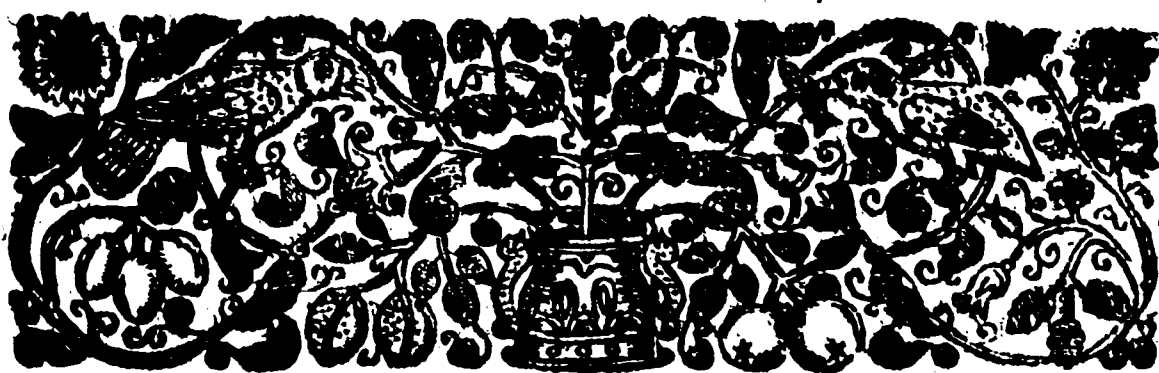
A
Short Discourse
UPON THE
REASONABLENESS
Of MEN's having a
RELIGION,
OR
Worship of God.

By his Grace,
GEORGE Duke of BUCKINGHAM.

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N,

Printed by *John Leake*, for *Luke Meredith*, at the *King's Head*, at the West End of *St. Paul's Church-Yard*,
MDC LXXXV.



TO THE
READER.

WHEN I began to write upon this Subject, it was out of a Curiosity I had to try, what I could say, in reason, against the bold Assertions of those Men, who think it a witty thing to defame Religion; and I have seen so few Writings of late, which are

To the Reader.

not very tedious, that I was desirous at least to avoid that fault in this, by making it as short as I could.

The Reason why I have suffer'd it to be Printed, is indeed, Because I could not help it; Coppies having been taken of it, and sent to the Press, by the negligence of some to whom I lent it to Read. I was as much ashamed to forbid the Printing of it, as I should have been, to have order'd it, or as I should be now it is Printed, to disown what I have Written; and therefore, I have here set my Name to it.

By the nature of this Discourse, I was forced to Conclude with an Opinion, which I have been long convinced of; That nothing can be more Antichristian, nor more contrary to Sense and

To the Reader.

and Reason, than to Trouble and Molest our Fellow-Christians, because they cannot be exactly of our Minds, in all the things relating to the Worship of God.

And who will but examine what multitudes of Men there are now amongst us, of different Perswasions in Religion; and how inconsiderable any one part of them is, compared to the rest, must, I am confident, be convinced, That the practice of it, at this time, would be of no advantage to the Publick.

If a serious consideration of the Present State of this Kingdom, can sink deep enough into Men's Hearts, to make them endeavour, now, to promote a true Liberty of Conscience, I shall yet hope to enjoy happy days in England. But otherwise,

To the Reader.

*wife, without pretending to be a Prophet,
I can easily foresee, That the contrary
must of necessity terminate in this; A
General Discontent; The Dispeopling
of our poor Country; And the Expo-
sing us to the Conquest of a Foreign
Nation.*

BUCKINGHAM.

A Short

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There is nothing that gives
Men a greater dissatisfac-
tion, than to find themselves
disappointed in their Expe-
ctations; especially of those things in
which

which they think themselves most concern'd; and therefore all, who go about to give Demonstrations in Matters of Religion, and fail in the attempt, do not onely leave Men less Devout than they were before, but also, with great pains and industry, lay in their Minds the very Grounds and Foundations of Atheism: For the generality of Mankind, either out of laziness, or a diffidence of their being able to judge aright in Points that are not very clear, are apt rather to take things upon trust than to give themselves the trouble to examine whether they be true or no. But when they find, that what a Man undertakes to give them for a Demonstration, is really none at all, they do not onely conclude they are deceived by him, but begin also to suspect, they have been ill used, by those, who first impos'd upon them a Notion,

Notion, for which no Demonstration can be given; and from that suspicion proceed to this other of a more dangerous consequence; That what is not demonstrable, may perhaps too not be true.

I shall, therefore in this Discourse, make use of another method, and content my self with endeavouring to shew what, in my Opinion, is most probable: Demonstration being, as to Matters of Faith, absolutely unnecessary: Because, if I can convince a Man, That the Notions I maintain are more likely to be true than False, it is not in his power not to believe them; no Man believing any thing because he has a mind to believe it, but because his Judgment is convinc'd, and he cannot choose but believe it, whether he will or no: and Belief is all that is required of us in the Speculative part of Religion.

Besides, Demonstration being such an Evidence of a thing, as shows the contrary of it to be impossible; it is, if you mark it, a whimsical kind of expression to say, That a Man does but believe a thing to be so, which he is sure cannot possibly be otherwise. It is just as ingenious as if one should profess, That he hopes he shall but begin to have a thing to morrow, which he is already this day in possession of. Belief and Faith being as intirely swallow'd up in Demonstration, as Hope is in Fruition.

My design in this Paper is, To induce Men to a belief of Religion, by the strength of Reason; and therefore, I am forc'd to lay aside all Arguments which have any dependence upon the Authority of Scripture, and must fashion my Discourse as if I had to do with those that have no Religion at all.

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The first main Question, upon the clearing of which I shall endeavour to ground the Reasonableness of Men's having a Religion, or Worship of God, is this, *Whether it is more probable that the World has ordered it self to be in the Form it now is, or was contriv'd to be so by some other Being of a more perfect, and more designing nature?* For whether or no the World has been Created out of nothing, is not material to our purpose; Because if a supreme Intelligent Agent has fram'd the World to be what it is, and has made us to be what we are, we ought as much to stand in awe of it, as if it had made both us and the World out of nothing. Yet because this latter Question ought not to be totally pass'd by, I shall take the liberty to offer some Conceptions of mine upon it.

The chief Argument used against God Almighty's having Created the World,

World, is, That no Man can imagine how a thing should be made out of nothing; and that, therefore, it is impossible, he should have made the World, because there is nothing else, out of which it could be made.

First then, I cannot choose but observe, that to say, Because we are not able to imagine how a thing should be, therefore the being of that thing must be impossible, is in it self a disingenious way of Argumentation, especially in those, who at the same time declare they believe this World to be Eternal, & yet are as little able to comprehend how it should be Eternal, as how it should be made out of nothing.

In the next place, I conceive that nothing can be properly said to endure, any longer than it remains just the same; for in the instant any part of it is changed, that thing as it was before, is no more in being.

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In the third place, That every part of this World we live in is changed every moment; and by consequence, that this whole World is so too, because the whole is nothing else but what is composed of every part; and that therefore we cannot properly say, this World has continued for many Ages, but onely that all things in this World have been changed for several Years together.

To evade which Opinion, those who maintain the Eternity of the World, are forc'd to say; That the Matter of it is not changed, but the Accidents onely; though this be a sort of Argument which they will not allow of in others. For when it is by the *Romanists* urged, in Defence of *Transubstantiation* in the Sacrament, *That the Accidents of the Wafer remain, though the Substance of it be changed*; they reject that as a ridiculous Notion; and yet it is not one jot more absurd

absurd to say, *That the Accidents remain when the Matter is chang'd, than that the Matter remains when the Accidents are changed*; nay of the two, the Assertors of this latter Opinion are the least excusable, because they boldly attribute it to a Natural Cause, whereas the *Romanists* have the modesty at least to own it for a Mysterious Miracle.

But that the weakness of this imagination, of separating Accidents from Bodies may the plainlier appear, let us examine a little what the meaning of the word Accident is. Accident then does not signifie a Being distinct from Body or Matter, but is only a Word, whereby we express the several ways we consider of what is in a Body, or matter that is before us. For example; If we perceive a Body to have length, then we consider of that length as an Accident of that Body; and when we

perceive

perceive a Body to have a Smell, or Taste, then we consider of that Smell, and that Taste, as Accidents of that Body: But in none of these Considerations we mean, that any thing can have Length, or Smell, or Taste, but what really is Body; and when any thing, that had a Smell or Taste, has left off to have a Smell or Taste, it is, because that Part of it, which had a Smell or Taste, is no more in it. So that, upon an Examination of the whole Matter, I am apt to believe, That there can be naturally no change of Accidents, but where there is a real change of Bodies.

But to proceed a little further, the Question being, *Whether it be more probable, that the World, or that God Almighty has been from all Eternity?* I think, I may adventure to affirm, That of two Propositions, the least probable

is that which comes nearest to a Contradiction: Now nothing can come nearer to a Contradiction, Than Eternity, or abiding the same for ever, and a continued Changing, or not abiding the same one moment: And therefore I conclude, it is less probable, that this Changeable World should have been from all Eternity, than that some other Being, of more Excellence, and greater Perfection, should be so, whose very Nature is incapable of Change.

That Being of more Excellence, and greater Perfection, I call *God*; and those, who out of a foolish aversion they have for the *Name of God*, will call it Nature, do not in any kind differ from this Notion of that Being, but only change its Name, and rather shew, they have a vain mistaken Ambition of being thought Atheists, than that they have any Reason strong enough

nough to Convince them to be so.

The next Question I shall take into Consideration, is this, *Whether, though there be a God, it is probable, that He should take a more particular Care of Mankind, than He does of Beasts and other Animals?* To which I have this to offer, That though there are several sorts of Animals, which give us occasion to imagine they have some kind of Reason in them, though not to so great a Perfection as Men have; yet since no other Animal did ever any one thing, that could give us the least cause to believe, they have a Conception of another World, or of a Deity; and that no Man was ever yet born, but had a Conception, or at least a Suspicion of it, more or less. I say, for this Reason, it is probable, in my Opinion, That there is something nearer a-kin to the Nature of *God* in Men, than

there is in any other Animals whatsoever; and for that Reason, that *God Almighty* does take a more particular Care of us, than He does of them.

If then *God* be Eternal, and it is probable there is something in our Nature, which is a-kin to the Nature of *God*, it is also probable, That that Part of us never dies.

It is also probable, That what by it we are prompted most to value and esteem, as the highest Perfections, good Qualities, and Vertues, are Parts of the Essence, and Nature of *God*.

Now, of all good Qualities, or Vertues, it is Justice; which all Men do most highly esteem and value in others, though they have not all the good Fortune to practise it themselves. For Justice is that good Quality, or Vertue, which causes all other good Qualities or Vertues

ties to be esteemed; nay, it is that Vertue, without which, all other Vertues become as Vices; that is, they all come to be abhor'd.

For he who wants Justice, and has Wit, Judgment, or Valor, will for the having Wit, Judgment, or Valor, be the more abhor'd; Because the more Wit, Judgment, or Valor he has, if he wants Justice, the more he will certainly become a Wicked Man: And he who wants Justice, and has Power, will for the having that Power, be the more abhor'd; Because the more Power he has, if he wants Justice, the more he will certainly become a Wicked Man: And therefore, in my Opinion, it is a very unreasonable thing for Men, out of a Design of extolling *God Almighty's* Power, to rob Him of Justice; the Quality without which, even Power it self must necessarily be abhor'd. And pray

pray what can be more disrespectful to *God Almighty*, than to phanſie that he ſhall puniſh us for doing that, which he has from all Eternity predeſtinated; that is, Compell'd us to do? It is an Act that I can hardly believe there ever yet was born a Man cruel enough to be guilty of, even in the depth of his Revenge; And ſhall we make that an Attribute of the Moſt Perfect, and the Moſt High God, which is beneath the effect of the meanest of Paſſions in the worſt of Men? It is, in my Opinion, more reaſonable to believe, That *God Almighty*, out of his Love to Mankind, has given us an Eternal Soul; That an Eternal Being, and Free-will, are things in their Nature inſeparable one from the other; and that therefore, according to our Actions, proceeding from our Wills, *God Almighty*, in Juſtice, will Reward and Punish

Puniſh us in another World, for the Good and Ill Deeds we perform in this. I do not ſay, that the beſt of our Actions here, are good enough to make us deſerve the utmoſt Joys of Heaven; we muſt owe them to *God Almighty's* Grace and Favour, as indeed, we owe all things elſe.

Neither will I take upon me to gueſs at the ſeveral Degrees of Joys there are in Heaven. Our dull Sences, making it as impoſſible, for us to diſcourſe well of thoſe things, as it is impoſſible for a Man Born Blind, to talk well of Colours. Nor will I pretend to judge how long, or how much *God Almighty* will Punish us hereafter; Becauſe, for the ſame Reaſon that we think him to be a God of Juſtice, we muſt alſo conclude him to be a God of Mercy.

This only I do verily believe, That the more we Love him, the more he will

will Love us, and the less we Love him,
the worse it will be for us.

Again, if this Instinct, or Conception, we have of a Deity, be the Ground of our Religion, it ought also to be the Guide of our Religion; That is, if the strongest Reason we have to believe, That God *Almighty* does take a more particular Care of us, than He does of other Animals, is, Because there is something in our Nature, nearer a-kin to the Nature of God, than any thing that is in any other Animal, I say, in all Reason, that part of us, which is nearest a-kin to the Nature of God, ought to be our Guide and Director, in Choosing the best Way for our Religious Worship of God.

There is also this other Consequence, which, in my Opinion, does naturally depend upon what has been said; That

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one of the greatest Crimes a Man can be guilty of, is, To force us to act or sin against that Instinct of Religion, which God *Almighty* has placed in our Hearts; for, if that Instinct be somewhat a-kin to the Nature of God, the sinning against it must be somewhat a-kin to the Sin against the *Holy Ghost*.

If then it be probable, that there is a God, and that this God will Reward and Punish us hereafter, for all the Good and Ill things we act in this Life; It does highly concern every Man, to examine seriously, Which is the best Way of Worshipping and Serving this God; That is, Which is the best Religion.

Now, if it be probable, that the Instinct which we have within us, of a Deity, be a-kin to the Nature of God; That Religion is probably the best,

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whose

whose Doctrine does most recommend to us those things, which, by that Institute, we are promoted to believe are Virtues, and good Qualities: And that I think, without exceeding the Bounds of Modesty, I may take upon me to affirm, is the Christian Religion.

And for the same Reason, it does also follow, That the Religion amongst *Christians*, which does most recommend to us Virtue, and a good Life, is, in all probably, the best Religion.

And here, I must leave every Man to take pains, in seeking out, and chusing for himself; he only being answerable to *God Almighty* for his own Soul.

I began this *Discourse*, as if I had to do with those, who have no Religion at all: And now, addressing my

my self to *Christians*, I hope, they will not be offended at me, for ending it with the Words of our *Saviour*:

Ask, and it shall be given you; Seek, and you shall find; Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

I shall beg Leave farther, only to propose a few Questions to all those, in general, who are pleas'd to call themselves *Christians*.

First, Whether there be any thing more directly opposite to the Doctrine and Practice of *Jesus Christ*, than to use any kind of Force upon Men, in Matters of Religion? And consequently, Whether all those that practise it, (let them be of what *Church*, or *Sect*, they please) ought not justly to be call'd *Antichristians*?

Secondly, Whether there can be any thing more unmanly, more barbarous, or more ridiculous, than to go about to convince a Man's Judgment by any thing, but by Reason? It is so ridiculous, that Boys at School are whipped for it; who instead of Answering an Argument with Reason, are Logger-heads enough to go to Cuffs.

And *Thirdly*, Whether the Practice of it, has not always been ruinous and destructive to those Countries, where it has been used, either in Monarchies, or Common-Wealths? And, Whether the contrary Practice has not always been successful to those Countries, where it has been used, either in Monarchies, or Common-Wealths?

I shall Conclude, with giving them this Friendly Advice; If they would
be

be thought Men of Reason, or of a good Conscience, Let them endeavour, by their good Counsel, and good Example, to perswade others to lead such Lives, as may save their Souls: And not be perpetually quarrelling amongst themselves, and cutting one another's Throats, about those things, which they all agree, are not absolutely necessary to Salvation.

F I N I S.

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