

THE
MYSTERIES
OF
The Christian Faith
ASSERTED and VINDICATED:
IN A
SERMON

Preached at
S. Laurence-Jewry *in* London,
APRIL the 7th. 1691.

By the Right Reverend Father in GOD,
EDWARD Lord Bishop of Worcester.

The Second Edition.

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A SERMON

Preached at

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1 TIM. I. 15.

This is a faithfull saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners, of whom I am chief.

IF these Words were to be understood without any Restriction or Limitation that Christ Jesus came into the World to save sinners, they would overthrow the great Design of the Gospel, and make its Excellent Precepts Useless and Ineffectual. For to what purpose should men be put upon the severe Practice of Repentance, Mortification and a continued Course of a Holy Life, if the meer being Sinners did sufficiently qualifie them for Salvation? This indeed would be thought a Doctrine worthy of all Acceptation by the greatest Sinners; but

it could not be a faithfull saying, being not agreeable either to the Nature of God, or Revelation of his Will by Christ Jesus. But S. Paul speaks of such Sinners, as himself had been; i. e. such as had been great Sinners, but had truly and sincerely repented. *Of whom I am chief.* What then? Must we look on him as the Standard and Measure of such Sinners whom Christ Jesus came to save? What will then become of all those who have been Sinners of a higher Rank than ever he was? It's true in the Verses before the Text, he sets out his Sins, as a humble Penitent is wont to do, with the worst Colours and deepest Aggravations, *Who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious*; but yet he adds, *that he obtained Mercy because he did it ignorantly, in unbelief.* How then is S. Paul the Chief of Sinners? Are Sins of Ignorance and Mistake the greatest of Sins; for which Christ died? Is there no Expiation for any other by Jesus Christ? What will become then of all such who sin against Knowledge and Conscience, and not in Ignorance and Unbelief? Can none of these hope for Mercy by Christ Jesus, although they do truly Repent? But the Blood of Christ is said elsewhere to cleanse us from all Sin; not, while we continue in them, but if we repent and forsake them. And Jesus Christ is said to be a Propitiation for our Sins; and not for ours only, but for the Sins of the whole World. And there-

Ver. 13.

1 Joh. 1. 7.

Ch. 2. v. 2.

fore

fore this Expression of S. Paul notes his great Humility and deep Sense of his own Sins; but doth not exclude others from the hopes of Pardon whose Sins have other Aggravations than his had. For, if we leave out the last words as peculiar to his Case; yet the other contain in them a true Proposition and of the greatest Importance to Mankind; *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save sinners.*

This, you may say, is a matter out of all doubt among all such who hope for Salvation by Christ Jesus; for all are agreed, that one way or other we are to be saved by him. But there is great Difficulty as to the Way of saving sinners by Christ Jesus; whether by the Doctrine and Example of the Man Christ Jesus; by the Power he attained through his Sufferings; Or, by the Eternal Son of God's assuming our Nature, and suffering in our stead in order to the Reconciling God to us and making a Propitiation for our Sins. These are two very different Hypotheses or Notions of Christ's coming to save Sinners and the former seems more Easie to be understood and believed; and the other seems to have Insurmountable Difficulties in point of Reason; and to run our Religion into Mysteries, which expose our Faith and make Christianity appear Contemptible to Men of Sense and Understanding. Is it not therefore much better to embrace such a Scheme of it, as

as will have the least Objection against it, that so Men of Reason may not be tempted to Infidelity, and Men of Superstition may not under the Colour of *Mysteries* bring in the most Absurd and Unreasonable Doctrines?

These are plausible Insinuations, and would be apt to prevail on considering Mens minds, if they were to form and make a Religion that might be most accommodated to the *Genius* and *Humour* of the Age they live in. And truly no Men (by their own Authority) can pretend to a Right to impose on others any *Mysteries of Faith*, or any such things which are above their Capacity to understand. But that is not our Case; for we all profess to believe and receive *Christianity* as a *Divine Revelation*; and God (we say) may require from us the belief of what we may not be able to comprehend, especially if it relates to Himself, or such things which are Consequent upon the Union of the Divine and Human Nature. Therefore our business is to consider, whether any such things be contained in that *Revelation* which we all own; and if they be, we are bound to believe them, although we are not able to comprehend them.

Now here are two Remarkable Characters in these Words, by which we may examine these different *Hypotheses* concerning the way of *Salvation* by *Jesus Christ*.

I. It

I. *It is a faithfull saying*, and therefore must be contained in that *Revelation* which God hath made concerning our *Salvation* by *Christ*.

II. *It is worthy of all Acceptation*; i. e. most useful and beneficial to Mankind.

Now by these two I shall proceed in the Examination of them.

I. Which is most agreeable to the Revealed Will of God.

II. Which doth offer fairest for the Benefit and Advantage of Mankind.

I. Which is most agreeable to the Revealed Will of God. For that we are sure is the most *faithfull saying*; since Men of Wit and Reason may deceive us, but God cannot. When the Apostles first preached this Doctrine to the World, they were not bound to believe what they affirmed to be a *faithfull saying* till they gave sufficient Evidence of their Authority from God, by the wonderfull Assistance of the Holy Ghost. But now this *faithfull saying* is contained in the Books of the *New Testament*, by which we are to judge of the Truth of all *Christian Doctrines*. And when two different Senses of Places of Scripture are offer'd, we are to consider, which is most Reasonable to be prefer'd. And herein we are allow'd to Exercise

our

out Reason as much as we please; and the more we do so, the sooner we shall come to Satisfaction in this matter.

Now according to Reason we may judge that Sense to be preferr'd,

(1.) Which is most plain and easie and agreeable to the most received Sense of Words; not that which is forced and intricate, or which puts improper and *metaphorical* Senses upon Words which are commonly taken in other Senses; especially when it is no Sacramental thing, which in its own Nature is Figurative.

(2.) That which suits most with the Scope and Design not only of the particular Places, but of the whole *New Testament*; which is, to magnifie God and to depress Man; to set forth the Infinite Love and Condescension of God in giving his Son to be a Propitiation for our Sins; to set up the Worship of one true God in Opposition to Creatures; to Represent and Declare the mighty Advantages Mankind receive by the Sufferings of Christ Jesus.

(3.) That which hath been generally received in the *Christian Church* to be the Sense of those places. For, we are certain, this was always look'd on as a matter of great Concernment to all Christians; and they had as great Capacity of understanding the Sense of the Apostles; and the Primitive Church had greater Helps for knowing it than

than others at so much greater Distance. And therefore the Sense is not to be taken from modern *Inventions*, or *Criticisms*, or pretences to *Revelation*; but that which was at first deliver'd to the *Christian Church* and hath been since received and embraced by it in the several Ages; and hath been most strenuously asserted, when it hath met with Opposition, as founded on *Scripture* and the general Consent of the *Christian Church*.

(4.) That which best agrees with the Characters of those Persons from whom we receive the *Christian Faith*; and those are *Christ Jesus* and his *holy Apostles*. For, if their Authority be lost, our Religion is gone; and their Authority depends upon their Sincerity and Faithfulness, and care to inform the World aright in matters of so great Importance.

(1.) I begin with the Character which the Apostles give of *Christ Jesus* himself; which is, that he was a Person of the greatest Humility and Condescension, that he did not assume to himself that which he might justly have done. For let the Words of *S. Paul* be understood either as to the Nature, or Dignity of Christ, it is certain that they must imply thus much, that when *Christ Jesus* was here on Earth, he was not of a vain assuming humour, that he did not boast of himself, nor magnifie his own Greatness, but was contented to be

look'd on as other Men; although he had at that time far greater and Diviner Excellency in him than the World would believe. Less than this, cannot be made of those Words of the Apostle, *Who being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no Reputation and took upon him the form of a Servant.*

Phil. i. 6, 7.

Now this being the Character given of him let us consider what he doth affirm concerning himself. For although he was far from drawing the People after him, by setting forth his own Perfections; yet upon just Occasions, when the Jews contested with him, he did Assert such things, which must savour of Vanity and Ostentation, or else must imply that he was the *Eternal Son of God*. For, all Mankind are agreed that the highest degree of Ambition lies in Affecting Divine Honour, or for a meer Man to be thought a God. How severely did God punish Herod for being pleased with the Peoples folly in crying out, *The Voice of God and not of Man?* And therefore he could never have born with such positive Assertions and such repeated Defences of his being the Son of God in such a manner as implied his being so from Eternity. This in his Disputes with the Jews he Affirms several times, *that he came down from Heaven*, not in a Metaphorical but in a proper Sense; as appears by those words, *What and if ye shall see*

Act. i. 2, 22.

Joh. 6. 32,

33.

38. 50.

38. 62.

the

the Son of Man ascend up where he was before? In another Conference he asserted, *that he was before Abraham.* Which the Jews so literally understood, that without a Metaphor they went about to stone him; little imagining that by Abraham the calling of the Gentiles was to be understood. But above all, is that Expression which he used to the Jews at another Conference, *I and my Father are one*; which they understood in such a manner that immediately they took up stones to have stoned him. What means all this Rage of the Jews against him? What for saying, *that he had Unity of Consent with his Father?* No certainly. But the Jews misunderstood him. Let us suppose it; would not our Saviour have immediately explained himself to prevent so dangerous a Misconstruction? But he asked them, what it was they stoned him for? They Answer him directly and plainly, *because that thou being a Man makest thy self God.* This was home to the purpose. And here was the time for him to have denied it, if it had not been so. But doth he deny it? Doth he say, it would be *Blasphemy* in him to own it? No; but he goes about to defend it; and proves it to be no *Blasphemy* for him to say that he was the Son of God; i. e. so as to be God, as the Jews understood it. Can we imagin that a meer Man knowing himself to be such, should Assume this to himself; and yet God to bear witness to him

Joh. 8. 58.

v. 59.

Joh. 10. 30.

v. 31.

v. 32, 33.

v. 36.

him not only by *Miracles* but by a *Voice from Heaven*, wherein he was called his *beloved Son* in whom he was well pleased? Could God be pleased with a mortal, finite, despicable Creature, as the *Jews* thought him, that Assumed to himself to be God and maintained and defended it among his own People, in a solemn Conference at a very Publick Place in one of the *Portico's* of the Temple? And this he persisted in to the last. For, when the High Priest adjured him by the living God to tell, whether he were the Christ the Son of God, (for he, no doubt, had heard of the Result of this Conference in Solomon's Porch) Jesus said unto him, Thou hast said. S. Mark, more expressly, Jesus said I am. And this was the Blasphemy, for which they put him to death; as appears by the *Evangelists*. So that this ought to be a Dispute only between *Jews* and *Christians*; since it was the very point, for which they condemned him to death. And in his last most divine Prayer just before his Suffering, he owns the *Glory* which he had with the Father before the World had a being. And now, O Father, glorifie thou me with the glory which I had with thee, before the World was. Was this nothing but the *Glory* which God had designed to give him? This is so far from being peculiar to Christ, that it is common to all whom God designs to glorifie; and takes away the distinction between the Decree and the Execution of it.

(2.) As

(2.) As to the *Apostles*, the Reason we believe their Testimony is, that they were Men of great Sincerity and Plainness, and of great Zeal for the Honour and Glory of God. And according to this Character, let us examin what they say concerning Christ Jesus.

He that was most conversant with him, and beloved by him, and lived to see his Divinity contested by some, and denied by others, is most ample in setting it forth in his Admirable, Sublime, and Divine Introduction to his Gospel. Which all the Wit of Mankind can never make tolerable Sense of, if they deny Christ's being the Eternal Son of God; and it is he, that hath preserved those Conferences with the *Jews*, wherein he asserts his own Divinity.

S. Paul was a Stranger to him while he lived; but at the same time when he was so zealous to perswade the *Gentiles* to the Worship of God and not of Creatures, he calls him God, over all blessed for evermore. And when he saith, that the Eternal Power and Godhead are known by the Creation of the World, he attributes the Creation of all things to Christ, applying to him those words of the Psalmist, Thou Lord in the beginning hast laid the Foundation of the Earth and the Heaven, the Work of thy hands. Which cannot be understood of any Metaphorical Creation.

And

And after the strictest Examination of Copies, those will be found the best, which have that Reading on which our Translation is grounded.

1 Tim. 3. 16. *And without Controversie great is the Mystery of Godliness, God was manifest in the Flesh. So that God's being manifest in the Flesh is made a great Part of the Mystery of Christianity.*

But here arises a Difficulty, which deserves to be consider'd; i. e. "If there were nothing in the Christian Doctrine, but the Way of Saving sinners by the Doctrine and Example of Christ, there would be little Objection to be made to it; since the obtaining Eternal Life is certainly the best thing can be proposed to Mankind, and the Precepts of Christ are Divine and Spiritual, Plain and Easie to be Understood, and Agreeable to the Reason of Mankind; but many other things are imposed on Men as necessary to be believed concerning Christ Jesus, as to his Divinity, Incarnation, and the Hypostatical Union of both Natures, which perplex and confound our Understandings; and yet these things are not only deliver'd as *Mysteries of the Christian Faith*; but the Belief of them is required as necessary to the Salvation of Sinners; whereas, if they are Revealed they are no longer *Mysteries*; and if they are not Revealed, how come they to be made Articles of Faith? The Scripture knows of no other

"other *Mysteries of Faith* but such as were hidden before the Revelation of them, but since they are Revealed they are plain and open to all mens Capacities; and therefore it is a great Injury to the Plainness and Simplicity of the Gospel to impose such incomprehensible Mysteries, as Necessary Articles of Faith; and it is Abusing the Credulity of Mankind, to make such things necessary to be believed, which are impossible to be understood. But those who have ever loved to Deceive and Abuse the rest of the World, have been always fond of the Name of *Mysteries*; and therefore all such things are to be suspected, which come under that Name. For, all such Points which will not bear Examination, must be wrapt up and Reverenced under the Name of *Mysteries*, that is, of things to be swallow'd without being understood. But the Scripture never calls that a *Mystery* which is Incomprehensible in it self; though never so much revealed. Discourse of the Word Mystery, &c. p. 5.

This is the main force of the Objection, which I shall endeavour to remove by shewing,

- (1.) That God may justly require from us in general, the Belief of what we cannot comprehend.
- (2.) That which way soever the Way of Salvation by Christ be explained, there will be something of that Nature found in it; and

and that those who reject the Mysteries of Faith run into greater Difficulties than those who assert them.

- (3.) That no more is required as a Necessary Article of Faith than what is plainly and clearly Revealed.

(1.) That God may justly require from us in general, the Belief of what we cannot comprehend. It is to very little purpose to enquire whether the Word *Mystery* in Scripture be applied to such particular Doctrines, whose Substance is Revealed, but the manner of them is incomprehensible by us; for why may not we make use of such a Word whereby to express things truly revealed, but above our Comprehension? We are certain the Word *Mystery* is used for things far less difficult and abstruse; and why may it not then be fitly applied to such matters, which are founded on Divine Revelation, but yet are too deep for us to go to the bottom of them? Are there not *Mysteries* in Arts, *Mysteries* in Nature, *Mysteries* in Providence? And what Absurdity is there to call those *Mysteries*, which in some Measure are known, but in much greater unknown to us? Although therefore in the Language of Scripture it be granted, that the word *Mystery* is most frequently applied, to things before hidden, but now revealed, yet there is no Incongruity in calling that a *Mystery*; which being revealed,

revealed, hath yet something in it which our understandings cannot reach to. But it is meer Cavilling to insist on a Word, if the Thing it self be granted. The chief thing therefore to be done is, to shew that God may require from us the belief of such things which are incomprehensible by us. For, God may require any thing from us, which it is reasonable for us to do; if it be then reasonable for us to give Assent where the manner of what God hath revealed is not comprehended, then God may certainly require it from us. Hath not God revealed to us that *in six days he made Heaven and Earth and all that is therein*? But is it not reasonable for us to believe this, unless we are able to comprehend the manner of God's production of things? Here we have something revealed and that plainly enough, viz. that *God created all things*, and yet, here is a *Mystery* remaining as to the manner of doing it. Hath not God plainly revealed that there shall be a *Resurrection* of the dead? and must we think it unreasonable to believe it, till we are able to comprehend all the changes of the Particles of Matter from the Creation to the General *Resurrection*? But it is said that there is no Contradiction in this, but there is in the *Mystery of the Trinity and Incarnation*. It is strange Boldness in Men to talk thus of *Monstrous Contradictions* in things above their Reach. The *Atheists* may as well say, *Infinite Power*

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Observations on
Dr. Wallis
his four
Letters,
p. 4.

is a *Monstrous Contradiction*; and *God's Immensity* and his other unsearchable Perfections are *Monstrous Paradoxes and Contradictions*. Will Men never learn to distinguish between *Numbers* and the Nature of *Things*? For *three to be one* is a *Contradiction* in *Numbers*; but whether an Infinite Nature can communicate it self to three different *Subsistences* without such a *Division* as is among *Created Beings*, must not be determin'd by bare *Numbers*, but by the *Absolute Perfections* of the Divine Nature; which must be owned to be above our *Comprehension*.

For let us examin some of those *Perfections* which are most clearly revealed and we shall find this true. The *Scripture* plainly reveals, that *God* is from *everlasting to everlasting*; that he *was and is and is to come*; but shall we not believe the Truth of this till we are able to fathom the *Abyss* of *God's Eternity*? I am apt to think (and I have some thoughtfull Men concurring with me) that there is no greater Difficulty in the Conception of the *Trinity* and *Incarnation*, than there is of *Eternity*. Not, but that there is great Reason to believe it; but from hence it appears that our Reason may oblige us to believe some things which it is not possible for us to comprehend. We know that either *God* must have been for ever, or it is impossible he ever should be; for if he should come into Being when he was not, he must have some Cause of his Being;

Psal. 90. 2.
Revel. 1. 4.
c. 11. v. 17.

Bisshopfield
a. Grell. p.
50.

Petav. de
Trin. l. 3.
c. 9. §. 15.

Being; and that which was the first Cause would be *God*. But, if he was for ever he must be from himself; and what Notion or Conception can we have in our Minds concerning it? And yet, *Atheistical Men* can take no Advantage from hence; because their own most absurd *Hypothesis* hath the very same Difficulty in it. For something must have been for ever. And it is far more Reasonable to suppose it of an Infinite and Eternal Mind, which hath Wisdom and Power and Goodness to give Being to other things, than of dull, stupid and senseless Matter; which could never move it self, nor give Being to any thing besides. Here we have therefore a thing which must be owned by all; and yet such a thing which can be conceived by none. Which shews the narrowness and shortness of our Understandings, and how unfit they are to be the Measures of the Possibilities of things. *Vain Men would be Wise*; they would fain go to the very bottom of things, when alas! they scarce understand the very Surface of them. They will allow no *Mysteries* in Religion; and yet every thing is a *Mystery* to them. They cry out of *Cheats* and *Impostures* under the Notion of *Mysteries*; and yet there is not a Spire of Grass but is a *Mystery* to them; they will bear with nothing in Religion which they cannot comprehend, and yet there is scarce any thing in the World which they can comprehend.

hend. But above other things the *Divine Perfections*, even those which are most Absolute and Necessary are above their Reach. For let such Men try their Imaginations about God's *Eternity*, not merely how he should be from himself, but how God should coexist with all the Differences of Times and yet there be no Succession in his own Being. I do not say there is such Difficulty to conceive a Rock standing still when the Waves run by it; or the *Gnomon* of a Dial when the Shadow passes from one Figure to another; because these are gross unactive things; but the Difficulty is far greater where the Being is Perfect and always Active. For, where there is Succession there is a passing out of not being in such a duration into being in it; which is not consistent with the Absolute Perfection of the Divine Nature. And therefore God must be all at once what he is, without any Respect to the Difference of Time past, present or to come. From whence *Eternity* was defined by *Boethius* to be a perfect and complete Possession all at once of everlasting Life. But how can we form any Conception in our Minds of that being all at once, which hath such different Acts as must be measur'd by a long Succession of Time? As, the Creating and Dissolving the Frame of the World; the Promising and Sending the *Messias*; the Declaring and Executing a general Judgment; how can these things be consistent

De Con-
sol. l. 3.

sistent with a Permanent Instant, or a Continuance of being without Succession? For, it is impossible for us in this Case, as to God's Eternity, to form a clear and distinct *Idea* in our Mind, of that which both *Reason* and *Revelation* convince us must be. The most we can make of our Conception of it is, that God hath neither Beginning of Being, nor End of Days; but that he always was and always must be. And this is rather a necessary Conclusion from Reason and Scripture, than any distinct Notion or Conception of Eternity in our Minds. From whence it evidently follows, that God may reveal something to us, which we are bound to believe, and yet after that Revelation the Manner of it may be incomprehensible by us, and consequently a *Mystery* to us.

Hath not God Revealed to us in Scripture the Spirituality of his own Nature? That he is a Spirit and therefore will be worshipp'd in Spirit and in Truth; For, that is a true Reason why Spiritual Worship should be most agreeable to him. Now, if we could have a clear, distinct positive Notion in our minds of God's Spiritual Nature, we might then pretend that there is nothing *mysterious* in this, since it is revealed.

But let such Men Examine their own thoughts about this matter; and try, whether the utmost they can attain to, be not something *Negative*, viz. because

because great Absurdities would follow if we attributed any thing *Corporeal* to God; for, then he must be compounded of Parts, and so he may be dissolved; then he must be confined to a certain place, and not every-where present; he cannot have the Power of Acting and Self-Determining which a meer Body hath not. For the clearest Notion we can have of *Body*, is, that it is made up of some things as parts of it, which may be separated from each other, and is confined to a certain place, and hath no Power to Move or Act from it self. But some of these Men who cry down *Mysteries* and magnifie Reason, to shew how slender their pretences to Reason are, have asserted a *Corporeal God*, with Shape and Figure. It was indeed, well thought of by those who would make a *Man* to be *God*, to bring *God* down as near to *Man*, as might be. But how to Reconcile the Notion of a Body with Infinite Perfections, is a *Mystery* to me, and far above my Comprehension. But if it be no *Mystery*, to such Men, they must either deny *God's* Infinite Perfections or shew how a bodily Shape can be capable of them. But some Men can confound *Finite* and *Infinite*, *Body* and *Spirit*, *God* and *Man*, and yet are for no *Mysteries*; whereas these things are farther from our Reach and Comprehension, than any of those Doctrines which they find fault with. But to proceed.

If

If we believe *Prophecie*, we must believe *God's* fore-knowledge of future Events: For, how could they be fore-told if he did not fore-know them? And if he did fore-know those which he did fore-tell, then it was either because those only were revealed to him which is inconsistent with the Divine Perfections; or that he doth fore-know all other Events and only thought fitting to Reveal these: But how can they Solve the Difficulties about *Divine Prescience*? Is there no *Mystery* in this? Nothing above their Comprehension? What then made their great Master deny it, as a thing above his Comprehension? Because nothing can be fore-known but what hath a certain Cause, and therefore, if evil Actions be fore-told *God* must be the Cause of them, and Men will not be free Agents in them. And yet it is most certain, that the Sufferings of *Christ* by the Wickedness of Men, were fore-told. What then? Must we make *God* the Author of Sin? *God* forbid. Will the righteous Judge of all the Earth, punish Mankind for his own Acts, which they could not avoid? Then we must yield, that there is something in the manner of the *Divine Prescience*, which is above our Comprehension. And the most Searching and Inquisitive Men have been forced to yield it at last, as to the Connection between the Certainty of Prescience and the Liberty of human Actions. Is it not then much better

Socin.
Præf. c. 11.

Cajetan. in
1. q. 22.
art. 4.

better to sit down quietly at first, Adoring the Infiniteness of God's incomprehensible Perfections, than after all the huffings and disputings of Men to say, *In Ignorantiâ sola quietem invenio*, as the great Schoolman did? Surely then, here is something plainly revealed, and yet the manner of it is still a *Mystery* to us.

I shall not now insist on any more of the particular Attributes of God, but only in general I desire to know, whether they believe them to be *Finite* or *Infinite*? If to be *Finite*, then they must have certain bounds and limits which they cannot exceed; and that must either be from the Imperfection of Nature, or from a Superiour Cause, both which are repugnant to the very Being of God. If they believe them to be *Infinite*, how can they comprehend them? We are strangely puzzled in plain, ordinary, finite things; but it is madness to pretend to comprehend what is *Infinite*; and yet if the Perfections of God be not *Infinite* they cannot belong to Him.

I shall only add, in Consequence to this Assertion, *That if nothing is to be believed, but what may be comprehended*, the very Being of God must be rejected too. And therefore I desire all such who talk so warmly against any *Mysteries in Religion* to consider whose Work it is they are doing; even theirs who under this pretence go about to overthrow all Religion.

Religion. "For, say they, *Religion* is a *Mystery* "in its own Nature; not this or that, or the other "Religion; but *they are all alike*, all is *Mystery*; "and that is but another Name for *Fraud* and *Im-* "posture. What were the *Heathen Mysteries* but "tricks of *Priest-Craft*; and such are maintained "and kept up in all kinds of Religion. If there- "fore these men, who talk against *Mysteries* under- "stand themselves, they must in pursuance of their "Principles reject *one God*, as well as *three Persons*; "For, as long as they believe an *Infinite* and *In-* "comprehensible Being, it is Nonsense to reject "any other Doctrine, which relates to an *Infinite* "Being, because it is *Incomprehensible*.

But yet these very Men, who seem to pursue the Consequence of this Principle to the utmost, must assert something more incomprehensible than the *Being of God*. For, I appeal to any man of common Understanding, whether it be not more agreeable to Reason to suppose Works of Skill, Beauty and Order to be the Effects of a Wise and Intelligent Being, than of Blind Chance and Unaccountable Necessity; whether it be not more agreeable to the Sense of Mankind to suppose an *Infinite* and *Eternal Mind* endued with all possible Perfections to be the Maker of this visible World; than, that it should start out from it self, without Contrivance, without Order, without Cause? Certainly such

men have no Reason to find fault with the *Mysteries of Religion* because they are *incomprehensible*, since there is nothing so Absurd and Incomprehensible, as their darling *Hypothesis*; And, there is nothing which can make it prevail, but to suppose Mankind to be as Dull and Insensible as the first *Chaos*.

Thus I have shewn that it is not unreasonable for God to require from us the Belief of something which we cannot comprehend.

(2.) I now come to consider, whether those who are so afraid of *incomprehensible Mysteries* in our Faith, have made it so much more easie in the Way they have taken. And notwithstanding all the Hectoring talk against *Mysteries* and things incomprehensible in Religion, I find more insuperable Difficulties in point of Reason in their Way than in ours. As for instance,

(1.) It is a more Reasonable thing to suppose something *Mysterious* in the Eternal Son of God's being with the Father before the World was made by him; (as S. John expresses it in the beginning of his Gospel) than in supposing that although John the Baptist were born six Months before Jesus Christ; that yet Christ was in Dignity before him. What a wonderfull *Mystery* is this? Can Men have the Face to cry down *Mysteries* in deep Speculations, and matters of a high and abstruse Nature, when they make such *Mysteries* of plain and easie things?

And

And suppose the *Evangelist* in profound Language and lofty Expressions to prove a thing, which was never disputed, viz. that although Christ Jesus were born six Months after John, yet he was in Dignity before him? Yet this was a *Mystery*, which, as I remember, *Faustus Socinus* glories in that his Uncle *Laelius* obtained by Revelation.

(2.) It is a more Reasonable thing to suppose that a *Divine Person* should assume human Nature, and so the *Word to be made Flesh*; than to say, that an Attribute of God, his *Wisdom* or *Power* is made *Flesh*, which is a *Mystery* beyond all Comprehension; There may be some Difficulties in our Conception of the other, but this is a thing beyond all Conception or Imagination; For an *Accident* to be made a *Substance* is as absurd, as to imagin it to subsist without one.

(3.) It is more Reasonable to suppose that the Son of God should come down from Heaven and take our Nature upon him, than that a man should be rapt up into Heaven, that it might be said that he came down from thence. For in the former Supposition we have many other places of Scripture to support it, which speak of his being with God, and having Glory with him before the World was; whereas there is nothing for the other, but only that it is necessary to make some tolerable Sense of those words

(4.) It is more Reasonable to believe that *God* should become *Man* by taking our Nature upon him, than that *Man* should become *God*. For in the former, there is nothing but the Difficulty of conceiving the Manner of the Union, which we all grant to be so between Soul and Body; but in the other there is a Repugnancy in the very Conception of a *Created God*, of an *Eternal Son of Adam*, of *Omnipotent Infirmary*, of an *Infinite finite Being*. In the former Case, an *Infinite* is united to a *Finite*; but in the other a *Finite* becomes *Infinite*.

(5.) It is more Reasonable to believe that *Christ Jesus* should suffer as he did *for our sakes* than *for his own*. We are all agreed that the *Sufferings* of *Christ* were far beyond any thing he deserved at *God's* hands; but what Account then is to be given of them? We say that he made himself a voluntary Sacrifice for Expiation of the Sins of Mankind; and so there was a great and noble End designed, and no Injury done to a willing Mind; and the *Scripture* as plainly expresses this, as it can do in Words. But others deny this, and make him to suffer as one wholly Innocent; for what Cause? To make the most Innocent Persons as apprehensive of Suffering as the most Guilty; and the most righteous God to put no difference between them, with Respect to Suffering?

(6.) It is more Reasonable to suppose such a Condescension in the Son of *God* to take upon him the

Form

Form of a Servant for our Advantage; than that a *meer Man* should be Exalted to the *Honour* and *Worship* which belongs only to *God*. For, on the one side, there is nothing but what is agreeable to the Divine Nature, viz. *Infinite Love* and *Condescension* and *Pity* to Mankind; on the other, there is the greatest Design of *Self-Exaltation* that ever was in *Human Nature*, viz. for a *meer Man* to have the most *Essential Attributes* and *Incommunicable Honour* which belongs to *God*. And whether of these two is more agreeable to the Spirit and Design of the New Testament, let any man of understanding judge. For as it is evident, that the great Intention of it is to magnifie the wonderfull Love of *God* in the sending of his Son; so it is as plain that one great End of the Christian Doctrine was to take Mankind off from giving Divine Worship to Creatures; and can we then suppose that at the same time it should set up the *Worship* of a *meer Man* with all the *Honour* and *Adoration* which belongs to *God*? This is to me an *incomprehensible Mystery* indeed, and far beyond all that is implied in the *Mysteries* of the *Trinity* and *Incarnation*. For it Subverts the very Foundation of the Design of Christianity as to the Re-forming *Idolatry* then in being; it lays the Foundation for introducing it into the World again; for since the Distance between *God* and his Creatures is taken away, in the matter of Worship, there is nothing

nothing left but the Declaration of his Will ; which doth not exclude more *Mediators* of *Intercession* but upon this Ground, that the *Mediation* of *Redemption* is the Foundation of that of *Intercession*. And it is far more easie for us to suppose there may be some things too hard for us to understand in the *Mystery* of our *Redemption* by *Jesus Christ*, than that at the same time it should be both a *Duty* and a *Sin* to worship any but the *true God* with proper *Divine Worship*. For if it be *Idolatry* to give it to a *Creature*, then it is a great *Sin* ; for so the *Scripture* still accounts it ; but if we are bound to give it to *Christ* who is but a *Creature*, then that which in it self is a *Sin*, is now become a *Necessary Duty* ; which overthrows the *Natural Differences* of *Good* and *Evil*, and makes *Idolatry* to be a meer *Arbitrary* thing. And I take it for granted, that in *Matters* of *Religion*, *Moral Difficulties* are more to be regarded than *Intellectual* ; because *Religion* was far more designed for a *Rule* of our *Actions*, than for the *Satisfaction* of our *Curiosity*. And upon due *Examination* we shall find that there is no such frightfull *Appearances* of *Difficulties* in the *Mystery* of the *Incarnation*, as there is in giving *Divine Worship* to a *Creature*.

And it ought to be observed, that those very *Places* which are supposed to exclude *Christ* from being the *true God* ; must, if they have any force, exclude him from *Divine Worship*. For they are spoken of

S. Jo. 17. 3.

1 Cor. 6. 6.

of *God* as the *Object* of our *Worship* ; but if he be not excluded from *Divine Worship*, then neither is he from being the *true God* ; which they grant he is by *Office* but not by *Nature*.

Socin. ad
Eurrop. p.
96.
c. Wick.
c. 11.
Catech.
Racov.
p. 65.

But a *God* by *Office* who is not so by *Nature* is a new and *incomprehensible Mystery*. A *Mystery* hidden from *Ages* and *Generations* as to the *Church* of *God* ; but not made known by the *Gospel* of his *Son*.

This is such a kind of *Mystery* as the *Heathen* *Priests* had, who had *Gods* many and *Lords* many, as the *Apostle* saith, i. e. many by *Office* although but one by *Nature*. But if the *Christian Religion* had owned one *God* by *Nature* and only one by *Office*, the *Heathens* had been to blame chiefly in the *Number* of their *Gods* by *Office*, and not in the *divine Worship* which they gave to them. But *S. Paul* blames the *Heathens* for doing *Service* to them which by *Nature* are no *Gods* ; not for doing it without *Divine* Authority, nor for mistaking the *Person* who was *God* by *Office*, but in giving *Divine Worship* to them who by *Nature* were no *Gods* ; which he would never have said, if by the *Christian Doctrine*, *Divine Worship* were to be given to one who was not *God* by *Nature*.

1 Cor. 8. 5.

Gal. 4. 8.

But these are indeed *incomprehensible Mysteries* how a *Man* by *Nature* can be a *God* really and truly by *Office* ; how the *Incommunicable Perfections* of the *Divine Nature* can be communicated to

to a Creature; how God should give his Glory to another, and by his own Command require that to be given to a Creature, which himself had absolutely forbidden to be given to any besides himself. It is said by a famous Jesuit (I will not say how agreeably to their own Doctrines and Practices about

Smiglee de Divin. Verb. Incarn. Nat. p. 45. Divine Worship) that the Command of God cannot make him worthy of Divine Worship, who without such a Command is not worthy of it. And it is very absurd to say, that he that is unworthy of it without a Command, can become worthy by it; for it makes God to command Divine Honour to be given to one who cannot deserve it. (For no meer Man can deserve to be made God.) But it is more agreeable to the Divine Nature and Will not to give his Honour to a Creature.

(3.) But after all the Invectives of these Enemies to Mysteries, we do not make that which we say is Incomprehensible to be a Necessary Article of Faith as it is Incomprehensible; but we do assert that what is Incomprehensible as to the Manner, may be a Necessary Article as far as it is plainly Revealed. As in the Instances I have already mentioned of the Creation and Resurrection of the Dead; would they in earnest have Men turn Infidels as to these things till they are able to comprehend all the difficulties which relate to them? If not, why should this suggestion be allow'd as to the Mysteries which relate to our Redemption by Jesus Christ? If it be said, the Case is

not alike for those are clearly Revealed and these are not; this brings it to the true and proper Issue of this matter, and if we do not prove a clear Revelation, we do not assert their being Necessary Articles of Faith; but my present business was only to take off this Objection that the Mysteries were Incomprehensible and therefore not to be received by us.

II. And so I come to the second Way, by which, we are to Examine the several Senses of Christ Jesus coming to save Sinners: Which of them tends more to the Benefit and Advantage of Mankind; or which is more worthy of all Acceptation.

And that will appear by considering these things;

- (1.) Which tends most to the raising our Esteem and Love of Christ Jesus.
 - (2.) Which tends most to the begetting in us a greater Hatred of Sin.
 - (3.) Which tends most to the strengthening our Hope of Salvation by Jesus Christ.
- (1.) As to the raising in us a greater Esteem and Love of Christ. We are certain that the Infinite Love and Condescension of Christ Jesus in undertaking such a Work as the saving of Sinners makes it most worthy of all Acceptation. Some Men may please themselves in thinking that by taking away all Mysteries they have made their Faith more

A Sermon preached

easie, but I am certain they have extremely lessen'd
 the Argument for our Love, viz. the Apprehensions
 of the wonderfull Love and Condescension of Christ
 in coming into the World to save Sinners. And yet
 this is the great Argument of the New Testament
 to perswade Mankind to the Love of God and of his
 Son: *God so loved the World that he gave his only be-*
gotten Son, &c. This is indeed a mighty Argument
 of Love; if by *the only begotten Son* be meant the
 Eternal Son of God, *who came down from Heaven*, as
 S. John speaks just before; but if no more be meant
 but only that God made a *meer Man* to be his Son,
 and after he had preached a while here on Earth
 and was ill used and crucified by his own People,
 he Exalted him to be *God* and gave him Divine At-
 tributes and Honours; this were an Argument of
 great Love to the Person of Christ, but not to the
 rest of Mankind. But *God's Love* in Scripture is
 magnified with Respect to *the World* in the sending
 of his Son. *In this was manifested*, saith the Apostle,
the Love of God towards us, because that God sent his
only begotten Son into the World that we should live
through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God
 but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a Propitia-
 tion for our Sins. The great Love we still see is
 towards us, i. e. towards Mankind, but according
 to the other Sense it must have been, Herein was
 the Love of God manifested to his Son, that for his
 Suffering

Sufferings he exalted him above all Creatures. *He*
that spared not his own Son, saith S. Paul, *but deliver'd* Rom. 8. 32.
him up for us all. If he were the *Eternal Son of God*
 who came to suffer for us, there is a mighty force
 and *Emphasis* in this Expression, and very apt to
 raise our Admiration and our Love; But what *not*
sparing his own Son is there, if nothing were meant
 but that he designed by Sufferings to Exalt him?
 For *not sparing him* supposes an Antecedent Relation
 of the highest Kindness, but the other is only de-
 signing extraordinary Kindness for the sake of his
 Sufferings. Therefore, the Argument for the Love
 of God is taken from what his Son was, when he
 deliver'd him up for us all; he was his *own Son*;
 not by *Adoption* as others are; S. John calls him, his
only begotten Son; and God himself, *his beloved Son* John 1. 14.
 in the Voice from Heaven; and this before his ch. 3. v. 16.
 Sufferings, immediately after his Baptism, when as Luk. 3. 22.
 yet, there was nothing extraordinary done by him,
 as to the great Design of his coming. Which shews,
 that there was an Antecedent Relation between
 him and the Father; and that therein the Love of
 God and of Christ was manifested, that being the
only begotten Son of the Father, he should take our
 Nature upon him and for our sakes do and suffer
 what he did. This is indeed an Argument great
 enough to raise our Admiration, to excite our De-
 votion, to inflame our Affections; but how flat

and low doth it appear, when it comes to no more than this, that there was a *Man*, whom, after his Sufferings, *God* raised from the dead and made him a *God* by Office? Doth this carry any such Argument in it for our Esteem and Love and Devotion to him as the other doth upon the most serious Consideration of it?

(2.) Which tends most to beget in us a greater *Hatred* of Sin. For that is so contrary to the Way of our Salvation by *Jesus Christ*, that what tends most to our *Hatred* of it, must conduce most to our Happiness; and therefore be most worthy of all Acceptation. It is agreed on all hands, that *Christ* did suffer very much both in his Mind and in his Body. In his Mind, when it is said, *that he was troubled in Spirit; that he began to be sorrowfull and very heavy; and soon after, My Soul is exceeding sorrowfull, even unto death.* S. Luke *Mark 14.* *saith, that he was in an Agony; wherein he not only prayed more earnestly, but his sweat was as it were great Drops of Blood falling to the Ground.* What made this Amazement, and dreadfull Agony in the mind of the most innocent Person in the World? Was it merely the Fear of the Pains of Death which he was to undergo? That is impossible, considering the Assurance which he had of so glorious a Reward so soon following after; when so many Martyrs endured such exquisite Torments

Torments for his sake without any such Disturbance or Consternation. But the Apostles give us another Account of it. S. Peter saith, He was *to bear our Sins in his own body on the tree; that Christ suffer'd for Sins, the just for the unjust.* 3. 18. S. Paul; *that God made him to be Sin for us who knew no Sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* 2 Cor. 5. 21. Hereby we understand how so innocent a Person came to suffer; he stood in our Stead; he was made Sin for us; and therefore was to be treated as a Sinner; and to suffer that on our Account, which he could not deserve on his own. If he suffer'd on his own Account, this were the way to fill our Minds with perplexity concerning the Justice of Providence with Respect to his dealings with the most innocent and holy Persons in this World; If he suffer'd on our Account, then we have the Benefit of his Sufferings, and therein we see how displeasing to God sin is, when even his own Son suffer'd so much by taking the guilt of our Sins upon him. And what can tend more to the begetting in us a due hatred of sin, than to consider, what *Christ* himself suffer'd on the Account of it? What can make us have more dreadfull thoughts of it, than that the great and mercifull God, when he designed to Save sinners, yet would have his own Son to become a Propitiation for the Sins of Mankind? And unless we allow

low this, we must put force upon the plainest Expressions of Scripture; and make Christ to suffer merely to shew God's Power over a most innocent Person, and his Will and Pleasure to inflict the most severe Punishment without any Respect to Guilt. And surely such a Notion of God, cannot be *worthy of all Acceptation*.

(3.) Which tends most to strengthen our *Hope of Salvation by Christ Jesus*. If we believe that he suffer'd for our Sins, then we have great Reason to hope for the Forgiveness of them; although they have been many and great, if we sincerely Repent; because the most prevailing Argument for Despair will be removed; which is taken from the *Justice of God*, and his declared *Hatred of Sin* and *Displeasure* against *Sinners*. If God be so much in earnest displeased with the Sins of Mankind, and his Justice be concerned in the Punishment of Sinners, how can they ever hope to escape, unless there be a way for his Displeasure to be removed, and his Justice to be satisfied? And this the Scripture tells us is done by Christ, who died that he might be a *Sacrifice of Atonement* to Reconcile us to God by his Death; as S. Paul expressly affirms. And by this means, we may have strong Consolation from the Hopes of Forgiveness of our Sins. Whereas, if this be taken away, either Men must believe that God was not in earnest

Rom. 5. 10.
2 Cor. 5. 19.
Heb. 9. 15

earnest displeased with the Sins of Mankind; which must exceedingly lessen our Esteem of the *Holiness* and *Justice of God*; or if he were so displeased, that he laid aside this Displeasure, without any *Atonement* or *Sacrifice of Expiation*. And so, as many as look on *God's Justice* and *Holiness* as necessary and essential Attributes of God, will be in danger of sinking into the Depths of Despair, as often as they Reflect seriously on the Guilt of their Sins. But on the other side, if we believe that while we were *Enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; then we may have *Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*; and have Reason to believe that there will be *no Condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus* by a lively Faith and sincere Repentance; then they may with Comfort look up to God as a Reconciled Father, through *Jesus Christ our Mediator*; then they may with inward Satisfaction look beyond the Grave, and stedfastly hope for that Salvation which Christ purchased on Earth and will at last bestow on all such as Love and Obey him. To which God of his Infinite Mercy bring us all through *Jesus Christ*. For, *This is a faithfull Saying and worthy of all Acceptation, that he came into the World to save Sinners*.

F I N I S.

*Lately Printed for Henry Mortlock at
the Phoenix in St. Paul's Church-Yard,*

A Sermon Preached before the Queen at *White-Hall*,
Febr. 22. 1688. upon 1 *Pet. 14. verse 18.*

A Sermon Preached before the King and Queen at
White-Hall, *March the 23d. 1689.* upon *Ecclesiastes 11.*
verse 9.

Christian Magnanimity: A Sermon Preached in the Ca-
thedral Church at *Worcester*, at the Time of the Assizes,
September 21. 1690. upon 2 *Tim. 1. verse 7.*

A Sermon Preached before the Queen at White-Hall,
March the 1st. 1691. on *Luke 6. v. 46.* All Four by the
Right Reverend Father in God, *Edward* Lord Bishop of
Worcester.

The Bishop of Worcester's Charge to the Clergy of his
Diocese, in his Primary Visitation, begun at Worcester,
Septemb. 11. 1690. Quarto.