

AA0002067692



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/reflexionsuponmr00lond>



R E F L E X I O N S

U P O N

Mr. *TOLAND*'s BOOK,

C A L L E D

*Christianity not Mysterious :*

W I T H S O M E

C O N S I D E R A T I O N S

About the Use of

Reason in Matters of RELIGION.

---

*In a Letter to a Friend.*

---

The Second Edition.

---

L O N D O N :

Printed for *M. Wotton*, at the *Three Daggers*  
in *Fleet-street*. 1701.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES THE FIRST

BY

JOHN BURNET

OF

ST. ANDREW'S

UNIVERSITY

IN TWO VOLUMES

THE SECOND

VOLUME

AND

THE CONCLUSION

OF

THE HISTORY

OF

BL

2773

T510Zr

ADVERTISEMENT  
TO THE  
READER.

**T**HE First Edition of this Paper was among the Occasional Papers, Numb.III. But the Convocation having lately given the World an Occasion to talk of, and perhaps to enquire after the Book that is here Answered, it is thought fit to reprint it, and by it self, without any relation to those other Papers which accompanied the First Edition; that People may have it without thinking themselves under any Obligation to compleat a Sett. But withal it is thought proper to give this Notice, that those who have the other Edition should not be put to a new charge to buy this.

863892

Reflections



## REFLEXIONS

UPON

Mr. Toland's BOOK,

CALLED

*Christianity not Mysterious :*

S I R,

**T**Here having nothing new appeared in the World since my last to you, which deserves any great *Animadversion*, I would take this Opportunity to give you a short Account of a Matter now much in discourse; occasioned by our late Controversies with the *Socinians*: and particularly by Mr. Toland's Book, about *Mysteries in Religion*. That Book has indeed been honour'd with *Reflections* from a Great Hand, which may justly now supersede my Labour in the Matter; but that being done only at the latter end

Ep. of Worcester.  
Vindict. of the  
Trinity.

of a Book filled with great Variety of Matter, and Abundance of Learning; and upon that account I am afraid not of such general Use: I believe that still a short and plain Account of that Matter by it self, may not be unprofitable.

In doing this I shall, *First*, take notice of some things in his Book, which I think dishonourable to God, and dangerous to Religion; not intending however to reflect upon all that is erroneous, but only upon those things that are of greatest Consequence in this Controversie of the *Mysteries of Faith*.

*Secondly*, I shall shew you as clearly, and in as little room as I can, what is the true Use of Reason in Matters of Religion; with particular Application to the Doctrines relating to the Blessed Trinity, being the Matters chiefly aimed at in this Controversie.

Mr. T—d begins his Book with what he calls *Stating the Controversie*; where, after he has represented his Adversaries Opinions, as Men use to do those things they have a mind to expose, he tells us in short what his own Thoughts are; *We hold that Reason is the only Foundation of all Certitude; and that nothing revealed, whether as to its Manner, or Existence, is more exempted from its Disquisition, than the ordinary Phenomena of nature — That there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, or above it; and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd a Mystery.*

But perhaps we shall see his Opinion more clearly in this Matter, if we consider what he says in his *Third Chapter*; where he distinguishes  
between

between the *Means of Information*, and the *Grounds of Persuasion*.

The *Means of Information*, he says, are those ways whereby any thing comes barely to our Knowledge, without necessarily commanding our Assent. Among these *Means of Information* he reckons *Humane* and *Divine Authority*. So that according to this, the Authority of God does no more than barely bring Matters to his Knowledge, but does not necessarily command his Assent. I hope the Reader will not think that I misrepresent Mr. Toland, for I assure him that they are his own Words, and that not recited by halves, but fully. He does indeed take the liberty to contradict himself in this Page with respect to *Humane Authority*, where he tells us, *That Matters of Fact, duly attested by Coevous Persons as known to them, and by others of different Times, Nations, or Interests, who could neither be imposed upon themselves, nor be justly suspected of combining together to deceive others, ought to be received by us as certain and undoubted, as if we had seen it with our eyes*— And a little after he says, *When all these Rules concur in any Matter of Fact, I take it then for a demonstration, which is nothing else but irresistible Evidence from proper Proofs*. So that though Reason be the only Foundation of all Certitude, and Authority be not a Ground of Persuasion, but a thing only that brings matters barely to our knowledge, yet at the same time it may be a proper Proof, be a Demonstration, and carry irresistible Evidence along with it.

Page 17.

But let us see whether so much may be said of *Divine Authority* as is here said of *Humane*; but for this he refers us to *Sect. II. Ch. 2*. Where he

recurs to the distinction before-mentioned, and tells us, That *Revelation is not a necessitating Motive of Assent, but a Means of Information*; we should not confound the way whereby we come to the knowledge of a thing, with the grounds we have to believe it. *A Man may inform me concerning a thousand Matters I never heard of before, and of which I should not so much as think, if I were not told; yet I believe nothing upon his Word, without Evidence in the things themselves. Not the bare Authority of him that speaks, but the clear Conception I form of what he says is the Ground of my Persuasion.* Which Words I must leave to the consideration of the Christian Reader, though I hope for his Reputation, that he does not mean quite so wickedly as he speaks; but that he does think the Authority of God a sufficient reason, why he ought to believe some things, as he acknowledges more than once in this Book, though in direct Contradiction to what he here lays down.

But then it's plain that this distinction of his, which he makes the chief Foundation of his Book, is perfectly false and frivolous; for the reason why I believe any thing true, is certainly the Ground of my Persuasion about it; and therefore if I believe any thing true, because God has said it, God's Authority must certainly be the Ground of that Persuasion.

I would ask Mr. T. whether he believes the Universal Deluge, the Destruction of *Sodom*, and the like? I do not question but he will say he does. But why does he believe these things? perhaps he'll say, because he has a clear and distinct Idea of them, so that he sees they are possible: But that

that only proves that they may be, and what things only may be, may not be too; but why does he believe that these things really were? I am sure he can make no other sensible Answer, but that God has said so, and he ought to believe him. So that the Authority of God is the Reason of his Belief, and the Ground of his Persuasion about them: His own Idea's, though never so clear and distinct, can at most prove them only possible, but can never prove them true.

I would now consider a little his *Grounds of Persuasion, or that Rule whereby we judge of all Truth, and which irresistibly convinces the Mind.* Page 16.

This, he tells us, is *Evidence*, and it consists in *the exact Conformity of our Idea's or Thoughts with their Objects, or the things we think upon*: which is a good Definition of *Truth*, but not of *Evidence*. Page 18.  
 If my Thoughts and Conceptions agree with the Natures of things, my Conceptions are then true and just; but they may be so very often, when I am not, and perhaps cannot be certain that they are so. Many Persons are in the right, who at the same time are much afraid that they are in the wrong; so that it is one thing to think truly, and another thing to have Certainty and Evidence that I do so. Besides that Men may have true Idea's of what never was, nor is ever like to be in the World. If a Person should tell me, that he had seen a Country in *America*, where the Mountains were all Gold, and the Men all forty Foot high, and the Trees all half a Mile about; though I have a very clear Conception of all these things, yet I should believe him never the more for that. And on the other side, though God has told

told me that he has reserved for good Men in the other World, what *neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has it enter'd into the heart of man to conceive* ; though perhaps this Author may laugh at me for believing unintelligible Mysteries, and without clear Idea's, yet I must confess I believe God never the less for that. If he had thought fit to make the matter more clear to me, my Knowledge might have been something more improv'd ; but my Faith is the same now it would have been then : and perhaps this answers the end of the Revelation as well as that would have done ; which was not to make me a greater Philosopher, but a better Man, and to encourage me to hold out against all the Temptations of this World, by the hopes of that great, though unknown Happiness of the other. Thus again ; if God should tell me that all the Stars were filled with Inhabitants of a very different kind from any thing in this Earth, and much Nobler ; here it would be a hard matter for me to have any clear Idea's ; but yet I should believe God, and be very thankful for the Revelation ; and such a Revelation might be of good use to me : it might raise my Thoughts of God, who has such abundance of Creatures unknown to me at his Service : it might make me more admire him for communicating his Goodness so largely, and give me a truer Scheme of the System of the World, than I now have. But I must confess I do not see how this Author could upon his Principles believe either of these things ; for here is nothing of his *Ground of Persuasion, no clear Idea's, no examining the manner of its existing* ; these are things he can never see through,

and

and therefore they are not capable of being measured by that Rule whereby he judgeth of all Truth.

I come now to consider the Two main Assertions of this Book, of which if I can give a good Account, all the rest of the Book must of it self fall to the ground.

The First is, That *no Doctrines of the Gospel is contrary to Reason;*

The Second is, That *there is nothing mysterious in the Gospel, or above Reason;*

As for the First of these: I shall readily grant him, that there is nothing contrary to Reason; that there is nothing in the Gospel but what, if we could fully understand the nature of it, we should find agreeable to the highest Reason; and that if there be any thing that seems to be otherwise, it is only so; because our Capacities cannot reach it.

But this do not satisfy our Author, who says That *but seeming Contradiction is to us the same thing as a real one;* and therefore that nothing which seems so contrary to Reason, can be admitted any more than if it were supposed really to be so.

In Answer to this, I grant, that if all things considered, I am fully persuaded that any thing is against Reason, and involves a Contradiction; such a seeming Contradiction is to me as a real one, and ought to be so reputed; for I can judge of things no otherwise, than as all Circumstances considered, they appear to me.

the

the thing be such, that I discern plainly that I cannot see thro' it ; and that therefore the Difficulties and Absurdities that appear, may not be so for any thing I know ; such Appearances as these ought to be no Hinderance to my Belief of the thing ; if I have upon other Accounts sufficient Reason to believe that God has revealed it : For notwithstanding any Difficulties of this kind, take the thing by it self without Revelation , and it may be true for any thing I know ; But if God once says it, then it certainly must be true ; and no Difficulties of this kind should be any Objection against the Revelation ; but we ought to receive the Evidence of that with all indifference ; because if my Reason tells me plainly that I cannot get to the Bottom of it, that the Matter is out of my Reach, it must leave it to be determin'd another way.

I believe, Sir, you are satisfied that there are a great many things of this kind in Religion, which serve the Interest of no Party : And if this Author has half the Learning he pretends to, he must have found abundance of them ; and that they have not been kept up as Mysteries, but that Learned Men in all Ages have done the best they can to give Light to them, and to clear the Difficulties : But that notwithstanding all that has been said about them, there are great Difficulties still remain ; and for ought appears, are still like to do so till we get to Heaven, where we shall not know *in part*, as we do in this World, *but shall know even as we are known*.

I am fully satisfied that I have a Freedom of Will, and a Liberty of determining my self as in Reason I judge fittest ; and of this besides other good Arguments, I have the same Evidence that I  
have

have that I see or hear, the Evidence of internal Sense and Feeling. And as I am persuaded of this, so I am also that *God sees all my Thoughts, even long before I think them*; but how to reconcile these two together, I must confess I cannot tell; and I perceive Learned Men of all sorts as much at a loss about it as my self. That an uncertain thing should be certainly foreseen; that God should certainly foresee a thing that is not certainly to come to pass; or, that what must certainly come to pass, should still be uncertain, and contingent, and under the Freedom of our Wills; These, with the Author's good Leave, I must call great Mysteries.

This Author seems very well satisfied that there are such things in the World as immaterial Beings; this he infers very well, because he feels something in himself that can think, which he can no way conceive to be in the power of meer Matter, in which I think he judges very rightly: But can he answer all the Difficulties that attend these immaterial Beings? and have not a great many laughed at these things, as the Mysteries of Priests, as he does at some others that have less difficulty in them? Can he tell how the Soul is in the Body, or how it actuates it? Can he give any account how it is more possible for a Soul to move a Body, than it is for a Body to think without a Soul?

I do indeed believe it more possible; but I cannot answer the difficulties of the one, any more than I can of the other. Whatsoever moves another thing must do it by contact, either immediate or mediate, or else by willing and commanding; but neither of these can be apprehended in this

case; not contact, because that has place only in Bodies, which have Extension and Parts: not by willing and commanding, because that supposes something that understands the Command, which Matter cannot do. In short, though it be so evident to sense, yet it is very hard to conceive, that there should be any such thing as Motion in the World; that either Matter should move of it self, or that any thing else which is not Matter, should be able to do it.

To conclude this Head: Let us but consider the various Methods of the Providence of God, the Manner whereby he upholds all Creatures in their Being, or assists them in their Actions, or the Methods he has in all Ages and Nations made use of to govern them, and we shall find a vast Scene of Difficulties and Objections, which the wisest Men in all Ages have not been able to answer; and indeed no other wise Answer can be given, but that *God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts*; that God is very Great, his Methods unsearchable, and *his Ways past finding out*.

I hope this Author will not think it adviseable to disbelieve either the Providence of God, or the Justice and Goodness of it, till all these difficulties can be cleared; if he do, my Opinion is, that he will do much more Service to God and the World by endeavouring to clear them, than by writing such Books as this I am now reflecting upon. But whatever he thinks of that, I believe most People will agree with me in this, that it had been much more decent for him to have given the World an Essay of his Skill, in making plain some of those things which have exercised so much the Thoughts  
of

of considering Men, before he had ventured to be too *dogmatical*: And this is what would have convinced the World much better than the Method he has taken; for bold Assertions never make any thing plainer than it was before.

I hope by this time I have made it pretty plain that there are many things in Religion which must be believed, if we will have any Religion at all, though we can't quite get to the bottom of them, or be able to give an Answer to all the *seeming* Absurdities and Difficulties that attend them.

But our Authour here objects, That if this be once admitted, it will make way for all the Absurdities and Contradictions in the World, even *Transubstantiation* it self.

But I don't see the Consequence of this, if Men will but be so wise as to observe these *Two* Rules.

*First*, To distinguish betwixt those things where the Contradiction is evident and apparent to them, and they plainly see it cannot be answered; and those other sort of things I mention'd, where tho' there be somewhat they cannot tell what to make of, yet still they may discern that the Matter is at present beyond their reach, that they can't see through it, and therefore should not conclude any thing positively against it from the present Appearances of it to them.

*Secondly*, That they take care not to admit any thing as a Revelation from God, but upon good grounds; that they satisfy themselves as well as they can, of the Truth of the Revelation in general;

ral; and that they are not mistaken in the Interpretation of it: of which two things when they are well convinced, it is then great Wisdom, as well as Piety, to over-rule all their Doubts; and to conclude all to be true which they have such reason to think comes from God, though they are not such Masters of the Matter, as to be able to answer all that may be said against it.

✓ Mr. Toland says, That *in Cases of this kind we should at least suspend our Belief till we are better satisfied about the Matter*; that is, in plain English, That we must not believe that we are free Agents, that we have any Souls, or that God governs the World, till we can solve the Objections about these Matters. But I would ask him seriously, whether he does believe the greatest part of Mankind capable of ever receiving satisfaction in these Points, and many other that might be named? or that they will ever be able to free them from *seeming Contradictions*? And must they then have no Religion as long as they live? I hope that Providence has provided better for them.

x But without this, he says, *they will be subject to be deceiv'd and impos'd upon*. But I hope not very much, if they will but observe the Two Rules I before laid down. Though in truth I never yet heard of any way that could secure Mankind from all Error; it seems to be the irremediable Condition of our Nature to be subject to some Mistakes: And therefore it is a very false way of arguing, that such or such things must be necessary, because otherwise we cannot be secured but that we shall be mistaken in some cases. It is upon this Principle that the *Papists* argue for their Infallibility;

fallibility; they aggravate very much the Errours to which Mens Reason has in all Ages carried them: and that therefore we can never be certain of being freed from Errour without submitting to an infallible Guide. Now, I must confess, I have by no means any Aversion to an infallible Guide, if they can but tell me where he is. But if they cannot, I must be contented to bear the Infirmities of Humane Nature, and do as well as I can, till God shall think fit to shew me a better way.

Thus our Author, though in a different Method, lays down that there is no way to prevent being mistaken, but by denying our Assent, till we get *clear Idea's*, and that that will fully do the business. Now I have as little Prejudice against *clear Idea's* as I have against an *infallible Judge*; but I am afraid that in many cases these are as hard to be found as the other. The truth is, whoever considers the State of Mankind, will not think that they were made to see through things so easily as he imagines; for there are very few of those who have made it their business to think and study, that can either talk or think clearly, or solve the Contradictions to which very common things seem to be liable: and much less can an Ability to do this be expected from all Mankind; and yet without it, they can never make use of his *only Rule* to judge of all Truth.

The Ability that God seems to have given the greatest part of Men, is, not to have full and clear Conceptions of things, but to judge of the common Arguments that prove the Truth of them; and therefore when from any of those Ar-  
guments

arguments we have sufficient reason to believe any thing true, we must then acquiesce; and not be startled by Objections that are plainly out of our reach. Not that this, or any other Method we can take, will secure Persons, that have no greater Abilities than we have, from all Error: But this I take to be the wisest, and what Providence designed we should take in our Search after Truth.

Secondly, I come now to consider the *second* sort of Doctrines mentioned, those that are said to be above Reason. Mr. Toland does indeed deny that there are any such Doctrines, but it is not easie to apprehend what he means. He says those things are *above Reason which are in their nature inconceivable, and not to be judged of by our ordinary Faculties and Idea's*. And yet he grants that we do not, and cannot conceive what the Essence of any thing is, nor what all the Properties of some things are; so that he might more truly and properly have said, that every thing was above Reason, than that nothing was.

Page 66.

Page 74.

But that we may see more distinctly into this Matter, I shall shew what *Divines* generally mean by a thing's being *above Reason*, when they make use of this Phrase with relation to what we call the *Mysteries of Faith*.

*First*, A thing may be said to be *above Reason*, when we do in the main apprehend well what is meant by it, but cannot so far see through it, as to be able to give an Answer to those Contradictions and Difficulties to which it seems liable;  
in

in this sense those things are above Reason which I mention'd under the last Head. Thus I apprehend, in the main, well enough what is meant by a Soul, and by the Soul's moving the Body; tho' I do not, and very likely cannot apprehend the Matter so fully as to be able to solve the seeming Impossibility that there is for any thing immaterial to move Matter; or indeed for Matter to be moved at all.

*Secondly*, A thing may be said to be *above Reason*, when we do not, and perhaps cannot apprehend what it is; but this may be *twofold*. X

1. When a thing is so far above us, that we do not at all conceive what is meant by it; have no Notion of the Matter; know nothing of it; but when we speak of it, mean only a Word, without any conceived sense under it: and 'tis against the Words taken in this sense, that the chief Arguments of the Author are directed, if they have any force at all: But in this he is not like to have me for his Adversary. A Religion that consisted of such Points as these, would not be a reasonable Service; and God would get no Honour, nor Men any Advantage by such Revelations: tho' indeed such could not be called Revelations, where Men are taught nothing, and have nothing discovered to them, but know just as much after, as they did before. If any *Divines* have advanced such a Notion as this, I leave them to Mr. T---d's Indignation, to be treated with as much Scorn as he pleases; though I believe he will hardly find any

any in the Church of *England* that talk in such a manner.

x ✓ 2. A Doctrine may be said to be *above Reason*, when we can from the Revelation apprehend it only in part; know so much of it, as may answer wise ends of the Revelation; but for other parts of it, they may be quite out of our reach, and above our Apprehension, so that we cannot form any distinct and clear Idea's of the whole Doctrine. And such Points as these are chiefly what we call *Mysteries* in Religion, about which Word I shall enter into no Contest with our Author; nor be solicitous in what sense it has been used in Heathen Authors; nor need we be much concern'd how it is generally taken even in Scripture it self; for it is now a very common *English* word: its signification is indeed borrowed from those Mysteries he mentions in the *Pagan* Worship of old, which were used to be kept private; but it is now made use of to signify any thing that is in a great measure a Secret to us; and particularly in Divinity it is used to signify such Doctrines as we can apprehend but in part and imperfectly while we are in this World; and if there be such things as these, there is no reason to quarrel at the Word, but if there be not, our business is not to throw away a Word, but to clear the Natures of things.

But to explain this Matter a little more fully: As for those parts of Christian Doctrines that are above our Apprehension, and of which we can have no Notion, God does not expect that we should believe them in the same manner that we do

do other parts which we do apprehend; for that would indeed be impossible: But he expects that we should believe him explicitly so far as our Understanding will go, and we can apprehend what his meaning is; but for other things that are out of our reach, it is sufficient that we believe in general, that that, and every thing else which God says, must certainly be true; in all which it will be a hard matter to shew any thing that is shocking to Reason: for I am sure it is very reasonable to suppose, that some things may be above our Apprehensions, and as reasonable to suppose, that whatever God says must be true.

But it may be it will be said, that the Difficulty is why, or for what Reason God should tell the World any thing of this kind, which seems not proper to serve any good End or Purpose: for though we had a thousand such Revelations as these, (if they may be called Revelations) we should know no more than we did before; things of this kind are not proper to instruct, but to amuse, and perplex, and confound the World.

As to this I answer; That there are many things which our Capacities can't fully reach, and therefore we can't have a full and a clear Notion of them, and yet it may be of great use to us to know and apprehend as much of these things as we can; and this we say is the Reason why God thought fit to tell the World of such things; not that they might fully apprehend them, but apprehend so much as may answer the wise Ends for which God revealed them, so much as may be of use to them; and which it's likely could not have been revealed

without saying something too which they could not apprehend. And this is a distinction not invented to serve a Turn, or the Interest of any Party, but is plain from some of the chiefest, and most uncontestable Grounds of Religion.

To take the first Principle of all Religion, the Being of God, I don't know what God is; but yet I don't mean a meer Word, when I say that I believe there is a God: I don't know what his Being is, but yet I know enough of him to be the Foundation of Religious Worship; which is the great end for which I am concerned to believe that there is such Being. I know that He is infinitely Good, and Just, and Powerful, and Wise; that he made, and does still govern the World, and much more of that kind: which things lie level to the meanest Capacities; though the Nature of God, and many thousand Questions that may be asked, lie quite out of the reach of the highest.

Thus again; The Scriptures tell us that *God is a Spirit*, which words are very far from being vain uselefs words, though we cannot have a full conception what a Spirit is; because thus much at least we may apprehend from them, that God, because he is a Spirit, is not like any of those things that we see in this World; that he is a Living, active Being, but without any bodily Shape; and this, with some other things of the like Nature, is all we believe explicitly about it. As for what more is implied in the word *Spirit*, which we cannot apprehend, that we believe only in general, that it does signifie something further, though we at present can't tell what. But in this, as in  
the

the former Case, what we do apprehend is sufficient for our Instruction, to remove from our Notion of God, the Imperfections of Material Beings ; to teach us to worship Him in a proper manner ; not to frame any Image or Likeness of Him, because He is not like any thing we see here, but to *worship him in spirit, and in truth.*

Thus as to the Immensity or Omnipresence of God, the thing seems to be plainly revealed in Scripture, and we may have some general and confused Notion of it ; but if we come to examine it more particularly, and ask our selves how God is present every where ? or what we do distinctly and particularly mean, when we profess our Belief of this Attribute of God, we shall find our selves very much at a loss ? It is a hard Matter to conceive a thing to be every where, without conceiving it extended ; and if so, then it will be as hard to conceive it without Parts, if not actually divisible, as in Bodies, yet however assignable to the several Parts of the Universe through which it is extended : And then one part of God must be in one part of the World, and another in another ; with a thousand more Absurdities. And yet to avoid this, it is as hard to conceive that the whole Essence of God should be every where, in so many Millions of distinct separate Places, and not be separate from it self.

But notwithstanding these Difficulties, yet such a general and confused Notion as we may have of this Matter, is of very great use to us ; and we have reason to be thankful to God for the discovery of so much : for there is nothing like to have a greater

Influence on our Lives, than to conceive that God is always and every where present with us.

Having from these Instances shewed ( I think plainly ) that there are some things in Religion *above Reason* ; that is, such things that we can apprehend but very imperfectly, and in part : I would now speak a word or two with relation to the *Mystery* of the Blessed *Trinity* ; in which I shall be very short ; because this Author does not in his Book expressly deny the Trinity, though we have reason to fear that his Book was chiefly design'd against it. But as it was sufficient for him to overthrow that Doctrine without professing to do it, by shewing that there could be no such thing in Religion as *Mysteries*, such as all suppose to be in that Doctrine : so on the other side, it is sufficient for me to defend it, as far as it is concerned in that Imputation ; to shew that there are such things, and which must be confess'd Essential Points of Religion. This, I think, I have done, and it is all that I pretend to do in this Paper ; supposing that upon other accounts there is good reason to believe that Doctrine, and only proving now that it ought not to be rejected, because it is a *Mystery*.

But however, before I proceed, I would observe about it these *Three* things.

*First*, That though there be in the Doctrine of the Blessed *Trinity* many things above our Apprehension, yet there are too, many things which we may conceive well enough, at least so far as to apprehend.

prehend what the meaning of God was in the Revelation.

*Secondly*, That God requires us explicitly to believe no more of this Doctrine than where we can explicitly understand his Meaning ; It would indeed be a great shock to Reason, or rather is an Impossibility, to believe explicitly we don't know what : But (as I observed before) there is neither, in giving an express Assent so far as we apprehend, and in supposing that what is beyond our Apprehension must be true, because God has said it.

*Thirdly*, I would observe, that what we do apprehend in this Doctrine is sufficient to answer those wise and good Ends we may suppose God had in revealing it to the World.

These *Three* things well considered will free the Doctrine of the *Trinity* from all those Objections which our Author makes against Mysteries ; and plainly shews us, that notwithstanding any thing in it which is above our Reason, yet take the whole together, we may assign good Causes, why God should reveal it, and why it should be our Duty to believe it.

This Discourse is already grown larger than I at first design'd it, and therefore I shall not insist particularly upon each of these Points.

But as to the *first* of them ; I think it clear enough, that the main Scheme of the Doctrine of the *Trinity* is not above the Apprehension of common People ; I do not mean, that they will be able to give a nice Philosophical Definition or Account

count of it; for that common People can hardly do in any thing, and even Learned Men but in very few things. There are many Matters that almost the meanest Capacities apprehend at the first Proposal; such as *Time* and *Place*, *Truth* and *Falseness*, *Body* and *Spirit*, and the like, of which yet they can give no Definition, nor any tolerable Account: And yet they know as well in the main, what is meant when those things are spoke of, as the greatest Philosopher; and the Knowledge they have of them perhaps serves their turn as well as if they had nicely studied the Nature of them. When therefore I say that the main Scheme of the Doctrine of the *Trinity* may be sufficiently apprehended by common People, I mean only a popular common Apprehension, such as they have of the Nature of God, and of almost all the Principles of Religion, and indeed of almost all the things they converse with; which Knowledge yet is sufficient in its kind, to answer all the wise Ends of God in giving it. Thus in particular, he that can apprehend that there is a God, or that the *Father of all* is God, may apprehend that the *Son*, or *Word* is God, and the same of the *Holy Spirit*; He may apprehend in the main well enough what we mean when we say, that these have each of them the same Divine Nature; and though they are truly and properly distinct from each other, so that the Father is not the Son, &c. yet that they are not so far distinct as Three Created Beings, and so are not Three Gods, but One God. Reason will indeed be apt to ask how can this be, but that supposes that it has at least a general Apprehension of the thing, otherwise it could not see the

the Difficulties, or ask Questions about it. In the same manner we may apprehend that the *Father* has the Divine Nature originally, that the *Son* has it communicated to him from the Father from all Eternity ; that the *Son* or *Word* of God was pleased in due time to take our Nature, and for our sake *was made Flesh*: That in that Humane Nature which he assumed, he was pleased to *offer himself a Sacrifice for the Sins of the World, and now sits at the right hand of God to make intercession for us.*

It is not my Business now to shew the Truth of these things from Scripture, or to answer the Difficulties that may be raised against them, but only to shew that they are Doctrines we do in a great measure apprehend. And this methinks the Enemies of it should not deny ; for they pretend to apprehend it well enough themselves, and bring many Arguments and Objections against it ; which surely they would not pretend to do, if they did not think at least that they apprehended our Meaning.

There are indeed many things that we would be glad to see resolved in these and several other Points of Religion, but God has not thought fit to give us any means to do it, and perhaps our Souls are not capable of a more clear Discovery of them in this World ; we must therefore be contented with such a degree of Knowledge as God is pleased to allow us ; and expect it as one part of that Happiness which is reserved for us in another State, that we shall then find all those hard things cleared which so puzzled us here. And this I remember one of the Ancient Fathers makes a considerable part of the Happiness of the

Athenag.  
p. 11.

next Life, That we shall then *know the Unity of the Father, and the Communication of the Father to the Son; what the Holy Ghost is, and what Union and Distinction there is between the Holy Ghost, the Son, and the Father.*

But that imperfect Knowledge which we have of them here is not vain and useless to us, but is the great Foundation of our Faith as Christians, and is a Direction to us in some of the greatest Christian Duties. These things were not revealed to entertain our Curiosity, or to be Matters only of Speculation, but are some of the chief parts of the Doctrine of the Redemption of the World by Jesus Christ: And this we may suppose was the chief Reason why the World was not acquainted with them before, because there was not that necessity of it before this great Mystery of our Redemption was to be revealed: And therefore as God was known to the Jews chiefly by these Titles, *God that made the World, the God of their Fathers, the God that brought them out of the Land of Ægypt*; so now to us Christians He is chiefly known by his Title of the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. And the solemn way that we are initiated into our Religion is *in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost*: These are now known to us by the Parts they have in the Redemption of the World; The *Father*, eminently in giving his Only Son, The *Son*, in being made Flesh, and taking our Nature upon him, and in that offering himself a Sacrifice for the Sins of the World; The *Holy Ghost*, in the Sanctification of our Natures, and disposing of the other Gifts of the *Spirit*, which he *divides*

to every man as he pleases: We have from so much as we know of the Doctrine of the Trinity, an Account of the Person of our Mediator, of the Dignity of his Nature, of his having the Name and the Attributes of God so often assign'd to him in Scripture, of our being baptiz'd in his Name, and of our being his Servants; of the Divine Worship that is given him, particularly of our Love, Trust, Confidence and Dependence upon him: We have from hence a great Idea of the Love of God to Mankind, and of the very great Condescension of our Saviour, which are both so much insisted on, and magnified all over the Scriptures, and made the Arguments of the great Thankfulness and Love that we ought to return to God the Father, and our Blessed Saviour. The whole Genius and Spirit of the Gospel almost runs upon these Considerations, which are noble and lively according to our Scheme; but there is scarce any thing more flat and insipid than what the *Socinians* say about these greatest Points of the Christian Religion. In short, if we will take the Christian Religion only for a Scheme of better Morality than the World had before, the *Socinian Hypothesis* may serve well enough; but if we will take it as it lies in the Scriptures, and as the Body of Christians have always owned it, for a Method of reconciling the World to God by the Death of his Son, and by the Sanctification of their Souls by the Holy Spirit, with all the other Doctrines and Duties that are there consequent upon it, there can no tolerable Account be given of it without the Doctrine of the Blessed *Trinity*.

But it may be our Author will say, that if we apprehend so much of the Doctrine of the Trinity as is useful and convenient for us to know, that then it is not a Mystery; for if we consult his *Second Chapter, Sect. III.* we shall find that he says to the same effect more than once or twice. So that I hope, notwithstanding all he has said, yet he still believes this Doctrine, and other Points of the Christian Religion, which are commonly counted Mysterious. And it's possible we may now come to agree; for if he will but grant me such Points as these, where we apprehend but in part, but however so much as may be of good Use and Service to us; I will, on the other side, gratifie him, (if that will do it) by rejecting all Doctrines of which we can apprehend nothing, and of which we can make no use.

But then I must desire him and the Reader to consider these *Two* things.

*First,* That when our *Divines* speak of Mysteries, they mean only such things as I have been describing; which are revealed, or which we can apprehend only in part, but however so much as may serve those wise Ends God had in revealing it. So that the Author has quite mistaken the State of the Question.

*Secondly,* It would be well if he would consider, how little he has consulted his Reputation with wise and good Men, in writing such a bold confident Book, and so often libelling the whole Christian Church, when he did not understand the Matter he wrote about.

I should now have dismiss'd Mr. T----d, and this Dispute of *Mysteries*, or things above Reason, together, but that there is one thing more in the Chapter I quoted before, which deserves our Observation; and that is this, That there is no more Mystery, in any thing than there is in every thing; that he knows as much of *Spirits* as he does of *Bodies*, as much of *God* as he does of the *meanest* of his *Creatures*; because, says he, we are equally ignorant of the *Essence* of every thing, of *Body* as well as *Spirit*. And as for the *Properties* of a *Spirit*, we know them as well as we do those of a *Body*; so that our Knowledge is as great of the one as the other; and one is no more out of our reach than the other is.

Chap 2.  
Sect. III.

Now I believe he is the first Person that ever talked so boldly about God as he does in this Chapter; that God should be comprehended as easily as the meanest of his *Creatures*, is very strange Language. But how does he prove this? why he understands the *Properties* of a *Spirit* as well as those of a *Body*: well; suppose that at present: But I believe he'll say, that all which he understands of the *Properties* of a *Spirit* is from reflecting upon the *Operations* of his own *Soul*; And is he sure that the *Operations* and *Attributes* of *God* are like those of his *Soul*? Does he comprehend *God's* Way of thinking, and apprehending, and judging, and willing as well as he does his own? Does he comprehend how *God* sees all things past, present and to come at one *View*? how he sees future *Contingencies*? There may be as much difference, for any thing he knows, in the manner of *God's* thinking and ours, as there is in the measure of our Know-

ledge ; and the same may be said of all his other Attributes and Operations ; But however, since he can judge of God only from Reflection upon the Operations of his own Soul, by supposing something in God, not like, but in some degree correspondent to these Perfections and Operations he finds there, he must certainly comprehend the Actions of his own Mind much better than he does those of God.

But how is he sure that he understands the Properties of *Finite Spirits* as well as he does those of *Bodies* ? He is not indeed the first Person that has said it ; but it seems to contradict the common Experience of Mankind, who find themselves much more at a loss in conceiving the one than they do in the other ; and indeed this seems not agreeable to the present State of things : For we live and converse here with a World of Material Beings. These are Things which we have daily Use of upon all Occasions ; and every Sense we have, lets us in to the Knowledge of them : But we have very little Means to come to the Knowledge of Spirits.

All that this Author pretends to, is by reflecting upon the Operations of his own Mind ; but that can at most inform him only with the *Actions* of Spirits : But he is still as much at a loss as ever to apprehend what sort of Substance a Spirit is, or what are the Properties of it as such a Substance. He knows very well the Properties of Bodies, as to *be extended, solid, divisible, smooth, rough, soft, hard*; and the like ; but he does not know any one Property of a Spirit consider'd as a Substance. Consider indeed a Spirit as a *Living* and an *Active Being*, and we feel, and inwardly perceive its Operations,  
such

such as thinking, willing, and the like: But these are only Actions, and those suppose something that acts; and here it is that we are at a loss, to know what sort of Being that is which thus thinks and acts; and what are the substantial Properties of it; whether it be extended or not? what Relation it has to Place? whether it be any where or no where? if it be in a Place, how it's there? whether two Spirits can be in the same Place? There may be a Thousand Properties of Spiritual Substances which may distinguish one from the other; of which at present, we neither do nor can know any thing. *Thinking* and *Willing* are but Actions, or, at most, but secondary Properties of a Spirit, belonging to it as a *living and an active Being*; but these must be conceived distinct from those that belong to it as it is a *Spiritual Substance* only.

And this, I suppose, is the Reason that almost every body easily frames a Notion of Bodies from the Properties of them which they see and know. But all the World seems to be at a loss about Spirits; and can go no farther in their Conceptions than some of the Actions of them; but what sort of Subject or Thing it is which thus acts, they have no Notion.

I would, before I proceed, make one Observation from what has been said about this Matter; and that is, of the great Difference that there is in the Difficulties that are observed in the Doctrine of the *Trinity* and those in *Transubstantiation*. As for *Transubstantiation*, besides that it is against some of the plainest Principles both of Reason and Religion, it is downright contradictory to some of the most Essential Properties of Bodies. There is nothing  
more

more evident to us; than, that a Body must be extended; indivisible; be circumscribed by Place, and the like. And it's plain that a Humane Body, if it be perfect, must have it's proper Joynts and Limbs, such as Head, Legs, Arms, and the like; and these not confounded together, but each in its proper Place, and Order: And it's plain from Scripture, that our Saviour's was such a Body as this is, *being in all things made like unto us, sin only excepted.* Now it's possible there may be many Reasons, some not known to us, why what is received in the Blessed Sacrament may be called the *Body of Christ*: Either because it solemnly represents it, or because with the outward Elements, to those that faithfully receive it, may be convey'd the Blessings procured by his Body and Blood; or because those Elements may be (as some have talk'd) in a supernatural Manner united to the Word or Divinity of Christ, and so in some sense be his Body; which though there do not appear the least ground for, yet however it does not seem impossible; or there may be other ways, unknown to us, why it may be so called. But still if we know any thing of a Body, it cannot be that Body which we have been speaking of, *which was made like unto Ours.* It cannot be that Body which the *Romish* Church has determin'd it to be, that Body which was born of the Virgin, which conversed with his Disciples, and which suffered upon the Cross: For that Body had Head, and Breast, and Legs, and Arms, and other Parts of a Humane Body, all in due Order; but it's plain that what is received in the Sacrament has not. That twenty such Bodies may be no bigger than a little Bit of Bread, if we know  
any

any thing of a Body, or the Properties of it, Christ could not take his own Body into his own Hands, and put it whole, Head, and Breast, and Legs, and Arms, into his own Mouth: These are things that shock all the Principles of Sense and Reason together; and are utterly inconsistent with the most Essential Properties of Bodies in general, and of a Humane Body in particular.

But now if we consider the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and those Properties which this Author says we know of Spirits, there does not appear any Inconsistency or Contradiction between them. The Properties he reckons up, which we know of Spirits, are *Thinking, Willing, Hoping, Loving, Knowing, Imagining*, and the like; now let him turn these as many ways as he pleases, and he will not be able to find any thing in any of them, or all of them together, which contradicts the Doctrine of the Trinity. But it will be said that this contradicts the Unity of God; but what the Unity of God is, we cannot learn from those Properties which he says we know of Spirits, and consequently must be very much at a loss about it, or to know whether this be indeed inconsistent with it or not: In short, to determine well in this Controversie, we must know more of the *Essence* of God, or of those *Essential Properties* before mentioned. And therefore I think it is apparently our Duty in things of this high Nature, which are so much out of our reach, to take things as God shall reveal them; and if we can but have good Arguments for the Truth of the Revelation, then to enquire no farther.

Page 85.

Having thus consider'd the chief things in Mr. Toland's Book, with which all the rest of it must stand or fall; I now proceed to what I propos'd in the *second place*, to shew *what is the Use of Reason in Matters of Religion.*

But having done this more largely than I expected in the foregoing Part, as far as it is concern'd in the present Controversie of the *Mysteries of Faith*, and my design being only to clear that Matter, I shall now be very short.

1. The *first* Rule that I would lay down is this, That no Man ought to believe any thing, unless he has in some way or other a sufficient Reason for so doing; and indeed if a Man knows what he does, and will but consider the Matter, he cannot believe any thing without some Reason or other that proves it a Matter credible and worthy of Belief; and, on the other side, he cannot but believe where the Matter appears plain and clear to him: Indeed in both these cases a Man may, as the greatest part of the World do, very well deceive himself; on the one side, by taking things for granted without considering, and so believing without Reason; and on the other side, by being prejudic'd against a thing, and not suffering his Mind to weigh those Reasons which would otherwise convince him.

2. As we ought not to believe without Reason, so we should consider, that every thing is not capable of the same sort of Proof; and that it is sufficient for us if a thing be but proved in its proper way. Sensible Matters may be proved by Sense, other Matters capable of it by Demonstration; but yet

yet we may have good Reason to believe what can be proved neither of these ways. In Matters of Fact it is a sufficient Reason of Belief, if the thing be well attested by credible Men; and in Matters of Revelation we ought to acquiesce in the Authority of God.

3. When any Persons pretend to bring Revelations from God, we should not immediately swallow down what they say without considering; for that would expose us to be deceived by all the Pretenders in the World: But we should *try the Spirits*, consider what Proofs they have of their Divine Mission. And among other Proofs we ought to consider the Matter they deliver: If what they deliver be contrary to the Principles of Natural Religion; or apparently absurd and contradictory, we may then conclude, that it cannot come from God, who cannot contradict himself, or the Eternal Rules of Reason. But if the main of the Matter appear worthy of God, and they bring other sufficient Evidences of their Divine Mission, such as Miracles, and the like; we ought then to receive what they say, though there be some things in what they deliver, by reason of the Sublimity of the Matter, in a great measure above our Comprehension, and such therefore as we cannot free from all the Difficulties that may be objected against them; because we may very well be proper Judges of those Arguments that prove their Divine Mission, but are not such proper Judges of the Natures of several things; and therefore should have a care lest we do by our own Judgment about them, make too bold with the Authority of God.

4. As we must make use of our Reason in discovering the Truth of any Revelation, so we must also in finding out the true sense of it. Every Act of Religion does indeed presuppose Reason, and a reasonable Creature ought to do nothing but according to the Principles of that. But then Reason it self dictates that in interpreting any Revelation, supposing that we are before convinced of the Truth of it, we should very impartially take what God shall say, as it lies before us; and not make bold to rack and force it to some preconceived Opinions of our own, because we think them reasonable. For this is to come to God's Revelations not to be informed by them, and to learn from them what we ought to believe or practise; but rather this is to teach God to speak what we think he ought to say; and this is not to make our selves wiser by the Revelation, but rather to bring our own Opinions along with us, and endeavour to fix them upon God. We should therefore come to the Holy Scriptures with great *Sincerity*, and great *Humility*, and take things just as God delivers them, otherwise it is great Odds but we deceive our selves instead of learning.

We should therefore, generally speaking, take the Words in their most plain sense; but if the Words taken literally do, as sometimes they may, involve a plain Absurdity, or contradict any other part of God's Word, it is then very Natural to see if the use of that Phrase will admit a Metaphorical Sense, which will not be hard to discover either from the common Use of the Words, or from the Context. But we must have a care that we don't force a sense upon Words such as no unprejudic'd Man would give,

give, only to avoid Difficulties in Matters above our Comprehension, as the *Socinians* plainly have done in interpreting the *first* Chapter of *St. John*, and several other Texts relating to the Divinity of Christ. He that gives a Sense to Words in one of the Chief Articles of Faith, such as no Christian thought of for above 1500 Years, and such as none would think of that did not set himself to invent, does but too plainly shew that his Design is to *guide* the Word of God, and not to be *guided* by it.

In a word, if we would truly understand the Scriptures, we should sincerely pray to God to enlighten our Understandings by his Holy Spirit; and when we have done we should as sincerely submit them to be guided by it; we should have a care not to attribute to God's Word any thing that's plainly absurd; but since we understand things so imperfectly, we should be willing that God should dictate to us in what is above our Reach; and though we ought to *call no Man Master upon earth*, or to pin our Faith upon the Authority of any Man or number of Men; yet a modest Christian should have a great regard to what the Christian Church in all Ages has looked upon as one of the Chief Articles of Faith, and which whosoever has denied, has been upon that denied the Communion of the Church, as a Corrupter of the Faith.

I have now done, Sir, with what I proposed; give me leave, before I conclude, to take notice of one or two things, which could not so easily be brought into the Body of this Discourse. Our Author makes a great deal of stir about the *Heathen Mysteries*,

*Mysteries*, which were industriously concealed from the People, to keep up a Reverence and Veneration for them, and for the *Priests* themselves, who had the Honour to be let into such Secrets; intimating, that the same Designs were still carrying on among us by amusing the People with the Notion of Mysteries in the Christian Religion. Now he knows very well that we have no such Mysteries as those he mentions; that there is nothing in our Religion that we endeavour to keep from the Knowledge of our People: He knows very well that our People are not only allowed but frequently exhorted to read the Word of God, and that they are required to believe nothing but what they find there: And as for those things that are indeed Mysteries in our Religion, they are so only from the Imperfection of our Understanding; and our People know as much of them as God design'd either we or they should know in this World; and we do not pretend to be let into the full Secret of them till we come to Heaven, where we and our People shall be fully inlightened together, as we both *know but in part* here.

I would fain hope that our Author meant well, and design'd the Honour of the Christian Religion, in endeavouring to free it from Mysteries, as what he thought a Dishonour to it; But we have not now the making of the Christian Religion, but must take it as God has been pleas'd to make it to our hands, which he has done according to the Methods of Infinite Wisdom, though the Principles of it have of old, as well as in this Age, been censur'd of Folly, by those who are *wise* in their *own* conceits,

*conceits*, and guide themselves by the Wisdom of the World. But besides, there is this great danger in endeavouring to force things into such a Scheme as our Reason may be pleased with; that when we have done this, and look back again, we should find that the Religion of the Scriptures, and of the Christian Church of all Ages is not that fine Scheme we fancied, and so may be tempted to throw off all together. By this means the Christian Religion may be effectually undermined by those very Methods which are made use of under pretence of Honour and Concern for it; as I have heard it has been the practice of some in a great *Publick Body*, when they have no mind a Matter should *pass*, to be the first that shew their Zeal for it, and by that get the *forming* and managing of it into their own hands, and then they may easily make it such as shall never *pass*; which they could not have been able to hinder by any open Opposition. I would not charge this upon any body with relation to the Christian Religion; if any have been guilty of it, I pray God to convert and forgive them; though in plain truth it's a hard matter to imagine what else should be meant by so industriously representing Christian Ministers to have been *Knaves*, and the People *Fools* for above these 1500 Years; that the People yet never understood their Religion in the chiefest Points of it, and that the Ministers have industriously made it their business to corrupt it. If this should once be believed in the World, it would be as hard a Matter to keep up the Honor of the Christian Religion, as it would be to keep up the Honour of the King of *England* when you had taken

ken away all his Subjects from him but those of one poor Market-Town.

There are no Mysteries that I know of owned in our Church, which bring any particular Gain to the Ministers of it, any more than the Contrary to them would have done, had it pleas'd God to make it their Duty to preach them to the World, as he has now made it their Duty to preach these. These are indeed things now established, and so must be owned by those that will Minister in Holy things; but there was no Interest but that of Truth why these should be established rather than any thing else: And those who have delivered down these Doctrines to us, as they could pretend to no Interest, but that of saving their own and other Peoples Souls; so if they had been to invent and chuse for themselves, it is very likely they would have chosen the more plausible side of these Questions. In a Word, as these are Doctrines which we have from the Holy Scriptures and the first Christians, so they are such as were very zealously asserted by our first Reformers, who lost their Lives in that good Service of Reforming the Church from the Errors of *Papery*. And tho' I should be very sorry ever to see Men persecuted again, for owning the Christian Religion; yet, if it should please God ever to bring it to that, I question not but there are a great many now living would give sufficient Testimony, that it was not Interest but Conscience which made them preach up these Doctrines before.





UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**AA** 000 206 769 2

