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S E R M O N

Preached at

White-Hall,

*April the 4th, 1679.*

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By JOHN TILLOTSON D. D. Dean of *Canterbury*;  
and Chaplain in Ordinary to His *Majesty*.

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L O N D O N,

Printed for *Brabazon Aylmer*, at the three Pigeons over  
against the *Royal Exchange* in *Cornhil*: And *William*  
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SEE REVERSE

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A  
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Preached at

W H I T E - H A L L

April the 4th, 1679.

i J O H N iv. ii.

*Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.*

**T**His caution and counsel was given upon occasion of the false Prophets and Teachers that were risen up in the Church, who endeavoured to seduce men from the true Doctrine of the Gospel delivered by the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour. And these teaching contrary things, could not both be from God: and therefore St. *John* calls upon

Christians to examin the Doctrines and Pretences of those new Teachers; whether they were from God or not. *Believe not every Spirit; that is,* not every one that takes upon him to be inspired and to be a Teacher come from God: *But try the Spirits; that is,* examine those that make this pretence, whether it be real or not; and examin the Doctrines which they bring: because there are many Impostors abroad in the World.

This is the plain sence of the Words: In which there are contained these *four* Propositions.

*First, That men may, and often do, falsely pretend to Inspiration.* And this is the Reason upon which the Apostle grounds this Exhortation: *Because many false Prophets are gone out into the World,* therefore we should try who are true, and who are false.

*Secondly, We are not to believe every one that pretends to be inspired, and to teach a Divine Doctrine:* This follows upon the former: because men may falsely pretend to Inspiration, therefore we are not to believe every one that makes this pretence. For any man that hath but confidence enough, and conscience little enough, may pretend



pretend to come from God. And if we admit all pretences of this kind, we lie at the mercy of every crafty and confident man, to be led by him into what delusions he pleaseth.

*Thirdly, Neither are we to reject all that pretend to come from God. This is sufficiently implied in the Text; for where the Apostle says, believe not every Spirit, he supposeth we are to believe some; and when he saith, try the Spirits whether they be of God, he supposeth some to be of God, and that those which are so, are to be believed. These three Observations are so plain that I need only to name them, to make way for the*

*Fourth, Which I principally designed to insist upon from these Words. And that is this, That there is some way to discern mere pretenders to Inspiration, from those who are truly and Divinely inspired: And this is necessarily implied in the Apostles bidding us to try the Spirits whether they are of God. For it were in vain to make any trial, if there be no way to discern between pretended and real Inspirations.*

Now the handling of this will give occasion to two very material Enquiries, and useful to be resolved.

- I. *How we may discern between true and counterfeit Doctrines:* those which really are from God, and those which only pretend to be so?
- II. To whom this judgment of discerning doth appertain?
- I. *How we may discern between true and counterfeit Doctrines and Revelations?* For the clearing of this I shall lay down these following Propositions.
1. That Reason is the faculty whereby Revelations are to be discerned; or to use the phrase in the Text, it is that whereby we are to judg what Spirits are of God, and what not. For all Revelation from God supposeth us to be men; and to be indued with Reason; and therefore it does not create new Faculties in us, but propounds new Objects to that Faculty which was in us before. Whatever Doctrines God reveals to men are propounded to their Understandings, and by this Faculty we are to examin all Doctrines which pretend to be from God, and upon examination to judg whether there be reason

to receive them as Divine, or to reject them as Impostures.

2. *All supernatural Revelation supposeth the truth of the Principles of Natural Religion.* We must first be assured that there is a God, before we can know that he hath made any Revelation of himself: and we must know that all his Words are true, otherwise there were no sufficient reason to believe the Revelations which he makes to us: and we must believe his Authority over us, and that he will reward our obedience to his Laws, and punish our breach of them; otherwise there would neither be sufficient obligation nor encouragement to Obedience. These, and many other things, are supposed to be true, and naturally known to us, antecedently to all supernatural Revelation; otherwise the Revelations of God would signify nothing to us, nor be of any force with us.

3. *All Reasonings about Divine Revelations must necessarily be governed by the Principles of Natural Religion; that is, by those apprehensions which men naturally have of the Divine perfections, and by the clear Notions of good and evil, which are imprinted upon our Natures.* Because we have no other way to judg what is worthy of  
God

God and credible to be <sup>usually</sup> believed by him, and what not, but by the natural notions which we have of God, and of his essential perfections: which, because we know him to be immutable, we have reason to believe he will never contradict. And by these Principles likewise, we are to interpret what God hath revealed; and when any doubt ariseth concerning the meaning of any divine Revelation (as that of the Holy Scriptures) we are to govern our selves in the interpretation of it, by what is most agreeable to those natural Notions which we have of God, and we have all the reason in the World to reject that sense which is contrary thereto. For instance, when God is represented in Scripture as having a humane shape, eyes, ears and hands, the Notions which men naturally have of the divine Nature and Perfections do sufficiently direct us to interpret these expressions in a sense worthy of God, and agreeable to his perfection: And therefore it is reasonable to understand them as rather spoken to our capacity, and in a Figure, than to be literally intended. And this will proportionably hold in many other cases.

4. *Nothing ought to be received as a Revelation from God which plainly contradicts the Principles of Natural Religion, or overthrows the certainty of them.* For instance, it were in vain to pretend a Revelation from God, *That there is no God*, because this is a contradiction in terms. So likewise to pretend a command from God, *That we are to hate and despise him*; because it is not credible that God should require any thing of Reasonable Creatures so unsuitable to their Natures, and to their Obligations to him: Besides, that such a Law as this does tacitely involve a contradiction; because upon such a supposition, to despise God would be to obey him; and yet to obey him is certainly to honour him. So that in this case to honour God, and to despise him, would be the same thing, and equal contempts of him. In like manner, it would be vain to pretend any Revelation from God, *That there is no life after this, nor rewards and punishments in another World*: because this is contrary to those natural apprehensions which have generally possess'd mankind, and would take away the main force and sanction of the divine Laws. The like may be said, concerning any pretended Revelation from God, which evidently contradicts those natural

Notions which men have of good and evil; as, *That God should command, or allow Sedition and Rebellion, Perfidiousness and Perjury;* because the practise of these would be apparently destructive of the peace and happiness of Mankind; and would naturally bring confusion into the World: But *God is not the God of Confusion, but of Order,* which St. Paul appeals to as a Principle naturally known. Upon the same account nothing ought to be entertained as a Divine Revelation *which overthrows the <sup>certainly of</sup> Principles of natural Religion;* because that would take away the certainty of Divine Revelation it self, which supposeth the truth of those Principles. For instance, who ever pretends any Revelation *that brings the Providence of God into question,* does by that very thing make such a Revelation questionable. For if God take no care of the World, have no concernment for humane affairs, why should we believe that he makes any Revelation of his Will to men? And by this Principle Moses will have false Prophets to be tried: *Deut. 13. 1. If there arise among you a Prophet, and giveth thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other Gods, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto*  
the

the words of that Prophet: And he gives the reason of this, ver. 5. because he hath spoken unto you to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the Land of Egypt. Here is a case wherein a false Prophet is supposed to work a true Miracle, to give credit to his Doctrine, (which in other cases the Scripture makes the sign of a true Prophet), but yet in this case he is to be rejected as an Impostor: Because the Doctrine he teacheth, would draw men off from the worship of the true God, who is naturally known, and had manifested himself to the people of *Israel* in so miraculous a manner, by bringing them out of the Land of *Egypt*. So that a Miracle is not enough to give credit to a Prophet who teacheth any thing contrary to that natural Notion which men have, *That there is but one God, who only ought to be worshipped.*

5. Nothing ought to be received as a Divine Doctrine and Revelation, without good evidence that it is so: that is, without some Argument sufficient to satisfy a prudent and considerate man. Now (supposing there be nothing in the matter of the Revelation that is evidently contrary to the Principles of Natural Religion, nor to any former Revelation which hath already received a

greater and more solemn attestation from God) Miracles are owned by all Mankind, to be a sufficient Testimony to any Person, or Doctrine, that they are from God. This was the Testimony which God gave to *Moses* to satisfy the people of *Israel* that he had sent him; *Exod. 4. 1, 2. Moses said, They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.* Upon this God endues him with a power of Miracles, to be an evidence to them, that they may believe that the God of their Fathers, *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* hath appeared unto thee. And all along in the *Old Testament*, when God sent his Prophets to make a new Revelation, or upon any strange and extraordinary message, he always gave credit to them by some Sign or Wonder which they foretold or wrought. And when he sent his Son into the World, he gave Testimony to him by innumerable great and unquestionable Miracles, more and greater than *Moses* and all the Prophets had wrought. And there was great Reason for this; because our Saviour came not only to publish a new Religion to the World, but to put an end to that Religion which God had instituted before. And now that the Gospel hath had the confirmation of such Miracles



cles as never were wrought upon any other occasion, no Evidence inferior to this can in reason controul this Revelation, or give credit to any thing contrary to it. And therefore though the false Prophets and Antichrists, foretold by our Saviour, did really work Miracles, yet they were so inconsiderable in comparison of our Saviours, that they deserve no credit in opposition to that Revelation which had so clear a Testimony given to it from Heaven, by Miracles, besides all other concurring Arguments to confirm it.

6. And Lastly, *No Argument is sufficient to prove a Doctrine or Revelation to be from God, which is not clearer and stronger than the Difficulties and Objections against it*: Because all Assent is grounded upon Evidence, and the strongest and clearest evidence always carries it: But where the evidence is equal on both sides, that can produce nothing but a suspense and doubt in the mind whether the thing be true or not. If *Moses* had not confuted *Pharaoh's* Magicians by working Miracles which they could not work, they might reasonably have disputed it with him who had been the true Prophet: But when he did works plainly above the power of their Magick and the Devil.

to do, then they submitted, and acknowledged that *there was the Finger of God*. So likewise, though a person work a Miracle (which ordinarily is a good evidence that he is sent by God) yet if the Doctrine he brings be plainly contrary to those natural Notions which we have of God, this is a better objection aginst the truth of his Doctrine than the other is a proof of it; as is plain in the case which *Moses* puts, *Deut. 13.* which I mentioned before.

Upon the same account no man can reasonably believe the Doctrine of *Transubstantiation* to be revealed by God: because every man hath as great evidence that *Transubstantiation* is false, as any man can pretend to have that God hath revealed any such thing. Suppose *Transubstantiation* to be part of the Christian Doctrine, it must have the same confirmation with the whole, and that is *Miracles*: But of all Doctrines in the world it is peculiarly incapable of being proved by a Miracle. For if a Miracle were wrought for the proof of it, the very same assurance which a man hath of the truth of the Miracle, he hath of the falshood of the Doctrine, *that is*, the clear evidence of his senses for both. For that there is a Miracle wrought to prove,

*that*

that what he sees in the Sacrament is not bread but the body of Christ, he hath only the evidence of his senses; and he hath the very same evidence to prove, that what he sees in the Sacrament is not the body of Christ, but bread. So that here ariseth a new controversy, whether a man should believe his senses giving testimony against the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, or bearing testimony to the Miracle which is wrought to confirm that Doctrine: For there is just the same evidence against the truth of the Doctrine, which there is for the truth of the Miracle. So that the Argument for Transubstantiation, and the Objection against it, do just ballance one another; and where the weights in both Scales are equal, it is impossible that the one should weigh down the other: and consequently Transubstantiation is not to be proved by a Miracle; for that would be, to prove to a man by something that he sees, that he does not see what he sees.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and clearly as I could, to give satisfaction to the first Enquiry I propounded, viz. How we may discern between true and counterfeit Revelations and Doctrines? I proceed now to the

II. II. *To whom this judgment of Discerning does ap-  
 pertain.* Whether to Christians in general, or  
 to some particular Person, or Persons, autho-  
 rised by God to judge for the rest of mankind,  
 by whose judgment all men are concluded and  
 bound up. And this is an enquiry of no small  
 Importance; because it is one of the most fun-  
 damental Points in difference between Us and  
 the Church of *Rome*. And however in many  
 particular Controversies, as concerning *Tran-  
 substantiation, the Communion in one kind, the Ser-  
 vice of God in an unknown Tongue; the business of  
 Indulgences, the Invocation of Saints, the Worship of  
 Images,* they are not able to offer any thing that is  
 fit to move a reasonable and considerate man;  
 yet in this Controversy, concerning the Judge of  
 Controversies, they are not destitute of some  
 specious appearance of Reason which deserves  
 to be weighed and considered. Therefore that  
 we may examine this matter to the bottom, I  
 shall do these *three* things.

1. Lay down some Cautions and Limi-  
 tations whereby we may understand how  
 far the generality of Christians are allowed

to judg in matters of Religion.

2. I shall represent the grounds of this Principle.

3. Endeavour to satisfy the main Objection of our Adversaries against it : And likewise to shew, that there is no such reason and necessity for an universal infallible Judg as they pretend.

I. I shall lay down some Cautions and Limitations, by which we may understand how far the generality of Christians are allowed to judg in matters of Religion.

*First*, Private Persons are only to judg for themselves, and not to impose their Judgment upon others, as if they had any Authority over them. And this is reasonable, because if it were otherwise, a Man would deprive others of that liberty which he assumes to himself, and which he can claim upon no other account, but because it belongs to others equally with himself.

*Secondly*, This liberty of judging is not so to be understood as to take away the necessity and use of Guides and Teachers in Religion. Nor can this be denied to be a reasonable limitation ;

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because the knowledge of revealed Religion is not a thing born with us, nor ordinarily supernaturally infused into men; but is to be learned, as other things are. And if it be to be learned, there must be some to teach and instruct others: And they that will learn, must be modest and humble; and in those things, of which they are no competent Judges, they must give credit to their Teachers, and trust their skill: For instance, every unlearned man is to take it upon the credit of those who are skilful, That the Scriptures are truly and faithfully translated; and for the understanding of obscure Texts of Scripture, and more difficult points in Religion, he is to rely upon those, whose proper business and employment it is to apply themselves to the understanding of these things. For in these cases every man is not capable of judging himself, and therefore he must necessarily trust others: And in all other things he ought to be modest; and unless it be in plain matters, which every man can judge of, he ought rather to distrust himself than his Teacher.

And this respect may be given to a Teacher without either supposing him to be infallible, or making an absolute resignation of my judgment

to him. A man may be a very able Teacher (suppose of the Mathematicks) and fit to have the respect which is due to a Teacher, though he be not infallible in those Sciences: and because Infallibility is not necessary to such a Teacher, it is neither necessary nor convenient that I should absolutely resign up my Judgment to him. For though I have reason to credit him, within the compass of his Art, in things which I do not know, I am not therefore bound to believe him in things plain contrary to what I and all mankind do certainly know. For example, if upon pretence of his skill in Arithmetick, which I am learning of him, he should tell me, *That twice two do not make four, but five*; though I believed him to be the best Mathematician in the World, yet I cannot believe him in this thing: Nor is there reason I should; because I did not come to learn this of him, but knew as much of *that* before as he or any man else could tell me. The case is the same in matters of Religion; in which there are some things so plain, and lie so level to all capacities, that every man is almost equally judg of them: As I shall have occasion farther to shew by and by.

*Thirdly*, Neither does this liberty of judging exempt men from a due submission and obedience to their Teachers and Governours. Every man is bound to obey the lawful Commands of his Governours: and what by publick consent and Authority is determined and established, ought not to be gainsaid by private Persons; but upon very clear evidence of the falshood or unlawfulness of it. And this is every mans duty, for the maintaining of Order, and out of regard to the Peace and Unity of the Church; which is not to be violated upon every scruple and frivolous pretence: And when men are perverse and disobedient, Authority is Judg, and may restrain and punish them.

*Fourthly*, Nor do I so far extend this Liberty of judging in Religion, as to think every man fit to dispute the Controversies of Religion. A great part of people are ignorant, and of so mean capacity, as not to be able to judg of the force of a very good Argument, much less of the issue of a long Dispute: and such persons ought not to engage in disputes of Religion; but to beg Gods direction, and to rely upon their Teachers; and above all to live up to the plain dictates of natural Light, and the clear Commands of Gods

Word;



Word; and this will be their best security. And if the providence of God have placed them under such Guides as do seduce them into Error, their Ignorance is invincible, and God will not condemn them for it, so long as they sincerely endeavour to do the will of God so far as they know it. And this being the case of many, especially in the Church of Rome, where Ignorance is so industriously cherished, I have so much charity as to hope well concerning many of them: And seeing that Church teacheth and enjoins the people to worship Images, it is in some sense charitably done of them not to let them know the second Commandment, that they may not be guilty of sinning against so plain a Law. Having premised these Cautions, I proceed in the

of II. Place, To represent to you the grounds of this Principle of our Religion, viz. That we allow private persons to judg for themselves in matters of Religion.

First; Because many things in Religion, especially those which are most necessary to be believed and practised; are so plain that every man:

but man of ordinary capacity, after competent instruction in matters of Religion (which is always to be supposed) can as well judge of them for himself, as any mans or company of men in the world can judge for him. Because in these he hath a plain Rule to go by, *Natural Light* and *clear Revelation of Scripture*. And this is no new Principle of the *Protestants*, but most expressly owned by the *ancient Fathers*. *Whatever things are necessary, are plain*, saith *St. Chrysostom*. *All things are plainly contained in Scripture which concern faith and a good life*, saith *St. Austin*. And nothing can be more reasonable than that those things which are plain to every man should be left to every man's judgment. For every man can judge of what is plain; of evident Truth and Falshood, Vertue and Vice; of Doctrines and Laws plainly delivered in Scripture, if we believe any thing to be so, which it is next to madness to deny. I will refer it to no man's judgment upon earth to determine for me, *Whether there be a God or not? Whether Murder and Perjury be Sins?* Whether it be not plain in Scripture, *That Jesus Christ is the Son of God, That he became man, and died for us, and rose*  
*again.*

again. So that there is no need of a Judg in these cases. Nor can I possibly believe any man to be so absolutely infallible, as not to call his infallibility into question, if he determines any thing contrary to what is plain and evident to all mankind. For if he should determine that there is no God; or that he is not to be worshipped, or that he will not punish and reward men, or, which is the case that Bellarmine puts, that Virtue is Vice, and Vice Virtue; he would hereby take away the very foundation of Religion; and how can I look upon him any longer as a Judg in matters of Religion, when there can be no such thing as Religion if he have judged and determined right.

Secondly, The Scripture plainly allows this liberty to particular and private Persons to judg for themselves. And for this I need go no farther than my Text, which bids men try the Spirits whether they be of God. I do not think this is spoken only to the Pope or a General Council, but to Christians in general; for to these the Apostle writes. Now if St. John had believed that God had constituted an infallible Judg in his Church, to whose Sentence  
and

and Determination all Christians are bound to submit, he ought in all reason to have referred Christians to him for the tryal of Spirits, and not have left it to every man's private judgment to examine and to determine these things. But it seems St. Paul was likewise of the same mind; and though he was guided by an infallible Spirit, yet he did not expect that men should blindly submit to his Doctrine: Nay, so far is he from that, that he commends the Bereans for that very thing for which I dare say the Church of Rome would have check'd them most severely, namely, for *searching the Scriptures* to see *whether those things* which the Apostles delivered *were so* or not: This liberty St. Paul allowed; and though he was inspired by God, yet he treated those whom he taught like men. And indeed, it were a hard case that a necessity of believing divine Revelations, and rejecting Impostures, should be imposed upon Christians; and yet the liberty of judging, whether a Doctrine be from God or not, should be taken away from them.

*Thirdly,*

*Thirdly*, Our Adversaries themselves are forced to grant that which in effect is as much as we contend for. For though they deny a liberty of judging in *particular points* of Religion, yet they are forced to grant men a liberty of judging upon the *whole*. When they of the Church of Rome would persuade a *Jew*, or a *Heathen*, to become a Christian; or a *Heretick* (as they are pleased to call *us*) to come over to the Communion of their Church, and offer Arguments to induce them thereto; they do by this very thing, whether they will or no, make that man Judge *which is the true Church*, and *the true Religion*. Because it would be ridiculous to persuade a man to turn to their Religion, and to urge him with Reasons to do so, and yet to deny him the use of his own judgment whether their Reasons be sufficient to move him to make such a change. Now, as the *Apostle* reasons in another case, If men be fit to judge for themselves in so great and important a matter as the choice of their Religion, why should they be thought *unworthy to judge in lesser matters*? They tell us indeed that a man may use his judgment in the choice of his Religion; but when he hath

once chosen, he is then for ever to resign up his judgment to their Church: But what tolerable reason can any man give, why a man should be fit to judge upon the *whole*, and yet unfit to judge upon *particular* Points? especially if it be considered, that no man can make a discreet judgment of any Religion, before he hath examined the particular Doctrines of it, and made a judgment concerning *them*. Is it credible, that God should give a man judgment in the most fundamental and important matter of all, viz. *to discern the true Religion, and the true Church, from the false*; for no other end, but to enable him to chuse once for all to whom he should resign and inflave his judgment for ever? which is just as reasonable as if one should say, That God had given a man eyes for no other end, but to look out once for all, and to pitch upon a discreet person to lead him about blindfold all the days of his life. I come now to the

III. Thing propounded, which is, *To answer the main Objection of our Adversaries against this Principle*; and likewise to shew that there is no such Reason and necessity for

an universal Infallible Judge, as they pretend. Now their great Objection is this, If every man may judge for himself, there will be nothing but confusion in Religion; there will be no end of Controversies: so that an universal infallible Judge is necessary, and without this God had not made sufficient provision for the assurance of men's Faith, and for the peace and unity of his Church: Or, as it is expressed in the *Canon Law*, *aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus*, otherwise our Lord had not seem'd to be discreet. How plausible soever this Objection may appear, I do not despair but if men will lay aside prejudice, and impartially consider things, to make it abundantly evident, that this ground is not sufficient to found an Infallible Judge upon. And therefore in answer to it, I desire these following particulars may be considered.

First, That this which they say, rather proves what God should have done according to their fancy, than what he hath really and actually done. My *Text* expressly bids Christians to *try the Spirits*, which to any man's sense does imply that they may judge of these matters: But the Church of *Rome* says they

may not; because if this liberty were permitted, God had not ordered things wisely, and for the best, for the peace and unity of his Church. But, as the *Aposile* says in another case, *What art thou, O man, that objectest against God?*

*Secondly* If this Reasoning be good, we may as well conclude that there is an universal infallible Judge, set over the whole World in all *Temporal* matters, to whose Authority all mankind is bound to submit. Because this is as necessary to the peace of the World, as the other is to the peace of the Church. And men surely are every whit as apt to be obstinate and perverse about matters of Temporal Right, as about matters of Faith. But it is evident in fact and experience that there is no such universal Judge, appointed by God over the whole World, to decide all Cases of temporal Right; and for want of him the World is fain to shift as well as it can. But now a very acute and scholastical man that would argue that God must needs have done whatever he fancies convenient for the World should be done, might by the very same way of Reasoning conclude the necessity of an universal infal-



infallible Judge in Civil matters, as well as in matters of Religion: And their *aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus*, otherwise God had not seem'd to be discreet, is every whit as cogent, and as civil, in the one Case as the other.

Thirdly, There is no need of such a Judge, to assure men in matters of Religion; Because men be sufficiently certain without him. I hope it may be certain and clear enough. *That there is a God; and That his Providence governs the World; and That there is another Life after this*, though neither Pope nor Council had ever declared any thing about these matters. And for Revealed Doctrines, we may be certain enough of all that is necessary, if it be true which the *Fathers* tell us, *That all things necessary are plainly revealed in the Holy Scriptures.*

Fourthly, An infallible Judge, if there were one, is no certain way to end Controversies, and to preserve the unity of the Church; unless it were likewise infallibly certain, *That there is such a Judge, and, Who he is.* For till men were sure of both these, there would still be a Controversie, whether there be an infallible Judge, and who he is.

And

And if it be true which they tell us, *That without an infallible Judge Controversies cannot be ended*; then a Controversie concerning an infallible Judge can never be ended. And there are *two* Controversies actually on foot about an infallible Judge; One, *Whether there be an infallible Judge or not?* which is a Controversie between Us and the Church of *Rome*: and the other, *Who this infallible Judge is?* which is a Controversie among themselves; which could never yet be decided: And yet till it be decided, Infallibility, if they had it, would be of no use to them for the ending of Controversies.

*sw Fifthly*, There is no such absolute need, as is pretended, of determining all Controversies in Religion. If men would divest themselves of prejudice and interest, as they ought, in matters of Religion, the necessary things of Religion are plain enough, and men would generally agree well enough about them: But if men will suffer themselves to be byassed by these, they would not hearken to an infallible Judge, if there were one; or they would find out some way or other to call his Infallibility into question. And as for doubtfull, and lesser matters in Religion, charity and mutual

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forbearance among Christians would make the Church as peaceable and happy, as perhaps it was ever designed to be in this World, without absolute unity in Opinion.

*Sixthly* and *Lastly*, Whatever may be the inconveniences of mens judging for themselves in Religion, yet taking this Principle with the Cautions I have given, I doubt not to make it appear, that the inconveniences are far the least on that side. The present condition of humane Nature doth not admit of any constitution of things, whether in Religion or Civil matters, which is free from all kind of exception and inconvenience: That is the best state of things which is liable to the least and fewest. If men be modest, and humble, and willing to learn, God hath done that which is sufficient for the assurance of our Faith, and for the peace of his Church, without an infallible Judge: And if men will not be so, I cannot tell what would be sufficient. I am sure there were Heresies and Schisms in the *Apostles* Times, when Those who governed the Church were certainly guided by an infallible Spirit. God hath appointed Guides and Teachers for us in matters of Religion,

and

and if we will be contented to be instructed by them in those necessary Articles and Duties of Religion, which are plainly contained in Scripture; and to be counselled and directed by them in things that are more doubtfull and difficult, I do not see why we might not do well enough without any infallible Judge or Guide.

But still it will be said, who shall judge what things are plain and what doubtfull? The answer to this, in my opinion, is not difficult. For if there be any thing plain in Religion, every man that hath been duly instructed in the Principles of Religion can judge of it, or else it is not plain. But there are some things in Religion so very plain, that no Guide or Judge can in reason claim that Authority over men, as to oblige them to believe or do the contrary; no, though he pretend to Infallibility; no, though he were an *Aposile*, though he were an *Angel from heaven*. *S. Paul* puts the case so high, *Gal. 1. 8. Though we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than what you have received, let him be accursed:* which plainly supposeth that Christians may and can judge when

when Doctrines are contrary to the Gospel. What? not believe an *Apostle*, nor an *Angel from heaven*, if he should teach any thing evidently contrary to the plain Doctrine of the Gospel? If he should determine Virtue to be Vice, and Vice to be Virtue? No; not an *Apostle*, nor an *Angel*; because such a Doctrine as this would confound and overturn all things in Religion. And yet *Bellarmino* puts this very Case, and says, If the Pope should so determine, *we were bound to believe him, unless we would sin against Conscience.*

I will conclude this Discourse by putting a very plain and familiar Case; by which it will appear what credit and authority is fit to be given to a Guide, and what not. Suppose I came a Stranger into *England*, and landing at *Dover*, took a Guide there to conduct me in my way to *York*, which I knew before by the *Mapp* to lie *North* of *Dover*: Having committed my self to him, if he lead me for two or three days together out of any plain Road, and many times over hedge and ditch, I cannot but think it strange, that in a civil and well-inhabited Country there should be no High-ways from one part of it to another:

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Yet thus far I submit to him, though not without some regret and impatience. But then if after this, for two or three days more he lead me directly *South*, and with my face full upon the Sun at Noon-day, and at last bring me back again to *Dover Pere*; and still bids me follow him: Then certainly no modesty do's oblige a man not to dispute with his Guide, and to tell him, surely that can be no way because it is *Sea*. Now though he set never so bold a face upon the matter, and tell me with all the gravity and authority in the world, That it is not *the Sea* but *dry Land* under the *species* and *appearance of Water*; and that whatever my eyes tell me, having once committed my self to his guidance, I must not trust my own senses in the case; it being one of the most dangerous sorts of Infidelity for a man to believe his own eyes rather than his *faithfull* and *infallible Guide*: All this Moves me not; but I begin to expostulate roundly with him, and to let him understand that if I must not believe what I see, he is like to be of no farther use to me; because I shall not be able, at this rate, to know whether I have a Guide, and whether I follow him, or not. In short, I  
tell.

tell him plainly, that when I took him for my Guide, I did not take him to tell me the difference between *North* and *South*, between a *Hedge* and a *High-way*, between *Sea* and *dry Land*; all this I knew before, as well as he or any man else could tell me; but I took him to conduct and direct me the nearest way to *York*: And therefore after all his impertinent talk; after all his Motives of Credibility to perswade me to believe him, and all his confident *sayings*, which he gravely calls *Demonstrations*, I stand stilly upon the shore, and leave my learned and reverend Guide to take his own course, and to dispose of himself as he pleaseth; but firmly resolved not to follow him. And is any man to be blamed that breaks with his Guide upon these Terms?

And this is truly the Case, when a man commits himself to the Guidance of any person or Church: If by virtue of this Authority, they will needs perswade me out of my senses, and not to believe *what I see* but *what they say*; *that Virtue is Vice, and Vice Virtue*, if they declare them to be so: And that because they say they are infallible, I am to receive all their Dictates for Oracles, though never so evident-

ly false and absurd in the judgment of all Mankind : In this case there is no way to be ridd of these unreasonable People, but to desire of them, since one kindness deserves another and all Contradictions are alike easie to be believed, that *they* would be pleased to believe that Infidelity is Faith, and that when I absolutely renounce their Authority I do yield a most perfect submission and obedience to it.

Upon the whole matter, all the Revelations of God, as well as the Laws of men, go upon this presumption that men are not stark fools ; but that they will consider their Interest, and have some regard to the great concernment of their eternal salvation. And this is as much to secure men from mistake in matters of Belief, as God hath afforded to keep men from sin in matters of Practice. He hath made no effectual and infallible provision that men shall not sin ; and yet it would puzzle any man to give a good Reason, why God should take more care to secure men against Errors in Belief, than against Sin and wickedness in their Lives.

I shall now only draw *three* or *four* Inferences from this Discourse, which I have made, and so conclude.

I. *That*



1. *That it is every mans Duty, who hath ability and capacity for it, to endeavour to understand the grounds of his Religion.* For to try Doctrines is to inquire into the grounds and reasons of them : which the better any man understands, the more firmly he will be established in the Truth, and be the more resolute in the day of Trial, and the better able to withstand the Arts and assaults of cunning Adversaries, and the fierce storms of Persecution. And, on the contrary, that man will soon be moved from his steadfastness who never examined the grounds and Reasons of his belief. When it comes to the Trial, he that hath but little to say for his Religion will probably neither do nor suffer much for it.

2. *That all Doctrines are vehemently to be suspected which decline Trial, and are so loth to be brought into the light ; which will not endure a fair Examination, but magisterially require an implicate Faith : Whereas Truth is bold and full of courage, and loves to appear openly ; and is so secure and confident of her own strength, as to offer her self to the severest Trial and Examination. But to deny all liberty of Enquiry and Judgment in matters.*

ters of Religion is the greatest injury and disparagement to Truth that can be, and a tacite acknowledgement that she lies under some disadvantage, and that there is less to be said for her than for Error.

I have often wonder'd why the People in the Church of *Rome* do not suspect their Teachers and Guides to have some ill design upon them, when they do so industriously debar them of the means of Knowledge, and are so very loth to let them understand what it is that we have to say against their Religion. For can any thing in the world be more suspicious than to perswade men to put out their eyes, upon promise that they will help them to a much better and more faithfull Guide? If any Church, any Profession of men, be unwilling their Doctrines should be exposed to Trial, it is a certain sign they know something by them that is faulty, and which will not endure the light. This is the account which our Saviour gives us in a like Case, It was *because mens deeds were evil that they loved darknes rather than light. For every one that doth evil hateth the light; neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov-  
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ved : But he that doth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.

3. Since Reason and Christianity allow this liberty to private persons to judge for themselves in matters of Religion, we should use this privilege with much modesty and humility, with great submission and deference to our Spiritual Rulers and Guides, whom God hath appointed in his Church. And there is very great need of this Caution, since by experience we find this liberty so much abused by many to the nourishing of Pride and self-conceit, of Division and Faction; and those who are least able to judge, to be frequently the most forward and confident, the most peremptory and perverse : and instead of demeaning themselves with the submission of Learners, to assume to themselves the authority of Judges, even in the most doubtful and disputable matters.

The Tyranny of the *Roman* Church over the Minds and Consciences of men is not to be justified upon any account; but nothing puts so plausible a colour upon it, as the ill use that is too frequently made of this natural  
Privilege.

Privilege of mens judging for themselves in a matter of so infinite concernment, as that of their eternal happiness. But then it is to be consider'd, that the proper remedy in this Case, is not to deprive men of this Privilege, but to use the best means to prevent the abuse of it. For though the *inconveniences* arising from the ill use of it may be very great, yet the *mischief* on the other hand is intolerable. Religion it self is liable to be abused to very bad purposes, and frequently is so; but it is not therefore best that there should be no Religion: And yet this Objection, if it be of any force and be pursued home, is every whit as strong against Religion it self, as against mens liberty of judging in matters of Religion. Nay I add farther, that no man can judiciously embrace the true Religion, unless he be permitted to judge, whether that which he embraces be the true Religion or not.

4. When upon due Trial and Examination we are well-settled and established in our Religion, *let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering*; and not be like *Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with*

*with every wind of Doctrine, through the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive.* And above all, let us resolve to live according to the excellent Rules and Precepts of our holy Religion; let us heartily obey that Doctrine which we profess to believe. We, who enjoy the *Protestant* Religion, have all the means and advantages of understanding the Will of God, free liberty and full scope of enquiring into it, and informing our selves concerning it: We have all the opportunities we can wish of coming to the knowledge of our Duty: The Oracles of God lie open to us, and his Law is continually before our eyes; *his word is nigh unto us, in our mouths, and in our hearts*; (that is, we may read it and meditate upon it) *that we may do it: The Key of Knowledge* is put into our hands, so that if we do not enter into the *Kingdom of Heaven*, it is we our selves that shut our selves out. And where there is nothing to hinder us from the knowledge of our Duty, there certainly nothing can excuse us from the practice of it. For the End of all knowledge is to direct men in their duty, and effectually to engage them to the performance of it: The great business of Religion

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ligion is, *to make men truly good, and to teach them to live well.* And if Religion have not this effect, it matters not of what Church any man lists and enters himself; for most certainly, *A bad man can be saved in none.* Though a man know the right way to Heaven never so well, and be entered into it, yet if he will not walk therein, he shall never come thither: Nay, it will be an aggravation of this man's unhappiness, that he was lost in the way to Heaven, and perished in the very Road to Salvation. But if we will in good earnest apply our selves to the practice of Religion, and the obedience of God's holy Laws, his Grace will never be wanting to us to so good a purpose.

I have not time to recommend Religion to you at large, with all its advantages. I will comprise what I have to say in a few words, and mind them at your peril. Let that which is our great concernment be our great care, *To know the Truth and to do it, To fear God and keep his Commandments.* Considering the Reasonableness and the Reward of Piety and Vertue, nothing can be wiser: and considering the mighty assistance of God's Grace, which he is ready to afford to us, and the unspeakable satisfaction

faction and delight which is to be had in the doing of our duty, nothing can be easier: Nothing will give us that pleasure, while we live; nothing can minister that true and solid comfort to us, when we come to die: There is probably no such way for a man to be happy in this World; to be sure, there is no way but this, to escape the intolerable and endless miseries of another World.

*Now God grant that we may all know, and do, in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, for his Mercies sake in Jesus Christ; To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all Honour and Glory now and for ever. Amen.*

**F I N I S.**







