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**The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John,
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

London, 1754

LXXVIII.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777)

to go together so seldom. This might be exemplified in many instances, but in none more strongly than in that of the jews. No nation so exact in observing fasts and feasts, and so superstitiously zealous in the practice of every ceremony of a law that abounded with ceremonies. But no nation so unhospitable at the same time, no people so uncharitable, nor so absolutely strangers to that fundamental principle of natural religion, universal benevolence.

LXXVIII.

IT were much to be wished that the same reproach could not be made in any degree to the professors of christianity. But I apprehend that they too must pass condemnation on this head. The doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments was established, no doubt, in the christian, as in every other system of instituted religion, to enforce natural, that is, the first, the most authentic, and as we may say the mistress of all religions, since they should be all subservient to her. But this doctrine is applied, in every communion of christians, as much to enforce matters of metaphysical speculation, or positive duties, or forms of worship which are neither parts of natural religion, nor have any necessary connection with our moral obligations, as it is applied to enforce these. The mistress is set on a level with the servant, and the same regard is paid to one as to the other. But why do I say the same, when it is manifest that much more regard is paid in many instances, and in the application we speak of here particularly, to the latter than to the former? Metaphysical speculations, positive duties, and forms of worship can have no merit any further than they contribute to maintain, and improve in our minds an awful sense of the majesty of the

the Supreme Being, of our dependance on him, of our duties to him, and of the moral obligations under which we lye to our fellow creatures: and as far as they contribute to these purposes, whether they are of human or of divine institution, they have great merit, and are of great importance. Their merit and their importance, however, cannot be equal to those of the religion they are designed to maintain and improve: and yet we find them treated by the doctors and professors of christianity as if they had more of both, as if this part of instituted religion could be substituted in the place of that part of it which republishes natural religion, and could supply the want of it.

THE clergy, who have taken the distribution of future rewards and punishments into their own hands, distribute them according to this rule. The man who has been a bad son, a bad husband, a bad father, a bad citizen, who has passed his whole life in the practice of private and public immorality, languishes on a sick bed. Conscious of guilt, he apprehends punishment, and all the terrors of hell stare him in the face. He repents, therefore, may signify in this case nothing more than this, he is afraid; and so will the most hardened villain be at the foot of the gallows. It is too late to amend, too late to repair the injuries he has done. The priest, however, who gave the terror, is called to administer the comfort. The man confesses his sins, makes an orthodox profession of his faith, joins in the prayers that are said over him, takes leave of the world with all the decorum which the discipline of his church requires, and dies. We are bound to believe well of this man's salvation, and we commit his body to the ground, "in a sure and certain hope of his resurrection to eternal life." The man who has passed his whole life in the practice of every moral virtue, and has lived up to the duties
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of natural religion in every relation, and in every station, has fulfilled by consequence all the obligations of revealed religion, as far as the latter is designed to republich, and enforce the former. But the latter is designed more immediately, and preferably for another purpose: and therefore the hope of heaven is held out to one man, notwithstanding his wicked life; the fear of hell is held out to another, notwithstanding his good life, on several occasions. Faith unimposed, and forms and ceremonies unprecribed by natural religion, may atone for the violations of it; but the strict observance of it cannot atone, in any communion, for the want of faith even in matters that have been much disputed among christians, and that are so still in other communions; nor for the neglect of forms and ceremonies that are of mere human institution, and that have varied frequently, as all such institutions must and do vary by their own nature, and by the nature of those who make, and of those for whom they are made. To bring an instance or two, that occur to me first out of many. Read the creed of ATHANASIUS, and then consider that the man we suppose in this place, who has conformed his whole life to the precepts of natural religion, and of reason, cannot be saved*, but must perish without doubt everlastingly, unless he believes faithfully such a rhapsody of jargon as talapoins and bonzes would be hardly brought to avow, as wants a sufficient foundation in the gospel, as none but factious priests, who meant to divide not to unite, could have combined to propagate, and as none but the least reasonable, and the most implicit set of men could have received for truth. Consider again, that the trite ceremony of baptism, instituted, by the heathens, practised by the jews, and adopted by the christians, is made so essential a part of religion under the vague name of a sacrament, that neither the moral goodness of men, nor the inno-

* xxxix articles.

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cence of children can secure their salvation, unless they have passed through this mystical washing: without which, and the graces consequent to it, the good works of the former are not pleasant to God, but have the nature of sin; and the innocence of the other is infected by that original taint which spread from the transgression of ADAM, and corrupted human nature in all his posterity.

THESE are principles of artificial theology, and such is the ecclesiastical distribution of future rewards and punishments in all christian communions. I wave descending into particular examples taken from the east or the west, from your church or from mine. This difference only I would observe between the two last. You acknowledge still a spiritual monarch, the vicar of JESUS CHRIST on earth, and an infallible judge in all matters of religion, to whom you ascribe a supreme ecclesiastical authority. At least the royalists prevail amongst you, and the partisans of spiritual liberty are few. We have thrown off this ridiculous but heavy yoke, and thus it is more easy, and therefore more frequent to impose new doctrines, new rites, new ceremonies in your church, than in mine; to save, to beatify, to sanctify whom his holiness pleases, and to pronounce as many arbitrary sentences of damnation as he thinks fit. Thus we have seen the constitution unigenitus, that child of jesuitical revenge, procured by fraud and maintained by tyranny, erected into a rule of faith in France, where a few years before, to shew the exercise of this power in a light as ridiculous as scandalous, not only propositions extracted from the works of JANSENIUS were condemned, but even they who did not understand the language in which the bishop of Ipres writ, like the nuns of Portroyal, were required to believe, and affirm that these very propositions were contained in his writings.

SUCH

SUCH occasional abuses of the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which the pope and his inferior pontiffs have applied with little regard to natural religion, and even with more regard to their artificial theology than to revealed religion, have been frequent. But there is another, which has been constant in all the ages of the church, and by which the clergy has raised exorbitant contributions on the laity. When christianity appeared first in the world, the professors of it composed a little, and in general a poor flock. They who had some substance helped to maintain those who had none; alms were gathered for the saints, and every church had a common purse. Like our quakers, they provided for their own poor; and, like our quakers too, the teachers and the taught made one body, one undivided society. The former as well as the latter lived on what they had of their own, or on the common purse, or on the bread they acquired by their industry: and, as ludicrous as it may seem, it may be said seriously, because it may be said truly, that if this order of things had been preserved among christians, we might behold at this day, with great edification, some of my lords the bishops working at their leisure hours (and they have many such from episcopal functions at least) in their trades, like St. PAUL. But this order of things was changed early, and the distinction of clergy and laity established; after which the former enjoyed in their own right, or as trustees for the poor, all that had belonged to every church in common before. When the former came by several means to be considered as a separate society under the name of the church, they appropriated the wealth, which increased daily, as well as the name, to themselves; and when every church had a bishop, the superior robbed the inferior pastors, and appropriated to himself what belonged

belonged to them, to his church, and to the poor; all of whom he threw on the laity to be maintained by them.

LXXIX.

THAT I may not render the deduction too long for this place, I content myself to observe further, that, as this order of men increased in outward dignity and riches, to neither of which they had any other claim than that which their own usurpations, and the bigot generosity of superstitious ages gave them, they increased in ambition and avarice. The doctrine of a future state was prostituted to serve the purposes of both; and as soon as they had persuaded the laity, that the power of tying and untying, which was given by CHRIST to his disciples, invested the clergy with a power of determining in this world the condition of men in another, heaven and hell became inexhaustible sources of ecclesiastical dominion and wealth, and were applied to little else. The man, for instance, who left his estate to the church, and to pious uses, as they are called, completed all the immoralities of his life by defrauding his family at his death. But the priest, or monk, conveyed him to heaven directly, and passports for that purpose, even of modern date, are said to have been found in the hands of the dead. The layman, who had a dispute with the church, stood exposed to the thunderbolt of excommunication, which he was prepared to believe did not only separate him from her communion here, but would deprive him of happiness hereafter; so that he might be damned eternally for withholding a tithe pig.