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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**

LXXX.

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through the eye of a needle, than for a poor man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

A casuist more modest, and who thinks himself more subtil than the former, may alledge perhaps, for it has been alledged, that the pope has virtually the keys of heaven since he has those of the treasure of the church, that treasure of merits which cannot be exhausted, the merits of JESUS CHRIST that are infinite, and that render therefore the rest of the heap unnecessary being contained in it; that the pope does not pretend to remit the debt which the sinner owes to God on a balance of the account of good and evil actions, but that he pays it by assigning out of this treasure as much merit as every sinner, who applies to him, wants to entitle him to salvation. So father PAUL represents the doctrine . . . . "ri-  
"compensa il debito del peccatore con assegnare altrettanto  
"valor del tesoro\*." Thus, it may be said, the pope decrees in all these cases according to a right which God has established, and not against right by virtue of an assumed arbitrary, unlimited power. But this whimsical hypothesis, if it could be received, would answer the purpose, for which it is invented, by halves at most, for there is something behind much worse than the accusation already brought.

## LXXX.

**Y**OUR divines, as well as ours, affirm very truly of the preceptive parts, that tho natural and revealed religion are distinct, yet the difference between them is not a difference

\* Con. di Tren. L. i.

of opposition ; and that the latter, which enjoins positive duties not enjoined by the former, enjoins none that are inconsistent with it. But now the same men, who say this very truly when they speak of the precepts of the gospel, say it very falsely when they speak of the religion which their artificial theology has imposed for christianity, and which is no more like to it in some respects, than talapoism, bonzism, or lamaism are. Some of them hold morality in small account. They place all religion in the observation of such rites and ceremonies as their church has instituted, and in various acts of external devotion. They have been spoken of already. Their whole religion is a system of superstition, unworthy of God as the author, and unworthy to be believed and practised by rational creatures. There are those again who hold morality in no account at all. Tho God has given us reason to discern our moral obligations, and a freedom of will to practise them, on which foundation alone it can be said either probably, or plausibly, that we are accountable creatures, and have been such in every age of the world ; yet would there have been no such thing as moral virtue, nor as good works, if CHRIST had never come into the world, according to these doctors: for if moral righteousness was at all times alike conformable to the will of God, in which conformity the very nature of it consists, it must have been at all times alike acceptable to him ; at least it could never be unacceptable: but we are told that it is unacceptable, unless it follow justification, unless it be produced by faith, by grace, by inspiration, and a whole process of mystery. Before CHRIST, therefore, it could not be conformable to the will of God, it could have no merit, nay, it could have no nature, there could be no such thing. This surely is fanaticism, and leads to enthusiasm. There are those again, and of those particularly I mean

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mean to speak in this place, who admit that there is a religion of nature and of reason, that is, a primitive revelation which ought to be the foundation, and criterion of every other: but in fact they deny what in words they admit; for under pretence of explaining and teaching a posterior revelation, they contradict the first. Their artificial theology does not only take in much of the superstition, and fanaticism that have been mentioned, but imposes for doctrines and precepts of christianity, and enforces by the sanctions of eternal rewards and punishments such as would prove this revelation to be inconsistent and false, if they were really contained in it.

Nothing can be more repugnant to the spirit of christianity than violence, persecution, and tyranny. Meekness, and humility, forgiveness of injuries, and benevolence exalted into charity are the great characteristics of this religion. They are so essential to it that many have deemed it on this account a fit profession for some private sect, but a rule impracticable in the great political societies of mankind, and in the government of them\*. That the clergy deemed it to be so very early, and has acted on this principle ever since, is evident to those who know any thing of the ecclesiastical history. The first missionaries of the gospel were sent forth to preach, to per-

\* When christians became numerous the names of eminent bishops alone were recited out of the diptychs; but when they were few, all that died in the communion of the church were commemorated in this manner. The diptychs were registers originally of the subjects of CHRIST, who were to be hereafter citizens of the new Jerusaleem typified by the church on earth. Excommunication out of one, therefore, excluded out of the other. Hence the expression, that names were written in heaven, and in the book of life, or that mens names were cast out.

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suade, to convert, and baptise. If they did not succeed, they had no power to call down fire from heaven, they were to shake off the dust of their feet, and to depart quietly. Their commission extended no further. If they did succeed, they established a church in the place under certain orders, and regulations of discipline, which seemed to be a necessary consequence of their original, and solely authentic commission, tho not expressly contained in it. Among these regulations that of separating from the congregations, and communion of christians, and of delivering over to satan, unless they repented and satisfied the church, such as were guilty of notorious crimes, and such as presumed to teach in those congregations a contrary doctrine, was made by common consent. I say it was made, because it is plain it was executed, by common consent.

BUT this power became soon confined, in the exercise, to a few persons, and extended little by little, in the application of it, to a multitude of cases neither intended, nor thought of in the first institution. Persons were appointed by the collective body of christians in every church, that is by every church, to perform the duties which the apostles, that founded these churches, and the first pastors of them however appointed, whether by the apostles, or by the churches, performed. The persons thus appointed did not cease to be members of the same religious society, for the whole congregation of christians was properly such, any more than persons appointed to military or civil employments cease to be members of the same political society. But the solemn air with which these spiritual magistrates were admitted into their offices by ordination and consecration, if these ceremonies are to be distinguished in honor of episcopacy, gave them a pretence to assume, and  
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prepared others to believe that there was, besides the human appointment, something divine in their institution; that they received the holy Ghost by imposition of hands, and could transmit the same gift to others by the same ceremony. Thus they came to be esteemed not only a distinct order, as the priests, the soldiers, and the husbandmen were in the kingdom of Aegypt, but a distinct and independent society too in many respects. This I mean. After CONSTANTINE had established christianity in the empire, the clergy were regarded as a superior order in the state whenever it was most advantageous for them to be reputed such; and as a distinct society in it whenever they thought fit, under the name of the church, to exercise powers, and to claim and procure to their order the enjoyment of immunities, or privileges, which they could neither claim, nor have any pretence to enjoy under the first character, and as members of the same state. From hence arose a double absurdity. It was absurd, for it implied contradiction, that the same order of men should be, and should not be at once a member of the same commonwealth. It was absurd, for it was repugnant to all the ideas of order to suffer what is commonly called imperium in imperio, to suffer a second supreme legislative power to grow up where a first was already established; and such a power especially as claimed a superior original, and an independent exercise: from which claims it was easy to foresee what happened soon, that the two powers would clash, that a conflict of jurisdictions would arise, and that the ecclesiastical might prevail over the civil.

THE principal and most effectual weapon, which the clergy employed to make men submit to this tyranny, was the chimerical weapon of excommunication, forged in the chimerical fire

fire of hell. They employed it first in their spiritual wars, for the state of christianity has been a state of war from the beginning. In these they excommunicated, and damned one another, till, ignorance, superstition, and bigotry realizing chimeras, these spiritual wars became very carnal. The clergy railed, and the laity cut throats. Ecclesiastical quarrels disturbed the peace of the latter empire as much, and caused the effusion of as much blood, as the invasions of barbarous nations. But things grew worse as the church grew stronger, and the scene became more disorderly, and more bloody too, after CHARLES the great, when the western church was reduced into a monarchy, and the bishop of Rome became the monarch. In this elevation, with the whole body of the clergy more united, and better disciplined under him, his own ambition increased, and he animated and guided theirs. They had made themselves before this time a distinct society from the civil in every country where they had been admitted. His authority over them had been very great, if it had not been intire in every country. He abetted them in their usurpations, and they in return abetted his. But in this age the clergy secular and regular composed not only a distinct ecclesiastical society in every particular state, they coalited into one political body, whereof the pope was the head all over the west. The contention for superiority over the civil powers was avowed; and whilst these defended themselves separately, or, which was worse, whilst they assisted the common enemy against one another, they were all subdued alike. Some of the greatest emperors were excommunicated, and in consequence insulted, oppressed, dethroned. The ecclesiastical order, and, at the instigation of this, all the other orders in their dominions revolted against them. They discovered as well as other princes and states, but they all discovered it too late, how dangerous  
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it is to protect, enrich, fortify, or even to suffer any order of men, who, having a distinct interest, and owing a distinct allegiance, must of course become a distinct society in the state; and especially when this order has the means of turning the consciences, and enflaming the passions of men by religion against the state, and the legal government of it. GREGORY the seventh carried these usurpations and this tyranny to the utmost height, by a more impudent, as well as a more successful prostitution of the doctrine of a future state, than any of his predecessors. From him his successors learned to distribute plenary indulgences with profusion, and to extend particular excommunications into general interdicts. By the first, they sold heaven to the best bidders, and sent men in shoals to eternal happiness. By the second, they condemned whole nations at once, deprived them of the means of salvation, and subjected them in one collective body to eternal misery. The first was a never failing source of wealth, the second of power. No instance can be produced in all these proceedings of any regard to true religion. Virtue and vice were out of the case. Even the opera operata of external devotion were enjoined for the sake of form alone. To be truly orthodox, and in a state of salvation, it was sufficient to submit blindly to the authority of the church, and to procure the advancement of it against law, reason, and every moral obligation. To be heretical, and in a state of damnation, it was sufficient to refuse the submission, or to resist the usurpation. This abuse of the doctrine of a future state grew so common in a short time, that it was employed not only in the great struggles, which arose between the ecclesiastical and civil powers, but in every paltry affair wherein the popes had any personal, or family concern; and indulgences and excommunications were let loose by this mitered



tyrant to fate the ambition, or avarice of a brother, a sister, a nephew, a niece, a whore, or a bastard.

## LXXXI.

**I**T is true that this exorbitancy has been restrained within two centuries; and this restraint is due to the reformation. We shook off the tyrant and his tyranny at once. You have filed the fangs, and blunted the teeth of the beast. He may mumble and bruise, he cannot tear, and bite, and devour as he did. But still the instances that have been cited are proper, and the reflections that have been made just. The instances are proper, because they are instances of the use that was made of this doctrine in the whole christian church during several centuries. The reflections are just, because tho the same use is not made of it now, even in your communion, that was made formerly, yet the same moral arguments are employed to maintain it; arguments, which cannot be reconciled, as it seems to my apprehension, to the belief of an all-perfect Being.

To demonstrate the existence of such a being by appeals to the inward conscioufness of their own existence, to the senses, and to the reason of men, is not a difficult task. But he who has succeeded in it, runs the risque of undoing what he has done, when he appeals at once to the senses and to the passions, of men for the injustice of God's dispensations here; and to their reason alone prejudiced by the former, for the justice of his dispensations hereafter, tho the actuality of these must be always hypothetical, and the equity of them not so much as problematical. The divines of our communion run  
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