

**AN ESSAY ON THE FEVERAL
DISPENSATIONS OF GOD TO MANKIND,
IN THE ORDER, IN WHICH THEY LIE IN
THE BIBLE; OR, A SHORT SYSTEM OF
RELIGION OF NATURE AND SCRIPTURE**

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An Essay on the Several Dispensations of God to Mankind, in the Order, in Which They Lie in the Bible; Or, a Short System of Religion of Nature and Scripture by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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DISPENSATIONS OF GOD TO MANKIND,
IN THE ORDER, IN WHICH THEY LIE IN
THE BIBLE; OR, A SHORT SYSTEM OF
RELIGION OF NATURE AND SCRIPTURE**

[By Barrington]

A N
E S S A Y

On the several
DISPENSATIONS of GOD to
Mankind, in the Order, in which they
lie in the Bible :

O R, A
Short S Y S T E M of the Religion of
Nature and Scripture :

W I T H A
P R E F A C E, shewing the Causes of the
Growth of Infidelity, and the likeliest Method
to put a Stop to it.

A N D A N
A P P E N D I X, proving, that God adopted
Abraham to the Inheritance of eternal Life, *Gen.*
xii. 2, 3. xxii. 17, 18.

God who at SUNDRY TIMES, AND IN DIVERS
MANNERS, spake unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in
these last Days spoken unto us by his Son, *Heb. i. 1, 2.*

ADAM, who was THE SON OF GOD, *Luke iii. 38.*

The SONS OF GOD saw the DAUGHTERS OF MEN,
Gen. vi. 2.

They which are of Faith, the same are the CHILDREN OF
ABRAHAM, *Gal. iii. 7.*

Israel is my SON, even my first BORN, (*Exod. iv. 22.*)

-- Saying, unto thee will I give the Land of CANAAN, the Lot
of your INHERITANCE, *Psal. cv. 11.*

Ye are the CHILDREN of the PROPHETS, *Mat. iii. 25.*

Ye are ALL the CHILDREN OF GOD BY FAITH IN
CHRIST JESUS, *Gal. iii. 26.*

And if ye be CHRIST'S, then are ye ABRAHAM'S SEED,
and Heirs according to the Promise, *Gal. iii. 29.*

And are the Sons of God, being the SONS OF THE RESUR-
RECTION, *Luke xx. 36.*

Behold what Manner of Love the Father hath bestowed upon us,
that we should be called the Sons of God. -- Beloved, now are we
the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but
we know, THAT WHEN HE APPEARETH, WE
SHALL BE LIKE HIM, 1 *John iii. 1, 2.*

L O N D O N,

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THE

PREFACE.

It seems to be a prevailing Opinion, that Deism gets Ground among thinking and virtuous Men; notwithstanding many excellent Tracts that have appeared of late in Defence of Christianity, by bringing together the external Evidence there is for it, and supporting it against the Exceptions that have been made to that Evidence.

It must needs be very fit for Believers to consider, what may be the Causes of so strange and threating an Appearance; since the being thoroughly appriz'd of the Cause of the Growth of Infidelity, can alone direct us to the best Method to prevent it.

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I am sensible, There are some, who will think much Enquiry about this Matter altogether needless; satisfying themselves with resolving the Growth of Deism into God's delivering Men up to a reprobate Sense, who don't care to retain the Knowledge of him in their Minds. But I must take Liberty to say, that these Persons entirely mistake the Enquiry; which is not about the Growth of Deism among careless, scoffing, and vitious; but among thoughtful and virtuous Men.

I am sensible too there are others, who instead of going further into this Enquiry, will do nothing more than inveigh against Liberty, (the Glory of the Age we live in) and the Inquisitiveness and Freedom of Debate which it has introduc'd; to the great Advancement of Learning and Virtue among us. It must be allowed to these Declaimers, that Men, who don't think at all about Religion, will not be Deists; But neither will they be Believers. They may indeed have the Faith of a Stone (that is, no Disbelief of any Thing) or the Faith of a Parrot (that is, Words without Ideas) but cannot have the rational Faith of a Man, that is, a Belief of the Agreement or Disagreement of Ideas founded on what they have just Reason to apprehend to be divine Testimony. We must therefore be content with Things as they are, and let Unbelievers be among us, in order to have Believers; and not be so angry or disturb'd
that

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that Deism grows, provided that a rational Faith grows along with it. For it is a much happier State to have the Number of rational Believers increase in a Nation, together with a Number of Deists, than to have all People sceptical, or entirely careless and insensible about the Matter. That is, it is better to have a Nation made up of rational Believers and of Disbelievers, than of nominal Believers only (whether they are sceptical or careless, or insensible) who are really no Believers at all. For to say otherwise, is to say, that no Believers are better than some Believers.

But to come closer to the Enquiry, for the sake of those who are willing to enter into it; I must lay this as a Foundation in it, that no Man, who believes there is a God, and does but at all reflect on what follows from that Belief, can bring himself to think, that God has not Ways to impart more Knowledge to us, than we can arrive at by the bare Use of the Faculties he has given us: Or to doubt, whether Mankind has not been, is not, and will not be, in such Circumstances, in which it may have been, is, and will be very suitable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God, to impart more Knowledge to them, than they can arrive at by the bare Use of their Faculties; the better to enable them to discharge the Duties they owe to him, themselves, and one another: Or in other Words, to act according to the Truth of Things, and consequently according

according to the true Maxims of their own Happiness, and the Happiness of others. And rational Beings can only be better enabled to all this, by such Knowledge being imparted to them, as may assist them under the Weakness of their Reason, (from their short and narrow Views of Things) and against the Strength of their Appetites and Passions. Every considering Man therefore must see, that if God is pleased to impart more Knowledge to Mankind, than their Faculties will discover to them, it must be to this Purpose; since such a Discovery alone is consistent with his Wisdom and Goodness; or with that prior Knowledge he has given us, by the bare Use of our Faculties, and by the Opportunities he has vouchsafed us for the Exercise of them.

And as no Man can reasonably receive any Thing, as a Revelation from God, considered as the Governor of the World, that has not evidently these Characters and Tendencies; so no Man can reasonably reject any Thing as such a Revelation that has them, and that has no others, inconsistent with them.

Revelation therefore appearing clearly in the Times of the Apostles, (when it was best understood) with these Characters and Tendencies, and being supported by other internal, and by the strongest external Evidence, offered to the Senses of those to whom it was proposed; and the Apostles being at hand to clear

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clear up any Difficulty that might arise against it, it is no wonder that none then could disbelieve or doubt of it; though but too many refus'd to live up to its Precepts, and profess'd to reject it, purely because they prefer'd their Lusts and Passions to Virtue and Holiness, and to eternal Life, which Revelation propos'd as the Motive to deny the one, and to pursue the other. But in this they were first self-condemn'd, afterwards their Consciences became seared as with a red hot Iron, and they themselves at last were given up to believe a Lie.

But in after Times Things came under a very different Consideration. For Revelation could not be so well understood, when the Apostles ceas'd to be its Ministers: Especially if their Doctrine was corrupted by others. Nor could the Proof that their pure Doctrine really was their Doctrine, or that it was so attested, as it purports to be, be so strong in after Times, as it was in their Times; since the Proof in all after Times must be made, by an Appeal to the Reason of Mankind only, and not to their Senses.

We have now more Difficulties to get at the true Sense and Meaning of Revelation, than attends any Piece of the greatest Antiquity; and we have none of the Illuminated or Inspired to resort to under this Difficulty.

Instead of that Assistance, we have many unnecessary Difficulties flung in our way.

Seve-

viii The PREFACE.

Several of the Patrons of Revelation have laid more weight upon it than it can bear. For whereas Revelation, as it was delivered by Patriarchs or Prophets, by Christ or his Apostles, was only proposed in Aid of natural Religion, and recommended as highly useful; many since have insisted, that it is absolutely necessary; not barely to give us a Title, on which we may claim eternal Life, as eternal Life is described in Scripture, (which may be justly said according to the Doctrine of Revelation) but to secure Men from eternal Damnation, and to obtain any degree of the Favour of God in another World. But as soon as Persons, to whom Revelation is recommended as thus absolutely necessary, come to see, that it is not so, nor can't be so; as they soon will; it may very easily happen, that they will not trouble their Heads any more about it; and finding the Opinion, that it is absolutely necessary, a great Extreme, may, without thinking further, (as indeed they ought) run into another, (as is but too common in these Cases,) and think it entirely useless.

Other Advocates for Revelation, who have understood it better than the former, have indeed pleaded for it only as useful; but many of them in explaining the main Use it is of, have not shewn wherein its great Usefulness consists, as the Apostles always did. I must needs say, I cannot but think the rational Divines, as they are called, very faulty on