

DEISM QUOTES

Lord Herbert of Cherbury: *De Veritate; De Religione Gentilium; Autobiography*

Thus universal consent will be the sovereign test of truth, and there is nothing of so great importance as to seek out these common notions, and to put them each in their place as indubitable truths.

I add that vulgar doctrines are not altogether false, nor true, for there was never any Religion or Philosophy so barbarous that it had not its portion of truth; yet nevertheless if it has been corrupted by error (as generally happens) there is no other way of restoring it to its splendour than by the separation which depends upon our method. For if the things which are true have the witness of a certain faculty, those which are false will have no such witness. Universal consent, then, should be regarded, in my view, as the first and sovereign Theology and Philosophy, and to this end divine providence greatly assists, for it has, in these last centuries, so largely revealed what was unknown to the earlier ones, that it seems there remains nothing worthy to be known which has not been declared to us.

Now we derive this universal consent not only from laws, religions, philosophies, and the written remains of all kinds of authors, but we claim further that there are certain faculties innate in us by means of which these truths are vouched for (*conformees*).

...we say merely that it is easy to establish the general truths which are necessary, and that universal consent (which can only be arrived at by divine providence) is the sole criterion of the truth in these necessary things. I undertake this labour the more willingly, for in so doing I am espousing the cause of God, who has given these common notions in all times and in all places and to all men, as the means of his universal divine providence.

Religion is a common notion, for there has never been a century nor any nation without religion. We must therefore see what universal consent has brought to light in religion, and compare all that we find on this subject, so as to receive as common notions all the things which are recognizably present and constant in the true religion.

Nay, if you desire a more expeditious method, I will give it to you: Retire into yourself and enter into your own faculties; you will find there God, virtue, and the other universal and eternal truths.

For what is vulgarly spoken about implicit Faith, both among us and in the remotest provinces of foreign lands, is of no service to us in this discussion. As for instance when we are told that human reason is blind, that it ought to yield to Faith, that the Church (which cannot err) has the right to prescribe divine worship, and that, in consequence, we must follow her in all things; that no man should trust so far to the

resources of his intelligence as to dare to examine the power and authority of Prelates, and of those who declare the word of God; that there are good reasons for all that is preached (although it surpasses the reach of the human mind) which are so true that one should rather adore than examine them; that God can do all this, and greater things. For all these arguments, and many others like them, which are used according to the diversity of times and places, are as proper for establishing a false religion as the true one, since there is no imposter who cannot use similar language to persuade men to believe his reveries, and to establish his imaginary laws.

But the truth is far otherwise, for the sovereign Judge will not call us to account for what we have done on someone else's authority: each will answer for himself. That is why we must establish preambles and foundations of religion by the light of the universal wisdom, to the end that whatever is added afterwards at the veritable dictation of faith may resemble the roofs of houses, which rest upon and follow the foundations.

We call then God, him who has received so many names amongst all sorts of nations.

One fair day in summer, my casement being opened towards the South, the sun shining clear and no wind stirring, I took my book *De veritate* in my hand, and kneeling on my knees, devoutly said these words: O thou Eternal God, Author of the light which now shines upon me, and giver of all inward illuminations, I do beseech thee of thy infinite goodness to pardon a greater request than a sinner ought to make; I am not satisfied enough whether I shall publish this book *De veritate*; if it be for thy glory, I beseech thee give me some sign from heaven; if not I shall suppress it. I had no sooner spoken these words, but a loud though gentle noise came from the heavens (for it was like nothing on earth) which did so comfort and cheer me, that I took my petition as granted, and that I had the sign I demanded, whereupon also I resolved to print my book: this (how strange soever it may seem) I protest before the Eternal God is true, neither am I any way superstitiously deceived herein, since I did not only clearly hear the noise, but in the serenest sky that I ever saw, being without all cloud, did to my thinking see the place from whence it came.

As for the attributes which are rejected by our inquiry, they are those which ascribe to God some novelty, or which attribute to him corporality, multitude, and particularity, or which assert that he damns men for his sole pleasure; for such a God is nothing but a pure idol of imagination, in which alone it subsists.

‘THAT THIS SOVEREIGN POWER MUST BE WORSHIPPED’

Common consent ordains this, although men differ as to the means.

Some religious cult of one kind or another is found everywhere. Herbert postulates this as a fundamental principle, and concludes from it that religion is the distinguishing characteristic of mankind. Those who appear to be atheists are generally those who, disgusted at the horrible things attributed to God by deluded men, prefer believing in no God to believing in this one. Whereas, were the divine attributes rightly conceived, such people would rather be in the mood to believe at all costs; so that even if there were no God they would wish there were one.

'THAT THE GOOD ORDERING OR DISPOSITION OF THE FACULTIES OF MAN
CONSTITUTES THE PRINCIPAL OR BEST PART OF DIVINE WORSHIP,
AND THAT THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN BELIEVED'

About ceremonies men have disputed, but about the necessity for good conduct there has been a universal consensus. Piety and holiness of life are forms of worship, for they naturally produce love towards God and faith in him. We have, it is true, our bodily nature; but nature has implanted in us a taste for virtue, so that our souls may be gradually detached from earthly delights, and dwell in the constant enjoyment of inner tranquillity.

'THAT ALL VICIES AND CRIMES SHOULD BE EXPIATED AND EFFACED BY REPENTANCE'

Predestinarian doctrines which imply the futility of repentance are inconsistent with divine goodness and justice.

'THAT THERE ARE REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS AFTER THIS LIFE'

Every religion, all sorts of laws and of philosophy, and, what is more, Conscience, teach openly or implicitly that we shall be punished or rewarded after this life.

Thus it appears, that the common notions which recognize a sovereign Author of all things, which bid us honour him, lead holy lives, repent of our crimes, and expect reward or punishment after death, come from God, and are imprinted in the whole human race, and that those which presume plurality of Gods, which allow sin to remain unrepented of, and which waver as to the eternal state of the soul, are no common notions, nor truths. All religion is not good, . . . and we are not claiming that a man can be saved in all sorts of religions—for how can it be that he who believes more than he need, and does less than he ought, can be saved? But we gladly believe that in every religion, and even in each conscience, whether by grace or by nature, a man has means sufficient to render himself acceptable to God.

These then are the common notions on which the universal Church is founded; for it is not the Church which is built of stone and lime, or even of marble, which is infallible, nor that which men establish by words or writing, mingling therewith somewhat of their own opinions and giving their support thereto; neither is it that which fights under some particular flag, or which comprises a certain number of

persons in some corner of the earth or in a certain century; but it is simply the doctrine of the common notions, which embraces all sorts of places and times, and all men, which ought to be called Catholic, since it is this alone which explains the universal divine providence and wisdom, and which shows the reason why we address God as the common Father of the universe; it is this Church outside which there is no salvation—nay, all the praises attributed to 'the Church' belong to it, and each of the other Churches is by much the less true, and the more subject to error, as it is further separated from this.

John Locke—*The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures.*

There remains yet something to be said to those who will be ready to object,—If the belief of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah; together with those concomitant articles of his resurrection, rule, and coming again to judge the world; be all the faith required as necessary to justification;—to what purpose were the Epistles written; I say, if the belief of those many doctrines contained in them, be not also necessary to salvation;—and if what is there delivered, a christian may believe or disbelieve, and yet nevertheless be a member of Christ's church and one of the faithful?

I do not deny, but the great doctrines of the christian faith are dropt here and there, and scattered up and down in most of them.—But it is not in the epistles we are to learn what are the fundamental articles of faith; where they are promiscuously and without distinction mixed with other truths, in discourses that were (though for edification indeed) yet only occasional.—We shall find and discern those great and necessary points best in the preaching of our Saviour and the apostles, to those who were yet strangers, and ignorant of the faith; [in order] to bring them in and convert them to it.—And what that was, we have seen already out of the history of the Evangelists, and the Acts; where they are plainly laid down; so that nobody can mistake them. . . .

John Toland—*Christianity Not Mysterious; Nazarene: or Jewish, Gentile and Mahometan Christianity.*

Matthew Tindal—*Christianity as Old as Creation: or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature.*

It is called forth one hundred fifty replies and so formed the high water mark of excitement in England over deism. James Orr

Since God is perfect, the religion he gives to man is perfect. Thus no further revelation (Bible) can improve upon it.

Because God is immutable, he is not capable of changing this religion as first given in nature.

Because God is impartial he would not give any race or age a special advantage as to a special knowledge of what he expected of them.

Therefore, any revelation is merely a reduplication of the first given, natural religion.

...If most of the Apostles., upon what Motives soever, were mistaken in a Matter of this Consequence, how can we be certain, that any One of them may not be mistaken in any other Matter? If they were not inspir'd in what they said in their Writings concerning the then Coming of Christ; how cou'd they be inspir'd in those Arguments they build on a Foundation far from being so? And if they thought their Times were the last, no Direction they gave, cou'd be intended to reach further than their own Times.

Thomas Chubb: *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ, Asserted.*

First, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not an historical account of matters of fact. As thus. Christ suffered, died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, &c. These are historical facts the credibility of which arises from the strength of those evidences which are, or can be offered in their favour: but then those facts are not the gospel of Jesus Christ, neither in whole, nor in part. Luke vii.22, '*Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached,*' &c. Here we see that the gospel was preached to the poor by Christ himself, antecedent to the transactions I now refer to; and therefore those facts, or any doctrines founded upon them, (such as that of Christ's satisfaction, or that of his intercession, or the like,) cannot be any part of the gospel. . . .

Secondly, the gospel of Jesus Christ is not any particular private opinion of any, or of all the writers of the history of his life and ministry; nor any private opinion of any, or of all those whom he sent out to publish his gospel to the world; nor is any of their reasonings, or conclusions founded on, or drawn from such opinions in any part of that gospel. Thus St. John begins his history, John i. 1,2,3. '*In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*' These propositions, for any thing that appears to the contrary, are only the private opinion of St. John, who wrote the history of Christ's life and ministry, and they are no part of Christ's gospel; viz. that gospel which he preached to the poor, and which he gave in charge to his Apostles to publish to the world. And therefore whether Christ was the Logos or Word, whether he was with God, and was God, or whether he made all things in the sense in which St. John uses those terms, or not, is of no consequence to us; because these points are no part of Christ's gospel, and they are what the salvation of mankind is not in the least concerned with. Whether Christ pre-existed, or not; or whether he was the agent employed by God in making this visible world, or not; are points which do not affect the saving of mens souls at all; it being sufficient for us to

know, that he was the sent of God, and that the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth. This I say, is sufficient to us to know, with regard to our salvation; and therefore whether the forementioned propositions are truths or not; is of no consequences to us in that respect. . . .

The doctrines of the imputed righteousness, the meritorious sufferings, and the prevailing intercession of Christ being either separately, or conjunctly the grounds of mens acceptance with God, and of sinners obtaining divine mercy, these doctrines do naturally tend to weaken and take off the persuasive influence of the gospel, and to render it of none effect; as by them is pointed out to men another way to God's favour and mercy, and another way to life eternal than the gospel has pointed out unto them; and consequently, the aforesaid doctrines render the doctrine of the gospel useless and an insignificant thing.

Thomas Morgan—*The Moral Philosopher*

St. Paul then, it seems, preach'd another and quite different Gospel from what was preach'd by Peter and the other Apostles. Nay, as you will have it, they differed about the most essential and concerning Points, as they must have been at that Time, the fundamental Terms of Communion, and the Method of propagating and settling the Gospel at first. But this being supposed, it is impossible they should have been all inspired, or under the infallible Direction of the Holy Ghost. . . .

And this was the vast Difference between the Jewish and Gentile Christians at first, and in the Apostolical Age itself. That one believ'd in and receiv'd Christ, as the Hope and Salvation of Israel only, or as the Restorer of their Kingdom; and the other as the Hope and Salvation of all Men alike, without Regard to any such fifth Monarchy, or temporal Jewish Kingdom.

This was a very wide Difference indeed; and at this Rate the Jewish and Gentile Christianity, or Peter's Religion and Paul's, were as opposite and inconsistent as Light and Darkness, Truth and Falsehood. . . .

It may therefore be farther observed, that Christ's own Apostles and Disciples grossly misunderstood and misapply'd all that he spoke to them in Parables and Allegories, about the Nature and Extent of his Kingdom, and Design of his Mission. What he intended of a spiritual Kingdom, and the Deliverance of Mankind in general from the Power and Captivity of Sin and Satan, they understood of a temporal Kingdom to be set up and established at Jersusalem, under his own Adminstration, and of the Deliverance of that Nation from their Captivity to the Romans. And this Mistake and Delusion they continued in, even after they had received the Holy Ghost, that was to lead them into all Truth; and when they came to believe him risen from the Dead, and preached him as such, it was as the Jewish Messiah, the Christ, King, and Saviour of Israel; and they expected his second Coming very speedily, to set up his Kingdom, and that they should live and reign with him in that very Generation, and before the Decease of some who were then living.

Johann Salomo Semler and Johann David Michaelis—

Both were directly dependent for the questions they asked, as well as for many of the answers they gave, on the writings of the English Deists. . . Werner Kummel

Semler's teacher, S.J. Baumgarten, had made the deistic literature known in Germany, and Semler had devoted himself to reading and partial translation of this literature. **Werner Kummel**

Michaelis himself attributes to his stay in England a decisive influence on his thought. **Werner Kummel**

The Deistical Society of New York:

Proposals for forming a society for the promotion of moral science and the religion of nature—having in view the destruction of superstition and fanaticism—tending to the development of the principles of a genuine morality—the practice of a pure and uncorrupted virtue—the cultivation of science and philosophy—the resurrection of reason, and the renovation of the intelligent world.

At a time when the political despotism of the earth is disappearing, and man is about to reclaim and enjoy the liberties of which for ages he has been deprived, it would be unpardonable to neglect the important concerns of intellectual and moral nature. The slavery of the mind has been the most destructive of all slavery; and the baneful effects of a dark and gloomy superstition have suppressed all the dignified efforts of the human understanding, and essentially circumscribed the sphere of intellectual energy. It is only by returning to the laws of nature, which man has so frequently abandoned, that happiness is to be acquired. And, although the efforts of a few individuals will be inadequate to the sudden establishment of moral and mental felicity, yet, they may lay the foundation on which a superstructure may be reared incalculably valuable to the welfare of future generations. To contribute to the accomplishment of an object so important, the members of this association do approve of the following fundamental principles—

1. That the universe proclaims the existence of one supreme Deity, worthy to adoration of intelligent beings.
2. That man is possessed of moral and intellectual faculties sufficient for the improvement of his nature, and the acquisition of happiness.
3. That the religion of nature is the only universal religion; that it grows out of the moral relations of intelligent beings, and that it stands connected with the progressive improvement and common welfare of the human race.
4. That it is essential to the true interest of man, that he love truth and practise virtue.

5. That vice is every where ruinous and destructive to the happiness of the individual and of society.
6. That a benevolent disposition, and beneficent actions, are fundamental duties of rational beings.
7. That religion mingled with persecution and malice cannot be of divine origin.
8. That education and science are essential to the happiness of man.
9. That civil and religious liberty is equally essential to his true interests.
10. That there can be no human authority to which man ought to be amenable for his religious opinions.
11. That science and truth, virtue and happiness, are the great objects to which the activity and energy of the human faculties ought to be directed.

Every member admitted into this association shall deem it his duty, by every suitable method in his power, to promote the cause of nature and moral truth, in opposition to all schemes of superstition and fanaticism, claiming divine origin.