



THE
HOLY TIME
OF
CHRISTMAS
Defended,

Against *NON-CONFORMISTS*, and
all others its Prophaners and Opposers.

OR,
A Discourse, shewing, That a Religious Obser-
vation of *CHRISTMAS* is Apostolical, and
Worthy every good Christian.

L O N D O N,

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THE

THE HISTORY OF

CHRISTIANITY

IN THE

WEST INDIES

OF

A COURSE OF LECTURES, GIVEN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, IN THE YEAR 1763, BY THE REV. JOHN BRIDGES, M.A. OF SAINT JOHN'S COLLEGE.

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Christmas Defended against it's Prophaners.

UNhappy times in which we live! That we should all believe, that sixteen Hundred years ago, a certain Man, who was also God, called *Jesus*, was born in a Stable for the Salvation of Mankind; and yet, that there should be certain amongst us, who should count it a piece of Religion, not to keep Holy the Day, on the which our said Great Redeemer was born: O unhappy Times! O cross Manners of mis-instructed *Zelots*! Does not Reason, the Light of God within us, tell us, that if the Consubstantial Son of the Almighty, has been so Good, as for our sakes to become Man, cloathing himself with the Raggs of our Mortality: We ought with Joy and Thanksgiving to remember so high a Favour? And does not the same Reason and Experience teach us, that the setting a part that particular Day, as near as we can guess, on which some notable Accident has happened, in Memory of it, does strangely help us, more lively, freshly, and affectionately to commemorate the said Wonder? Tell me candidly your Thoughts. Should we by no other Memorial but the History of *Boscobel*, relate to Posterity, the wonderful Restauration of our Gracious Sovereign; how little knowledge, and how faint a Belief think you would there be all over *England*, of that strange Wonder and all it's circumstances a thousand years hence? We cannot reasonably imagin, but the generality of the common People would be wholly ignorant of it; and we may without rash Judgment surmize, there would not want Cavilling Wits, who would call in question the whole Story, and for some seemingly, unlikely circumstances, condemn the whole Narration as fabulous, or at best, of very doubtful and uncertain credit: So that in effect, Posterity some Ages hence, would have little more Belief of that undoubted History, than we have now of the Fable of *Guy of Warwick*. But let us go on as we have begun, to commemorate that strange accident, with a Day set a part on purpose, Religiously to be observed in all the Parishes of *England*, by publick Prayers, and Sermons, suited to the occasion,

occasion, and 'tis not possible, but till Dooms-day come, there shall be an assured Belief, and fresh Memory of it in the generality of all *English* Hearts. Has Nature then made us so cunning for ever to keep in memory what we have a mind should never be forgotten? And can you think Grace, or the Holy Ghost was wanting to make the first Planters of Christianity so wise, as to think upon a happy Expedient; how all Generations all the World over, might have a fresh Memory, and assured Faith of the wonderful Nativity of their Lord and Saviour; especially when the lively Memory of the said their Lord's Nativity, with all it's circumstances is strangely conducing to the Salvation of the World? But why do I urge the authority of Reason and Nature? Did not, infinit unerring Wisdom, and the God of Nature use this very Means, to propagate to posterity the Memory of the stupendious Wonders, he wrought amidst his beloved People the *Jews*, by the hand of his Servant *Moses*? Read from the sixth Chapter to the fourteenth, in the Book of *Exodus*, and take notice of those strange Wonders Almighty God wrought, to compel *Pharaoh*, to let his chosen People go into the Wilderness to worship him; turning all the Rivers of *Egypt* into Blood, filling the whole Country, in their very houses with Frogs, &c. and finally, killing all their First-born both of Man and Beasts. And now because a lively Memory of these Wonders to all Generations, would be of admirable benefit to every Age; as well to preserve in them a strong actual Faith of the true God, the Author of all those Miracles, as a Holy Dread of the same Divine Majesty, and care to observe his Commandements: Almighty God ordained that for ever, that very day, on which his People came out of *Egypt*, should be Solemn and Sacred; and observed with such Ceremonies, as might make Posterity even see their Ancestors going out of *Egypt* many hundreds of years before. They must kill a Lamb, and eat the flesh of the same Lamb with Unleavened Bread, &c. in token of what their Ancestors did in like manner in *Egypt*, and to remember the great haste in which they departed, with unleavened Dough on their backs: and for ever offer to Almighty God their First-born, both of Man and Beasts, in memory of his killing the Firstlings of the *Egyptians*, and sparing theirs. And this account they were to give of this Ceremonial observance; when they should in future Generations be asked the reason of it by their Children. *Exod. 13. v. 14. When thy Son shall ask thee to Morrow, saying, What is this? Thou shalt answer him; in a strong hand the Lord brought us out*

out of the Land of Egypt: For when Pharaoh was hardened, and would not let us goe, the Lord killed all the First-born in the Land of Egypt, from the First-born of Man to the Firstling of Beasts; therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that opens the Womb of the Masculine Sex, and all the First-begotten of my Sons I redeem. Such a provision as this, made it utterly impossible to the Jews, ever to forget for all Generations, what the Almighty had wrought in favour of their Ancestors in bringing them out of Egypt. And he must be out of his Wits, or devoid of common sense, that could question a matter of Fact, so solemnly immemorially commemorated, and so particularly recounted in a Book; which a whole People time out of mind has venerated as a most true History. For had the Rivers of Egypt not been turned into Blood, (the like I say of the rest of the Wonders) no man could have had the impudence to have committed to Writing as most certain Truths, what thousands must necessarily have known to be most notorious Lyes. Much less could any one have prevailed with many thousands, in a most serious and solemn manner to commemorate yearly with thanksgiving to God, what they all knew had never happened.

And can it now enter into any Christian mans heart to think, that Moses was more faithful and careful to preserve in the Memories of the Jews, the Wonders the Almighty wrought to deliver that particular People from under the Bondage of Pharaoh: Then was Jesus Christ and his Apostles, to keep in the fresh memory of all Christians, the stupendious Wonders wrought to deliver the whole VWorld, from the Eternal slavery of Sin and Devils? Let it be Four of our Lords followers, have left written Memorials of his Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven. But had all his first Missionaries to the VWorld, ordained in every County converted by them to the Christian Faith, that they should yearly spend the Day of his Nativity (which they might easily learn from his Holy Mother) in Prayer, Reading, Hearing, and Meditating that Mystery with all its circumstances, and the ends for which it was so wrought: VVould not such an Observation as this in every Christian Parish in the VWorld, have strangely conduced to a pious, profitable, grateful memory of that Miracle of Love, of God's becoming a little Infant for the Salvation of the VWorld? And this methinks should be sufficient to satisfie any reasonable man, that the keeping Holy, by a yearly Observation, of the sacred time of our dear Lord's Nativity, was not only worthy the Holy Apostles Institution;

tution; but also that it cannot be well understood, how they could be faithful in their Office, without the making of such an Ordination, or at least without leaving Power and Charge to their Successors so to ordain. Such Ordinations being absolutely necessary to posterity at a long distance; howsoever, less needful they might be, to them who lived so near the time, when that and the other Mysteries of our Lord Jesus were acted. Nor let us deceive our selves and posterity, by pretending to remember our Lord's Nativity every Day; too sad Experience telling us, this is the way seldom or never, soundly and heartily to think of it. In our own Country, what's become of all memory of *Gowry's Conspiracy*, for want of a day to remember it? And had not the fifth of *November* been set a part particularly to remember the *Gun-powder Treason*, but had every one been left to remember it every day, in all likelyhood the memory of that horrid Plot had been by this time quite lost in the memories of the vulgar people.

But all that I have hitherto been saying, only shews, that the appointment of a particular time to remember our Lord's Nativity, was worthy of the Holy Apostles; but what evidence have we that the Holy Apostles have actually made any such Ordination? Why, what evidence would you have? Indeed they have written no Book to recommend the Observation of any particular day to Posterity; but if they have taught such an Observation by word of mouth, to all the Countries in the World, where they preached the Gospel; is not this sufficient? Let us then in our thoughts, Travel into the several Christian Countries of the World, and see what they observe. And first let us take a view of our own Native Country, and enquire when we began, upon the 25th. of *December*, every year particularly, to lay aside all our worldly Affairs, and with Prayers, and other Holy Exercises, to remember our dear Lord's Birth? The oldest man alive, can tell us no beginning of this our practice. No Chronicles, no Annals give us any account of it's beginning neither. They tell us indeed, that *St. Joseph of Arimathea*, not long after our Blessed Saviour's Departure into Heaven, brought Christianity into our Country; but they do not tell us of any one since that time, who enjoyned us to keep *Christmas Day* Holy. The same Annals tell us, that about the year six hundred, one *Austin*, with certain Companions came from *Rome* to convert our Nation, then over-run by the Infidel *Saxons*, from Paganism to Christianity. They tell us also, that the same *Austin*, found certain *British* Christians driven into *Wales* by

by the *Saxons*; and make mention also how the said *Austin*, and the *Christian Britains*, differed about certain Ceremonies in the administration of *Baptism*; and moreover, upon what Sunday they should keep *Easter Day*; both agreeing *Easter Day* was to be kept; the one holding upon the 14th. of the Moon of *March*, in case it happened on the Sunday, the other not till the Sunday following. But now had they differed about the keeping of *Christmas Day*, and that so, as one should have said, a day was to be kept, and precisely the 25th. of *December*, and the other should have contended no Day at all was to be kept: This would have been a more notorious Disagreement, than upon what Sunday *Easter* was to be solemnized; and consequently would have been taken notice of by our Historiographers. Hence I infer, the *Britains* kept holy *Christmas Day*, before the coming of *Austin*. For it cannot be doubted, but *Austin* brought from *Rome* the Religion that was then practised at *Rome*. And 'tis manifest that at *Rome*, they then, and many years before kept Holy the day of our Lord's Nativity. For we have Sermons preached at *Rome* upon the day of our Lord's Nativity, by St. *Leo* Pope, above a hundred years before. Nor let any one be afraid of *Rome*, and her way of *VV*orship thus early; the Church of *England* willingly appeals to the Faith and Practice of *Rome*, and other Christian Cities, for the first six hundred years after our Blessed Saviour. Besides, had the Observation of *Christmas* in our Nation, been begun since our Conversion to Christianity by *Austin*, our Chronicles would make mention, what National Synod or Council, commanded it to be so universally observed, as it has been time out of mind in every Parish in *England*. Should any Forreiner that comes into our Country, take notice of the standing of our Plows, the shutting up of our Shops, and the frequenting of *Divine Service* in every Parish, upon the fifth of *November*, he would instantly conclude, we never fell upon such a Practice by chance; but that it was so commanded and ordained by some Sovereign power *Ecclesiastical* or *Civil*. The like Discourse will every rational man make, upon the general Religious Observations of *Christmas Day*: To wit, that we never fell upon such an Observance by chance; but either we were all taught so by the first Planters of Christianity in our Nation; or enjoined so to do by some Supreme Authority since; but our Annals making no mention of any such Ordination, 'tis rightly concluded, we were so taught by our first Christian Masters.

But if you give a little more scope to your Thoughts, and Consider

der that not only *England*, but *Holland*, *Germany*, *France*, *Spain*, *Italy*, and other Christian Country's, have Immemorially from their first Conversion to Christianity, kept Holy the Day of our Lords Nativity: Nor is there any mention of any General Council, or other Universal Authority's imposing any such Observation upon them: this Reflection will compel you to acknowledg this Practice must needs have been taught, the several Nations of Christendom, by the first Preachers of the Gospel the Holy Apostles. And remarkable to my present purpose, is the Rule of the Great St. *Augustin*: VVhatsoever we find, universally practised over all the Christian VVorld, we safely Conclude, either to have been Ordained by the Apostles or some General Council, for that it cannot be presumed, that whole Nations could by chance fall upon the Religious Observation of the same Day, or other Ceremonial Right. And he whom such a Discourse as this does not satisfy; but he still Doubts & Disputes; How can he be sure the Apostles ever taught any such Observation? Such an one I say let him take heed; for he is dangerously disposed to throw away the whole New Testament. For how can he tell St. *Matthew* wrote this Book, St. *Luke* that, and so of the rest, but by the universal immemorial Testimony of several Christian Countrys. If Almighty God will Oblige me to keep such Daies Holy, as were so appointed, and reverence such Books as Divine, as were by Divine Inspiration written, sixteen Hundred Years before I was born, he cannot reasonably expect I should know and distinguish either the one or the other, but by the immemorial Testimonys of my Ancestors in several Countries. But how at the Day of Judgment I should Answer the refusal of such a Book, or the Non-Observance of such a Day; So immemorially recommended by my Ancestors, I cannot tell. It belongs to the providence of our Blessed Saviour to take care, that no Age should be so devilishly malicious, universally to tell their Children, a Book of their own forging (the like may be said of a Holy-Day or other Ritual Observance) was written by a Holy Apostle of Jesus Christ, some hundred of Years before. One Man may be presumed to be so Malicious, whole Nations never did, nor ever can do any such thing. Nor does the Church of *England* in this differ from the Church of *Rome*, as if she thought what the Apostles VVrit, was of greater Authority then what they Taught, or Ordained. She willingly admits all Traditions, of which she can have good proof, that they come from the Apostles. Such are the Observations of *Christmas*, *Lent*, *Easter*, &c.

But

But if *Christmas* Day was taught the World by the Apostles, how comes it to pass we have no mention of it in all the New Testament? What daies were to be Observed by the *Jews*, are made mention of, over and over in the old Testament; how comes it to pass, if *Christmas* Day, or other Days be to be Observed by Christians, we find no mention of them in any of the Books of the New Scripture, Reflect upon the nature of the Books of the two Testaments, and the Reason is Manifest. For if you consider the Old Testament, you will find not only Historical Books, such are the books of *Judges*, the *Kings* &c. and moral Books which treat of good Life, &c. such are the *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* & others: But besides these, there are Ritual Books, which by the very subject of them every one sees, their Design was to describe the external Mosaical Worship, as to Observation of Daies, Priestly Garments, Sacrifices, &c. Such are the Books of *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, and *Deuteronomy*. And therefore no wonder if you find exactly set down, what Daies that people was to keep Holy, How their Priests were to be Consecrated, and how Vested in time of Divine Service, &c. But now cast your Eye upon all the Books of the New Testament, and you'll not find one that you can reasonably presume, the Author of it had a Design in it, to Describe the External Worship of the Gospel: What daies for Example, we Christians are to observe in memory of Christian Mercies and Mysterics, what Garments our Priests are to use in Divine Service, &c. And yet the Light of God within us tells us, such Institutions are very useful to increase Piety, when Religiously Observed: and all History tells us, that immemorially in all Nations, there have been certain external Christian Rites, not mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, ever since the first planting of Christianity amongst them. The four Gospels are a History of our Blessed Saviours Life and Death, who lived as to the external Rites of Religion according to the Jewish Law, and so we cannot reasonably in any of them expect, what Days we Christians are to observe in the time of the Gospel. Indeed had the Acts of the Apostles been intended as an exact Narration, how the Apostles lived as to the whole course of their Life, what Days they kept Holy, and what Days they Fasted, &c. We might reasonably have expected some mention there of *Christmas* Day and *Lent*: But that Holy Book making mention only, of some few particular passages, of two or three of the Apostles Lives; the Apostles might well keep *Christmas* Day and *Lent* too, and teach them also to their first Converts, and yet there be a profound silence of such Observations in the Book of
B. their

their Acts. As for St. *Johns* Prophetical Book, it were no ways proper in it, to treat either of *Christmas Day* or *Lent*. Though I must tell you, for ought you or I know, when St. *John* says he was in the Spirit on the Lords Day, he may mean the Day of our Lords Birth, or the yearly *Easter Day* of his Resurrection, as well as our V Weekly Sunday. The rest of the New Testament are certain Epistles or Letters of spiritual Counsels written by St. *Paul* or some other Apostle, to particular Persons or whole Cities, already instructed in the Christian way of VVorship: But why they should needs make mention therein of *Christmas Day*, I understand not, unless perchance the Persons they wrote unto, had been deficient in keeping it Holy.

But, does not St. *Paul* expressly decry the keeping of *Christmasts-Day*, in one of his Epistles, and tells the Christians he wrote to, he was afraid he had laboured in vain amongst them, by reason of their Superstitious Observation of Dayes. *Gal. 4. 9, 10. How are ye Converted again to weak and beggarly Elements, which you will Serve again? Ye observe Dayes, and Months, and Times and Years. I am afraid of you, lest I should have laboured amongst you in Vain.* Was then the Holy Apostle afraid, lest the *Galatians* should leave Christianity, and return to Judaism or Paganism, because of their Observing *Christmasts-Day*, in Memory of our Blessed Saviour's Birth, or *Lent*, in Memory of his Fasting forty Dayes, or *Easter* in Memory of his Resurrection? Is this a likely Story? Or is it not evident from the Context, *Of their returning again to weak and poor Elements*, that because of their returning to the Observation of *Jewish-Dayes*, Comanded by *Moses*, or *Pagan Dayes*, in honour of *Jupiter, Mars, or Saturn*, he was afraid they would Relinquish the Gospel, by them Received, and become *Jews* again or *Pagans*. But, still methinks, I am afraid of Superstition, and Will-Worship, by observing a Day, which, I fear, God has never Comanded me. But you have more reason to be afraid of Prophaners, in neglecting a Day which you have all reason to think God has Comanded you to keep Holy, if you Reflect well upon what I have said, above. Seeing you are Comanded to keep Holy *Christmasts-Day*, by doing only such Actions, as you acknowledge to be Christianly and Good, What danger can there be of Superstition? Especially, when you are not Taught neither, that such Actions are then more acceptible to God Almighty, than at another times. Only, you are Comanded at that Set-Time to do them, lest, otherwise, you should wholly omit Them. My dearest Relations (whom I pity with my Soul) take heed whilst under

Under pretence of Opposing *Anti-Christ*, you be not one day found Abettors of *Anti-Christ*. Consider, *Anti-Christ* is to Leny and Oppose *Christ*; and then think, Who are more like *Anti-Christ*, those who piously observe certain Dayes, in Memory of the Birth, Death, and Resurrection of *Christ*, or those who prophane and decry all such Dayes as Superstitious? Who are most likely to promote *Anti-Christ's* Design, that is, to Abollish and Root all Memory of *Christ* out of the World, the Devout Observers, or Irreligious Prophaners of Christian Solemnities?

But were it not better, to remember and ponder the Mystery of our Lord's Nativity, with it's circumstances every day? No, He that would grasp many things together, holds fast few, or perhaps none. The capacity of our Souls is so limited, that if we would have the Thoughts of our Lord's humble Nativity, sink deep into us, and efficaciously work the spiritual Fruit they are apt to work in us, we must entertain them, and no other but them for a good season together, and repeat them over and over. He that will pretend to have all sorts of spiritual Thoughts every day, will I fear, upon no day, have any to any spiritual purpose. Let us not pretend, to be wiser than God Almighty. He ordered the *Jews*, and he has ordered us Christians also, a grateful Variety of spiritual Seasons. Let it therefore be concluded against the *Non-conformists* (the All-Merciful Jesus open their Eyes) that a Religious Observation of *Christmas*, has nothing of Superstition, but a great deal of Christian Piety in it.

And now, we are resolved *Christmas* ought to be kept, but how must we keep it? If any Man keep a day, let him keep it to the Lord; So as his keeping of it may not Contristate, but Recreate, and Rejoyce his Dear and Greatest Lord: So, as his keeping of it, may make him all the Year after, more strong and ready, to imitate and tread in the Steps (as neer as Humane-Frailty will permit,) of his same Lord. Let now this Holy time be spent, as to the far greatest part of it, in devout Prayers, frequent Meditations upon the Mysteries of the Solemnity, Reading spiritual Books, Hearing Sermons suited to the occasion; Giving large Alms to God Almighty in his poor and needy, in gratitude to him, who at this time gave us no less than his only Son, &c. And the truth is, that which makes many well meaning, and tenderly Conscientious Christians, to make no distinction of this Sacred Time, from another, was the intolerable abuse of it, by its pretended Religious Observers. Time would fail me, if I should go about to enumerate the Debaucherys, with which this Sa-

cred Time has been prophaned. May they never be Remembered unless it be to VVeep for them, and to excite our selves to make amends for them, by a double diligence in all *Holy* and *Christian* Exercises, these *Dares of Christ*. Had this holy Time been ever spent, according to its *Primitive Institution* in more abundant *VWorks* of *Piety* and *Charity*: And when our *Spirits* had been wearied out with *Spiritual exercises*; had we refreshed *Nature* by a *Festival Reflection*, or some harmless *Disport*; but still with a vigilant *Watch* in honor of the *Sacred Season*, so to play, as our *Pastime* might not make our *Great little Jesus* VVeep: Had, I say, this *Holy Time* been ever thus holily *Observed*, the *Devil* himself could not have had the *Impudence*, to have declared against it, as *Antichristian*. But indeed, as it has been of late *Observed*, or rather *Prophaned*, we may without a *slander*, say, it was become a truly *Antichristian Time* indeed.

But what *Remedy* then? *Abandon* the new *prophane Abuse*, and retrieve the first *pious Use*. But what *Fruit* may we expect from a *Religious Observation* of this *Holy Time*? *Observe* it, as was said above, and you'll be better able to tell me afterwards at *Twelf-ride*, then I can tell you *Before*, on *Christmasts - Eve*.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo.

