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“A History of the Anglican Church—Part XLVIII: An Essay on the Role of Christian Lawyers and Judges within the Secular State”©

By

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-- Rev. Algernon Sidney Crapsey (Anglican Priest)

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The ideas expressed in this Apostolate Paper are wholly those of the author, and subject to modification as a result of on-going research into this subject matter. This paper is currently being revised and edited, but this version is submitted for the purpose of sharing Christian scholarship with clergy, the legal profession, and the general public.

PREFACE

The organized Christian church of the Twenty-First Century is in crisis and at a crossroad. Christianity as a whole is in flux. And I believe that Christian lawyers and judges are on the frontlines of the conflict and changes which are today challenging both the Christian church and the Christian religion. Christian lawyers and judges have the power to influence and shape the social, economic, political, and legal landscape in a way that will allow Christianity and other faith-based institutions to evangelize the world for the betterment of all human beings. I write this essay, and a series of future essays, in an effort to persuade the American legal profession to rethink and reconsider one of its most critical and important jurisprudential foundations: the Christian religion. To this end, I hereby present the sixty-fifth in this series: “A History of the Anglican Church—Part LXVIII.”

Introduction¹

Matthew Tindal (1657 – 1733) was a great Christian theologian, chancery lawyer, and legal scholar. His life and thoughts have much to teach today's English and American bench and bar. He is a superb role model for modern-day Christian lawyers and judges. His legal analysis of "law and religion" exemplifies very high quality Christian legal scholarship. His monumental work *Christianity as Old as the Creation: or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730) clearly demonstrates, for example, how certain words used in the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776)— e.g., "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," "appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world," and " with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence"—exemplify the "religion of nature" that was prevalent in eighteenth-century Anglo-American juridical, theological, and political thought. According to Dr. Tindal, "reason," or the law of nature, is the foundation of natural religion; and Christianity is simply the republication of that natural religion. For this reason, we may safely deduce from Dr. Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* that Christianity, through the influence of the Church of England, was still the foundation of Anglo-American constitutional law and jurisprudence throughout the eighteenth century.

Matthew Tindal, who was a chancery lawyer for the Church of England and a judge advocate lawyer in the British Navy, is rarely described as a devout Christian. For example, in the Wikipedia on-line encyclopedia as an "eminent English deist author. His works, highly influential at the dawn of the Enlightenment, caused great controversy and challenged the Christian consensus of his time." Routedledge.com describes him as "one of the last and most learned exponents of English deism."² And Encyclopedia.com has thus described him as an "English jurist, Whig propagandist, and deist."³ The typical biographical summary of Dr. Tindal reads as follows:

¹ This paper is dedicated to the Faculty and Staff of the Whitefield Theological Seminary (Lakeland, Florida), to the Christ Presbyterian Church (Lakeland, Florida), and to the Calvinist wing of the Church of England.

² <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/biographical/tindal-matthew-1657-1733/v-1>

³ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/tindal-matthew-1657-1733>

Matthew Tindal was one of the last and most learned exponents of English deism. His most famous work is *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730), a comprehensive apology for natural religion. In it, he argued that God's law is imprinted on the nature of all things, including the human soul, and is accessible to reason. Revealed religion merely restates this universal law – the will of God – in a different form. Religion enables us to act in accordance with this natural order, and its end is happiness. However, Tindal was scathingly critical of the clergy, and cast doubt on the reliability of the Bible. Although Tindal's work was severely criticized by William Law, it exerted a considerable influence on the English and Continental Enlightenment.⁴

But is it not unfair to omit the fact the Dr. Tindal was, above all else, a devout Christian and an apologist for what he called the true Christian faith—to honor God and to love thy neighbor as thyself? In my estimation, the answer to that question is a resounding “yes,” because Dr. Tindal was, after all, trying to disenthral humanity from the shackles of false religion and to present the true Christian faith through the prism of reason, natural law, and natural religion.

Hence, Dr. Tindal was not only a great lawyer, but he was also a great Christian and a great intellectual. In my estimation, his conceptualization of God was certainly orthodox and biblical and squarely within the parameters of latitudinarian Anglicanism. Indeed, Dr. Tindal was a devout Anglican who used his legal education to demystify the superstitions which he found to be within the text of the Sacred Scriptures or in the Christiana faith as a whole. Tindal sought to free men and women from ecclesiastical oppressions in order that they might truly enjoy their God-given rights—true Christian liberty. To that end, Dr. Tindal was an 18th-century human rights lawyer whose influential publication *Christianity As Old as the Creation: or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730) helped to lay the foundation for religious liberty and the natural religion that undergird the American Revolution and the framing of the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776).

Summary

In *Christianity as Old as the Creation: Or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730), Dr. Tindal attempts to filter out all of the unnecessary,

⁴ <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/biographical/tindal-matthew-1657-1733/v-1>

redundant, and irrelevant components of the Christian religion. He argues that these irrelevant components of Christianity not only have no nexus to Christ's two-fold instructions to honor God and love neighbor, but also that these irrelevant components have been invented by priests in order to enslave mankind. The true religion, argues Dr. Tindal, existed since the beginning of time and is revealed to all human beings through their consciences. The very best Christian theologians all throughout the history of the church, argues Dr. Tindal, affirm this position. Hence, true religion is really "natural religion," promulgated by God through his creation and revealed to human beings through their consciences. Natural law is the law of Christ, writes Dr. Tindal. And the Christian religion is simply the republication of natural law or natural religion. Both the Christian faith and natural law tend toward the same end, which is the happiness and the good of humanity.

Part XLVIII. Anglican Church: Notes on Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as The Creation* (1730)

A. Biography of Matthew Tindal (1657 - 1733)

Matthew Tindal was born in 1657 at Beer Ferris, Devonshire, as the son of John and Anne Tindal. His father John Tindal was a minister and the rector of a local parish. Through Tindal's mother, Anne, he descended from English nobility (Clifford and Fortescue families), and was a first cousin of Thomas Clifford, 1st Lord Clifford of Chudleigh. Tindal was baptized on 12 May 1657 at Bere Ferrers in Devon.

After an early education in the country, he proceeded to study law at Oxford, first at Lincoln College and later at Exeter College. He studied arts and law at Lincoln College, Oxford, under the high churchman George Hicke, Dean of Worcester, and then at Exeter College, Oxford. In 1678, Tindal was elected to a law fellowship at All Souls' College, Oxford. In 1679, he received the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Civil Law degrees, and, in 1685, he earned the Doctor of Civil Law degree. Cambridge University later bestowed upon him the LLD (i.e., doctor of laws degree). In 1685, Dr. Tindal was also admitted as an advocate at Doctors' Commons, a society of ecclesiastical lawyers, with a pension of £200 a year for the remainder of his life. Doctors' Commons was comparable to the English Inns of Court, but Doctors' Commons had restricted jurisdiction over ecclesiastical and admiralty law:

Doctors' Commons, also called the College of Civilians, was a society of lawyers practising non-common law (civil law in that sense) in

London, namely ecclesiastical and admiralty law. Like the Inns of Court of the common lawyers, the society had buildings with rooms where its members lived and worked, and a large library. It was also a lower venue for determinations and hearings, short of the society's convening in the Court of the Arches or Admiralty Court, which frequently consisted of judges with other responsibilities and from which further appeal lay. The society used St Benet's, Paul's Wharf as its church.⁵

While at Oxford and under the influence of the high churchman George Hickes, Tindal defected from the Church of England to the Roman Catholic Church.⁶ He concluded that there was no sufficient legal basis for the Church of England's separation from Rome.⁷ But discerning "the absurdities of popery," Tindal soon recanted and rejoined the Church of England in 1688.⁸

Between the early 1690s and his death in 1733, Tindal made major contributions in a various areas. As Deputy Judge Advocate of the Fleet he had a large influence on the case law on piracy, such as his contributions the 1693–1694 trial of John Golden. In addition, his timely pamphlet on the freedom of the press was hugely influential in the ending of the legal requirement that all publications be licensed before being printed. Tindal's book *Rights of the Christian Church* had an immense impact on church/state relations and on the growth of freethinking. Dr. Tindal also published a long series of tracts and books, culminating in 1730, when he was over seventy years old, with *Christianity as Old as the Creation: or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature*.⁹ "Frequently called 'the deist's Bible,' this work elicited more than 150 replies, including Bishop Butler's famous *Analogy of Religion* (1736)."¹⁰

B. First Argument: That God has at all times given men "general revelation" that is a sufficient means for Salvation.

Was there ever a moment in human history when God did not make the means of salvation available and accessible to human beings? Dr. Tindal opens up

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctors%27_Commons

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Tindal

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Christianity as Old as the Creation by answering this question in the negative. In the beginning of human history, God gave human beings a primitive religion of nature. Dr. Tindal argued that at no point in human history did God fail to provide a sufficient means of salvation or a sufficient means of making men acceptable to God.

Although Dr. Tindal does not cite *Genesis* to make his point—his focus is natural religion—it should be pointed out here that, according to *The Holy Bible*, Adam certainly had the true original religion. Adam’s second son Abel,¹¹ had a natural religion which he practiced,¹² and for which he was martyred by his brother Cain.¹³ God informed Cain of the consequences of good deeds and bad deeds, stating “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.”¹⁴ And so, Cain was sufficiently forewarned as to the consequences of his actions, before he murdered his brother, Abel. Similarly, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, in Dr. Tindal purports that religion has always existed among human beings and asks:

Can it be supposed, an infinitely good and gracious being, who gives men notice, by their senses, what does good or hurt to their bodies; has had less regard for their immortal parts, and has not given them, at all times, by the light of their understanding, sufficient means to discover what makes for the good of their souls; but has necessitated them, or any of them, to continue from age to age, in destructive ignorance and error? To press this matter further, let me ask you, whether there is not a clear and distinct light, that enlightens all men; and which, the moment they attend to it, makes them perceive those eternal truths, which are the foundation of all our knowledge?¹⁵

The Holy Bible suggests that religion always present since the creation. The Bible says that Adam’s wife Eve bore a third son, Seth, “another seed instead of Abel.” And to Seth was born “Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.”¹⁶ According to *The Holy Bible*, then, a pre-Abrahamic religion existed in the world. What were the parameters of that religion, we do not know exactly, but Dr. Tindal surmises that this was “natural religion,” and that this religion was

¹¹ Genesis 4:2.

¹² Genesis 4:4 (“And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering.”)

¹³ Genesis 5:5-8.

¹⁴ Genesis 4:7.

¹⁵ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Genesis 4: 25-26.

universal and omnipresent. God was always willing that “all men should come to the knowledge of his truth,” concludes Dr. Tindal. And “there never was a time when God intended men should have no religion.”¹⁷ If this is true, then at some point in human history, all human beings must have had “all of one religion,” and “have had sufficient means to discover it.”¹⁸

The revealed religion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, say Dr. Tindal, “is not a religion of yesterday, but what God, at the beginning, dictated, and still continues to dictate to Christians, **as well as others.**”¹⁹ Here, I surmise that Dr. Tindal’s words “as well as others” is reflective of St. Paul’s theology in his *Epistle to the Romans*.²⁰ Indeed, it is for this reason that St. Augustine held Plato, a non-Christian philosopher, in very high regards, referencing St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans* as his reference:

Then, that [a Christian man] may not suppose that all philosophers are [deceptive and worldly], he hears the same apostle say concerning certain of them, **‘Because that which is known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifest it to them. For His invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, also His eternal power and Godhead.’**²¹ And, when speaking to the Athenians, after having spoken a mighty thing concerning God, which few are able to understand, ‘In Him we live, and move, and have our being,’ he goes

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁰ See, e.g., Romans 2:11- 16, stating:

For there is no respect of persons with God.

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Which **shew the work of the law written in their hearts,** their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

²¹ Here, St. Augustine is citing Romans 1:19-20.

on to say, ‘As certain also of your own have said.’²²

Like St. Paul and St. Augustine, Dr. Tindal reached the same theological conclusion, to wit: that “a law of nature,” which was “an universal law, so fully promulgated to mankind, that they should have no just plea from their ignorance.”²³ Similarly, Dr. Tindal’s conclusions are supported by St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, where Paul concluded that the Gentiles could not plea ignorance.²⁴ Moreover, Dr. Tindal’s reference to the “natural religion” as a

²² St. Augustine, *The City of God*, (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 254.

²³ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 17.

²⁴ See, e.g., Romans 1:16 – 32, stating:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; **for God hath shewed it unto them.**

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

“universal moral law,” is also a plain reference to the natural-law philosophy of Cicero (107 BC- 43 BC).²⁵ Thus adopting the reasoning of Greco-Roman

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

²⁵ The Roman Senator Cicero’s profound influence upon Anglo-American constitutional jurisprudence has been profound. Cicero (107 BC to 43 BC) was a lawyer, statesman, philosopher, and theorist who was assassinated during the turbulent period when Caesar Augustus established the Roman Empire, just before the birth of Jesus Christ. St. Augustine has written lucidly of this period in his work, *The City of God*, describing Cicero as a righteous pagan who was assassinated because of his ideals of virtue and justice. Cicero’s conception of nature, natural law and justice had a significant influence upon St. Paul and the early Christian Church, which, in turn, passed Cicero’s influence on to what late became the 18th-century British Empire:

Cicero wrote in his *De Legibus* that both justice and law originate from what nature has given to humanity, from what the human mind embraces, from the function of humanity, and from what serves to unite humanity. For Cicero, natural law obliges us to contribute to the general good of the larger society. The **purpose of positive laws is to provide for ‘the safety of citizens, the preservation of states, and the tranquility and happiness of human life.’** In this view, **‘wicked and unjust statutes’ are ‘anything but “laws,”** because **‘in the very definition of the term “law” there inheres the idea and principle of choosing what is just and true.’** Law, for Cicero, **‘ought to be a reformer of vice and an incentive to virtue.’** Cicero expressed the view that **‘the virtues which we ought to cultivate, always tend to our own happiness, and that the best means of promoting them consists in living with men in that perfect union and charity which are cemented by mutual benefits.’**

In *De Re Publica*, he writes:

There is indeed a law, right reason, which is in accordance with nature; existing in all, unchangeable, eternal. Commanding us to do what is right, forbidding us to do what is wrong. It has dominion over good men, but possesses no influence over bad ones. No other law can be substituted for it, no part of it can be taken away, nor can it be abrogated altogether. Neither the people or the senate can absolve from it. It is not one thing at Rome, and another thing at Athens : one thing to-day, and another thing to-morrow; but it is eternal and immutable for all nations and for all time.

Cicero influenced the discussion of natural law for many centuries to come, up through the era of the American Revolution. **The jurisprudence of the Roman Empire was rooted in Cicero, who held ‘an extraordinary grip ... upon the imagination of posterity’ as ‘the medium for the propagation of those ideas which informed the law and institutions of the empire.’** Cicero’s conception of natural law ‘found its way to later centuries notably through the writings of Saint Isidore of Seville and the Decretum of Gratian.’ Thomas Aquinas, in his summary of medieval natural law, quoted Cicero’s statement that “nature” and “custom” were the sources of a society’s laws.

philosophy, Dr. Tindal concluded, “[t]his reasoning, if true, necessarily infers some universal law, knowable at all times...”²⁶

Moreover, as Judge Advocate lawyer and jurist in the British Navy, Dr. Tindal had a great deal of knowledge about international law and of the influential international law treatises of the Dutch Protestant Hugo Grotius, whom Dr. Tindal quotes in *Christianity as Old as Creation*. Unlike St. Thomas Aquinas, Hugo Grotius spoke in terms of a natural law that was discoverable and valid, even without any idea or notion of orthodox religion. And Dr. Tindal certainly built his arguments upon Grotius’ conceptualization of natural law, stating: “[a]nd in truth all laws, whether the law of nations, or those of particular countries, are only the law of nature adjusted, and accommodated to circumstances....”²⁷ In keeping with English legal tradition, Dr. Tindal considered “natural law” to be the foundation of secular human law. For this reason, Dr. Tindal never once separated the secularized “natural law of Hugo Grotius” from the “natural law” of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Richard Hooker, or the Church of England. For instance, when speaking about the universality of natural law and natural religion, Dr. Tindal punctuated his remarks by quoting Jesus of Nazareth in the *Gospel of St.*

The Renaissance Italian historian **Leonardo Bruni** praised Cicero as the person ‘who carried philosophy from Greece to Italy, and nourished it with the golden river of his eloquence.’ The legal culture of Elizabethan England, exemplified by **Sir Edward Coke**, was ‘steeped in Ciceronian rhetoric.’ The Scottish moral philosopher **Francis Hutcheson**, as a student at Glasgow, ‘was attracted most by Cicero, for whom he always professed the greatest admiration.’ More generally in eighteenth-century Great Britain, Cicero’s name was a household word among educated people. Likewise, ‘in the admiration of early Americans Cicero took pride of place as orator, political theorist, stylist, and moralist.’

The British polemicist **Thomas Gordon** ‘incorporated **Cicero into the radical ideological tradition that travelled from the mother country to the colonies in the course of the eighteenth century and decisively shaped early American political culture**’ Cicero’s description of the immutable, eternal, and universal natural law was quoted by **Burlamaqui** and later by the American revolutionary legal scholar **James Wilson**. Cicero became **John Adams**’s “foremost model of public service, republican virtue, and forensic eloquence’ Adams wrote of Cicero that “as all the ages of the world have not produced a greater statesman and philosopher united in the same character, his authority should have great weight.’ **Thomas Jefferson** ‘first encountered Cicero as a schoolboy while learning Latin, and continued to read his letters and discourses throughout his life. He admired him as a patriot, valued his opinions as a moral philosopher, and there is little doubt that he looked upon Cicero’s life, with his love of study and aristocratic country life, as a model for his own.’ Jefferson described Cicero as ‘the father of eloquence and philosophy.’

“Natural Law,” Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_law#:~:text=Ancient%20Rome,-Marcus%20Tullius%20Cicero&text=For%20Cicero%2C%20natural%20law%20obliges,good%20of%20the%20larger%20society.&text=There%20is%20indeed%20a%20law,to%20do%20what%20is%20wrong.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

Matthew,²⁸ stating: “Heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one tittle of this eternal law shall either be abrogated or altered.”²⁹ This “natural religion” and “universal moral law,” argued Dr. Tindal, was “all God can require, all that it is in their³⁰ power to do for the discovery of his will.”³¹

Moreover, God, who “is absolutely perfect, eternal, and unchangeable,”³² has devised laws which are “absolutely perfect,”³³ writes Dr. Tindal. Moreover, God’s means of communicating his laws to human beings have always been sufficient. A loving and just God would never leave man without “sufficient means of knowing” his laws, concluded Dr. Tindal.³⁴ “Shall we say,” writes Dr. Tindal, “that God, who had the forming of human understanding, as well as his own laws, did not know how to adjust the one to the other?”³⁵ Even though all men do not have the same level of intelligence, education, or cultural development, Dr. Tindal opines that God has made certain “that all should have what is sufficient or the circumstances they are in.”³⁶

What is that “sufficient means” whereby God teaches human beings to know what God requires of them? “[H]uman reason,” answered Dr. Tindal, “must then be that means; for as God has made us rational creatures, and reason tells us, that it is his will that we act up to the dignity of our natures, so reason must tell us when we do so.”³⁷ “[T]here is a law of nature, or reason; which is so called, as being a law which is common, or natural, to all rational creatures; and that this law, like its author, is absolutely perfect, eternal, and unchangeable,” writes Dr. Tindal. In other words, in keeping to English legal tradition, Dr. Tindal states that human reason is “law of reason,” which is “law of nature.”³⁸ God, the supreme governor, has given mankind a “universal law,”³⁹ which all human beings may know through “the use of their reason.”⁴⁰ In other words, God has given human beings “standing rules to distinguish truth from falsehood, especially in matters of the highest

²⁸ Matthew 5: 18.

²⁹ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 24.

³⁰ Dr. Tindal is referring to men and women who lived prior to time of Christ or who did not have the advantages of knowing or hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

³¹ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 10.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

consequence to their eternal as well as temporal happiness?”⁴¹

Finally, Dr. Tindal makes two very radical and controversial points. The first point that he makes is that all other religions that were developed by human beings are merely derivative of the universal “natural religion.”⁴² These numerous religions have succeeded one another, says Dr. Tindal, and many of them have changed doctrine or gone out of existence, but the “natural religion,” which is simple and easy to understand, is remained steadfast and universal. The second radical and controversial point is that the Christian religion did not add anything new to this “natural religion,” but instead Christianity was designed merely to “free men from the load of superstition which had been mixed with it.”⁴³ Hence, Dr. Tindal next proceeds to discuss Christianity in light of the “natural religion,” and suggests that Christianity in its purest form is not the organized religion that has been described as the organized Christian churches (many of which promote superstition) but rather is the pure and simple “natural religion” that existed since the beginning of time.

C. Second Argument: That by observing the relation of God and man and of man to man, our reason may show us the religion of nature.

Setting aside the plain text of *The Holy Bible*, Dr. Tindal suggests that it is possible to go to God directly, and to ascertain all of the moral precepts contained in *The Holy Bible*, through the observations of “relations” within God’s creations. Moreover, these observations of “relation” within God’s creations (i.e., the laws of nature) yield the same information to every human being, regardless of race, culture, language, etc. That same information, which is found in nature and contained within the natural law, fully explains mankind’s relationship to God, and his relationship to his fellow human beings. There are certain preconditions in nature which also yield accurate theological conclusions about God and human nature. First off, our human reason is sufficient enough for us to acknowledge that we have a duty to “honor God” and to abide by his commandments, or else we shall suffer and die. Secondly, human nature desires its own good, and human experience demonstrates that the good of human nature is preserved in mutual aid, cooperation, and interdependence. This human interdependence is obviously natural and necessary; human society is thus the natural result. Perhaps the first “human society”—where interdependence is necessary—is the family: husband, wife, and children. Within this “society” are natural laws, which place mankind

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 18.

⁴² Ibid., p.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 15.

into a “state of religion” where happiness and the Good are perpetually sought, and where misery and Evil are perpetually avoided. This “state of religion” teaches human beings about God and his laws—it teaches them “natural religion.” Dr. Tindal then explains how from these conditions our religious duties are formulated through human reason:

As to what God expects from man with relation to each other; every one must know his duty, who considers that the common parent of mankind has the whole species alike under his protection, and will equally punish him for injuring others as he would others for injuring him; and consequently that it is duty to deal with them as he expects they should deal with him in the like circumstances. How much this is his duty, every one must perceive, who considers himself as a weak creature, not able to subsist without the assistance of others, who have it in their power to retaliate the usage he gives them: and that he may expect, if he breaks those rules which are necessary for mens [sic] mutual happiness, to be treated like a common enemy, not only by the persons injured, but by all others; who, by the common ties of nature, are obliged to defend and assist each other. And not only a man’s own particular interest, but that of his children, his family, and all that is dear to him, obliges him to promote the common happiness, and to endeavor to convey the same to posterity.⁴⁴

Now what is obvious, particularly to any lawyer or judge, is that this “natural theology” is also the foundation of the same “natural law” that is the foundation of both civil and criminal justice, such as the law of torts, property, contracts, criminal law, and commercial relations—thus covering every aspect of society. Perhaps it is for this reason, that in England both the natural law and the revealed religion of Christianity, together with the unwritten English constitution, were woven together into one system of Law, to wit:

Thomas Woods in *Institutes of the Laws of England* (1720), to wit:

“As Law in General is an Art directing to the Knowledge of Justice, and to the well ordering of civil Society, so the Law of England, in particular, is an Art to know what is Justice in England, and to preserve Order in that Kingdom: And this Law is raised upon ... principal Foundations.

1. Upon the *Law of Nature*, though we seldom make Use of the Terms, *The Law of*

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

*Nature. But we say, that such a **Thing is reasonable, or unreasonable, or against the....***

2. Upon the **revealed Law of God**, Hence it is that our Law punishes Blasphemies, Perjuries, & etc. and receives the Canons of the Church [of England] duly made, and supported a spiritual Jurisdiction and Authority in the Church [of England].

3. The third Ground are several general *Customs*, these Customs are properly called the *Common Law*. Wherefore when we say, it is so by **Common Law**, it is as much as to say, by common Right, or of common Justice.

Indeed it is many Times very difficult to know what Cases are grounded on the *Law of Reason*, and what upon the *Custom* of the Kingdom, yet we must endeavor to understand this, to know the perfect Reason of the Law.

Rules concerning Law

The *Common Law* is the **absolute Perfection of Reason**. For nothing that is contrary to Reason is consonant to Law

Common Law is common Right.

The Law is the Subject's best **Birth-right**.

The Law respects the **Order of Nature....**"

Source: Thomas Wood, LL.D., *An Institute of the laws of England: or, the Laws of England in their Natural Order* (London, England: Strahan and Woodall, 1720), pp. 4-5.

Significantly, as Dr. Tindal suggest below,⁴⁵ the obligation to sustain such an order society is apparently a religious duty and function emanating from God. Indeed, he quotes, inter alia, Bishop Charron⁴⁶, Dean of Canterbury, who said:

The law of nature, by which I mean universal reason and equity, is the candle of our maker, lighted up in every breast, to guide, and shine perpetually. This is the dictate of God himself, he is the king, and this

⁴⁵ In Chapter IX of *Christianity as Old as Creation*, Dr. Tindal discusses the origins of constitutional law in this manner:

The Jews, taking the story to be literally true, being upon their coming out of Egypt a free people, had a right by the law of nature to choose what government and governor they pleased; and God would not act so inconsistent a part, as to deprive them of any of these rights he had given them by the law of nature; and therefore did not take upon him the civil administration of their affairs, till he had obtained their express consent....

Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁶ I am unable to determine exactly who this person is. There are no external references to him.

is the fundamental law of the universe; a ray and beam of the divine nature, which flows from, and has a necessary connection and dependence upon the eternal and immutable law, which the Almighty prescribes to his own actions.

A man, who proceeds on this principle, is his own rule; for he acts in agreement with the noblest, and most valuable part of his nature: the honesty of this man is essential to, and inseparable from him, not precarious and uncertain, and owing merely to chance and occasion; for this light and law is born with, and bred in us; a piece of our frame and constitution; and from thence obtains the name of nature, and the law of nature: such a man, by consequence, will be a good man constantly, and at all times his virtue will be uniform, and every place, every emergency will find him the same; for this law of nature is perpetual, the obligation of it is lasting and inviolable; the equity and reason of it are eternal, written in large and indelible characters, no accident can deface them, no length of time waste or wear them out.—

These first principles, which are the ground of all moral institutions, admit of no change, no increase, no abatement, no sittings, no starts, no ebbings and flowings.—Why then, vain man, dost thou trouble thyself to seek abroad for some law or rule to mankind? What can books or masters tell thee, which thou mightiest not tell thyself? What can study or travel shew, which, without being at the expense of so much pains, thou mightiest not see at home, by descending into thy own conscience, and hearkening attentively its own admonitions?

To what purpose is all this labor and cost? The toilsome tumbling over codes and institutes?—The two tables of Moses, the twelve tables of the Greeks, the law written in the hearts of those who had no law; and in short, all the rules of equity and good laws, that have any where been enacted, and obtained in the world, are nothing but copies and transcripts produced in open court, and published from that original, which thou keepest close within thee, and yet all the while pretending to know nothing of the matter, stifling and suppressing as much as in thee lieth the brightest of that light, which shines within thee. As this invisible fountain within is more exuberant and plenteous, so it is more lively, pure, and strong, than any of the streams derived from it; of which we need but this single testimony, that when any disputes arise about the right meaning of any positive

law, the constant, and best method of any positive law, the constant, and best method of understanding the equity and true intent of it, is by running back to its head and observing what is most agreeable to the law of nature: this is the test and touch, this is the level, and the truth, by which the rest are to be judged.⁴⁷

It is thus safe to conclude that Dr. Tindal's reliance upon the authority of Bishop Charron, is clear evidence that Dr. Tindal's latitudinarian Anglican philosophy (i.e., Christian deism) was not ungodly, but rather his views exemplified a juridical or constitutional structure put natural religion at the foundation. Indeed, Dr. Tindal defines "natural religion" as "the belief of the existence of God," and the "sense and practice of those duties which result from the knowledge we, by our reason, have of him and his perfections... so that the religion of nature takes in everything that is founded on the reason and nature of things."⁴⁸ The "light of nature" teaches us "that there is God; or in other words a Being absolutely perfect, and infinitely happy in himself, who is the source of all other things," writes Dr. Tindal.⁴⁹ Dr. Tindal also advances the theological doctrine that God, through his creations in nature, and the "reason of things, or the relation they have to each other, teaches us our duty in all cases whatsoever."⁵⁰ Observations of nature and of the reason of things, also teaches us God's "will."⁵¹ Dr. Tindal writes:

In a word, as a most beneficent disposition in the Supreme Being is the source of all his actions in relation to creatures; so he has implanted in man, whom he has made after his own image, a love of his species; the gratifying of which, in doing acts of benevolence, compassion and good will, produces a pleasure that never satiates; as, on the contrary, actions of ill-nature, envy, malice, &c. never fail to produce shame.... And now let any one say how it is possible God could more fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures, than by making everything within, and without them a declaration of it, and an argument for observing it.⁵²

Furthermore, human nature is so constituted that men naturally co-exist together in "society and mutual assistance."⁵³ This presupposes a law of nature and a natural

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 22.

religion, which implores through medium of reason and conscience, all human beings to help, and not hurt, one another.⁵⁴ Thus, according to Dr. Tindal, Christ's summation of the two great commandments—to honor God and to love one's neighbor⁵⁵—are exactly the same, in both form and substance, as natural law or natural religion.

D. Third Argument: That happiness and perfection of rational beings are found within their nature, and may be attained if they follow the dictates of their nature.

Dr. Tindal's natural theology asserts his general belief that the objective of all human endeavor, including religious endeavors, is satisfaction or "happiness." And, by the same token, rational humans seek to avoid dissatisfaction and unhappiness—whether in this life or in the life to come. It is appropriate here to point out that the express language in the American *Declaration of Independence* adopts this exact same natural theology on "happiness," purporting "[w]e hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Similarly, in *Confessions*, St. Augustine of Hippo, makes the same observations regarding "happiness" and "the happy life,"⁵⁶ stating: "[h]ow, then, do I seek you, lord? For when I seek you, my god, I seek a happy life.... For a happy life is joy in the truth."⁵⁷ Similarly, Dr. Tindal asserts that this desire for "happiness" confirms within rational beings a desire for perfection, and that this perfection is "the perfections of their nature."⁵⁸ All of God's laws—laws of nature—are designed to promote happiness—"[t]he great design of them... is to do us good.... [E]very law of his is both a necessary and sovereign prescription against the diseases of my nature.... [T]here is nothing in religion but what is moral."⁵⁹

Therefore, Dr. Tindal concludes that all that is good, right, and healthy, is "natural" and strengthens the constitution of the human body and soul. But, on the contrary, all that is bad, wrong, and unhealthy is "unnatural" and weakens the constitution of the human body and soul. On this point, his philosophy of nature is

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Matthew 22: 37- 40 (Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.")

⁵⁶ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (New York, N.Y.: Barnes & Nobles Classic, 2007), pp. 163 – 166.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 25.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p 35.

no different than that of St. Augustine's, as stated in *The City of God*, to wit:

The peace of body and soul is the well-ordered and harmonious life and health of the living creature.... As, then, there may be life without pain, while there cannot be pain without some kind of life.... And therefore since there is a nature in which evil does not or even cannot exist; but there cannot be a nature in which there is no good.... God, then, the most wise Creator and most just Ordainer of all natures, who placed the human race upon earth as its greatest ornament, imparted to men some good things adapted to this life from health and safety and human fellowship, and all things needful for the preservation and recovery of this peace, such as the objects which are accommodated to our outward senses, light, night, the air, and waters suitable for us, and everything the body requires to sustain, shelter, heal, or beautify it: and all under this most equitable condition, that every man who made a good use of these advantages suited to the peace of his mortal condition, should receive ampler and better blessings, namely, the peace of immortality, accompanied by glory and honour in an endless life made fit for the enjoyment of God and of one another in God; but that he who used the present blessings badly should both lose them and should not receive the others.⁶⁰

Likewise, Dr. Tindal thus describes the "divine nature" as containing "all perfection" and "all happiness."⁶¹ The "book of nature," which is readily apparent from God's creations, "shews us in character legible by the whole world, the relation we stand in to God and our fellow-creatures, and the duties resulting from thence...."⁶² This "book of nature," says Dr. Tindal, may be summarized as follows:

[T]he most considerable men, even among the Papists, do not scruple to maintain there is nothing in religion but what is moral. The divines of Port-Royal for instance say, 'All the precepts, and all the mysteries that are expressed in so many different ways in the holy volumes, do all center in this one commandment, of loving God with all our hearts, and in loving our neighbors as ourselves.... Upon this double precept is founded the whole system in the Christian religion; and it is unto this, say they, according to the expression of Jesus Christ, that all the

⁶⁰ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 691 – 692.

⁶¹ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

ancient law and prophets have reference; and we may add also, all the mysteries, and all the precepts of the new law: For love, says St. Paul, is the fulfilling of the law.’ ... And I might add the authority of a greater man, and a Papist too, who says, ‘Religion adds nothing to natural probity, but the consolation of doing that for love and obedience to our heavenly Father, which reason itself requires us to do in favor of virtue.’⁶³

All of God’s mandates that are imposed upon human beings are only designed for their happiness and good. God’s mandates have been communicated to mankind in the form of natural laws. Therefore, whatever is “natural” is also “religious.” For this reason, Dr. Tindal concludes that true religion provides nothing new to nature or natural law.⁶⁴

E. Fourth Argument: That the penalties annexed to God’s laws, even for those who suffer from them, are for the good of mankind.

Dr. Tindal argues that God’s laws of nature are self-executing, and human reason allows us to readily observe these laws of nature throughout the course of natural history and human events—“all laws being designed for the good of the governed.”⁶⁵ There is a law of cause and effect, and this law forewarns both humans and animals regarding good and evil consequences of certain behaviors. “Punishment” is thus manifest in the evil consequences that result when following a certain course of action, breaking the laws of nature, or the commission of sins. This “natural knowledge we have of God,” says Dr. Tindal, “is the foundation of all religion.”⁶⁶

All of God’s laws are thus designed for the “good of the governed,” and for no other purpose.⁶⁷ “God framed his laws, and consequently, the sanctions that make them laws,” Dr. Tindal concluded, “for the good of man; yet a due regard to his own honor, the dignity of his laws and government, will obliged him to punish those, who violate his laws....”⁶⁸ This is the essence of natural law and natural religion that was present with human beings since the beginning of time.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 35- 36.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 36.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

F. Fifth Argument: That God does not require any particular type of worship in order for mankind to have sufficient faith in him.

Now Dr. Tindal's objective in writing *Christianity as Old as Creation* is to complete, if you will, the work of the Protestant Reformers in freeing the "true Christian religion" for the orthodox Christian Church. He does this by distinguishing the duties required of human beings to follow God's natural laws, and the duties that have been artificially imposed upon human beings by the Christian Church. The orthodox Christian Church, including the Church of England and the other Protestant Churches, imposed duties upon Christians that were either superfluous or superstitious, concluded Dr. Tindal. Whereas true Christian practice—the true religion—was nothing more than simply discharging ones' twofold obligation the laws of nature. The "book of nature," says Dr. Tindal, has provided all of the religion that human beings need:

[T]he most considerable men, even among the Papists, do not scruple to maintain there is nothing in religion but what is moral. The divines of Port-Royal for instance say, 'All the precepts, and all the mysteries that are expressed in so many different ways in the holy volumes, do all center in this one commandment, of loving God with all out hearts, and in loving our neighbors as ourselves....'⁶⁹

Formal religion, says Dr. Tindal, has confused true religion with superfluous man-made rituals. Religion is needed not "for God's sake, but for our own,"⁷⁰ concludes Dr. Tindal. Thus quoting Jesus of Nazareth, Dr. Tindal makes that point, stating the "Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."⁷¹ Just as the Jewish church had done during the time of Christ, and as the Roman Catholic Church had done during the time of Luther and Calvin, Dr. Tindal also felt that the Church of England and its priesthood (particularly the "Low Church" Tories within the Anglican priesthood) placed onerous and unnecessary burdens upon the laity, prohibited freedom of thought, and promoted religious superstition.⁷² The only appropriate law for the Christian churches, however, is the original law of Christ: love of God and neighbor, and nothing more or less, concluded Dr. Tindal. "To live under this sense and expectation," he concludes "is to live a life of faith, and is co-incident with a life of virtue."⁷³

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 43-54.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 52.

G. Sixth Argument: That natural religion is an absolutely perfect religion, and that revealed religion can neither add to or take away from the perfection of natural religion.

Dr. Tindal believed that “religious truth” and “true religion” implies “truth in general,” because “God is frequently stiled [archaic] in the scripture the God of truth, because his ideas of things, and the things themselves exactly correspond; and all his actions are agreeable to the relation things have to one another: and when our actions are such, we will do that is fit, just and reasonable, all that God or man can require....”⁷⁴ This definition of religion is certainly much more expansive than the four corners of the Sacred Scriptures, which is precisely the point which Dr. Tindal wished to make. The true religion is really “natural religion,” that squares with all truth—whether it fall into the category of “secular” or “sacred.”⁷⁵ In order to grasp truth, “the light of nature” allow human beings to “distinguish truth from falsehood.”⁷⁶ Again, Dr. Tindal’s emphasis on “truth” was certainly well within the orthodox traditions of the Western Church. St. Augustine of Hippo, for instance, described “truth” in his catholic theology, as follows:

Your law is the truth and you are truth”⁷⁷

The ‘truth’ is “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”⁷⁸

For even when we are instructed by means of the mutable creation, we are thereby led to the truth immutable.⁷⁹

For by consulting the Gospel we learn that Christ is the Truth.⁸⁰

[F]or He was God who said, ‘I am the truth.’⁸¹

Next, Dr. Tindal insisted that men and women needed adequate freedom and

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

⁷⁷ *Confessions*, supra, p. 48.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 101 (Here, St. Augustine is quoting St. Paul, Romans 1:20).

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 190.

⁸⁰ *The City of God*, supra, p. 645.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 445 (Here, St. Augustine is quoting St. John, John 14:6).

liberty investigate the religious truths for themselves. To that end, he argued that religious freedom was necessary in order to judge the truth or falsity of revealed religion. In other words, every Christian had a right and a duty to judge the propositions of the Sacred Scriptures, the Sacred Traditions, and all of the ecclesiastical rules and laws for themselves. Whether the “truth” or “falsity” of religion, or of any proposition, must be based upon “natural law” or “natural religion.”⁸²

The only way to ascertain if the Christian religion is valid, concluded Dr. Tindal, is to test it with the use of human reasoning. “This reasoning, if true, necessarily infers some universal law, knowable at all times,” said he, “and cannot be applied to any particular religion unknown to the world for many ages [such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam]; and, as not being discoverable by reason, still unknown to the greatest part of it.”⁸³ This reasoning, says Dr. Tindal, is the “law of nature,” which is plain, simple, unanimous, universal, ancient, and, nay, eternal—a “law, which does not depend on the uncertain meaning of words and phrases in dead languages, much less on types, metaphors, allegories, parables, or on the skill or honesty of weak or designing transcribers (not to mention translators....”⁸⁴ This assessment of natural law, or natural religion, was later shared by American Founding Father Thomas Paine, who wrote:

It has been the scheme of the Christian church, and of all other invented systems of religion, to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of governments to hold him in ignorance of his rights. The systems of the one are as false as those of the other, and are calculated for mutual support. The study of theology, as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing. It is founded in nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and admits of no conclusion. Not any thing can be studied as a science without our being in possession of the principles upon which it is founded; and as this is not the case with Christian theology, it is, therefore, the study of nothing....⁸⁵

It is only by the exercise of **reason**, that man can discover God. Take away that reason, and he would be incapable of understanding any thing; and, in this case, it would be just as consistent to read even the

⁸² *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 58. (“And in truth all laws, whether the law of nations, or those of particular countries, are only the law of nature adjusted....”).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1995), p. 826.

book called the Bible, to a horse as to a man....⁸⁶

It is not Moses and the prophets, nor Jesus Christ, nor his apostles, that have done it. The Almighty is the great mechanic of the creation; the first philosopher and the original teacher of all science. Let us then learn to reverence our master, and not forget the labours of our ancestors.... The bible of the creation is inexhaustible in texts. Every part of science, whether connected with the geometry of the universe, with the systems of animal and vegetable life, or with the properties of inanimate matter, is a text as well for devotion as for philosophy; for gratitude, as for human improvement....⁸⁷

Now, to be sure, Dr. Tindal did not reach the same conclusion as did Thomas Paine regarding the “nothingness” of the Christian religion.⁸⁸ Indeed, Dr. Tindal vigorously defended the twofold mandate of Christianity: to love God and neighbor. Thomas Paine never made this connection; nor did Paine acknowledge that Christianity is republication of “natural religion.” In his *The Age of Reason*, Paine found several unforgiveable textual errors in both the Old and New Testament which proved, at least in his mind, that many portions of the Sacred Scriptures were forgeries or at least not inerrant.⁸⁹ For these reason, Paine rejected the Christian faith outright, while acknowledging Jesus as a great moral teacher. This seems to have been the established trend among Deists during the 18th century. But Dr. Tindal, on the other hand, agreed with Paine’s deistic view that the observations of nature readily afforded us a “bible of the creation is inexhaustible in texts.... [e]very part of science....”⁹⁰ This view had never been “unchristian,” as St. Paul himself had said in his *Epistle to the Romans*, to wit:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse....⁹¹

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 688.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 828.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 826.

⁸⁹ See, generally, Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1995).

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 828.

⁹¹ Romans 1:9-20.

contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another....⁹²

In *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, Dr. Tindal expressly adopts St. Paul's natural theology as a principle foundation for his own latitudinarian Anglican philosophy, namely, that Christianity is the republication of natural religion.⁹³

H. Seventh Argument: That natural and revealed religion having the same end, their precepts must be the same.

Significantly, and in no uncertain terms, while relying on the theology of St. Paul,⁹⁴ Dr. Tindal states that natural religion and the Christian religion are the same. In addition, Dr. Tindal also cites Dr. Sherlock, Bishop of Bangor, who writes:

The religion of the gospel is the true original religion of reason and nature. – That the doctrine of repentance, with which the gospel set out in the world, had reference to the law of reason and nature, against which men had every where offended: and since repentance infers the necessity of a future reformation, and a return to that duty and obedience, from which, by transgression, we are fallen; the consequence is manifestly this, that the gospel was republication of the law of nature, and its precepts declarative of that original religion, which was as old as the creation.

This will appear, by considering the nature of the thing itself. The notions of good and evil are eternally and unalterably the same; which notions are the rules and measures of all moral actions, and are consequently necessary, and constitute parts of religion. And therefore, if the religion of nature, in her primitive state, was pure and uncorrupt, which will not, I presume, be denied, thought there was sufficient reason for the republication of it because of the great

⁹² Romans 2: 14-15.

⁹³ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 327 (“The apostle Paul...by saying, the Gentiles that have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; makes the law of nature and grace to be the same....”).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

ignorance and superstition which had grown upon the world; yet there could be no reason for any alteration of it. . . . The duties of religion considered as the rules of relation, flow from the relation we bear to God, and to one another; and religion must ever be the same, as long as these relations continue unaltered. If our first parent was the creature of God, so are we; and whatever service and duty he owed in virtue of this dependence, the same is due from us; nor can this relation be ever made the ground of different duties in his case and ours. If therefore nature rightly instructed him at first how to serve his maker; our obligations being the same with his, our rule must be the same also. The case is the same with respect to the duties owing from man to man. And it would be as reasonable to suppose, that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right ones in one age, and unequal in another, as to suppose, that the duties of religion should differ in one age from what they were in another; the habitudes and relations from which they flow continuing always the same.

That the case is in fact what I have represented it to be, might be shewn from the particular laws of the gospel, and their dependence on the maxims and principles of natural religion.—I will consent myself with one general proof, which reaches to every part of the Christian doctrine.—if the law and the prophets hang on these great commandments, viz. The love of God, and the love of our neighbor; then the doctrine of our savior, which is the perfection of the law, and the prophets, must hang on them likewise. Now, if you will allow, that **the love of God, and the love of our neighbor, are fundamentals in the law of reason and nature** (as undoubtedly they are) you must also allow, that whatever may be deduced from them by rational consequence, must be a precept of the law of nature: Whatever therefore hangs on these two commandments, must necessarily be a part of natural religion; and that all the law and the prophets do so hang, and consequently the doctrine of the gospel, which is the perfection of them, you have had our saviour's express testimony.

Since then it appears (as I think) that the religion of the gospel is the true original religion of reason and nature;-- That it has, as such, a claim to be received independent of those miracles which were wrought for its confirmation; will be admitted by all who allow the force and obligation of natural religion; and can be denied by none

who know or understand themselves. The principles of religion are interwoven with the very frame and make of our minds, and we may as well run from ourselves, as from the sense of the obligations we are under.⁹⁵

Thus quoting the Bishop of Bangor, Dr. Tindal equated Christ's twofold summation of religion⁹⁶ to natural law, where Dr. Tindal writes: "True religion... is, and ever will be the same in semblance in all countries, and it all nations, and among all sorts and conditions of men whatsoever; and the sum of it is, *To love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our minds, and with all our strength; and next to that, to love our neighbor as ourselves.*"⁹⁷ Dr. Tindal's assessment of the universal law of nature was also embraced by St. Augustine of Hippo in his classic work *Confessions*, where Augustine writes: "Can it ever, at any time or place, be unrighteous for a man to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind; and his neighbor as himself? Similarly, offenses against nature are everywhere and all times to be held in detestation and should be punished."⁹⁸ Thus, according to Dr. Tindal, the *Gospel of St. Matthew* provides the summation of the fundamental law of nature.⁹⁹ In other words, Christ's summation of the two great commandments—to honor God and to love one's neighbor—are exactly the same, in both form and substance, as natural law or natural religion. Dr. Tindal further explains:

If original religion comprehends everything obligatory on the account of its excellency; that is, every thing which tends to the honor of God, or the good of man; and these are the only ends of traditional religion; no arbitrary, or merely positive precepts, as not tending to the honor of God, or the good of man, can belong either to natural or revealed religion.

By the law of nature, as well as the gospel, the honor of God, and the good of man, being the two grand, or general commandments, all particular precepts must be comprehended under these two, and belong alike to the law of nature as well as the gospel; and what does

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 72- 74.

⁹⁶ Matthew 22: 37- 40.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 75 (Italics in original text).

⁹⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessions* (New York, N.Y.: Barnes & Nobles Classics, 2007), p. 36 (quoting Matthew 22: 37- 39).

⁹⁹ Matthew 22: 37- 40 (Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.")

not, can belong to neither. Thus any particular precept, can belong to neither. Thus any particular precept, if by change of circumstances it creates to contribute to honor of God, or the good of man, much more is to be prejudiced to either, must lose its obliging force.¹⁰⁰

Despite critics who label Tindal a “deist,” it is quite clear that Tindal equates his deism to the very essence and nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the “laws of nature” (i.e., natural religion) and “the Gospel” are “two grand laws [which] are in effect the same, since what promotes the honor of God, necessarily promotes the good of man.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, Tindal does not deprecate the special ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus “does not say,” writes Tindal, “[that his doctrines] are distinct from those doctrines which flow from the principles of reason and nature.”¹⁰² Quoting the Bishop of Bangor, Tindal writes that Jesus “‘came into the world to supply the defects, not of religion... but of nature....’”¹⁰³ Thus, Dr. Tindal’s latitudinarian Anglicanism thus may not be correctly defined or described as atheistic, agnostic, unchristian, or antichrist.

I. Eighth Argument: That by not adhering to the dictates of reason, mankind has attained a false and superstition idea of the nature of God and of His divine attributes.

Now, Dr. Tindal insists that without “reason,” nobody may know whether a religion, or a religious doctrine or principle, is true or false. Nobody can know whether the texts of the Sacred Scriptures are true or false, without the use of “reason.” When “reason” is extracted from religion, religious practices, or religious beliefs, writes Dr. Tindal, then the twin evils of “superstition” and “atheism” result.¹⁰⁴

The superstition which comes for the absence of “reason” in religion, explains Dr. Tindal, comes from widespread priest craft.¹⁰⁵ Priest craft comes in a myriad of forms: forgeries; creations of untrue myths; revenue-raising schemes; and political patronage. These religious practices are both untruthful and superfluous, argues Dr. Tindal. And when these religious practices are imposed upon the laity, they have the tendency to create “superstitious” beliefs that defy reason and the laws of nature. When some persons question, refuse to belief, or

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 88 - 89.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 82-89.

oppose such superstitious beliefs and practices, they are often the subject of oppression, repression, censorship, persecution, excommunication and banishment.¹⁰⁶

Atheism thus is the natural reaction to widespread superstition, writes Dr. Tindal. Thus, latitudinarian Anglicanism (i.e., Christian deism) rejects atheism, or the belief that there is no God. Atheism is considered to be an extreme response to religious superstition. Atheists tend to point to superstition religious practices and beliefs, such as “miracles” and mythological stories, to support their beliefs. But of the “atheist” and the “superstitious” believer, Dr. Tindal argues that the “superstitious” believer is far more abhorrent and dangerous! Superstitious religious zealots (with their “outward moral virtue”¹⁰⁷) are more likely to be intolerant of others, promoters of religious oppression, and objectors to freedom of thought, rights of conscience, and religious freedom.

It should be noted here, that Dr. Tindal did not support the Lower House of Convocation (Church of England), because he believed within this chamber there was a large glass of conservative Tories who wished impose superstitious orthodoxy upon the entire nation of England.

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Dr. Tindal, who was a Whig and latitudinarian High-Church Anglican, wrote: “[w]hat credit ought we ought to be given to the representations of the modern divines, we may, in some measure, learn from a pamphlet entitled, *The Representation of the present State of Religion*; with regard to the late excessive Growth of Infidelity, Heresy, and profaness, as it passed the lower house of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 91, 105.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

Convocation: where are almost as many notorious falsehoods, as there are paragraphs; not to say anything of a certain pastoral letter.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, Dr. Tindal’s arguments, in favor of Christian deism and latitudinarian Anglicanism, was certainly against the conservative, orthodox Low Church Anglicanism that was promoted by the British Tory party.

J. Ninth Argument: That since human happiness is the ultimate design and end of natural religion, as well as revealed religion, the means to attain that happiness must be the same.

Now the American *Declaration of Independence* speaks of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” As we have seen in Section C, above, that word “happiness” is the subject-matter of theology—both natural theology and the theology of revealed Christian religion. Dr. Tindal asserts his general belief that the objective of all human endeavor, including religious endeavors, is satisfaction or “happiness.” And, by the same token, rational humans seek to avoid dissatisfaction and unhappiness—whether in this life or in the life to come. Similarly, in *Confessions*, St. Augustine of Hippo, makes the same observations regarding “happiness” and “the happy life,”¹⁰⁹ stating: “[h]ow, then, do I seek you, lord? For when I seek you, my god, I seek a happy life.... For a happy life is joy in the truth.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Dr. Tindal asserts that this desire for “happiness” confirms within rational beings a desire for perfection, and that this perfection is “the perfections of their nature.”¹¹¹ All of God’s laws—laws of nature—are designed to promote happiness—“[t]he great design of them... is to do us good.... [E]very law of his is both a necessary and sovereign prescription against the diseases of my nature.... [T]here is nothing in religion but what is moral.”¹¹² Significantly, Dr. Tindal argues that “human happiness” is the foundation of both ecclesiastical and civil government.

Hence, for Dr. Tindal, the ends for which both ecclesiastical and civil government exist is human happiness.¹¹³ Similarly, we find the same theological expressions stated in the American *Declaration of Independence*, where it says, “...Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁰⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (New York, N.Y.: Barnes & Nobles Classic, 2007), pp. 163 – 166.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 25.

¹¹² Ibid., p 35.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 92.

destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it....” For this reason, Dr. Tindal concluded that priests and clerics have no right to impose any particular form of ecclesiastical or civil government upon the people who are governed. He pointed out that the Early Church was democratic; the priests were chosen by their congregation; the bishops were elected; “but as soon as this simple and natural method was broke, and the clergy were formed into a closely-united body, with the subordination and dependence they had to one another, the Christian world was enslaved, and religion forced to give way to destructive superstition.”¹¹⁴ Thus, Dr. Tindal, while writing as a Whig and a latitudinarian High-Church Anglican, advanced the Protestant Reformation, and held that no particular form of church polity was required. Hence, a Presbyterian form of church polity was just as good as an Episcopal form of church polity.¹¹⁵ At the same time, Dr. Tindal pointed out that God required no particular form of civil polity, but instead He had, through the Horeb Covenant¹¹⁶, permitted the Jews to adopt, as a matter of “right by the law of nature to choose what government and governor they pleased.”¹¹⁷ This advanced early 18th-century latitudinarian Anglican and Whig viewpoint of the political relations between Church and State, where “human happiness” was at the foundation, and where the people retained, as a matter of natural law, the right to determine the forms of the own government and governors, laid the foundations for American revolutionary thought during the later part of the 18th century.

K. Tenth Argument: God does not arbitrarily interpose unnecessary means of carrying out religion—such as artificially-made religious duties; but rather God leaves to human discretion such means as it thinks most conducive to carrying out religious duties toward God.

At the heart of Dr. Tindal’s objections to the established Church of England’s policy on orthodoxy, conformity, and intolerance of religious dissenters was his objections to ecclesiastical regulations and traditions that do nothing to promote the primary objective of religion (i.e., to honor God and to love one’s neighbor). He was concerned that many ordained priests and bishops were using these ecclesiastical regulations and traditions as litmus tests to determine church membership and also as a means to suppress religious dissenters who did not which to embrace those regulations and traditions. He felt that Anglican

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 98.

¹¹⁶

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

clergymen who were members of the Lower House of Convocation were quite intolerant and tended to suppress religious dissenters.¹¹⁸

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Dr. Tindal acknowledged that human beings live in different circumstances and environments and, as such, should be allowed flexibility in “the most proper methods for” and “the most convenient way” for religious practice and expression.¹¹⁹ In general, he did not believe that God dictated certain and mandatory forms of liturgical worship. Unfortunately, the priesthood, through superstition, has introduced certain mandatory liturgical practices (i.e., “superstition”), and imposed them upon the laity, under the cloak of the “divine sacraments,” in order for gain social and political control. One such superstitious rite was that of Penance.

Confession of sins to honest and judicious persons might be of service by the prudent advice they gave how to avoid the like sins for the future; but the Popish priests claiming a power by divine right to absolve people upon confession, have been let into the secrets of all persons, and by virtue of it have governed all things; and have made the sins of the people, not to be pardoned but on their terms, the harvest of the priests.¹²⁰

Another such superstitious rite, writes Dr. Tindal, is that of “laying on of hands.”¹²¹ “This gave a rite to the clergy to pretend, that their laying on of hands upon a man, was necessary to qualify him for the ministry....”¹²² The relics of the martyrs, in

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 101 – 102.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 103.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 104.

¹²² Ibid.

the Roman Catholic Church, also was believed to have special powers.¹²³ Dr. Tindal also points out that in the Early Church, it was expected that Christians would carry themselves in a special way, set themselves apart from worldly persons, and uphold high moral standards. From this standards of outward and inward holiness came also the duty to avoid filthy conversation and associations with ungodly persons. However, after the rise of the Holy Roman Empire this sacred standard turned into the divine right to excommunicate and to ban unbelievers from the body politic—the state as well as the church!¹²⁴ This power of excommunication extended to any and all matters which the priest, bishops, or the pope might claim as rightly falling within the jurisdiction of the church. After the princes and kings of Europe cooperated in executing the Pope’s excommunication decrees, they too found themselves the subject of interdictions and excommunications.¹²⁵ Thus, the clergy, who were united among themselves, monopolized control over religion, through superstition and superstitious liturgical practices, which had no relation whatsoever to the end of true religion.¹²⁶ These clergy, says Dr. Tindal, oppressed their laity with rites, tithes, and mandatory service that was tantamount to religious despotism. They were able to achieve this by making “indifferent things,” or things which had nothing to do with honoring God or loving one’s neighbor, the most important of religious duties!¹²⁷ And Dr. Tindal asked, “[i]f religion consists in imitating the perfections of God, what perfection of God do the superstitious imitate, when they contend, as *pro aris & focis*, for forms, rites and ceremonies? ... In a word, if there is nothing in a religion which comes from God, but what is most excellent; what room can there be for indifferent things?”¹²⁸ Dr. Tindal, in the spirit of the Protestant Reformers, argued that such religious rituals, which he called indifferent “trifles,” should no longer be identified as “religion,” or utilized by priests and clergymen to oppress the laity, or utilized to acrimoniously divide men and women of different denominations.¹²⁹

Instead, Dr. Tindal argued that the “law of nature” should be the new guidepost for social policy and religious tolerance. He argued that not even religion and religious practice should be permitted to abridge the “law of nature,” which affords to each individual *the right to judge and to distinguish falsity from truth*, including the right to read and to judge the Sacred Scriptures for his- or herself. This specific right of nature, which is a “right of conscience,” was,

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp 105-106.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 106.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 106-107.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 101 – 122.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 110 – 111.

without question, the heritage of Martin Luther's Protestant theology and of the Protestant Reformation. It certainly promoted the idea of the "priesthood of all believers" and promoted a new form of orthodoxy that gave the common man the natural right to serve as his own priest and as his own ecclesiastical judge. Since this new right of conscience was a "natural right," it was also to be recognized by the civil magistrate as a "civil right" or as a "constitutional right" as well, thus opening the door to a newer American-style ideal of "religious liberty." Under this newer church-state system, no established church—whether Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, or any other Protestant denomination—should have the exclusive right to dominate the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures or to dominate the beliefs of the conscience of the individual citizen. The "new covenant," in which Christ was "high priest,"¹³⁰ the individual Christians would not need teachers¹³¹ but would already "Know the Lord."¹³² This new "religious liberty," then, was not only the natural progressive result of the Protestant Reformation, but it was also securely supported in the Sacred Scriptures.¹³³

For this reason, Dr. Tindal could advocate both natural religion and the Christian religion. He felt that the Christian religion was a republication of natural religion, and that natural religion supported liberty of conscience and religious freedom. "It is true," wrote Dr. Tindal, "the law of nature leaves men **at liberty to act as they please in all indifferent matters; and if any traditional law abridges this liberty, so far it is contrary to that of nature**, and invades those rights which nature and its author has given mankind."¹³⁴ Furthermore, Dr. Tindal argued that "[t]o suppose that God by the law of nature leaves men at liberty in all indifferent things, and yet by a positive law retains this liberty in certain parts and ages of the world; is to suppose God determines one way by immediate and another by mediate revelation, both laws too subsisting at the same time."¹³⁵ The universal moral God would not issue such radically different decrees. "In short," writes Dr. Tindal, "the law of nature either is, or is not, a perfect law; if the first, it is not capable of addition; if the last does it not argue the want off wisdom in the legislator."¹³⁶ Of course, Dr. Tindal argued that the law of nature is far superior to religious rituals that constitute indifferent trifles, and that most orthodox religious

¹³⁰ Hebrews 7: 26; 9:11.

¹³¹ Hebrews 8: 10-11 ("For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people; and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.")

¹³² Hebrews 8: 10-13.

¹³³ See, e.g., Hebrews 8: 1-13.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

practices were superfluous and should not be legally-imposed upon the laity. In summary, Dr. Tindal did not advocate for a godless constitutional scheme where men and women could violate natural laws or natural religion, since he believed that “reason” was the true essence of civil law and civic duty. Dr. Tindal adopted the classical orthodox Anglican conception of law; that is to say, the law of reason was the law of nature; and the law of the Gospel was a republication of the law of nature and reason. But he did not support requiring British citizens to be conforming members of the Church of England in order to avail themselves of their natural and civil rights. Instead, Dr. Tindal advocated in favor of religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and the right of the individual to judge the Sacred Scriptures for themselves, without the domineering influence of the clergy. Hence, Dr. Tindal’s conceptualization of religious freedom reflected the 18th-century Whig worldview—the same worldview of which Americans Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, and many others would readily embrace during the American Revolution.

In closing this section, I would be remiss if I did not point out that, under this liberal Whig and latitudinarian Anglican worldview, the “law of nature” provided a definite “iron law,” which was viewed as the immutable and eternal will of God, which human beings were not at liberty to change. This was the orthodox view of the Western Church—both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. The idea that certain things are absolutely necessary for life—such as humans breathing oxygen—exemplifies the firm boundaries of natural law. No religious liberty that violates the laws of nature need be protected as a civil right. In other words, the practice of “religious liberty” is not absolute. For example, a religious belief in the practice theft, homicide, infanticide, adultery, libel, bearing false witness under oath, etc., violate clear laws of nature and should not be protected as a civil right under any human law.

L. Eleventh Argument: Human contrivances called religious duties ought not be made mandatory, since this would be inconsistent with the good of mankind, as well as the honor of God.

Religious practices, liturgical calendars, church traditions and sub-cultures are not inherently wrong, unchristian, or impractical. There is no other way to ensure a functional church without ecclesiastical order. Neither Dr. Tindal nor the Whig High-Churchmen advocated for tearing down the institutional church. However, they did advocate for the rights of individual citizens to join whichever church they desired to join, because the Church of England did not have the authority to impose its version of the Christian faith upon unwilling citizens. The

Church of England would remain the established Church of England, but it would be tolerant of other views. This, of course, threatened the institutional foundations of Anglican orthodoxy and made many priests and bishops quite insecure. Hence, the latitudinarian High-Church Anglicans, who supported views similar to Dr. Tindal's, moved swiftly into the direction of secularization of English life, arguing that most of the Church of England's mandates were really trifles supported by superstitious beliefs and traditions. They considered those Anglicans who were both Tories and believers in zealous orthodoxy¹³⁷ to be a great hindrance to the House of Hanover, the Whig party, and the growth of the 18th-century British Empire.

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The Whigs naturally recruited many Calvinists to their party. The Whigs wanted to implement a policy of religious liberty, and the English Puritans and Calvinists certainly supported the Whig cause on both sides of the Atlantic. However, it should be pointed out, too, that the Whig party also tended to break down the orthodox discipline of the Calvinist Reformed Churches. For in attacking the orthodox structures of the Church of England as relics of "superstition," the Whigs also discovered that certain very backwards practices within the Calvinistic Reformed Churches were also "superstitious" as well. For example, Dr. Tindal observed:

And are there not even now, numbers in the best reformed churches... [persons who] persuade themselves, that God is wonderfully concerned about small things, about trifling opinions and indifferent actions, and the rights and modes, and the appendages of religion; and under this persuasion they hope to atone for all the immoralities of their lives, by the forms and outsides of religion; by uncommanded severities, and affected singularities; by contending for opinions, and

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

stickling for parties; and being pragmatically zealous about the borders and fringes of religion’....¹³⁸

Thus, “zealous orthodoxy,” whether amongst the conservative “Catholic” wing of the Anglican Church (i.e., the Low Church Anglicans) or among the “Calvinistic” wing of the Anglican church (i.e., the Puritans, Presbyterians), was severely excoriated by the latitudinarian High-Church Anglicans. The latitude Anglicans argued that the zealous and orthodox Anglicans promoted show-boating¹³⁹, gaudy ceremonialism,¹⁴⁰ superstition,¹⁴¹ and entertainment.¹⁴² The latitudes argued that the orthodox Anglicans did not practice morality, which is the sole objective of religion; and that many of them were morally corrupt, hypocrites—in a word, very sinful. The latitudes observed that such zealous and orthodox Anglican clergymen relied upon their “orthodoxy” to cover up a multitude of “sins.”¹⁴³ The latitude Anglicans pointed out how many of the corruptions that had been perpetuated to the days of Martin Luther were still kept amongst the zealous and orthodox Anglican clergy.¹⁴⁴ They argued that the Lower House of the Convocation within the Church of England – where most of the zealous and orthodox Anglican clergy resided—perpetuated “excessive Growth of Infidelity, Heresy and profaneness....”¹⁴⁵ In the past, throughout church history, this sort of church corruption has led to even some Priests forging sacred documents, letters, and creeds. Rather than have a “priesthood of all believers,” the zealous, orthodox Anglicans created a divide between the clergy and the laity, which required the laity to depend upon the clergy for the interpretation of Scripture, prayer, and salvation.¹⁴⁶ The latitude Anglicans were beginning to argue that the only sanctification, ordination, and consecration that are necessary to make men and things holy is to “imitate God,” since “God alone is absolutely holy.”¹⁴⁷

The result of the Whig latitudinarian programme of tolerance was to break the authority of all institutionalized churches over the laity throughout the British empire. As a consequence, the Evangelical Revival and the First Great Awakening were launched in England and in colonial British North America as a sort of knee-jerk reaction the fall-out over the growing secularization of British life which was

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 128 – 130.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 127 – 130.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 130 – 131.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

the fruit of latitudinarian Anglicanism.

M. Twelfth Argument: That persons who magnify revealed religion or divine revelation in order to weaken the religion of reason and nature, strike against all religion; and there cannot be two independent rules for government of human actions.

The next critical point that Dr. Tindal and the latitude Anglicans made was that unless the “law of reason” reigned supreme over all organized religion—including biblical hermeneutics—then there was no reason to take organized religion seriously, and no person should be compelled to believe anything in the Sacred Scriptures or otherwise, unless they are permitted, through reason, to come to their own understanding of it. Dr. Tindal and the latitude Anglicans did not discard “revelation,” but they elevated “reason” above “revelation.” “Whatever is true by reason,” wrote Dr. Tindal, “can never be false by revelation.”¹⁴⁸ This, indeed, was a part of the Whig tradition and heritage going back to the days of the Glorious Revolution and of the great English theologian, physician, and philosopher John Locke, who wrote:

I say, that the same truths may be discovered, and conveyed down from revelation, which are discoverable to us by reason, and by those ideas we naturally may have. So God might, by revelation, discover the truth of any proposition in Euclid; as well as men, by the natural use of their faculties, come to make the discovery themselves. In all things of this kind, there is little need or use of revelation, God having furnished us with natural and surer means to arrive at the knowledge of them. For whatsoever truth we come to the clear discovery of, from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas, will always be certainer to us, than those which are conveyed to us by traditional revelation. For the knowledge we have, that this revelation came at first from God, can never be so sure, as the knowledge we have from the clear and distinct perception of the agreement or disagreement of our own ideas; v.g., if it were revealed some ages since, that the three angles of a triangle were equal to two right ones, I might assent to the truth of the proposition, upon the credit of the tradition, that it was revealed; but that would never amount to so great a certainty, as the knowledge of it, upon the comparing and measuring my own ideas of two right angles, and the three angles of a triangle.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁴⁹ John Locke. “Essay Concerning Human Understanding” *The English Philosophers From Bacon To Mill*. New

Under the new Whig regime, revelation would be subordinated to reason. Similarly, for John Locke (1632 – 1704), “revelation” played a subordinate role to “reason,” in this sense: “[f]or where there principles of reason have not evidenced a proposition to be certainly true or false, there clear revelation, as another principle of truth, and ground of assent, may determine; and so it may be matter of faith, and be also above reason. Because reason, in that particular matter, being able to reach no higher than probability, faith gave the determination where reason come short; and revelation discovered on which side the truth lay.”¹⁵⁰

Hence, Locke’s scheme of “reason-revelation” clearly mitigates against religious superstition and incorporates advanced knowledge of learning and education.¹⁵¹ And this was certainly what Dr. Tindal, the latitudinal Anglicans, and American founding fathers such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson wanted. Indeed, by the time of the American Revolutionary period, Thomas Jefferson himself was arguing against the established Anglican Church in the state of Virginia, stating:

This is a summary view of that religious slavery, under which a people have been willing to remain, who have lavished their lives and fortunes for the establishment of their civil freedom. The error seems not sufficiently eradicated, that the operations of the mind, as well as the acts of the body, are subject to the coercion of the laws. But our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God.... Reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error. Give a loose to them, they will support the true religion, by bringing every false one to their tribunal.... Had not the Roman government permitted free enquiry, Christianity could never have been introduced.¹⁵²

And, similarly, American founding father Thomas Paine noted:

It is only by the exercise of reason, that man can discover God. Take away that reason, and he would be incapable of understanding any

York, NY: The Modern Library (1950).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Thomas Jefferson, *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1984), p. 285.

thing; and, in this case, it would be just as consistent to read even the book called the Bible, to a horse as to a man. How then is it that those people pretend to reject reason?¹⁵³

But the latitudinarian Anglicans, as exemplified in Dr. Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730), argued that, in no uncertain terms, "reason" is the true essence of the Christian faith as well as the foundation of biblical hermeneutics. In fact, within orthodox Christendom, "reason" had always been associated with the divine Logos, which is the "word of God"—Christ. And the early Christians had long associated the logos of Greco-Roman philosophy as Christ. On this point, English philosopher Bertrand Russell has noted:

For Christians, the Messiah was the historical Jesus, who was also identified with the Logos of Greek philosophy....¹⁵⁴

It was this intellectual element in Plato's religion that led Christians—notably the author of Saint John's Gospel—to identify Christ with the Logos. Logos should be translated 'reason' in this connection....¹⁵⁵

In proportion as Christianity became Hellenized, it became theological. Jewish theology was always simple.... This Jewish simplicity, on the whole, still characterizes the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but has already disappeared in Saint John, where Christ is identified with the Platonic-Stoic Logos. It is less Christ the Man than Christ the theological figure that interests this fourth evangelist....¹⁵⁶

[St. Augustine of Hippo] compares the Platonic philosophy with Christian doctrine. The Lord, he says, at this time provided him with 'certain books of the Platonists.... And therein [he] read, not indeed in these words, but to the same purpose... 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... Broadly speaking, [St. Augustine] found in Platonists the metaphysical doctrine of the Logos....¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1995), p. 688.

¹⁵⁴ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 309.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

The Logos is the principle that brings the many back to the One, and man back to God; it is thus the Saviour of the world.¹⁵⁸

Since “reason” or “logos” was incorporated into the Christian faith in the Early Church as early as the writing of the Gospel of St. John, and firmly acknowledged in St. Augustine’s theology, there was never any legitimate basis for skeptics such as American Founding Father Thomas Paine to disassociate “reason” with the Christian faith, as if the two ideals were diametrically opposed to one another. The latitudinarian Anglicans, as expressed in the writings of Dr. Tindal, never disassociated “reason” with the person of Christ as the “logos,” and in fact insisted that “reason” was the very essence of the Holy Ghost—the spirit of truth. Dr. Tindal not only argued against superstition within the Church of England, but he held that “reason” was the only true guide to interpreting the Sacred Scriptures and determining the true religion. Dr. Tindal wrote:

In a word, to suppose any thing in revelation inconsistent with reason, and, at the same time, pretend it to be the will of God, is not only to destroy that proof, on which we conclude it to be the will of God, but even the proof of the being of a God....

And to suppose any thing can be true by revelation, which is false by reason, is not to support that thing, but to undermine revelation; because nothing unreasonable, nay, what is not highly reasonable, can come from a God of unlimited, universal, and eternal reason.¹⁵⁹

According to Dr. Tindal, the atheists and the skeptics misunderstand the nature of the Christian faith when that suppose “reason” to be opposed to faith and revelation. Likewise, he concluded that the superstitious, zealous, and orthodox Christians misunderstood the nature of the Christian faith, when they interpret the Sacred Scriptures in a manner that is inconsistent with, or opposed to, a clear explanation from “reason.” He cited the great Christian theologian Tertullian who said “We ought to interpret Scripture, not by the sound of words, but by the nature of things?”¹⁶⁰ Here, the words “nature of things,” concluded Dr. Tindal, certainly mean according to “reason,” to wit:¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 405.

¹⁵⁹ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 155.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 164.

But if reason must tell us what those qualifications are, and whether they are to be found in Scripture; and if one of those qualifications is, that the Scripture must be agreeable to the nature of things; does not that suppose the nature of things to be the standing rule, by which we must judge of the truth of all those doctrines contained in the Scriptures? So that **the Scripture can only be a secondary rule**, as far as it is found agreeable to **the nature of things**; or to those **self-evident notions, which are the foundation of all knowledge and certainty**.¹⁶²

This is precisely why “reason” (i.e., logos or the “light of nature”) is the very essence of natural religion, natural philosophy, natural law as well as the Christian faith. It is not simply an intellectual activity, but rather it is also a love for wisdom and truth—the Spirit of Truth. For this reason, the latitudinarian Anglicans elevated “natural law” above those of the Sacred Scriptures, thus overturning that medieval catholic structure posed by St. Thomas Aquinas.

THE TORIES (18th-century Lower House of Convocation)	THE WHIGS (18th-century Upper House of Convocation)
St. Thomas Aquinas’s <i>Summa Theologica</i> (13th-Century)	Dr. Matthew Tindal’s <i>Christianity as Old as Religion</i> (1730); Bishop Joseph Butler’s <i>The Analogy of Religion</i> (1736)
Eternal Law	Eternal Law
Divine Law	<i>Natural Law</i>
<i>Natural Law</i>	Divine Law
Human Law	Human law

In fact, Dr. Tindal goes so far as to purport that biblical hermeneutics cannot be correctly performed without the light of nature known as “reason.” In fact, the latitude Anglicans and Dr. Tindal insisted that “reason” must be utilized to root out “religious superstition,” as well as an incorrect understanding of the Sacred

¹⁶² Ibid.

Scriptures.¹⁶³ From this example of Tertullian's, Dr. Tindal goes on to assert that "reason" is the most authoritative tool for interpreting the Sacred Scriptures:

All divines, I think, now agree in owning, that there is a law of reason, antecedent to any external revelation, that God cannot dispense, either with his creatures or himself, for not observing; and that no external revelation can be true, that in the least circumstance, or mintest point, is inconsistent with it. If so, how can we affirm any one thing in revelation to true, until we perceive, by that understanding, which God hath us to discern the truth of things; whether it agrees with this immutable law, or not?¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, Dr. Tindal points out that without reason, St. Paul could have never explained the validity of the Gospels to his Jewish and Gentile audiences, pointing out where St. Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath."¹⁶⁵ He points that the prophet Isaiah wrote, "come now, and let us reason together."¹⁶⁶ And he points out where Job said, "I desire to reason with God."¹⁶⁷

Significantly, Dr. Tindal also points out that, fundamentally, this doctrine on "reason" was implicit within the Protestant Reformers who insisted that the "scriptures manifest evidences of God's speaking in them."¹⁶⁸ This is why the Protestant Reformers supported "private judgment" of Sacred Scriptures, meaning that each man or woman should exercise their god-given right to read and judge the scriptures for themselves. These Protestant Reformers were "chiefly concerned for the authority of the Scripture... 'that the Scriptures themselves, from their innate evidence, and by the illumination of the same holy Spirit which inspired them, sufficiently shewed themselves to be the will of God.'"¹⁶⁹

Dr. Tindal cites the Dutch Confession of 1560, as stating: "these we receive as the only sacred and canonical books; not because the church receives them as such; but because **the holy spirit witness to our consciences**, that they proceed from God; and themselves testify their authority."¹⁷⁰ He cites the Westminster Confession of 1647, as stating: "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 168 (referencing Acts 18:4).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. (reference to Isaiah 1: 16-18).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. (reference to Job 13:3).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

truth thereof (the Scriptures) is from **the inward work of the holy spirit**, bearing witness by, and with the words in our hearts.”¹⁷¹ Dr. Tindal also quotes John Calvinism, where he writes: “ ‘all must allow, that there are in the Scriptures manifest evidences of God’s speaking in them—the majesty of God in them will presently appear to every impartial examiner, which will extort our assent: ... -- The word will never meet with credit in men’s minds, till it be **sealed by the internal testimony of the spirit** who wrote it.”¹⁷² Dr. Tindal quotes an Anglican divine, who writes: “The sum, says he, of our opinion is, that the Scriptures have all their authority and credit from themselves; that they are to be acknowledged and received not because the church has appointed or commanded so, but because they came from God; but that they came from God, cannot be certainly known by the church, but **from the Holy Ghost?**”¹⁷³ Dr. Tindal quotes the Quaker R. Barclay, who says “ ‘how necessary it is to seek the certainty of the Scripture **from the spirit**, the infinite janglings, and the endless contests of those who seek their authority elsewhere, do witness to the truth thereof.”¹⁷⁴ Finally, Dr. Tindal quotes and English Dissenter, Dr. Owen, who writes: “the Scriptures of the old and new testament do abundantly, and uncontrollably manifest themselves to be the word of the living God; so that merely on the account of their own proposal to us, in the name and majesty of God as such, without the contribution of help, or assistance from tradition, church, or anything else without themselves, we are obliged upon the penalty of eternal damnation, to receive them with that subjection of soul, which is due to the word of God. The **authority of God shining in them**, they afford unto us all the divine evidence of themselves, which God is willing to grant us, or are any way needful for us.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, the Protestant Reformation uniformly taught that the Sacred Scriptures were self-authenticated by the Holy Spirit working internally inside of the hearts and minds of the anyone consulting them. Is this to mean, that the “inspiration of the holy spirit” is the same as the “use of reason” in the interpretation of the Scriptures? Dr. Tindal seems to answer query in the affirmative, stating that “[o]ur divines, it seems, at last found out, that the reformers, and their successors, had embraced Christianity on such grounds, as they believed would equally serve any other religion, where there was **a strong persuasion....**”¹⁷⁶

But Dr. Tindal was concerned about those Protestant Reformers and orthodox Anglican theologians who insisted that the Sacred Scriptures (i.e.,

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp 261- 262.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 262 – 263.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 263.

revealed religion) were superior to the natural religion.¹⁷⁷ These theologians generally acknowledged that the “light of nature” was sufficient to lead some men to salvation, that because those “defects in the light of nature” were so overbearing within the minds of most commoners persons (especially the laity), that the “revealed religion” was absolutely indispensable for the salvation of most, because the “revealed religion” was a more clearer and concise representation of God’s will. This was certainly the position of the Roman Catholic Church, and perhaps many Calvinists and other conservative or orthodox Protestants who elevated the very text of the Sacred Scriptures far above human reason. It was necessary that a man be “born again,” they insisted; and being “born again” could not be achieved with the explicit law of Christ and the revealed religion of Christianity. But Dr. Tindal and other latitudinarian Anglicans felt that this restrictive viewpoint not only contradicted St. Paul’s position in Romans 1:17-20 and Romans 2:13-16, but also that this restrictive view was promoted by corrupt priests and bishops who simply wished to promote and protect their own self-serving, pecuniary and political interests.¹⁷⁸ Dr. Tindal therefore disagreed with Reformed theologians who, like St. Thomas Aquinas and the Roman Catholics, elevated the Sacred Scriptures above natural religion.

N. Thirteenth Argument: That the bulk of mankind, by their reason, must be able to distinguish between religion and superstition; otherwise, they can never extricate themselves from the superstition they chance to be educated in.

Now, in order to demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, or of any reason, a person must have the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood and to reason. And the ability to reason must be afforded to everyone so that they can extricate themselves from the falsehoods of superstition—particularly those learned in childhood. This same ability to reason must be allowed to the Christian laity and faithful, who happen to come across questions posed to their clergy—otherwise, there can be no way to prevent the clergy from abusing the laity. On this very point, Dr. Tindal writes:

Was there a set of priests, on whose authority the common people were every where to depend for their religious sentiments, they must be known **by some plain, external marks**: to say the people must follow those priests that are in the right, **is to suppose people must judge what is right** ; and then judge (if that concerned them) whether

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 328-330.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 328 – 372.

any set of priests are in the right; and if men cannot believe, when they see no reason for believing, what reason can the bulk of mankind have to prefer one religion before a number of others, on the account of such things, as, upon priestly authority, are believed to belong to every one of them....¹⁷⁹

This idea certainly democratizes the hierarchical structure of orthodox Christianity, but only to the extent that the laity is free to question and to exit the orthodox faith or any church. The lack of the freedom to question or to leave any religion is tantamount to religious despotism, concludes Dr. Tindal. But the right to question both priest and orthodoxy is the right to use “reason” as the criterion for orthodoxy. This, in essence, places the “law of reason” as the supreme law above the texts of the Sacred Scriptures—and we might say that this “law of reason” is manifest in the rules of biblical hermeneutics, whereby “reason” is brought to bare upon the methods of biblical interpretation. But the priests—and priestly knowledge—is no different that any other form of specialized knowledge such as law or medicine; and so there is no way to prevent religious knowledge and influence from being concentrated into the hands of the skillful, masterful interpreters of religion. “The bulk of mankind being incapable of metaphysical speculations,” writes Dr. Tindal.¹⁸⁰ “Can, for instance, the common people, who understand not a word of the language of the Jewish books are writ in, be better judges than the Jews themselves of the meaning of their own books; and of their own prophets speaking in their own language?”¹⁸¹ “Or, are the common people capable of judging the innumerable disputes among Christians...?”¹⁸² The types, antitypes, symbols, similes, metaphors, figures of speech, tropes, and similar methods utilized to explicate the Sacred Scriptures have been the subject matter for innumerable theological debates not only across religious traditions but within them, such that the common people ought not be made to keep tabs on such things, but can only be held accountable to what the natural religion reveals to them as truth. “In short,” writes Dr. Tindal, “true religion cannot but be plain, simple, and natural, as designed for all mankind, adapted to every capacity....”¹⁸³ Perhaps it is for this reason, that in conventional rules of Christian hermeneutics:

Divines tell us, we must recede from the letter, when the nature of the thing requires it; that is when it contains any notion, or fact, which our

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 203-204.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 207.

reason tells us is unworthy of God; as being inconsistent with his wisdom, goodness, justice, immutability, impartial and universal benevolence, or any other of his perfections; or any ways clashes with those duties, that men as men, or creatures of the same creator owe their fellow creatures.¹⁸⁴

What is this but yet another method of elevating “natural religion” and the “law of reason” above the plain texts of the Sacred Scriptures—such that sola scriptura, at least in its strictest sense, is unworkable without “reason” as a guide.

The same general rule of reason should likewise govern Christian tradition. And so, what the Christian must do with biblical hermeneutics, they must also do with “Christian tradition”—the law of reason must be the guide in everything. Therefore, the Christian must, first and foremost, to rely upon their own reason to determine whether “tradition” be “a faithful conveyancer” of true religion. If it is, then tradition is good; but if it is not, then tradition must be rejected.¹⁸⁵

Dr. Tindal also points out that even though the clergy of revealed and orthodox religions have taken great pains to ensure uniformity, the great bulk of mankind is nevertheless divided – even among Christians—as to the meaning of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. “Would not one think that a little honest reflection should carry them further, and make them see, that it is inconsistent with the universal and unlimited goodness of the common parent of mankind, not to make that which is necessary for the salvation of all men so plain, as that all men may know it?”¹⁸⁶ It is nonsense and foolishness for Christian pastors to assume that there is no room in heaven but for those persons who are “of their own narrow principles,” writes Dr. Tindal.¹⁸⁷ But God is no respecter of persons; and “all may come to him, who believe that he will reward those in all nations, and at all times, who have diligently sought him,” writes Dr. Tindal.¹⁸⁸ He then appeals to the natural religion as being far superior to any other form of religion:

Natural religion, which is of the greatest importance to mankind, and is a perpetual standing rule for men of the meanest, as well as the highest capacity, carries its own evidence with it, those internal inseparable marks of truth; but can that be said of any religion, which depends on

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 215 – 216.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 210- 215.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 208.

tradition?¹⁸⁹

If natural religion is not part of the religion of Christ, it is scarce worth while to enquire at all what his religion is. If it be, then the preaching natural religion is preaching Christ—The religion of Christ must be understood before it can or ought to be believed; and that it must be proved to be a constituent and rational religion, before they can be under any obligation to receive it.¹⁹⁰

Moreover, even considering the inspired persons of the Bible—Abraham, David, Solomon, and St. Paul—it is quite obvious, says Dr. Tindal, that they were “subject to the same passions, even to dissembling and lying, as other men.... And that we sin against that reason, which was given us to distinguish between good and evil; religion and superstition; if we do not by it examine all doctrines whatsoever, and by whomsoever delivered....”¹⁹¹ What this proves is that no biblical character, other than Christ, is more perfect or more honorable than any human being alive today. Rather, the Sacred Scriptures only proves the universality of human frailties and tendencies. All human beings are the same, and God’s relationship to all human beings is unalterably immutable.

But the controversial part of Dr. Tindal’s *Christianity as Old as the Creation* is his tacit admission that even the bible’s Hebrew prophets do not act honorably or prophesy about events that do not materialize or come to pass. Taken literally, the Sacred Scriptures cannot be deemed completely accurate, Dr. Tindal admits. The only way to get around the obvious discrepancies in the Sacred Scriptures is to read “natural law” and “reason” into them, through hermeneutical techniques, argues Dr. Tindal. But this only proves the superiority of the “law of reason,” or natural theology, over the plain texts of the Sacred Scriptures. This has been the theological approach of the Early Church, says Dr. Tindal, who writes:

Origen was famous for this allegorical method, and by virtue of it esteemed the greatest champion of Christianity, next to the apostles; and since what he says, was not only its own, but the sense of the then church, it will not be improper to cite him. ‘If we adhere, says he, to the letter; or understand what is written in the law of God, as the Jews do, in the common acceptation of the words; I blush to own, that God ever gave such laws: for mere human constitutions, as those of the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 210.

Romans, Athenians, or Lacedaemonians, will seem more reasonable and proper; but if the law of God is to be understood in the sense of the church teaches, then truly it exceeds all human ordinances. For which reason, then truly he makes the **allegorical way of interpreting scripture** to be the key of knowledge; and following the letter of the law, the direct way to infidelity and vain superstition....¹⁹²

How can we be edified in reading that so great a patriarch as Abraham, not only lyed to Abimelech, but also betrayed to him the chasity of his wife? What instructions can we reap from the wife of so great a patriarch, if we think she was exposed to be debauched by her husband's contrivance? Let the Jews believe such things, and those with them, who are greater friends to the letter than to the spirit....

That there are, even in the gospel, things said, which, according to the letter, or taken in their literal sense, are mere falsities or lyes; as where our saviour says, he that believeth in me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do. John xiv. 12 & c. which he shews, was not verified literally, but spiritually....

That it was want of knowledge in the scriptures, to think, that God spent six real days in the work of the creation.... How the truth of the gospels can be maintained, or their seeming contrarities cleared by any other than the anagogical method; which he affirms necessary for that purpose.¹⁹³

According to Dr. Tindal, “the [Church] fathers sufficiently acknowledged the **sovereignty of reason**, in allegorizing away matters of fact, that were in truth, incapable of being allegorized....”¹⁹⁴ This was the position of St. Augustine of Hippo, whom Dr. Tindal calls “a man of the greatest authority of all the fathers,”¹⁹⁵ as well as St. Ambrose.¹⁹⁶ Hence, the Early Church—the Western Church—certainly incorporated the Alexandrian school of interpretation into Christian theology.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

But there was another allegorical school, that of Antioch, which rejected much of this allegorical or anagogical hermeneutical methods. Its criticism was that “the fathers have so turned and twisted the scriptures, with a pious intention to make it speak nothing but what they thought agreeable to reason.... For by making the scripture, in so many places say one thing, and mean another, they have destroyed its certainty....”¹⁹⁷ He includes Justin Martyr and St. Chrysostom in this group of fathers who give the Scriptures their plain or literal interpretation.¹⁹⁸ But the problem, says Dr. Tindal, is that the Christian faith is largely viciously divided within itself, over disagreements over hermeneutical approaches to scriptural interpretation.¹⁹⁹ The result is that, for example, the Roman Catholic Church has become “a different religion” from the Protestant faith.²⁰⁰ The Roman Catholics interpret the Holy Eucharist to be the literal “blood” and “human flesh” of Jesus Christ—a proposition which the Protestants reject. The same is true of the dichotomy between the Jews and the Christians. “By allegorizing some texts, the Jews have made the Messiah a temporal prince, the Christians a spiritual one.”²⁰¹ And the Muslims have only added to further difference and divisions with respect to interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures.

The consequence of these hermeneutical differences, together with the centuries of bloody civil wars, only supports Dr. Tindal’s general conclusion in *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, that “the law of reason and the religion of nature,” which suffers none of the defects of “mysteries or unintelligible propositions; no allegories, no hyperboles, no metaphors, types, parables, or phrases of an uncertain signification, to confound his understanding.”²⁰² God, says Dr. Tindal, teaches all mankind directly, and has made them fully capable of understanding “those external proofs, on which all traditional religions do, and must depend.”²⁰³

Furthermore, throughout his entire thirteenth chapter in *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, Dr. Tindal points out numerous examples of contradictions or improbable propositions within both the Old and New Testament.²⁰⁴ As it would be more tedious, than difficult, to thoroughly restate and explain each of these

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 196 – 197.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 198.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 199.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 199- 304.

examples here, some sort of outline of Dr. Tindal’s fundamental points would facilitate our understanding of the fundamental problem regarding the orthodox religion through the burgeoning and cosmopolitan British empire during the 18th century.²⁰⁵ Accordingly, I have provided below a quick outline of Dr. Tindal’s observations of the some difficulties or hermeneutical challenges found in the Sacred Scriptures:

The <i>Holy Bible</i> Story	Scripture Reference	Dr. Tindal’s Observation, Criticism, or Objection stated in <i>Christianity as Old as the Creation</i>
General Text	General Text	<p>Similar to Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), Dr. Tindal argues that the common man (i.e., the laity) should have the right to interpret the Sacred Scriptures and to fairly assess Sacred Traditions or the teachings of the Clergy and of the orthodox churches, for themselves.</p> <p>Furthermore, when interpreting the Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Traditions²⁰⁶, Dr. Tindal argues that the common man (i.e., the laity) has no other viable option accept to rely upon his own “reason” (i.e., “natural religion,” “natural theology,” “natural law”) when making these interpretations.</p> <p>Dr. Tindal asks, “Can the common man (i.e., the laity) distinguish truth from falsehood?”²⁰⁷</p>

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 210 – 211 (“Admitting tradition had been a faithful conveyancer, yet how can the common people be certain the scripture has been truly translated?”).

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 199. (The quotation marks is that of the author of this paper).

		<p>Must the laity accept religion “because their priests, who are hired to maintain it, tell them it” is true as “along while ago revealed to certain persons”?²⁰⁸</p> <p>Priests “have an interest” in deceiving the laity and “they have seldom failed to do so, when occasion served.”²⁰⁹</p> <p>Christian priests are also biased against other religious traditions. “Priests of other religions, we know, will lye for interests; and conscious that their traditional religion will not bear examination, guard it with penal laws; but we can never suspect, that our own priests, though they take the same methods, act on the same motives.”²¹⁰</p> <p>Biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew, within the Sacred Scriptures, are beyond the grasp of the large numbers of the laity.²¹¹</p> <p>“There cannot be a more dangerous thing to rely on, than the opinion of others, nor more likely to mislead one; since there is much more falsehood and error among men than truth and knowledge.”²¹²</p>
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²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 200.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 201.

²¹² Ibid., p. 202.

Hermeneutics: General Text	Hermeneutics: General Text	<p>Dr. Tindal points out that Christianity’s best and most influential theologians agree with him, to wit: the <i>letter</i> of the Sacred Scriptures must give way to the <i>spirit</i>, or give way to a more <i>equitable interpretation</i> of the letter.²¹³</p> <p>For instance, Dr. Tindal says, “Divines tell us, we must recede from the letter, when the nature of the thing requires it; that is, when it contains any notion, or fact, which our reason tells us is unworthy of God; as being inconsistent with his wisdom, goodness,</p>

²¹³ See, also, Roderick O. Ford, *Jesus Master of Law: A Juridical Science of Christianity and the Law of Equity* (Tampa, FL.: Xlibris Pub., 2015), pp. 201- 202:

The difficulty with modern jurisprudence, however, lay with less obvious problems than laws which authorize ‘legalized lawlessness.’ Most constitutional provisions, statutory laws and judicial opinions are on their face just and profess to proclaim righteous and moral objectives. But what happens when the judicial administration or application of such laws lead to unjust outcomes? This was a central point of contention between Jesus of Nazareth and the religious leaders, chief priests, and lawyers of his day. The latter group were simply complacent and willing to accept unjust outcomes, so long as their complex legal analysis and complicated rule-following had been achieved.

Jesus of Nazareth, however, was not so complacent with allowing complex legal analysis and complicated rule-following to supplant just outcomes. For Jesus had devised an alternative method for looking at the law.

For Jesus, the objective of the law is justice [e.g., equity], and justice should not be evaded by complex legal analysis and complicated rule-following. Of course, complex legal analysis and rule-following are sometimes indispensable, but Jesus argued that they should not supplant just decisions and just outcomes.

There is a widespread misperception in American and Western legal culture that legal competency consists in the mastery of complex legal analysis and complicated rule-following; but we should be reminded that this misperception was shared by the ancient Pharisees of Jesus’ day.

Importantly, Jesus of Nazareth’s teachings and parables remind us that judicial opinions, statutory law, constitutional law, complex legal analysis, and complicated rule-following, etc., ultimately cannot evade, but must exist as tools to achieve, justice and just judgments. Jesus’ teachings and parables thus laid the foundations for a most advanced system of law. May we heed his profound wisdom and advice.

		<p>justice, immutability, impartial and universal benevolence, or any other of his perfections; or any ways clashes with those duties, that men as men, or creatures of the same creator owe their fellow-creatures.”²¹⁴</p> <p>For example, Jesus of Nazareth explained a fundamental hermeneutical doctrine of love in Matthew 22: 37-40²¹⁵; and in Luke 10:25-37.²¹⁶</p> <p>Similarly, St. Paul also explained the same fundamental hermeneutical doctrine of love in Romans 13: 8 – 10²¹⁷; and in 2</p>
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²¹⁴ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, pp. 215 – 216.

²¹⁵ Matthew 22: 37 – 40: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

(Citation inserted by the author of this dissertation).

²¹⁶ Luke 10: 25 – 37:

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

(Citation inserted by the author of this dissertation).

²¹⁷ Romans 13: 8 – 10:

		<p>Corinthians 3 and 4.²¹⁸</p> <p>And, finally, St. Augustine of Hippo says: “Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought.”²¹⁹</p>
<p>General: All Biblical Characters are imperfect²²⁰</p>	<p>Examples given: Abraham, David, Solomon, St. Paul²²¹</p>	<p>Dr. Tindal says, “It is not enough to be certain, these men were not imposed on... or, in other words, were not men of like passions and infirmities with other mortals. Does not the scriptures give very many stances of inspired</p>

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

(Citation inserted by the author of this dissertation).

²¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 3: 4-6:

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us **able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.**

2 Corinthians 4: 3-6:

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded **the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

²¹⁹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.36.40, cited in “Augustine on Hermeneutical Priority of Love” <https://michianacovenant.org/augustine-on-the-hermeneutical-priority-of-love/>. (Citation inserted by the author of this dissertation).

²²⁰ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, pp. 208 – 210.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

		<p>persons as much governed by their passions as uninspired?”²²²</p> <p>Dr. Tindal goes on to explain how Abraham, David, Solomon and St. Paul were imperfect mortals, and writes: “Do not these instances, though many more might be added, plainly shew, that inspired persons, whether prophets or apostles, are subject to the same passions, even to dissembling and lying, as other men? And that we sin against that reason, which was given us to distinguish between good and evil; religion and superstition; if we do not by it examine all doctrines whatsoever, and by whomsoever delivered?”²²³</p>
<p>General Texts: the Sacred Scriptures are filled with unclear or prophecies that are “unworthy of God” without applying the law of reason or allegorical hermeneutics.</p> <p>(Part 1)</p>	<p>Examples: prophecies of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea; as well as stories in Genesis and Exodus²²⁴</p>	<p>Dr. Tindal says, to make sense of these contradictions, a bible reader “will have to exercise his reasoning faculty, in allegorising away facts delivered in the plainest manner: As for instance, if reason tells us, that God, the only true God is invisible, we must not interpret those numerous texts literally, which suppose him to have been often seen by mortal eyes: No, not even those which represent him for many days together visible on mount Sinai....”²²⁵</p>

²²² Ibid., p. 208.

²²³ Ibid., p. 210.

²²⁴ Ibid., pp. 216- 221.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 216.

<p>General Texts: the Sacred Scriptures are filled with unclear or prophecies that are “unworthy of God” without applying the law of reason or allegorical hermeneutics.</p> <p>(Part 2)</p>	<p>Examples: prophecies or stories of Jeremiah, Hilda, Elisha, Micaiah, etc. , where there are seeming contradictions.²²⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King Zedekiah Jeremiah 34: 4-5 II Kings 25: 6-7 Jeremiah 52: 10-11 • King Josiah II Chronicles 34: 22-27 II Chronicles 35: 21-27 • King Benhadad II Kings 8: 7-15 • King Jehoshaphat I Kings 22: 11-22; 19-23. 	<p>Dr. Tindal points out a glaring biblical contraction:</p> <p>“Jeremiah prophesies king Zedekiah should die in peace; and yet he poor king had his sons slain before his eyes, and his eyes then put out, bound in chains, and died in prison. And although he prophesied that Jehoiachim should be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn, and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem; yet this does not at all agree with what is related of him in the last chapter of the second book of kings, or even in the last chapter of Jeremiah.”²²⁷</p> <p>“The prophetess Hilda assures good king Josiah from the Lord, that he should be gathered to his grave in peace; and yet soon after he received a mortal wound of which he died.”²²⁸</p> <p>“The prophet Elisha sends word to Benhadad, the king of Syria, who consults him about his recovery, that he may, (or rather recover; yet he tells Hazael, who had a design on his crown and life and who before had been anointed king of Syria, by the prophet Elijah) that he should surely die. And this looked the more ungrateful in the prophet, because he had received forty camel loads of the good things</p>
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²²⁶ Ibid., pp. 220- 221.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 221.

		<p>of Damascus, to tell the king the truth.”²²⁹</p> <p>“But I need not mention single prophets deceiving, or being deceived, when the scripture tells us of four hundred being deceived at once, to the destruction of a number of innocent persons. I saw, says the prophet Micaiah, the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the host of Heaven standing on his right hand, and on his left. And the Lord said, who shall entice Ahab, king of Israel, that he may go up, and fall at Ramouth gilead? And one spake, saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, wherewith? And he said I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said, thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail. Go out, and do even so.”²³⁰</p>
<p>General Texts: the Sacred Scriptures are filled with unclear or prophecies that are “unworthy of God” without applying the law of reason or allegorical hermeneutics.</p> <p>(Part 3)</p>	<p>Examples: the first Apostles erroneously believed the return of Christ would occur during their own lifetimes.²³¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew 24: 3- 51. • Matthew 25: 1- 46. 	<p>Dr. Tindal points out that the Apostles believed, erroneously, that Christ would return during their own lifetimes and that “[i]f most of the apostles, from what motives soever, were mistaken in a matter of this consequence; how ca we be</p>

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 225.

		<p>absolutely certain, that any one of them may not be mistaken in any other matter?”²³²</p> <p>It should be noted here that there is very little direct or explicit evidence in any of New Testament books which state that the first Apostles or early Christians believed that Jesus would return during their lifetimes.²³³</p>
<p>General Texts: the Old Testament historical chronologies often contain messages which could not have been included within the original texts.</p> <p>(Part 4)</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <p>The Book of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.</p>	<p>Dr. Tindal points out that whoever assembled the Old Testament inserted historical data and facts which could not have been known during the time period when those texts were purported to have been written.</p> <p>“What you say may be true, since there are several mistakes crept into the old testament; where there is scarce a chapter, which give any historical account of matters; but there are some</p>

²³² Ibid.

²³³ See, e.g., <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/did-early-christians-believe-that-jesus-would-return-in-their-own-lifetime-implications-for-canon/> (Stating that the only reference to the so-called belief that Jesus would return during the lifetime of the Apostles is at I Thessalonians 4: 15-17, which states:

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

But this passage of St. Paul’s certainly does not prove the proposition that Christ’s eleven disciples, apostles, and church fathers believed the Christ would return during their lifetimes.)

		<p>things in it, which could not be there originally; and even in this book of Chronicles, there are things mentioned, too late to be inserted by Ezra, or Nehemiah. And I might add, that the Jewish History being for the most part taken from larger accounts, it is no wonder its abstracts are not always very exact.”²³⁴</p> <p>Thomas Paine, in his second part of <i>The Age of Reason</i>, significantly expands and expounds upon this same topic.²³⁵</p>
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Dr. Tindal then summarizes his position, stating that regardless of the religion, sacred tradition, or sacred text, all human beings must have recourse to reason in order to assess and judge whether they be valid or truthful. Significantly, Dr. Tindal concedes to the Protestant Reformers, such as the Lutherans, the orthodox Anglicans, and the Calvinists, who insisted that “the inward work of the holy spirit” could lead the everyday and common Christian to read and to interpret the Sacred Scriptures for themselves.²³⁶ Here, Dr. Tindal clearly equates “reason” with the “light of nature” which is the “holy spirit,” and attributes the Protestant divines has having embraced, essentially, his same methods of Christian hermeneutics.²³⁷ In other words, the Reformed methods of hermeneutics had incorporated within it a “law of reason,” which Dr. Tindal claims is really “natural religion” incorporated into the revealed religion. Dr. Tindal concludes that the objectives of the original Protestant Reformation were fully compatible with the dictates of natural religion:

From these, and such like reasons, the papists concluded, that if the people are obliged to go a step beyond the plain and obvious rules of

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 230.

²³⁵ See, generally, Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1995), pp. 731 – 830.

²³⁶ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, pp. 260-

²³⁷ Not to be unfair to the Roman Catholics, St. Augustine of Hippo, upon whom Luther and Calvin greatly depended, set forth this same method of hermeneutics also embraced by St. Thomas Aquinas and the Roman Catholic Church.

natural religion, there is, in the judgment of all churches whatever, a necessity for them to have recourse to others to judge for them; unless there are to be as many religions as judges.

B. How did our reformers answer these opinions.

A. They being chiefly concerned for the authority of the scripture, and withal willing in their disputes with the papists to support private judgments, said, ‘ that the scriptures themselves, from their innate evidence, and by the illumination of the same holy spirit which indited them, sufficiently shewed themselves to be the will of God.’

The Dutch confession published in 150, in the name of the Belian churches, after having recited a catalogue of the books of scripture, say; ‘these we receive as the only sacred and canonical books; not because the church receives them as such; but because the holy spirit witnesses to our consciences, that they proceeded from God; and themselves testify their authority.’

The Gallican churches, in their confession, go somewhat further, not only, ‘declaring their faith in the scriptures, to depend on the testimony of the internal persuasion of the spirit; but that that thereby they know the canonica from the ecclesiastical, i.e., Apochryhal books.’ And,

The assembly of divines at Westminster maintained, that ‘our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth thereof (the scriptures) is from the inward work of the holy spirit, bearing witness by, and with the words in our hearts.’

As to foreign divines, I shall only mention that great reformer Calvin, who say, ‘all must allow, that there are in the scriptures manifest evidences of God’s speaking in them—The majesty of God in them will presently appear o every impartial examiner, which will extort our assent: so that they act preposterously, who endeavor by any argument to [give an absurd] credit to the scriptures.—The word will never meet with credit in men’s minds, ‘till it be sealed by the internal testimony of the spirit who wrote it.’

Our learned [Anglican bishop] Whitaker, in his controversy about the scripture against [bishop] Bellarmine, gives this account of the doctrines of the church: ‘The sum, says he, of our opinion is, that the scriptures have all their authority and credit from themselves; that they are to be acknowledged and received not because the church has appointed or commanded so, but because they come from God; but that they came from God, cannot be certainly known by the church, but from the Holy Ghost?’ ...

The reformed would have argued unanswerably, had they contended themselves with laying, that there are no doctrines of a divine original contained in the gospel dispensation, but what by their innate excellency are knowable to be such: as being writ in our minds, and put into our hearts by God himself; as it expressly declared by the prophet Jeremiah, and repeated and re-asserted by the apostle, and by Christ himself.* But,

Our divines, it seems, at last found out, that the reformers, and their successors, had embraced Christianity on such grounds, as they believed would equally serve any other religion, where there was a strong persuasion....²³⁸

Thus, Dr. Tindal argued that the natural progression of the Protestant Reformation was to take ecclesiastical and spiritual power away from an oppressive, abusive clergy and to place that power into the hands of the common man, who, through the power of “reason” and “natural religion,” assess the validity of the Sacred Scriptures for themselves.²³⁹ This preserved “the common rights of mankind” and “the consciences of the people”²⁴⁰—both of which are necessary to guard against “civil tyranny” and “ecclesiastical tyranny.”²⁴¹ Dr. Tindal further points out that, a plain reading of the offices of the Early Church, as stated in the New Testament, do not correlate with the offices in the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church which bore the same titles.²⁴² The office of “bishop” and “presbyter” are

²³⁸ Ibid., pp. 261-263.

²³⁹ Ibid. But also consider the argument against Dr. Tindal’s position, that powerful Capitalists and lawyers were the real forces behind the movement toward “natural religion” and “Deism.” These powerful forces wished simply to overthrow the institutional Christian Churches and had real concern for the welfare of the common man. For example, the Rev. John Wesley’s primary criticism of 18th century liberalism was that, ultimately, it was corrupted by commercialism and had not genuine concern for the people or the “rights of man” as it purported.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 274.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 275.

²⁴² Ibid., pp. 274 - 275.

really “synonymous terms,” writes Dr. Tindal.²⁴³ And a bishop is nothing more than a senior clergyman, or elder, who serves as an “overseer.”²⁴⁴ Originally, “bishops” were nothing more than “elders” who presided over a single church.²⁴⁵ New Testament deacons within the Early Church consisted of both men and women, writes Dr. Tindal.²⁴⁶ New Testament presbyters were not called “priests,” and had none of the duties for sacrificing live animals which the “Jewish sacrificer” priests possessed.²⁴⁷ In the New Testament, the sacrament of “baptism” meant literally to submerge under water, not sprinkling with water, argues Dr. Tindal.²⁴⁸ What the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and many of the Protestant Churches had created in replacement of this simple, Early Church, was hideous, argued Dr. Tindal.²⁴⁹ The word “orthodoxy,” says Dr. Tindal, means nothing more than the simple displacement of “reason” and “natural religion” from the true Christian faith.²⁵⁰ Moreover, the *Holy Bible* has “suffered so much by the hand of time,” argued Dr. Tindal,²⁵¹ such that the recourse to “reason” is essential to the interpretation of its true meaning. Unless we consult our reason (i.e., the holy spirit), the letter of the Sacred Scriptures can lead us astray.²⁵² Biblical hermeneutics (e.g., the allegorical method) is necessary to correctly interpret some portions of the Sacred Scriptures, Dr. Tindal concluded. However, Dr. Tindal also concluded that the simple message of Christ, as previously mentioned, is twofold: to honor God and to love neighbor²⁵³; and God himself, through the light of reason, teaches all men directly as to how to perform these duties.²⁵⁴ Dr. Tindal upholds “natural religion” as the true, authentic religion, and that Christianity is really only “a republication, or restoration of that religion, which is founded on the eternal reason of things.”²⁵⁵

Finally, Dr. Tindal’s *Christianity as Old as the Creation* explicitly acknowledged, and embraced, St. Paul’s natural-law theology found in his *Epistle to the Romans*,²⁵⁶ to wit

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 275 – 276.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 285.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 286.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 304.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 327.

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

For the invisible things of hi from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse....²⁵⁷

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another....²⁵⁸

Dr. Tindal with this text makes the argument that ““The apostle supposes that the moral law is founded in the nature and reason of things; that every man is endued with such powers and faculties of mind, as render him capable of seeing, and taking notice of this law: and also with such a sense and judgment of the reasonableness, and fitness of conforming his actions to it, that he cannot but in his own mind acquit himself when he does so; and condemn himself when he does otherwise.””²⁵⁹ This is that same natural law theory that was contemplated by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Christian theologians Origen and Augustine of Hippo. For it is for this reason, Matthew Tindal’s Christian deism may be rightfully framed as “orthodox” Christianity, particularly where he says,

²⁵⁷ Romans 1: 17 – 20.

²⁵⁸ Romans 2: 12-- 15.

²⁵⁹ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, p. 329.

referencing Protestant reformers,²⁶⁰ the following:

In our next conference... I shall shew you that all mankind, Jews, Gentiles, Mahometans, & c. agree, in owning the sufficiency of the law of nature, to make men acceptable to God; and that the primitive Christians believed, there was an exact agreement between natural and revealed religion; and that the excellency of the latter, did consist in being a republication of the former.

For the present take these few authorities: 'If,' says the renowned Origen, 'we admit the judgment of God to be just, we must acknowledge, that there can be no ground for the punishment of sinners, unless the common conceptions of all men, are sufficient to give them a sound understanding in the duties of morality. And therefore, it is not to be thought strange, that those things that God has taught us by the prophets, and by our saviour, were implanted by him in the minds of men; that so every man, having had the intention, and meaning of the law written in his own heart, should be left without excuse before the divine tribunal.' And,

Lactantius,²⁶¹ the most eloquent of the fathers seems ravished with the description Cicero gives of the law of nature: and therefore, chooses to express his own sense of it, in the words of that philosopher. 'The law of God,' says he, 'is necessary to be observed, that will lead us into the way of happiness; that holy and heavenly law, I mean, which Marcus Tullius has, as it were, divinely described in this third book *de Republica*; and whole words, I will, therefore, subjoin. Right reason is a law of truth, consonant to nature, implanted in all men, uniform and eternal.—This law neither needs to be proposed, nor can it ever be, either in whole, or part, repealed; neither senate, nor people, can discharge us from the obligation of it; we need not look abroad for an

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p, 370 (referencing "Calvin" and "our first reformers.")

²⁶¹ "**Lucius Caecilius Firmianus** signo Lactantius (c. 250 – c. 325) was an early Christian author who became an advisor to Roman emperor, Constantine I, guiding his Christian religious policy in its initial stages of emergence, and a tutor to his son Crispus. His most important work is the *Institutiones Divinae* ("The Divine Institutes"), an apologetic treatise intended to establish the reasonableness and truth of Christianity to pagan critics. He is best known for his apologetic works, widely read during the Renaissance by humanists who called Lactantius the "Christian Cicero". Also often attributed to Lactantius is the poem *The Phoenix*, which is based on the myth of the phoenix from Oriental mythology. Though the poem is not clearly Christian in its motifs, modern scholars have found some literary evidence in the text to suggest the author had a Christian interpretation of the eastern myth as a symbol of resurrection." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lactantius>

expositor to make us understand it. It is not one law at Rome, another at Athens; one at this time, another hereafter; but one and the same immutable law continues, and extends itself to all times and nations; and one God is the common Lord and governor of all things. He it is that has framed, propounded, and established this law; and whosoever obeys not him, abandons even himself, renounces his own nature; and in so doing, suffers actually in himself the greatest punishment, though he escapes all things else which are deemed so.’

St. Augustine says, the reason why God has given us a written law, is not because his law was not already written in our hearts; but because men letting out their appetites after things abroad, became strangers to themselves; and therefore, we have been summoned, and called upon by him, who is every where present, to return into ourselves: For what is that the outward written law calls for, not those who have forsaken the law written in their hearts; but return, O ye transgressors, to your own hearts?’

I shall, likewise, shew you, that the law of liberty, that perfect law of liberty, which we are obliged to maintain in all our words and actions, as the law we are to be judged by; does not consist in a freedom from things of a moral nature, for that would be perfect slavery.... The apostle of the Gentiles not only says, Stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free; but declares, Wherever the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; and consequently, that they who impose any indifferent things, as part of religion, sin against our Christian liberty; and act by another spirit than that of the Lord....²⁶²

Thus, Dr. Tindal argued that true Christian liberty is the freedom of every Christian to follow the laws of nature, to honor God and to love neighbor as oneself, and that the imposition of indifferent things—under the cloak of revealed religion—is to interpose not only religious despotism but also “the service of antichrist.”²⁶³ The nature and objective of this *Christian liberty* is to live *virtuously*—not sinfully and immorally. Hence, the “virtue” often spoken of by Socrates and Plato was likewise spoken of by St. Paul, who wrote in the *Epistle to the Philippians*, to wit: “[f]inally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any **virtue**, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”²⁶⁴ Hence, pagan

²⁶² Ibid., pp. 367-369.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 370.

²⁶⁴ Philippians 4: 8.; Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, p. 330.

virtue and Christian holiness, according to Dr. Tindal, are one and the same—no difference. For this reason, the orthodox priestcraft of the established Christian church ought not to be artificially imposed on others. What is necessary for a properly-functioning civil polity, reasoned Dr. Tindal, are religious liberty and civil laws that reinforce the laws of nature. And a virtuous person, who follows the dictates of the laws of nature, is also a righteous person who follows the dictates of the Christian faith, and vice versa.

The latitudinarian Anglicans, such as Dr. Tindal, were not without their detractors, including the likes of the Rev. John Wesley (1703 – 1791)²⁶⁵ and Rev. Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758) who would become leaders of the Evangelical Revival and the First Great Awakening movements in England and colonial British North America.²⁶⁶ The concerns of these detractors were that that institutional church and pastoral care, guidance, and leadership of the most vulnerable members of the community, were proportionally weakened by latitudinarian Anglican ideals.²⁶⁷ They rightfully observed that the institutional church must function sort of like an emergency triage assistance centre and hospital for the sin-sick and the lost; and that the latitudinarian Anglicans, while they had high and noble intentions, made not provision for indispensable pastoral ministry which the Tories believed to be indispensable.²⁶⁸ These theologians generally acknowledged that the “light of nature” was sufficient to lead some men to salvation, that because those “defects in the light of nature” were so overbearing within the minds of most commoners persons (especially the laity), that the “revealed religion” was absolutely indispensable for the salvation of most, because the “revealed religion” was a more clearer and concise representation of God’s will. The theologians argued that it was necessary that a man be “born again,” they insisted; and being “born again” could not be achieved with the explicit law of Christ and the revealed religion of Christianity. At the same time, however, there was considerable overlap between the objectives of the latitudinarian Anglicans and the Methodists such as Rev. John Wesley, since both groups wished to uproot religious despotism, bigotry, and superstition from both religion and the civil polity.²⁶⁹ Both groups wanted

²⁶⁵ See, generally, Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman, “High and Low? The Heritage of Anglican Latitudinarianism In the Thought of John Wesley,” *The Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture*, Volume 5, Number 1, June 2019, pp. 83-99(17); Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman, “Is the ‘Wesleyan Quadrilateral’ an accurate portrayal of Wesley’s theological method?” *Theology and Ministry* 5 (2018): 1.1-17 ISSN 2049-4513; Howe Octavius Thomas, Jr., “John Wesley’s Awareness and Application of the Method of Distinguishing Between Theological Essentials and Theological Opinions” *Methodist History*, 26:2 (January 1988).

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

only religious liberty.²⁷⁰ However, the Methodists' insistence upon Christian holiness and the best traditions of the Christian church caused them to shudder at the liberal tendencies of the latitudinarian Anglican objectives.²⁷¹

At the same time, the latitudinarian Anglicans, such as Dr. Tindal, who also considered themselves to be “Christian deists,”²⁷² were improperly lumped together with those non-Christian deists, such as American Founding Father Thomas Paine, who, together with many of their French brethren who led the French Revolution of 1789, wanted to get rid of the orthodox Christian church altogether. Hence, the word “deist” or “deism” would eventually come to be confused with atheism, secular humanism and even antichrist; and as “Deism” no longer was understood to mean what Dr. Tindal had described in *Christianity as Old as Religion*, as a simple formula, which asserted that “Christianity is a republication of natural religion.” In other words, Dr. Tindal’s conceptualization of Deism essentially made “natural law” the legal description, the legal definition, and the legal translation of Christian religion. Deism was the Christian lawyer’s conceptualization of the Gospels of Christ as a universal constitutional law. And it is not surprise the many 18th-century Christian lawyers—such as Matthew Tindal, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison—found natural religion to be the best conceptualization of the Christian faith that was most suitable to accommodate all of the Protestant Christian sects and to guarantee religious freedom for all.

CONCLUSION

We may safely deduce from Dr. Tindal’s *Christianity as Old as the Creation: Or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730) that Christianity is the foundation of Anglo-American constitutional law. Indeed, Dr. Tindal’s work set forth the proposition that Christianity is the republication of natural religion, and that natural religion reinforces the principles of the Christian faith. On the other hand, the *Holy Bible* was problematic, because its books and chapters are often so unclear and contradictory that they require hermeneutical experts for a correct interpretation. But this requirement only opens the door to much abuse. Dr. Tindal points out that the history of the organized Christian Church is the history of spiritual despotism and abuse. And so the rights of the

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid. (But also consider the argument against Dr. Tindal’s position, that powerful Capitalists and lawyers were the real forces behind the movement toward “natural religion” and “Deism.” These powerful forces wished simply to overthrow the institutional Christian Churches and had real concern for the welfare of the common man. For example, the Rev. John Wesley’s primary criticism of 18th century liberalism was that, ultimately, it was corrupted by commercialism and had not genuine concern for the people or the “rights of man” as it purported).

²⁷² Ibid., pp. 316 – 321.

laity—as held by the Protestant Reformers—to read and interpret the Sacred Scriptures (or any religious text) was necessary to guarantee religious freedom. And this right to read and judge the Sacred Scriptures for oneself— i.e., to determine the difference between right and wrong for oneself—was indispensable, according to Dr. Tindal, and he felt that this was one of the greatest achievements of the Protestant Reformation and particularly of the Reformed Church. Moreover, Dr. Tindal argued that the mandates of ecclesiastical laws and sacred traditions were often redundant and tend to obscure the pure and simple two-fold mandate of natural religion: to honor God and to love neighbor. Dr. Tindal argued that true Christianity, in fact, only required this same simple two-fold mandate. But orthodox Christian churches have so obscured this simple obligation that they have achieved nothing short of religious despotism and oppression. The only remedy for this problem, according to Dr. Tindal, is complete religious liberty. Such religious liberty, he argued, was, in fact, more consistent with the true spirit of the Christian faith than any of the ecclesiastical mandates or sacred traditions that were imposed upon the laity by orthodox churches. In summary, Dr. Tindal’s deism was not godless or atheistic. On the contrary, Dr. Tindal argued in favor of implementing a natural religion—the laws of nature—which he argued was no different than Christ’s *Sermon on the Mount*. These laws of nature were superior to the *Holy Bible* and, as such, must not be supplanted by biblical hermeneutics or the Sacred Traditions.

THE END

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