

whom they believe to be heretics. I steer the middle way. I would neither kill nor be killed. I would not use the sword against them, nor put it into their hands, lest they should use it against me; I wish them well, but I dare not trust them.

But still I say, persecution is out of the question. And I look on all vague declamations upon it, which have been lately poured out, as either mere flourishes of persons who think they talk prettily, or artful endeavours to puzzle the cause, and to throw dust into the eyes of honest Englishmen.

JOHN WESLEY.

BRISTOL, *March 18, 1782.*

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## THE ORIGIN

OF

## IMAGE-WORSHIP AMONG CHRISTIANS.

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WHEN Christianity was first preached in the world, it was supported by such miraculous assistance of the divine power, that there was need of little or no human aid to the propagation of it. Not only the Apostles, who first preached it, but even the lay-believers were sufficiently instructed in all the articles of faith, and were inspired with the power of working miracles, and the gift of speaking in languages unknown to them before.

But when the gospel was spread, and had taken root through the world; when Kings and Princes became Christians, and when temples were built and magnificently adorned for Christian worship; then the zeal of some well-disposed Christians brought pictures into the churches, not only as ornaments, but as instructors of the ignorant; and from thence they were called *libri laicorum*,—"the books of the people." Thus the walls of the churches were beset with pictures, representing all the particular transactions mentioned. And they who did not understand a letter of a book knew how to give a very good account of the gospel, being taught to understand the

particular passages of it in the pictures of the church. Thus, as hieroglyphics were the first means of propagating knowledge, before writing by letters and words was invented; so the more ignorant people were taught compendiously by pictures, what, by the scarcity of teachers, they had not an opportunity of being otherwise fully instructed in.

But these things, which were at first intended for good, became, by the devil's subtlety, a snare for the souls of Christians. For when Christian Princes, and the rich and great, vied with one another, who should embellish the temples with greatest magnificence, the pictures upon the walls were turned into gaudy images upon the altars; and the people being deceived by the outward appearance of the Priests' bowing and kneeling, (before those images,) as the different parts of their devotion led them, they imagined that those gestures were designed to do honour to the images, before which they were performed; (which they certainly were not;) and so, from admiring, the people came to adore them. Thus, what were at first designed as monuments of edification, became the instruments of superstition. This being a fatal oversight in the Clergy, at first neglected, or winked at, by degrees (as all errors have crept into the Church) gathered strength; so that, from being in the beginning the dotage of the ignorant vulgar, the poison infected those of better rank, and, by their influence and countenance, brought some of the Priests over to their opinion, or rather those Priests were the occasion of deceiving the rich and powerful, especially the female sex, for ends not very reputable or agreeable to the integrity of their profession. But so it was, that what the Priests at first winked at, they afterwards gave countenance to; and what they once countenanced, they thought themselves obliged in honour to defend; till, at last, superstition came to be preached from the pulpits, and gross idolatry obtruded upon the people for true devotion.

It is true, there were many of the sacred order, whose sound hearts and clear heads were very averse to this innovation; who both preached and wrote against the worship of images, showing both the wickedness and folly of it. But the disease was so far spread, and the poison had taken such root, that the consequence of opposition was the dividing the Church into parties and schisms, and at last proceeded to blood and slaughter.

N. B. Is it not marvellous that what was so simple in the



beginning, should degenerate into such idolatry as is scarce to be found in the heathen world! While this, and several other errors, equally contrary to Scripture and reason, are found in the Church, together with the abominable lives of multitudes who call themselves Christians, the very name of Christianity must stink in the nostrils of the Mahometans, Jews, and Infidels.

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## A LETTER

TO

A PERSON LATELY JOINED WITH THE  
PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS.

IN ANSWER TO A LETTER WROTE BY HIM.

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BRISTOL, *February* 10, 1747-8.

You ask me, "Is there any difference between Quakerism and Christianity?" I think there is. What that difference is, I will tell you as plainly as I can.

I will, First, set down the account of Quakerism, so called, which is given by Robert Barclay; and, Then, add wherein it agrees with, and wherein it differs from, Christianity.

"1. Seeing the height of all happiness is placed in the true knowledge of God, the right understanding of this is what is most necessary to be known in the first place.

"2. It is by the Spirit alone that the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be, revealed. And these revelations, which are absolutely necessary for the building up of true faith, neither do, nor can, ever contradict right reason or the testimony of the Scriptures."

Thus far there is no difference between Quakerism and Christianity.