

Washington April 21. 1803.

Dear Sir

In some of the delightful conversations with you, in the evenings of 1798. 99. which served as an Anodyne to the afflictions of the crisis through which our country was then labouring, the Christian religion was sometimes our topic: and I then promised you that one day or other, I would give you my views of it. they are the result of a life of enquiry & reflection, & very different from that Anti-Christian system imputed to me by those who know nothing of my opinions. to the corruptions of Christianity I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian in the only sense in which he wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence, and believing he never claimed any other. at the short intervals since these conversations, when I could justifiably abstract my mind from public affairs, this subject has been under my contemplation. but the more I considered it, the more it expanded beyond the measure of either my time or information. in the moment of my late departure from Monticello, I received from Doct<sup>r</sup> Priestly his little treatise of 'Socrates & Jesus compared'. this being a section of the general view I had taken of the field, it became a subject of reflection while on the road, & unoccupied otherwise. the result was to arrange in my mind a Syllabus, or Outline of such an Estimate of the comparative merits of Christianity as I wished to see executed by some one of more leisure and information, for the task, than myself. this I now send you, as the only discharge of my promise I can probably ever execute. and in confiding it to you, I know it will not be exposed to the malignant perversions of those who make every word from me a text for new misrepresentations & calumnies. I am moreover averse to the communication of my religious tenets to the public; because it would countenance the presumption of those who have endeavoured to draw them before that tribunal, & to seduce public opinion to erect itself into that inquisition, over the rights of conscience, which the laws have so justly

proscribed. it behoves every man, who values liberty of conscience, <sup>for</sup> himself  
to resist invasions of it in the case of others; or their case may, by change  
of circumstances become his own. it behoves him too, in his own case, to  
give no example of concession, betraying the common right of independent  
opinion, by answering questions of faith which the laws have left between  
God & himself. accept my affectionate salutations.