

## Judicious Designation

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As to the Term of Reproach, *Brood of Vipers*, used by the Baptist upon this Occasion, I take the Reason of it to be as follows: It is a probable Opinion, that Men (*quatenus Animals*) have each a peculiar Resemblance to some particular Species of Animals. Which may be the Reason why Jesus is called *The Lamb of God, or The Divine Lamb*: And his Disciples, or those who are in such a State as renders them capable of becoming such, are named *Sheep*.

As, on the other hand, the politic *Herod* is called a *Fox*; and Persons noted for an insidious, ravenous, profane, or sensual Disposition, are named respectively *Serpents, Dogs, Wolves, and Swine*: Which Terms, when they occur in the Gospel, are not the random Language of *Passion, and calling Names*, as we speak, but a judicious Designation of the Persons meant by them: For it was fitting, that such Men should be denoted by their proper Signature, either for a *Caution* to others, or a *Warning* to themselves. The Baptist probably had both these Ends in View, when he called these Pharisees and Sadducees a *Brood of Vipers*.

As they were Persons of a *public* Character, it was proper, that the World should be informed what kind of Men they were, to prevent the Infection of their bad Example: And, upon their own Account, it was proper to describe them to themselves, and denominate them (mere *animal* Men as they were) by their *animal* Properties, because, being already hardened in the Use of religious Ordinances, if they were not thus roughly dealt with, and alarmed by a true Sense of their dangerous Condition, they would probably abuse Baptism, as they had other holy Institutions, to quiet their Consciences, which were now somewhat awakened, and struck, as with a panic Fear, upon the general Concourse that was at that time to the Predication of St. *John*.

(Theological Lectures at Westminster-Abbey. With an Interpretation of the Four Gospels... by John Heylyn, London: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, M DCC XLIX, ebook, 15-16)