

Observations on St. Paul

Conversion & Apostleship — by George Lyttelton, 1747

Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul

by George Lyttelton

A Condensed Modern-English Edition

by George Lyttelton

Originally published in 1747

Prepared for the
Wednesday Evening Bible Study
Church of Christ

A Note on This Edition

This is a condensed companion to the full modern-English edition of George Lyttelton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, originally published in 1747. It is meant for a reader who wants Lyttelton's case in a sitting rather than the complete book: every one of his main arguments is kept, in the order he makes them, but repetition, secondary examples, and lengthy supporting asides have been trimmed to about a third of the full edition's length.

Nothing has been added, and no argument has been cut outright — only compressed. Where a point is condensed, Lyttelton's own reasoning and his strongest evidence for it are kept; what falls away is restatement, not substance. Readers who want the complete, unabridged case, with every illustration and aside Lyttelton offers, should turn to the full modern-English edition.

Scripture quotations follow the King James Version, matching Lyttelton's own practice and the version most familiar to this congregation. The book remains, as Lyttelton wrote it, a personal letter to his friend Gilbert West.

Lyttelton, by a durable literary tradition, set out to disprove the conversion of Paul and ended up persuaded of it instead; West's companion volume, Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, tells the same kind of story about the resurrection. A matching condensed edition of West's book is available alongside this one.

Sir,

In a recent conversation we had together on the subject of the Christian religion, I told you that besides all the proofs of it that can be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I thought that the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, properly considered, was by itself a sufficient demonstration to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation. Since you seemed to think that so compact a proof might be of use in convincing those unbelievers who will not attend to a longer chain of arguments, I have gathered together the reasons on which I base that claim.

In the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles — written by a contemporary author, and a companion of St. Paul in preaching the gospel — St. Paul is recorded as having given this account of his own conversion to King Agrippa and Festus the Roman governor: "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews... And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them… being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." He goes on: "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that

should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles." And as he thus spoke for himself, Festus cried out with a loud voice that much learning had made him mad; but Paul answered, "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." Then Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

In another chapter he gives, in substance, the same account to the Jews, adding that Ananias, "a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there," came to him at Damascus and restored his sight, saying, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." And in the ninth chapter it is related that Saul, in a vision, saw Ananias coming to him before Ananias actually arrived, and that when Ananias had spoken to him, immediately there fell from his eyes what seemed to be scales.

St. Paul speaks of himself in just this way throughout the epistles he wrote to the churches he planted — epistles whose authenticity cannot be doubted without overturning every rule by which the authority of any writing can be proved. To the Galatians he writes: "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it." To the Philippians: "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church… But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." And to Timothy: "I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Elsewhere he calls himself an apostle "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" — which implies some miraculous call to that office — and to the Corinthians, after listing many appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, he adds: "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

Now it must necessarily be that the man testifying these things of himself, and of whom they are related in so authentic a manner, either was an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with the intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast, who through the force of an overheated imagination deceived himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others, and everything

he said must be attributed to the power of that deceit; or else what he declared to have been the cause of his conversion, and what he said happened as a consequence of it, really did all happen — in which case the Christian religion is a divine revelation.

That he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false, I shall try to prove by showing that he could have had no rational motive to undertake such an imposture, and that he could not possibly have carried it off successfully by the means we know he used.

The inducement to such an imposture must have been one of two things: either the hope of advancing his own wealth, credit, or power, or the gratification of some passion under cover of the religion's authority. Consider the circumstances under which he acted. Jesus, who called himself Messiah and Son of God, had been crucified by the Jews as an impostor and blasphemer; his apostles, though at first terrified, had recovered their courage and were publicly teaching in his name, confirming their claims with miracles — yet the chief priests and rulers, far from being won over, had begun a severe persecution against the whole sect. In all these severities St. Paul took part, being himself a Pharisee raised at the feet of Gamaliel; "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," he obtained letters from the high priest to the synagogues at Damascus so that he might bring any he found there, bound, to Jerusalem. At this very moment, and under these circumstances, did he become a disciple of Christ.

What could his motive have been? Not wealth: the certain consequence of the step was the loss of everything he had, and of all hope of acquiring more. Those he left behind controlled the wealth and power in Judea; those he joined were poor men, so poor that even with what the wealthier among them shared, the whole community was barely supplied with necessities. And in the richer churches he himself later planted, St. Paul so far refused to draw their wealth to himself that he labored with his own hands rather than be burdensome to them. "Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked... and labour, working with our own hands," he tells the Corinthians; and to the Ephesian elders he says, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel... these hands have ministered unto my necessities." Plainly he had no thought of increasing his wealth by becoming a Christian, when by remaining the Jews' champion he had every hope of making his fortune.

Nor could it be credit or reputation, for that too lay entirely on the side he abandoned. The sect he joined was held in universal contempt; its leaders were men of the lowest rank and learning, their founder had died a criminal's death between two thieves, and preaching "Christ crucified" was, as Paul found by experience, "a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness" — so that, as he tells the Corinthians, "we are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things unto this day." Yet he carried on as

zealously as he had begun, and was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Clearly, ambition for a name was not his motive.

Nor could it be power — over whom? Over a flock being driven to the same slaughter as their murdered shepherd, from whose rulers he, as their deserter, could expect less mercy than any other apostle. And in fact we find him claiming no power at all, not even equality with the other apostles: he called himself "the least" of them, "less than the least of all saints," merely an instrument and a servant, never the head of a sect — "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed… we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." All the authority he exercised was purely spiritual, aimed at their edification, with none of that civil dominion in which alone an impostor can find real profit — the kind of dominion achieved, under pretense of divine inspiration, by Minos, Numa, Zoroaster, Mahomet, and the many false messiahs among the Jews. St. Paul introduced no innovation in government, raised no rebellions, sought no temporal power; obedience to rulers was the very doctrine he taught, and he taught it without any of the flattering arts by which ambitious men win followers to themselves. Even his spiritual authority he never used to set himself up over the churches: he preached "not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom," determined to know nothing among them "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," so that their faith "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" — putting himself on exactly the same level as the other apostles, which no man seeking dominion would ever have done. It would have been far easier for him to make himself head of a handful of poor fishermen than it later was for the bishops of Rome to bring whole metropolitan sees, such as Ravenna or Milan, under their obedience; and he had every opportunity to attempt it, since he preached in parts of the world where no other apostle had been, where Christ "was not named" before him, and where he was careful, as he says, to avoid "building upon another man's foundation." He could therefore have shaped most of the churches he founded however he pleased, without fear of contradiction; yet instead the gospel he preached agreed with that of the other apostles in every single particular, with none of them claiming more for himself, or establishing anything, even in matters of order or discipline, especially advantageous to his own interest. Nor is there any real discord, as some have imagined, between his teaching on faith and St. James's teaching on works; for in the same letter in which he preaches justification by faith, he writes, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" — plainly supposing that his own final salvation was not so secured by faith alone, nor by any irresistible election, that the ordinary discipline of a godly life could be dispensed with. This entire agreement among all the apostles, in doctrine as in conduct, each confirming the others' claims rather than competing with them, is itself a strong and convincing proof that they were not impostors, but were acting under one and the same divine inspiration.

If he had nothing to gain, consider what he gave up: a fortune he was on a fair path to advancing; a reputation earned by a lifetime's labor and blameless conduct; his friends, his family, the religion and the traditions of his fathers of which he had been exceedingly zealous — no small sacrifice for a Jew, the most tenacious of all peoples in religious belief, and for a Pharisee besides. And consider what he had to fear: the relentless vengeance of those he had deserted; the peculiarly bitter contempt of those whose good opinion he had once most eagerly sought, which is always harder to bear than the contempt of strangers; and all the other hardships — stripes, imprisonments, shipwrecks, perils by his own countrymen and by strangers, weariness, hunger, and nakedness — which he catalogues at length in his second letter to the Corinthians: evils the least of which would have frightened off any impostor from even the most promising and profitable scheme, let alone one offering nothing at all.

It remains to ask whether some other passion, indulged under cover of the religion's authority, could have been his inducement. But his writings breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, and abhorrence of license carried on under the cloak of religion; nowhere does he teach that the saints are above moral obligation, or any of the wicked notions by which impostors have disturbed the peace of society under color of revelation. Nor does his life, before or after his conversion, show any mark of a libertine disposition. "Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile," he tells the Thessalonians; "ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you." And had he held any secret, self-serving doctrine, we should expect some trace of it in his private letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon — yet the same disinterested, holy spirit breathes through these as through his public epistles.

It might still be said that, though he had no selfish motive, he might have supported Christianity as a "pious fraud," useful to mankind though false in fact. But the circumstances of men who have done this elsewhere were wholly different from Paul's. The reformers of savage nations used such pretense only to tame barbarism, and could be sure no harm would come of it; when Lycurgus and Numa taught their peoples to credit oracles, no persecution followed from that belief. But to persuade any man to become a Christian in that age was to persuade him to expose himself to every slander and suffering human nature could endure, as Paul himself warned his converts to expect — offering them no comfort beyond the hope "that if they suffered with Christ, they should be also glorified together," for, as he tells the Corinthians, "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Whoever professed the gospel under such circumstances without being entirely convinced of its truth must have been mad; whoever led others into it by fraud, for the sake of its moral teaching alone, must have been worse than mad. The notion is too absurd to need further refutation.

One further observation. It might be said of the other apostles that, having followed Jesus in life, they were obliged to go on professing him after his death, for their own credit, having gone too far to turn back. But this cannot be said of Paul, who, being of far higher education and standing than they, and so having far more credit to lose, was by that very reasoning more strongly bound than they to remain a Jew and an enemy of Christ. The only difference was that they, by abandoning their master, might have saved themselves, whereas Paul, by abandoning the Jews, certainly brought about his own ruin. Since, then, no rational motive appears for his taking this course without genuine conviction, and everything worked to discourage it, we may reasonably conclude he was convinced of the gospel's truth, and was no impostor.

But let me also show that, even had he been irrational enough to attempt such an imposture, he could not have carried it off by the means he actually used. First, it was not an imposture one man could manage alone. The faith he preached was not his own invention; he had never had contact with Jesus before his death, nor with Jesus's apostles after it, except as their persecutor; yet as an apostle he needed a precise and complete knowledge of facts known only to the Twelve, on pain of being exposed and contradicted by those who preached the same gospel with greater knowledge than his own. This required a partnership with the apostles themselves — and a power of apparently working miracles besides, which meant he would have needed them to teach him whatever secret tricks of deception they used. But how could he have won over as his accomplices the very men he had been "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against, right up to the moment of his conversion? Would men who would not betray their cause under the harshest persecution now confess their fraud to their own persecutor, trusting him to become their accomplice?

We must suppose, then, that he had no communication with the apostles until Damascus, and acted there alone. But then everyone who was with him when he claimed to see his vision must also have been his accomplice, since otherwise his story would have been contradicted by the very witnesses needed to support it — and these were probably officers sent, like him, to enforce the persecution, men with no conceivable motive to betray their mission on his behalf. And Ananias too, a man of excellent character well spoken of by all the Jews of Damascus, and by all appearances a stranger to Paul, must also have been his confederate — though how he dared play so dangerous a part without the apostles' consent, or how that consent was ever obtained, remains unanswerable. And how absurdly contrived, besides, to make Saul's conversion the effect of a public miracle that everyone present must have known never happened, when it would have been far safer to ascribe it to some private miracle no one could examine, or to arguments used on the Christian prisoners he held! For, as Paul himself told Agrippa, "this thing was not done in a corner," but in full view of the world, open to the strictest examination by the Jews of Damascus and by the very authorities at

Jerusalem whose commission he carried — and yet many years later he could appeal, in the presence of Festus, to King Agrippa's own knowledge of its truth, and Agrippa did not contradict him.

Nor do we ever afterward hear of Paul and Ananias keeping company, or of Ananias drawing any benefit from so dangerous a service — a difficulty resolved only by the unsupported guess that Ananias conveniently died soon after. And having thus, without any evidence, disposed of his first accomplice, Paul's most urgent task should have been to secure his standing with the apostles at Jerusalem, without which he could have no credit among the disciples at all; yet instead of hastening there, he went off into Arabia, returned to Damascus, and did not go up to Jerusalem for three years — conduct explicable only if, as he says, he "neither received the gospel of any man, neither was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ," and so needed no human confederacy at all. We find him, too, at Antioch withstanding Peter "to his face" and rebuking him before all the disciples — the freedom of truth, not the deference that accomplices in fraud must show one another.

Then consider the Gentile mission itself, the distinguishing work of his apostleship — a subject you have already, in your excellent recent book on the Resurrection, largely exhausted, in discoursing on the difficulties that stood in the way of the gospel's spread through the world. There he had to contend, first, with the magistrates, who everywhere treated any attack on the established religion as treason against the state itself; second, with the priests, whose wealth and influence rested on the very superstitions he attacked, and who would use every art to stop him; third, with the prejudices of the people, who despised the Jews as a nation, and who clung to idolatry not from mere habit but because it flattered and indulged their passions, while the gospel demanded repentance, purity, and the surrender of those very lusts — and offered, in a crucified Redeemer, a stumbling-block to every notion they held of deity; and fourth, with the wisdom and pride of the philosophers — a subject the learned Mr. Warburton has already treated well in a recent pamphlet of his, so I touch on it only briefly. Men who claimed to be lifted above common prejudice might seem likely helpers to the gospel, but they proved among its most stubborn enemies: their much-vaunted wisdom was chiefly empty metaphysical speculation and dogmatic certainty about doubtful opinions, and on one point every school, Platonist, Stoic, Academic, or Epicurean, agreed in rejecting as unphilosophical that article on which the whole gospel rests — the resurrection of the body, of which Christ was "the firstborn." Their pride, no less than that of the scribes and Pharisees, was itself an obstacle to a doctrine meant expressly to humble it; and their prestige in that age exceeded even that of the priests, for every man of learning or rank called himself their disciple. Could an unknown teacher, alone or with one or two companions as obscure as himself, have hoped unaided to prevail against the combined authority of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno, any more than to build a monarchy on the ruins of every

state then existing? It necessarily follows that, to succeed, he must have had recourse to some power beyond mere human reason and argument — and he himself attributes all his success to exactly that: his preaching, he tells the Corinthians, was "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

For falsely claimed miracles to gain credit, two things are generally necessary: a receptive disposition in those to be deceived, and a powerful confederacy to support the deception. Both attended the heathen world's faith in oracles, and both attend belief in Catholic miracles today; and something of the first attended the apostles' miracles among the Jews, whose imaginations were already prepared by the fame of Christ's own works. But neither condition favored Paul among the Gentiles. When he healed, at Lystra, a man lame from birth, the people there were so far from expecting such power from an apostle of Christ that they took Paul and Barnabas for gods come down in the likeness of men, and would have offered sacrifice to them as such. Did the citizens of Lystra conspire to deceive themselves, or were their imaginations so heated by some prior notion of Paul's miraculous power that they merely imagined a miracle that never happened? Since plainly neither is true, so everywhere else he carried the gospel, no favorable bias existed to assist an imposture, unless the miracles by which he confirmed his preaching were, in fact, real. Nor was there any confederacy: he had no league with Gentile priests or magistrates, and in his Gentile ministry he was commonly alone, or with but two or three companions, against the combined opposition of magistrates, priests, philosophers, and people together — nor were the people he converted ignorant or credulous, but included men like Sergius Paulus the proconsul and Dionysius the Areopagite, in the most enlightened, skeptical parts of the ancient world.

Compare this with impostures that did succeed by these very means. The lately much-talked-of miracles at the tomb of the Abbé Pâris were backed by the whole powerful Jansenist party, and those who believed in them were already strongly inclined to; yet they were suppressed the moment the government simply walled up his tomb, giving rise to the witty inscription posted there: "By order of the king, God is forbidden to work any more miracles in this place" — for if God had truly been working miracles there, could so absurd a prohibition ever have taken effect, any more than the walls of a prison could hold the apostles once the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out? Or consider Alexander of Pontus, whose fraud, laid bare by Lucian, succeeded only because he grafted it onto the religion already established rather than opposing it, enlisted the whole pagan priesthood in his support, won the protection of the Roman general Rutilianus by flattering him with promises of a long life and a place among the gods, silenced his critics by force and secret murder, never ventured beyond the ignorant province he had chosen, and employed a wide network of paid agents to spread his fame abroad. Every one of these methods is the exact opposite of those St. Paul used — and it was only by such methods that any

such deception ever did succeed. We may fairly conclude, then, that no human means available to St. Paul could account for his success in converting the Gentiles, and that it can be attributed to nothing but the power of God accompanying his ministry.

Having shown that St. Paul was not an impostor, I come next to consider whether he was an enthusiast — a man whose own overheated imagination deceived him. Enthusiasm is generally made up of an excitable temperament, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity. That Paul had the first of these may be granted — his zeal, as Jew and as Christian, was fervent — but this alone proves nothing, being common also to men never thought enthusiasts, such as the Gracchi, Cato, and Brutus; nor did it ever master his reason, since he could become "all things to all men" with the most prudent flexibility, and conducted himself with the ordinary civility and decorum of life before Agrippa, Festus, and Felix — nothing like the blind, unseemly zeal of a fanatic.

As for melancholy, which of all conditions most disposes to enthusiasm, nothing in his life or writings shows any trace of it: no gloomy penances or extravagant self-mortifications of the kind the Brahmins, the Yogis, or the monks of La Trappe inflict upon themselves, only the simple, cheerful performance of his apostolic duties, and the lawful use of every prudent means to avoid danger, such as his claim to the privilege of a Roman citizen, or his careful answer before the Areopagus at Athens — where, charged under a capital law against introducing strange gods, he neither recanted like an impostor nor threw his life away like an enthusiast, but pointed to the altar inscribed "To the Unknown God" and declared, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you," preaching no new deity but only the one Athens already acknowledged — a response of good sense, with no tincture of melancholy in it.

As for ignorance, another ground of enthusiasm, Paul was master of both Jewish and Greek learning — a further reason why he is less open than the other apostles to the charge of enthusiasm, though none of them deserve it any more than he does. As for credulity, his history shows the opposite: he had been fully aware of Christ's own miracles, of the healing of the lame man by Peter and John, of the apostles' escape from prison, of their testimony before the council that God had raised Jesus from the dead — "We ought to obey God rather than men… him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour" — and he resisted all of it, and consented to the murder of Stephen, who confirmed the same truth by miracles. A mind so barred against belief could have been overcome by nothing less than the irresistible evidence of his own senses.

As for vanity, the last and most telling mark of enthusiasm — found in Montanus and his followers, in the writings attributed to the counterfeit Dionysius the Areopagite, in Saint Teresa, Saint Catherine of Siena, Madame Bourignon, Saint Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, and, nearer our own day,

in George Fox and in Whitefield's own Journal — nothing could be further from Paul's temper. He calls himself "less than the least of all saints," "the least of the apostles... not meet to be called an apostle"; "of sinners," he tells Timothy, "I am chief." When driven by a false teacher's slander to assert his apostleship to the Corinthians, lest he betray the office entrusted to him, he does it not by vaunting his miracles but by the plainest, most reluctant reminder that "the signs of an apostle were wrought among you... in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" — offering many apologies even for that much self-defense. And when he mentions, in that same letter, his rapture into the third heaven, he speaks of it in the third person, fourteen years after it happened, in three bare sentences — "lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me" — the very opposite of the enthusiast's endless dwelling on raptures and visions. Nor does he take credit even for his apostolic success: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase... by the grace of God I am what I am." And it is this same man who, ranking all gifts below charity, writes: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal... and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" — a ranking no enthusiast, who always prizes his supposed gifts above moral virtue, could ever have made.

But suppose, for argument's sake, that all these marks of enthusiasm had been found in him — he still could not have deceived himself about the facts in question. Imagination, however heated, always works along the line of opinions already impressed on it, never against them, any more than a river can carry a boat against its own current. Now when Saul set out for Damascus, armed with a commission he had himself sought, his mind was possessed, and his passions inflamed, entirely against the Christians. That at that very moment, with nothing to alter his opinions, he should suddenly imagine himself called by Christ to become the apostle of the very man he had a moment before accounted a justly executed blasphemer, is the precise opposite of what enthusiasm would naturally produce. Nor was he alone: his companions, whose minds were no better disposed to Christianity than his own, saw the same light shining above the brightness of the sun, and fell to the ground with him at midday, though they heard no distinct words — a coincidence of delusion among several differently constituted minds that nature cannot explain. Nor can a chance meteor account for it: it cannot account for the distinct words Paul heard and answered, nor for Ananias afterward addressing him in the very terms of that vision before Ananias had been told of it, nor for a blindness of three days cured in a moment by a touch and a word — which plainly exceeds the power of nature, and proves that if one event was miraculous, so was the other, since Ananias himself ascribed the cure to "the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way."

Indeed it is a harder task for unbelievers to account for Paul's success on the theory that he was an enthusiast than on the theory that he was an

impostor, for a madman could overcome none of the obstacles that a clever impostor himself could scarcely have overcome. Nor can enthusiasm account for the miracles that followed: when Paul struck Elymas the sorcerer blind before the Roman deputy at Paphos, the effect converted Sergius Paulus, a proconsul no more inclined to credit miracles than any man alive; when the young man Eutychus, fallen dead from a window at Troas, was restored by Paul's embrace; when, shipwrecked at Malta, a viper fastened on Paul's hand and he shook it off unharmed, though the islanders, seeing it hang there, had said among themselves, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live" — in none of these could enthusiasm, in Paul or in the onlookers, have played any part. Nor can it account for the gifts of healing and of tongues he says were common in the church at Corinth, which he discusses, and regulates, in a sober letter wholly unlike the talk of partners in fraud or delusion: he urges them not to be puffed up over such gifts, to covet the best of them, and to rank charity above them all — counsel no confederates in a fraud would ever think to give one another. Suppose a Quaker told his meeting that some among them had received the gift of healing, others the gift of tongues; they would take him for a madman, since they claim no such powers. Paul and the Corinthians could no more have persisted, against the plain conviction of their own senses, in believing they healed diseases they had not healed, or spoke languages they had never learned, especially since the very purpose of the gift of tongues was to convert foreigners who understood no language the speaker naturally knew — a test that would have exposed the pretense at once, had it been one. If these powers were real, as the success of his mission shows they must have been, then St. Paul was no enthusiast; and whoever would credit mere imagination with such effects must be crediting imagination with the very omnipotence Paul ascribes to God.

It remains only to ask whether he might have been deceived by the fraud of others. But it was morally impossible for the disciples even to conceive of turning their fiercest persecutor into Christ's apostle, and physically impossible for them to have staged a light brighter than the midday sun, words heard by Paul alone and by no one else present, a three-day blindness, and its instant cure by a word — far less the subsequent miracles which Paul himself performed as an active agent, and appealed to in his own letters as proof of his commission. He was, then, neither impostor, nor enthusiast, nor the dupe of others' fraud; and it follows that everything he reported as the cause of his conversion, and as happening afterward in consequence of it, really did happen — and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation.

This conclusion follows fairly from the premises unless some other probable cause can be found for these well-attested facts, and I am confident none can be. To attribute them to magic or to the power of demons, as pagans and Jews once did when faced with the undeniable miracles of Christ and his disciples, is not open to those who in our own age disbelieve Christianity — and the very need of such a resort among the ancient opponents of the faith,

Celsus and Julian among them, is itself no small testimony to the truth of the facts they could not deny. The dispute, then, was never between faith and reason, but between religion and superstition: superstition attributed these works to magical secrets, religion to God, and reason sided with religion. On what ground, then, shall we now reject St. Paul's testimony that he was called by God to be a disciple and an apostle of Christ? Not because his doctrine contradicts the moral law — even those who reject Christianity as a divine revelation allow that the morals taught by Christ and his apostles are worthy of God. It can only be because of the mysteries the gospel contains that facts otherwise supported by evidence of the clearest kind are denied — which is to abandon the use of our understanding exactly where we are competent to use it, in order to apply it instead to matters beyond its reach. The motives and manner of divine action may well lie beyond our minds' capacity to grasp; the motives and manner of human action, such as Paul's, lie entirely within the sphere of human knowledge, and on these we may judge with well-founded confidence.

Nor should the difficulties of Christian mystery be weighed against it alone, as though no other system we accept were burdened with the same kind of difficulty. Even deism, the simplest of all religious views, contains several difficulties human reason can scarcely resolve, which might not improperly be called articles of faith in their own right: the origin of evil under the rule of an all-good and all-powerful God, a question so hard that the inability to answer it has driven some of the greatest philosophers into the senseless extremes of Manichaeism and atheism; the reconciling of God's foreknowledge with human free will, which, after much thought, Mr. Locke honestly confessed he could not do, though he believed in both; and the question whether the world was created at some particular time or eternally produced from God. On the one hand, it is hard to accept that God's goodness could have lain unexercised through a whole eternity before any such creation, however far back we set it; on the other, "eternal production" is very nearly a contradiction in terms, since matter, unlike light streaming from the sun, is no quality inherent in and naturally flowing from the divine essence, but a substance entirely distinct from it. If matter is not self-existing it must have been created, and so cannot be eternal; and if, to avoid that conclusion, we suppose matter self-existing and independent of God, we are driven to admit two first principles, which no true theism can allow. However far back we push the moment of creation, a whole eternity must still have gone before it, during which the divine attributes lay unexercised in that beneficent work so fitting to them; and for this delay human reason's speculations can find no cause at all. Yet no wise man, because of such difficulties, denies the existence of God, whose reality is proved by evidence carrying the clearest and strongest conviction, and which cannot be denied without plunging the mind into far greater absurdities. The only course left to us is to account, as best our limited reason allows, for such apparent objections, and where that

fails, to acknowledge reason's limits and rest content that our own imperfect judgment cannot be the measure of divine wisdom.

The very same holds true of the Christian religion. Since its truth rests on evidence so strong that it cannot be denied without facing still greater difficulties than those involved in believing it, we ought not to reject it on account of such mysteries, however much they wound our pride. God has chosen to measure our knowledge against our needs, not our pride; everything that concerns our duty he has made clear, and to refuse to rejoice in what he has graciously allowed us to know, out of resentment at not being allowed to know more, is as absurd as refusing to walk because we cannot fly. It is from this same arrogant reaching after matters beyond our knowledge that the worst superstitions of the pagan world arose, and from the same source have since flowed many of the gravest corruptions of gospel truth, and the stubbornest prejudices against it — an effect as natural as our eyes growing weak from straining after objects never meant for them to see.

Our intellectual faculties are nonetheless of the most necessary use in religion, when rightly employed: to distinguish its genuine teachings from those wrongly fastened onto it, and above all to weigh, with the strictest care, the evidence, internal and external, on which it rests. Where that evidence is strong, and nothing within it argues falsehood, no remaining difficulty should withhold our full assent; it is our duty to seek the best solution we can, and where none can be found, to submit humbly, believing that what lies beyond us belongs to a wisdom higher than our own. Nor does this open the door to every absurdity ever grafted onto the Christian name: nothing can belong to that faith which contradicts our clear, intuitive knowledge, or the plain dictates of reason. I speak only of difficulties attending certain pure and essential doctrines, plainly set forth in a revelation supported by evidence our reason ought to accept, and which reason could never have discovered unaided, yet cannot pronounce false. If the glorious light of the gospel is sometimes clouded over with doubt, so too is the light of our own reason; shall we deprive ourselves of the benefit of either, merely because those clouds cannot, perhaps, be entirely cleared away in this mortal life? Shall we shut our eyes against that dawn from on high which has visited us, because we cannot yet bear the full brightness of its rays? Not even in heaven itself, not even in the highest state a finite being can attain, will all the counsels of providence lie open even to the most exalted archangel; even there faith will still be necessary, and a submissive confidence in divine wisdom. What, then, shall mere man presume that his weak understanding needs no revelation and no faith at all, or complain that the ways of God are not as his ways, and are past his finding out? True philosophy, no less than true Christianity, would teach us a wiser and more modest part: to be content within the bounds God has assigned us, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

FINIS.