

Observations on St. Paul

Conversion & Apostleship — by George Lyttelton, 1747

Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul

by George Lyttelton

A Modern-English Edition

by George Lyttelton

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Prepared for the
Wednesday Evening Bible Study
Church of Christ

A Note on This Edition

This is a complete, unabridged rendering of George Lyttelton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul into contemporary English. Nothing in Lyttelton's original argument has been cut, condensed, or summarized — every illustration, aside, and line of reasoning in the 1747 edition appears here, in the same order Lyttelton gave it.

What has changed is the surface: eighteenth-century spelling, punctuation, and sentence construction have been smoothed into the kind of English a reader today can move through without constantly stopping to untangle the grammar. Long, nested periodic sentences have sometimes been broken into two or three shorter ones for clarity, but no content has been lost in the process.

Scripture quotations follow the King James Version, which was Lyttelton's own translation of choice and remains the version most familiar to this congregation. Where Lyttelton's citation of a verse reference was unclear or evidently a printer's error, it has been corrected against the passage actually quoted.

The book is written, and remains here, in the form in which Lyttelton published it: a long 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, and has been modernized in the same manner as a companion to this edition.

Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, in a Letter to Gilbert West, Esq. Fifth Edition. London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, and sold by M. Cooper in Paternoster Row, 1754.

A Letter to Gilbert West, Esq.

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, as appears from the book itself (Acts 20:6,13,14; 27:1, etc.) — St. Paul is recorded as having given this account of his own conversion and preaching 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; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. 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. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and 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. 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." *(Acts 26:4–23)*

And as he thus spoke for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." But he said, "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 unto Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." And Paul said, "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." (Acts 26:24–29)

In another chapter of the same book he gives, in substance, the same account to the Jews, adding these further particulars:

"*And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews that dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, 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 now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" *(Acts 22:10–16)*

In the ninth chapter of the same book, its author relates the same story with some further circumstances not mentioned in these other accounts: that Saul, in a vision, saw Ananias coming in to him and laying his hand upon him

before Ananias actually arrived, so that he might receive his sight; and that when Ananias had spoken to him, immediately there fell from his eyes what seemed to be scales. (Acts 9:12, 18)

And in keeping with all these accounts, St. Paul speaks of himself in just this way in the epistles he wrote to the various churches he planted — epistles whose authenticity cannot be doubted without overturning every rule by which the authority and genuineness of any writing can be proved or confirmed.

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: and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood," and so on. (Galatians 1:11–17)

To the Philippians he says: "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 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; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." (Philippians 3:4–8)

And in his epistle to Timothy he writes: "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." (1 Timothy 1:12–13)

In other epistles he calls himself an apostle "by the will of God," an apostle "by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ," and an apostle "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; Galatians 1:1) — all of which implies some miraculous call that made him an apostle. And to the Corinthians, after listing many appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, he says: "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." (1 Corinthians 15:8)

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.

Now, that he was not an impostor who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive, 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.

First, then: the inducement to such an imposture must have been one of two things — either the hope of advancing his own temporal interest, credit, or power by it, or the gratification of some of his passions under the cover of its authority and by the means it provided.

Now, these were the circumstances under which St. Paul declared his conversion to the faith of Christ Jesus. That Jesus, who called himself the Messiah and Son of God — notwithstanding the innocence and holiness of his life, and notwithstanding the miracles by which he had attested his mission — had been crucified by the Jews as an impostor and blasphemer. That crucifixion, humanly speaking, could only have discouraged others from following him or embracing his doctrines; and it also confirmed the Jews in their opinion that he could not be their promised Messiah, who, according to all their expectations, was not to suffer in any way at all, but to reign triumphant forever here on earth. His apostles, indeed, though at first they appeared terrified by the death of their master and disappointed in all their hopes, had surprisingly recovered their courage and were publicly teaching in his name, declaring him risen from the grave, and confirming that claim by many miracles they worked, or claimed to work, themselves. But the chief priests and rulers among the Jews were so far from being won over by either their words or their works that they had begun a severe persecution against them — putting some to death, imprisoning others, and pressing on with implacable rage against the whole sect.

In all these severities St. Paul took part, being himself a Pharisee, raised at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the leading men of that sect (Acts 7); nor was he content, in the heat of his zeal, merely with persecuting the Christians who were in Jerusalem, but, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," he went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to this "way," whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9). His request was granted, and he set out for Damascus with authority and a commission from the high priest (Acts 26). At this very moment, and under these circumstances, did he become a disciple of Christ. What could his motives have been for taking such a step? Was it the hope of increasing his

wealth? The certain consequence of taking that step was not only the loss of everything he had, but of all hope of acquiring more. Those he left behind controlled the wealth, the honors, and the power in Judea; those he went over to were poor men, oppressed and kept from any means of improving their fortunes. Those among them who had more than the rest shared it with their brethren, and even with this help the whole community was barely supplied with the necessities of life. And even in the churches he himself later planted, which were considerably wealthier than the church at Jerusalem, St. Paul was so far from taking advantage of their generosity, or of the reverence they had for him, to draw that wealth to himself, that he often refused to take any part of it even for his own basic needs.

So he tells the Corinthians: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour, working with our own hands." (1 Corinthians 4:11–12)

In another letter to them he writes: "Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you; for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." (2 Corinthians 12:14)

To the Thessalonians he says: "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness; nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." (1 Thessalonians 2:4–9) And again, in another letter to them, he repeats the same testimony to his own lack of self-interest: "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought, but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you." (2 Thessalonians 3:8) And when he took his leave of the church at Ephesus, whose members he told would never see him again, he gave this account of himself and appealed to them for its truth: "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." (Acts 20:33–34) It is plain, then, both from the state of the church when St. Paul first joined it, and from his later conduct, that he had no thought of increasing his wealth by becoming a Christian — whereas by remaining their enemy, he had almost certain hopes of making his fortune through the favor of those at the head of the Jewish state, to whom nothing could have recommended him more than the zeal he had shown in that persecution.

As for credit or reputation, that too lay entirely on the side he abandoned. The sect he joined was held in the greatest and most universal contempt of any then in the world. Its chiefs and leaders were men of the lowest birth,

education, and rank. They had no advantage of talent, learning, or any other human accomplishment to recommend them. The doctrines they taught contradicted those professed by men accounted the wisest and most learned of their nation. The remarkable works they did were attributed either to magic or to fraud. The very founder and head of their faith had been condemned as a criminal and had died on a cross between two thieves. Could the disciple of Gamaliel imagine he would gain any credit or reputation by becoming a teacher in a school of fishermen? Could he flatter himself that, either in or out of Judea, the doctrines he taught could bring him any honor? No — he knew very well that preaching Christ crucified was "a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness." He later found by experience that everywhere in the world, contempt was the lot of anyone who undertook to preach a mystery so unpalatable to the world, to all its passions and pleasures, and so irreconcilable with the pride of human reason. "We are made," he tells the Corinthians, "as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things unto this day." (1 Corinthians 4:13) Yet he carried on as zealously as he had begun, and was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." (Romans 1:16) Clearly, then, the desire for glory — the ambition to make a great name for himself — was not his motive for embracing Christianity.

Was it then the love of power? Power — over whom? Over a flock of sheep being driven to slaughter, whose shepherd had himself been murdered only a little before. All he could hope to gain from such power was to be singled out, in some particular way, for the same knife he had seen so bloodily drawn against them already. Could he expect more mercy from the chief priests and rulers than they had already shown to Jesus himself? Would their anger not likely burn more fiercely against the deserter and betrayer of their cause than against any other of the apostles? Was power over so lowly and despised a group of people worth attempting at so much risk? But it might still be said that there are some people so fond of power that they will seek it at any price, and be satisfied with it even over the humblest of men. Let us then see what power St. Paul actually claimed over the Christians. Did he claim any superiority over the other apostles? No — he called himself "the least" of them (1 Corinthians 15:9), and "less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8). Even in the churches he himself planted, he never claimed any primacy or power above the other apostles, nor would he allow himself to be regarded by them as anything more than an instrument of God's grace to them, and a preacher of the gospel — not as the head of a sect. He writes to the Corinthians in these words: "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:12–13) And elsewhere: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" (1 Corinthians 3:5) "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:5)

All the authority he exercised over them was purely spiritual in nature, aimed at their instruction and edification, with no trace of that civil dominion in which alone an impostor can find any real profit. That kind of dominion — acquired and exercised under the pretense of divine inspiration — was what many ancient lawgivers achieved: Minos, Rhadamanthus, Triptolemus, Lycurgus, Numa, Zaleucus, Zoroaster, and Zamolxis; even Pythagoras, who joined lawgiving to his philosophy and, like the others, claimed miracles and revelations from God to lend a more solemn sanction to the laws he laid down. In later times the same was achieved by Odin among the Goths, by Mahomet among the Arabs, by Manco Capac among the Peruvians, by the Sophy family among the Persians, and by the line of the Sherifs among the Moors. The many false messiahs among the Jews also aspired to just such a dominion. In short, every one of these claimants to divine inspiration — and others whom history records in different ages and countries as having used the same methods — desired spiritual authority only as a foundation for temporal power, or as a prop to support it. But St. Paul introduced no innovation in government or civil affairs; he had nothing to do with lawgiving, he founded no commonwealths, he raised no rebellions, he sought no temporal power. Obedience to their rulers was the doctrine he taught the churches he founded (Romans 13), and what he taught he also practiced himself; nor did he use any of those flattering arts by which ambitious and cunning men win the favor of those they mean to bring under their power. Whatever was wrong among the disciples in his care, he freely corrected, as befit a teacher sent from God — of which countless examples are found throughout his epistles. And he was just as careful of them after he had left them as while he lived among them, which an impostor, whose aims centered entirely on himself, would hardly have been. This is how he writes to the Philippians: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12) And a little later he adds the reason he cared so much about their conduct: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." (Philippians 2:15–17) Are these the words of an impostor seeking nothing but temporal power? No — they were plainly written by a man who looked beyond the bounds of this life.

But it might be said that he at least claimed an absolute spiritual power over the churches he formed. I answer that he preached Christ Jesus, and not himself. Christ was the head; he himself was only the minister, and that was the only role in which he presented himself to them. He called those who assisted him in preaching the gospel his "fellow-labourers" and "fellow-servants."

So far was he from taking advantage of his superior education, learning, and experience of the world to claim any supremacy over the other apostles, that he made light of all those attainments, and declared that he had come not "with excellency of speech, or of wisdom," but was determined to know nothing among those he converted "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." And the reason he gave for this was so that their faith "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1–5) This policy put him on exactly the same level as the other apostles, who knew Jesus Christ just as well as he did, and whose preaching was accompanied by the power of God to an equal degree of virtue and grace. But an impostor whose aim was power would have acted quite differently: he would have made full use of all those advantages, praised them as highly as possible, and used them to establish himself as the head either of the sect he had joined or at least of the converts he himself had made. This is no more than every philosopher who founded a school did; it would have been far more natural still for one who was spreading a new religion.

We can see that the bishops of Rome have claimed for themselves a primacy — or rather a monarchy — over the whole Christian church. If St. Paul had been driven by the same lust for dominion, it would have been far easier for him to succeed in such an attempt. It would have been far easier for him to make himself head of a handful of poor tradesmen and fishermen, over whom he had always been regarded as superior in the eyes of the world, than it was for the bishops of Rome to bring those of Ravenna or Milan, and other great metropolitan sees, under their obedience. Besides the resistance they met from such powerful rivals, they were forced to support their claims in direct contradiction to the very scriptures on which they were obliged to ground them, and to the undisputed practice of the whole Christian church for many centuries. These were difficulties that called for the utmost skill and ability to overcome. But the first preachers of the gospel had much easier means of corrupting a faith that was not yet fully known, and which in many places could only be known through what each of them separately published. It was necessary, of course, that while they remained together and taught the same people, they should agree with one another, or the credibility of their sect would have collapsed; but once they separated and formed different churches in distant countries, that same necessity no longer applied.

It was within St. Paul's power to shape most of the churches he formed in whatever way favored his own ambition, for he preached the gospel in parts of the world where no other apostle had been — where Christ "was not named" until he brought the knowledge of him there — avoiding, as he put it, "building upon another man's foundation." (Romans 15:20) Now, had he been an impostor, would he have confined himself to exactly the same gospel delivered by the other apostles, when he had such freedom to preach whatever he pleased without contradiction? Would he not have twisted and shaped the doctrines of Christ to serve his own ends, to the particular use and convenience of his own followers, and to the special support and growth of his

own power? That this was not done — not by St. Paul, nor by any other of the apostles, in all the many and various parts of the world into which they traveled, and in churches entirely under their own direction — that the gospel preached by all of them should be one and the same, their doctrines agreeing in every particular, with none of them claiming more for himself than for the others, or establishing anything, even in matters of order or discipline, different from the rest, or more advantageous to his own interest, credit, or power —

I should mention here that if anyone imagines he can see some difference between the doctrines of St. James and St. Paul concerning justification by faith or by works, he should read Mr. Locke's excellent commentary on St. Paul's epistles; or he need only consider these words in the first epistle to the Corinthians: "But 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." (1 Corinthians 9:27) If St. Paul had believed or taught that faith without works was enough to save a disciple of Christ, what purpose was there in his keeping his body under control, since his salvation did not depend on his body being subject to the power of his reason, but merely on the faith he professed? His faith was firm, and so strongly grounded on the most absolute conviction, that he had no reason to doubt it would continue; how then could he think it possible that, while he held on to that saving faith, he might nevertheless become "a castaway"? Or if he had supposed that his election and calling were of such a nature that they irresistibly compelled him toward good and restrained him from evil, how could he express any fear that the appetites of his body might prevent his salvation? Can such an apprehension be reconciled with the notion of absolute predestination that some have attributed to St. Paul? He could have no doubt that the grace of God had been given to him in the most extraordinary manner; and yet we see that he thought his election was not so certain that he could not fall from it again, through the natural strength of bodily appetites, unless he kept them in check by his own voluntary effort. This single passage is a full answer, from St. Paul's own mouth, to all the mistakes that have been made about his meaning in some obscure statements concerning grace, election, and justification.

This agreement among all the apostles is itself a most strong and convincing proof that they were not impostors, but were acting entirely under divine inspiration.

If, then, it appears that St. Paul had nothing to gain by taking this course, let us consider, on the other hand, what he gave up, and what he had reason to fear. He gave up a fortune he was then on a fair path to advancing. He gave up the reputation he had earned through the labors and studies of his whole life, and through conduct that had been blameless "touching the righteousness which is in the law." (Philippians 3:6) He gave up his friends, his relations, and his family, from whom he estranged and banished himself

for life. He gave up the religion in which he had advanced beyond many of his contemporaries in his own nation, and those traditions of his fathers of which he had been exceedingly zealous. How hard such a sacrifice was for a man of his passionate temperament, and above all for a Jew, deserves some thought. That nation is known to have clung to its religious beliefs more tenaciously than any other people on the face of the earth. The strictest and proudest sect among them was that of the Pharisees, in whose discipline St. Paul had been raised. To depart so suddenly from their cherished beliefs, to renounce their pride, and to turn from being their disciple into their adversary, was an extraordinarily difficult thing for someone so steeped in their esteem to do — someone whose early prejudices had been so firmly reinforced by every force of habit, every authority of example, and every lure of honor and self-interest.

These were the sacrifices he had to make in becoming a Christian. Now let us see what hardships he had to fear: the relentless vengeance of those he had deserted; that particularly hard-to-bear kind of contempt — the contempt of those whose good opinion he had once most eagerly sought; and all those other compounded evils that he describes in his second epistle to the Corinthians, chapter eleven — evils, the least of which would have been enough to frighten off any impostor, even from the most promising and profitable scheme. But where the advantage offered bears no proportion to the dangers run, or the hardships endured, a man would have to be completely out of his mind either to take up such an imposture, or, having taken it up, to persist in it.

On the whole, then, I think I have shown that the desire for wealth, fame, or power could have been no motive to make St. Paul a convert to Christ; on the contrary, he must have been held back by that very desire, as well as by the reasonable fear of many unavoidable and unbearable hardships, from taking a course so utterly at odds with his past life and with every principle he had absorbed and every habit he had formed. It remains only to ask whether the gratification of some other passion, under the cover of that religion's authority, or by means it provided, could have been his inducement.

Now, both ancient and modern history show that there have been some impostors who claimed revelations from God merely to give free rein to disordered passions, and to free themselves from every restraint of government, law, or morality. But the doctrine St. Paul preached is utterly opposed to any such design. His writings breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order, and government (Romans 13), together with the deepest abhorrence of all license, idleness, or loose behavior carried out under the cloak of religion. Nowhere in his writings do we read that the saints are above moral obligation, that dominion or property is founded on grace, that there is no difference between moral actions, that any impulse of the mind is to guide us against the light of our reason and the laws of nature, or any of those wicked notions by which the peace of society has been disturbed and the rules of morality broken by men claiming to act

under the sanction of a divine revelation. Nor does any part of his life, either before or after his conversion to Christianity, show any mark of a libertine disposition. Among the Jews, as later among the Christians, his conduct and manner of life were blameless. Hear the appeal he makes to the Thessalonians concerning his teaching and conduct among them: "Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile. ... Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:3,5,10) And to the Corinthians he says, "We have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man." (2 Corinthians 7:2)

Had St. Paul held any secret or, as the philosophers call them, "esoteric" doctrines, we would probably find traces of them in the letters he wrote to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, his closest friends and disciples. But the theological and moral doctrine in those letters is exactly the same as in the letters he wrote to the churches — a very strong presumptive proof that he was no impostor. Surely, had he been one, he would have dropped some hint in those private letters about the deception he and others were carrying on, and given some secret instructions for turning it to some worldly purpose or other. But nothing of the kind is to be found in any one of them. The same disinterested, holy, and divine spirit breathes through all of these letters as through his other, more public epistles.

It was not, then, the desire to indulge some irregular passion that could have induced St. Paul to become a Christian, any more than the hope of advancing himself in wealth, reputation, or power. But it is still possible for some to say — and I would not want to leave any conceivable objection unanswered — that although St. Paul could have had no selfish or self-interested motive for undertaking such an imposture, he might still, for the sake of its moral teaching, have been inclined to support the Christian faith and make use of some "pious frauds" to promote a religion which, though mistaken and false in its theological claims and in the facts on which it was founded, was nonetheless beneficial to mankind in its precepts and influence.

Now it is true that some good men in the pagan world have both claimed divine revelations and promoted religions they knew to be false, under the idea of public benefit. But besides the fact that this practice rested on principles the Jews themselves rejected — for, holding truth rather than usefulness to be the foundation of their religion, they abhorred all such frauds and considered them an offense against the honor of God — the circumstances those men acted under were very different from St. Paul's.

The first reformers of savage, uncivilized peoples had no other way to tame those barbarous nations and bring them to submit to order and government except through the reverence they gained by this pretense. The fraud, in such cases, benefited both the deceiver and the deceived alike. And in every other instance that can be given of good men playing this part, they

not only acted for good ends, but could be sure that no harm would come of it. So when Lycurgus persuaded the Spartans, or Numa the Romans, that the laws of the one were inspired by Apollo, and those of the other by Egeria, or when they taught their people to put great faith in oracles or augury, no worldly harm — either to themselves or to their people — could result from accepting that belief. It drew no persecution, no hostility from the world. But at the time St. Paul undertook to preach the gospel, to persuade anyone to become a Christian was to persuade him to expose himself to every kind of slander human nature could suffer. St. Paul knew this; he not only expected it himself, he warned those he taught to expect it too (1 Thessalonians 3:4; 2 Corinthians 6:4–5; Ephesians 6:10–16; Philippians 1:28–30; Colossians 1:9–11; Romans 8:35–36). The only comfort he offered — to himself or to them — was that "if they suffered with Christ, they should be also glorified together," and that "he reckoned that the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared with that glory." (Romans 8:17–18) So too he writes to the Thessalonians: "We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." (2 Thessalonians 1:4–7) And to the Corinthians he says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (1 Corinthians 15:19) How much reason he had to say this, the hatred, the contempt, the torments, and the deaths endured by Christians in that age, and for long after, abundantly prove. Whoever professed the gospel under such circumstances without being entirely convinced that it was a divine revelation must have been mad; and if he led others to profess it by fraud or deceit, he must have been worse than mad — he must have been the most hardened wretch who ever lived. Could any man with the least spark of humanity in his nature subject his fellow creatures to so many miseries? Or could anyone with the least ray of reason in his mind expose himself to share those miseries with those he deceived, merely in order to promote a religion he knew to be false, for the sake of its moral teaching alone? Such a thing is too absurd to be imagined, and I have already dwelt too long on a notion that collapses under a moment's reflection.

I would only add, to the other proofs I have given that St. Paul could have had no rational motive for becoming a disciple of Christ unless he sincerely believed in him, this further observation. Whereas it might be objected against the other apostles, by those determined not to believe their testimony, that having been closely attached to Jesus during his life, they were obliged to go on making the same profession after his death, both to protect their own credibility and because they had gone too far to turn back — this cannot by any means be said of St. Paul. On the contrary, whatever weight that line of reasoning may carry elsewhere, it all tends to confirm that

St. Paul would naturally have remained a Jew and an enemy of Christ Jesus. If the other apostles were committed on one side, he was just as strongly committed on the other. If shame kept them from changing sides, it should have restrained him far more, since, being of considerably higher education and social standing than they were, he had far more credit to lose, and must be supposed to have been much more sensitive to that kind of shame. The only difference was that they, by abandoning their master after his death, might have saved themselves, whereas he, by abandoning the Jews and taking up the cross of Christ, certainly brought about his own ruin.

Since, then, no rational motive appears for St. Paul's embracing the faith of Christ without having been genuinely convinced of its truth — and since, on the contrary, everything worked to discourage him from taking that course — one might very reasonably conclude that when a man of his understanding embraced that faith, he was in fact convinced of its truth, and consequently that he was not an impostor who said what he knew to be false with the intent to deceive.

But so that no shadow of doubt may remain about the impossibility of his having been such an impostor — so that it cannot be said, "the minds of men are sometimes so unpredictable that they will act without any rational motive, for no reason they themselves could give, and perhaps St. Paul was the same" — I shall next try to show that, even if he had been so inexplicably wild and irrational as to undertake an imposture so unprofitable and dangerous both to himself and to those he deceived by it, he could not possibly have carried it off successfully by the means we know he actually used.

First, then, let me point out that if his conversion, and the part he played as a consequence of it, was an imposture, it was the kind of imposture that could not have been carried out by one man alone. The faith he professed, and of which he became an apostle, was not his own invention. He was not its author or founder, and therefore it was not within his power to draw its doctrines out of his own imagination. With Jesus, who was its author and head, he had never had any contact before his death; nor with Jesus's apostles after his death, except as their persecutor. In taking on the office and character of an apostle, it was absolutely necessary for him to have a precise and complete knowledge of all the facts contained in the gospel — several of which had passed only between Jesus himself and his twelve apostles, and others still more privately, so that they could be known to very few people, not yet having been made public in any writings. Otherwise he would have exposed himself to ridicule among those who preached that same gospel with greater knowledge than he had; and since their testimony would then have differed from his on matters of fact, and many of their doctrines and interpretations of scripture would have clashed with his — given his complete disagreement with the very Jewish opinions he had been raised in — either they would have had to destroy his credibility, or he would have destroyed theirs. He might have picked up some general notions of these matters from

the Christians he persecuted, but nothing precise or thorough enough to qualify him for the office of apostle, where even the smallest error on these points would have disgraced him, and would have ruined every claim he made to that inspiration from which apostolic authority was chiefly derived. It was therefore impossible for him to play this part except in collaboration, at the very least, with the apostles. Such a partnership was all the more necessary for him because undertaking to preach the gospel required not only an exact and detailed knowledge of everything it contained, but also an apparent power to work miracles — for all the apostles pointed to just such a power as proof of their mission and of the doctrines they preached. He would therefore have had to learn from them by what secret tricks they managed to deceive people's senses, if this power was in fact a fraud. But how could he have won these men over to become his fellow conspirators? Was it… …by zealously persecuting them and their brethren, as we find that he did, right up to the very moment of his conversion? Would they have risked entrusting their worst enemy with all the secrets of their imposture—secrets on which all their hopes and credit depended? Would they have put it in his power to destroy not only their lives but the honor of their sect, which they valued even above their lives, by placing such ill-judged confidence in him? Would men so guarded that no amount of the harshest persecution could draw from them a single word that might convince anyone they were impostors, now confess themselves to be such to their own persecutor, in hopes that he would become their accomplice? This is even more impossible than that he should have tried to join their fraud without their consent and assistance.

We must suppose, then, that until he came to Damascus he had no communication with the apostles, acted in no concert with them, and learned nothing from them beyond the doctrines they had publicly taught to the whole world. When he arrived at Damascus, he told the Jews to whom he carried letters from the high priest and the synagogue against the Christians—the disciples of Christ were not actually called Christians until some time after this, but I use the name here because it is the one most familiar to us, and to avoid clumsy circumlocution—that he had seen a great light from heaven on the way, and had heard Christ Jesus reproaching him for his persecution and commanding him to go into the city, where he would be told what he was to do.

But to account for his choosing this particular way of declaring himself a convert to Christ, we must suppose that everyone who was with him when he claimed to have had this vision was also his accomplice. Otherwise the story he told could never have gained belief, since it would have been contradicted by the very men whose testimony was needed to vouch for its truth. And yet how can we suppose that all these men would have been willing to join in such an imposture? They were probably officers of justice, or soldiers, who had often before been employed in carrying out the orders of the high priest and the rulers against the Christians. Or, if they had been chosen specifically for this expedition, they must have been chosen as men trusted for their zeal in

that cause. What, then, would have induced them to betray the very business they had been sent to carry out? Does it even appear that they had any connection with the man they lied for, either before or after this time, or that they received any reward from him for it? This is therefore a difficulty, right at the very outset of this supposed imposture, that cannot be overcome.

But further: he was to be instructed by a certain man at Damascus—Ananias. That instructor, then, must also have been his accomplice, even though the two appear to have been complete strangers to one another, and even though Ananias was a man of excellent character, well spoken of by all the Jews living at Damascus, and therefore most unlikely to have engaged in such an imposture. Despite these improbabilities, this man, I say, must have been his confidant and accomplice in carrying on this wicked fraud, and the whole scheme must have been agreed upon between them beforehand. But here the same objection arises again: how could this man dare to play so dangerous a part without the consent of the other disciples—especially the apostles—or by what means could he have obtained their consent? And how absurdly did they contrive the business, making Saul's conversion the effect of a miracle which everyone who was with him must have known never happened! How much easier it would have been simply to have him present at some miracle pretended to be worked by the disciples, or by Ananias himself, where no one could discover the fraud, and to have attributed his conversion to that—or to arguments used by some of the prisoners he held, whom he might have talked with and questioned about their faith and its grounds, in order to lend color to his intended conversion.

This would have been not only the safer but also the more natural way of bringing about such a change, instead of ascribing it to an event so wide open to exposure. For, to use Paul's own words to Agrippa, "this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26), but in full view of the world, and immediately open to examination by those who would search most strictly into its truth—the Jews of Damascus. Had they been able to produce even the shadow of proof to convict him of fraud in this affair, his whole scheme of imposture would have been nipped in the bud. Nor were the authorities at Jerusalem, whose commission he carried, any less concerned to expose so provoking a fraud. Yet we find that many years later, when they had had all the time and opportunity they could wish for to make the strictest inquiry, he was bold enough to appeal to Agrippa, in the presence of Festus, on the strength of his own knowledge of the truth of his story—and Agrippa did not contradict him, even though he had certainly heard everything the Jews could allege against its credibility on any point. This is a very remarkable proof both of how well known the event was, and of the man's integrity, that he could, with such fearless confidence, call upon a king to testify on his behalf, even while that king sat in judgment over him.

But to return to Ananias: is it not strange that, if this story had been an imposture and Ananias had joined with Paul in carrying it out, we never

afterward hear of the two of them keeping company or acting together, or of Ananias drawing any benefit from his friendship with Paul once Paul became so prominent among the Christians? Did Ananias take part in, and continue in, so dangerous a fraud without any hope or desire of private gain? Or was it safe for Paul simply to shake him off and risk his resentment? There is, I think, no way to get around this difficulty except by supposing that Ananias happened to die soon after Paul's conversion. Let us, then, grant that for the sake of argument, without any historical or traditional evidence for it, and see in what manner this supposed wondrous imposture was carried on by Paul himself.

His first concern ought to have been to get himself acknowledged and received as an apostle by the apostles. Until that was accomplished, the ground he stood on was very narrow, and he could have had no reliable way of establishing himself in any esteem or credit among the disciples. Those who force their way into an imposture run a double risk: they are in danger of being found out, not only by those they are trying to deceive, but also by those whose company they have intruded upon, who must always be suspicious of such an intrusion—and all the more so from a man who had always before behaved as their enemy. So winning over the apostles, and getting them to admit him to a full share in all their mysteries, all their plans, and all their authority, was absolutely essential for Paul at this time. Any delay at all carried dangerous consequences, and might have exposed him to difficulties he could never afterward have overcome. But instead of attending to this urgent necessity, he went off into Arabia, then returned again to Damascus, and did not go to Jerusalem until three years had passed (Gal. 1:17–18).

Now this conduct can be accounted for, if it is true, as he declares in his letter to the Galatians, that he "neither received the gospel of any man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). Under such a Master, and with the help of his divine power, he could go forward boldly without needing any human allies. But an impostor left so entirely to himself—so deprived of all help, all support, all recommendation—could never have succeeded.

Further, we find that at Antioch he was not afraid to stand up to Peter "to his face," and even to rebuke him in front of all the disciples, "because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). If he had been an impostor, how could he have dared to offend an apostle whom it was so greatly in his interest to agree with and please? Accomplices in a fraud are obliged to show one another greater deference; such freedom belongs to truth alone.

But let us now consider the difficulties he had to face among the Gentiles themselves, in the undertaking he set himself—going to them, making himself their apostle, and converting them to the religion of Christ. Since this undertaking was the distinguishing part of his apostolic work—the part to which, in the language of his own letters, he was specifically called, or which,

to put it as an unbeliever might, he chose and assigned to himself—it deserves particular attention. But I shall only touch on its main points, and as briefly as I can, because you have already, in your excellent recent book on the Resurrection, largely exhausted this subject, discoursing with such force of reasoning and eloquence on the difficulties that stood in the way of the spread of the Christian religion throughout the world.

Now, in this undertaking, St. Paul had to contend, first, with the policy and power of the magistrates; second, with the interest, standing, and cunning of the priests; third, with the prejudices and passions of the people; and fourth, with the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

That in every heathen country the established religion was woven into the fabric of the civil constitution, and upheld by the magistrates as an essential part of government, is something no one acquainted with antiquity can fail to know. They did indeed tolerate many different forms of worship—though not with quite so much latitude as some people suppose—allowing men to discuss religion very freely, provided they outwardly conformed to the established rites; and in keeping with the spirit of paganism, which allowed for a kind of fellowship among different forms of worship, they in most places admitted new gods and new rites without much difficulty. But nowhere did they tolerate any attempt to overturn the established religion, or any direct opposition to it; they regarded that as an unpardonable offense, not merely against the gods, but against the state itself. This was so universal a notion, and so settled a principle of heathen policy, that when the Christian religion set itself up in opposition to every other religion, admitted no fellowship with any of them, and declared that the gods of the Gentiles were "not to be worshipped," nor any association allowed between them and the one true God —when this new doctrine began to spread and grew prominent enough to come to the magistrates' attention, the civil power everywhere armed itself with all its terrors against it. So when St. Paul undertook the conversion of the Gentiles, he knew very well that the severest persecutions must be the consequence of any success in his design.

Second, this danger was made all the more certain by the opposition he could expect from the interest, standing, and cunning of the priests. History shows how profitable a business the priests, together with all their lesser dependents, made out of the superstitions he set out to destroy; how much influence this gave them with both the people and the state; and how much cunning they employed in carrying on their impostures. Paul could not doubt that all these men would use every ability they had to stop the spread of the doctrines he preached—doctrines that struck at the very root of their power and their income, and were far more alarming to them than even the teachings of the most atheistic school of philosophers. For the philosophers, even when they denied the priests' principles, at the same time declared themselves in favor of maintaining their practices as useful deceptions, or at least acquiesced in them as establishments sanctioned by law. So whatever

cunning they could contrive to support their own worship, whatever help they could draw from the magistrates, whatever zeal they could stir up among the people, St. Paul had to contend with it all, without the support of any human assistance.

And third, he had to do all this in direct opposition to all the prejudices and passions of the people. Now, had he confined his preaching to Judea alone, this difficulty would not have arisen to nearly the same degree. The people there had been so moved by the miracles the apostles had worked, as well as by the memory of those Jesus himself had done, that, in spite of their rulers, they began to look favorably on the apostles; indeed we find that the high priest and the council were more than once kept from treating the apostles with as much severity as they wished, for fear of the people (Acts 4). But no such favorable disposition could be expected among the Gentile populace. Their prejudices ran strong—not only in favor of their own superstitions, but particularly against any doctrine taught by a Jew. Just as the Jews, because of their hatred of idolatry and their unwillingness to mix with any other religion, were accused of hating mankind, so they in turn were hated by every other nation—and not merely hated, but despised. The degree to which that contempt was carried is plain both from the way they are spoken of by heathen writers, and from the complaints Josephus makes, in his Apology against Apion, about how unreasonable and unjust that contempt was. What authority, then, could St. Paul hope his preaching would carry among a people to whom he was, at one and the same time, both an object of national hatred and national scorn?

And beyond this popular prejudice against a Jew, the doctrines he taught were such as shocked all their most deeply rooted religious opinions. They held to no principles he could appeal to in order to win their assent to the rest of the gospel he preached. To convert the Jews to Christ Jesus, he could argue from their own Scriptures, on the authority of books they themselves acknowledged to contain divine revelation, and from these he could clearly show them that Jesus was indeed the Christ. But all these ideas were entirely new to the Gentiles: they expected no Christ, they acknowledged no such Scriptures; they had to be taught the Old Testament as well as the New. How was this to be accomplished by a man not even commissioned by his own nation, opposed by those who were regarded as the greatest and wisest among the Gentiles, and either entirely alone, or accompanied by just one or two others under the same disadvantages, and of even less standing than himself?

The light of nature alone, without any direct revelation, might indeed have led the Gentiles to the knowledge of one God, the Creator of all things, and it was to that light that St. Paul appealed, as we find that he did (Acts 14:17; 17:27–28). But clear as that light was, they had all but extinguished it through their own superstitions, having "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed

beasts, and creeping things," and served the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:23). And they clung to this idolatry stubbornly—not merely because of prejudice, but because their passions were flattered and indulged by it, since they believed their gods were made favorable toward them not through virtue and holiness, but through offerings, incense, and outward ceremonies—ceremonies that dazzled their senses with splendid spectacle, and drew them in with pleasures that were often thoroughly impure and immoral. The gospel, by contrast, offered them no other terms of acceptance with God than worship of him in spirit and in truth, sincere repentance, complete submission to the divine law, the strictest purity of life and conduct, and giving up all the lusts in which they had formerly indulged. How unappealing such a doctrine must have been to men so thoroughly given over to the power of those very lusts, as the whole heathen world then was! Even if their philosophers could have been brought to approve of it, there would have been no hope that the common people would take to it, or would trade the ease and indulgence their own religions allowed their appetites for something so harsh and demanding. But could not St. Paul, in order to win them over, have relaxed that strictness? He might very well have done so, and probably would have, had he been an impostor; but it is plain from all his letters that he preached it just as purely, and insisted on it just as strongly, as Jesus himself had done.

But suppose they could be persuaded to give up their habitual indulgence of the flesh for the purity of the gospel, and to abandon their idolatries, which Paul counts among the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19–20), in favor of the spiritual worship of the one invisible God—how were they disposed to receive the doctrine of mankind's salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ? Could men raised on ideas so utterly opposed to that great mystery, that "hidden wisdom" of God "which none of the princes of this world knew" (1 Cor. 2:7–8), be inclined to accept it against the teaching of all their instructors and the example of all those above them? Could men whose gods had nearly all been mighty kings and great conquerors—men who, at that very time, paid divine honors to the Roman emperors, whose only claim to deity was imperial power—could they reconcile their thinking to a crucified Son of God, to a redeemer of mankind dying on a cross? Would they look there for him who is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: by whom and for whom all things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers" (Col. 1:15–16)? Now, most assuredly, "the natural man," to use Paul's own words, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). I may therefore conclude that in his undertaking of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul had to contend not only with the policy and power of the magistrates, and with the interest, standing, and cunning of the priests, but also with the prejudices and passions of the people.

I come next to show that he had to expect no less opposition from the wisdom and pride of the philosophers. Some might imagine that men who claimed to be lifted above common prejudices and common passions would have been some help to him in his undertaking; but a closer look shows that, far from assisting or befriending the gospel, they were among its worst and most unyielding enemies. They had prejudices of their own, even more opposed to the doctrines of Christ than those of ordinary people, and more deeply and stubbornly fixed in their minds. The wisdom they prided themselves on consisted mainly of empty metaphysical speculation, logical hair-splitting, endless argument, inflated notions of the perfection and self-sufficiency of human wisdom, dogmatic certainty about doubtful opinions, and skeptical doubt about the clearest and most certain truths. It must be obvious at first glance that nothing could be more contrary to the first principles of the Christian religion than the teachings of the atheistic or skeptical schools, which at that time were very widespread among both Greeks and Romans; nor will we find that the theistic schools were much less hostile to it, once we consider what they taught about the nature of God and the soul.

I will not dwell further on a subject that the learned Mr. Warburton has already treated so well, in a recent pamphlet of his on the matter. If it were necessary to go into this argument in detail, I could easily show that there was not one of all the various philosophical schools then on earth—not even the Platonists themselves, who are generally thought to come closest to favoring it—that did not hold some opinions fundamentally at odds with those of the gospel. And on one point they were all agreed: all of them rejected, as thoroughly unphilosophical and contrary to every notion any of them held, that great article of the Christian religion on which its very foundation rests, and without which, as Paul tells his converts, their faith would be in vain (1 Cor. 15:17)—the resurrection of the dead in their bodies, of which resurrection Christ was the firstborn (Col. 1:18).

Beyond the plain contradiction between their teachings and those of the gospel, the pride common to all philosophers was in itself an almost insurmountable obstacle to accepting evangelical doctrines meant to humble that very pride, and to teach them that "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:22). This pride was every bit as stubborn, and every bit as hostile to the teaching of Christ and his apostles, as that of the scribes and Pharisees had been. St. Paul therefore had to contend, in his undertaking to convert the Gentiles, with all the opposition that every different school of philosophy could bring against it. And how formidable that opposition was, let those judge who know from history the enormous prestige those schools had won by that time in the world—prestige even greater than that of the priests. Anyone who claimed learning or virtue was their disciple; the greatest magistrates, generals, and kings placed themselves under their instruction, were trained in their schools, and professed the opinions they taught.

All these schools made it a point of principle not to disturb popular worship or established religion; but within those limits, they taught very freely whatever they pleased, and no religious opinions were more passionately defended by their followers than the ones they put forward. Christianity, by contrast, overturned all their various systems at once; it taught a morality more perfect than theirs, and established it on higher and far stronger foundations; it humiliated their pride, confounded their learning, exposed their ignorance, and ruined their standing. Against such an enemy, what would they not do? Would they not bring to bear the full power of their rhetoric, the whole art of their logic, their influence over the people, and their standing with the powerful, to discredit so alarming a novelty? If St. Paul had had nothing to rely on but his own natural abilities—his own understanding, knowledge, and eloquence—could he have hoped to be, single-handed, a match for all of theirs united against him? Could a teacher no one had ever heard of before, from an obscure and uneducated corner of the world, have stood up against the authority of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Arcesilaus, Carneades, and all the great names that held the first rank in human wisdom? He might just as well have tried, alone, or with the help of Barnabas and Silas, of Timothy and Titus, to build a monarchy on the ruins of every state then existing in the world, as to establish Christianity on the ruins of all the various schools of philosophy that reigned in the minds of the Gentiles he preached to —particularly the Greeks and the Romans.

Having thus shown, as I believe, that in the work of converting the Gentiles St. Paul could expect no assistance at all, but was certain, on the contrary, of facing the utmost resistance and opposition imaginable from magistrates, priests, people, and philosophers alike, it necessarily follows that, to succeed in that work, he must have called on some extraordinary aid —some power stronger than mere reason and argument. And indeed we find him telling the Corinthians that his speech and his preaching were "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4); and to the Thessalonians he says, "our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thess. 1:5). It was to the working of divine power that he attributed all his success in those lands, and wherever else he planted the gospel of Christ. If that power really did go with him, it would be enough to enable him to overcome every one of the difficulties standing in the way of his undertaking—but then he was not an impostor. Our question, then, must be whether, supposing him to have been an impostor, he could, simply by pretending to work miracles, have overcome all those difficulties and carried his work forward successfully.

Now, for falsely claimed miracles to gain any credit, two things are generally necessary: a receptive disposition in those they are meant to deceive, and a powerful group of confederates to carry on and support the deception. Both of these conditions—or at the very least one of them—have always accompanied every false miracle, ancient or modern, that has ever won any real belief among mankind. It was to both of these that the heathen

world owed its general faith in oracles, auspices, auguries, and other such impostures, by which the priests, working together with the magistrates, upheld the national religion and deceived a people already favorably disposed toward it and willing to be deceived. The same two causes likewise combine to produce belief in Catholic miracles among members of that church. But neither of these helped St. Paul. What predisposition could there possibly have been, in the minds of the Gentiles, in his favor, or in favor of the doctrines he taught? Or rather, what predisposition could have been stronger than the one they undoubtedly already had against both him and his message? Had he stayed in Judea, unbelievers might have suggested that the Jews were a credulous people, inclined to look for miracles and quick to believe in them, and that the fame of the miracles said to have been done by Jesus himself, and by his apostles, before Paul announced his conversion, had already prepared their minds and stirred their imaginations to accept further ones supposedly worked by that same power.

The remarkable miracle of the apostles speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost had won three thousand converts (Acts 2:41); the healing of the lame man at the gate of the Temple won five thousand more (Acts 3; 4:4). Indeed, such was the faith of the crowd that they carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and pallets, so that at the very least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them (Acts 5:15). Here, then, was a solid foundation already laid for Paul to build on, had he wished to claim similar miraculous works; for although the priests and the rulers were hardened against them, the people were inclined to believe in them, and there was good reason to hope for success among them, both at Jerusalem and throughout the regions where Jews lived. But no such readiness existed among the Gentiles. There was, among them, no material already prepared for an imposture to work on—no knowledge of Christ, no awareness of his power, or of the power of those who came in his name. So when Paul, at Lystra, healed a man who had been a cripple from birth (Acts 14), the people there were so far from supposing he could do such a thing as an apostle of Christ, or by any power derived from him, that they instead took Paul and Barnabas to be gods of their own come down to earth "in the likeness of men," and would have offered sacrifices to them as such.

Now I ask: did the citizens of Lystra conspire to deceive themselves in this matter? Were their imaginations so overheated by some notion of a miraculous power belonging to Paul that this predisposed them to think he had performed a miracle when he had not? Since the opposite is plainly true, so in every other place to which he carried the gospel it can be proved beyond doubt that he could find no favorable disposition, no readiness, no bias anywhere to assist an imposture—unless the miracles by which he everywhere confirmed his preaching were, in fact, true.

On the other hand, let us examine whether, lacking any such advantage, there was a confederacy strong enough to impose false miracles on the

Gentiles, who were both unprepared and disinclined to accept them. The opposite is plain. He was in no league with their priests or their magistrates; no sect or party among them gave him any help at all; every eye was open and watchful to catch him in an imposture, and every hand ready to punish him the moment he was caught. Had he stayed in Judea, he would at least have had a good many confederates—all the apostles, and all the disciples of Christ, who by that time were fairly numerous. But in preaching to the Gentiles he was often alone, never with more than two or three companions or followers. Was this a confederacy strong enough to carry off such a deception, in so many different parts of the world, against the combined opposition of magistrates, priests, philosophers, and people, all working together to expose their frauds?

It should also be remembered that the people on whom these tricks were supposedly practiced were not a crude or ignorant population, likely to mistake some unusual natural occurrence or clever trick for a genuine miracle. The churches Paul founded were in the most enlightened parts of the world—among the Greeks of Asia and of Europe, among the Romans—in the midst of learning, philosophy, and freedom of thought, in an age more curious and inquisitive about the workings of nature, and less inclined to believe religious frauds, than any age before it. Nor did he convert only the lowest of the people: Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Paphos; Erastus, the treasurer (or chamberlain) of Corinth; and Dionysius the Areopagite were all among his converts. Taken altogether, it appears beyond dispute that his claim to work miracles was supported neither by a favorable disposition in those he aimed to convert through them, nor by any powerful confederacy to carry on and back up the deception—and without one or both of these conditions, no such claim has ever been sustained with any success.

Both of these conditions did come together, however, even in the recent, much-talked-about miracles supposedly performed at the tomb of the Abbé Pâris. These, it is true, did not enjoy the backing of the government, which is why they seem to deserve closer attention than other Catholic miracles; but they were backed by the entire Jansenist party—a very powerful and numerous faction in France, made up partly of wise and capable men, and partly of bigots and enthusiasts. All of these banded together to lend credit to miracles said to have been worked on their party's behalf, and those who believed in them were already strongly inclined to that belief. And yet, with all these advantages, how easily they were suppressed! It took nothing more than walling up the part of the church where the tomb of the saint supposed to work them stood. Soon after this was done, a notice was posted on the wall with this inscription:

> "*De par le Roy défense à Dieu, de faire miracle en ce lieu*"—*By order of the king, God is forbidden to work any more miracles in this place.*

It was a witty piece of mockery, but events turned it against the very party that composed it: for if God had really been working miracles there, could so absurd a prohibition ever have taken effect? Would he have allowed his purpose to be defeated by the building of a wall? When all the apostles were shut up in prison to stop them from working miracles, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out (Acts 5:19). But the power supposedly at work in the Abbé Pâris could neither tear down the wall that shut out his followers, nor operate through that obstacle. And yet his miracles are often compared—and set up by unbelievers in opposition—to those of Christ and his apostles, which is why I have taken particular notice of them here. But let me go back to times nearer to St. Paul's own. Lucian records a remarkably successful imposture carried out in his own day by a certain Alexander of Pontus, who introduced a new god into that country, styled himself its prophet, and in that god's name claimed to work miracles and deliver oracles, by which he gained great wealth and power.

All the tricks by which this fraud was managed are laid bare by Lucian, and nothing could better illustrate the difference between imposture and truth than comparing the conduct of this man with that of St. Paul. Alexander made no change at all to the religion already established in Pontus; he simply grafted his own onto it, and spared no effort to involve the entire pagan priesthood—not just in Pontus, but throughout the world—in making it succeed, sending great numbers of those who came to consult him on to other oracles that were then held in the highest esteem, and by this means securing their support for his own reputation and his fraud. He spoke with the greatest respect of every philosophical school except the Epicureans, whom he knew their own principles would lead to mock and oppose his deception; for though the Epicureans did not presume to introduce new religions or overturn established ones, they freely attacked and exposed any innovation introduced under the name of religion that lacked the backing of established law. To overcome their opposition, as well as that of the Christians, he resorted to persecution and force, stirring up the people against them and answering their objections with stones. And to make sure of gaining enough money, he delivered this oracle in the name of his god: "I command you to honor my prophet and minister with gifts; for I care nothing for riches myself, but a great deal for my prophet's." (In the original Latin: Muneribus decorare meum Vatem atque Ministrum praecipio—nec opum mihi cura, at maxima Vati.) The immense profits he made from this he shared out among a vast number of associates and agents whom he employed to carry on and support his fraud. Anyone who declared himself an enemy, and whom Alexander did not dare attack openly, he tried to win over with flattery—and once he had such a person in his power, he would destroy him by secret means, a trick he himself used against Lucian. Others he kept in fear and dependence on him by holding on to the written questions they had submitted to his god concerning affairs of state; and since these generally came from men of the greatest

power and rank, having possession of them gave him enormous leverage—he became master of their secrets, and of no small part of their wealth besides.

He won the protection and friendship of Rutilianus, a prominent Roman general, by promising him, through flattery, an exceptionally long life and elevation to divine status after his death; and at last, having completely turned the man's head, he commanded him, by an oracle, to marry his supposed daughter, whom he claimed to have fathered by the Moon—a command Rutilianus obeyed, and through this alliance secured the impostor against any danger of punishment, since the Roman governor of Bithynia and Pontus excused himself from bringing him to justice, even when Lucian and several others offered to come forward as his accusers.

He never left that ignorant and backward country, which he had chosen from the start as the place best suited to playing his tricks undetected; but, while residing among those superstitious and credulous people himself, he extended his fame far and wide through the agents he employed throughout the world, especially at Rome—men who did not themselves claim to work any miracles, but merely spread word of his, and kept him informed of anything useful for him to know.

These were the methods by which this remarkable fraud was carried on—every one of them the exact opposite of those St. Paul used in preaching the gospel; and yet it was only by such methods that a deception of this kind could ever succeed. I will not even mention the many debaucheries and wicked excesses this false prophet committed under the mask of religion, which marks another clear difference between him and St. Paul; nor the evasive answers, cunning dodges, and deceitful tricks he used, in all of which it is easy to see the plain marks of an imposture, as well as in the goals he obviously had in view. What I wish chiefly to point out is the powerful network of confederates he took care to assemble in support of his claim to miraculous powers, and the ready disposition of those he deceived to cooperate in deceiving themselves—advantages that were entirely absent in the case of the apostles of Christ.

From all this, I think it may fairly be concluded that no merely human means available to St. Paul in his design of converting the Gentiles were, or could have been, equal to the great difficulties he had to overcome, or to the success we know his work actually achieved; and we can, in all reason, attribute that success to no other cause than the power of God accompanying and assisting his ministry—because nothing else was equal to the effect produced.

Having now shown that St. Paul had no rational motive for becoming an apostle of Christ without himself being convinced of the truth of the gospel he preached; and that, had he undertaken such an imposture without rational motives, he would have had no possible way of carrying it off with any success; and having also brought forward reasons of considerable weight to

show that the success he undoubtedly had in preaching the gospel was the effect of divine power accompanying his ministry—I could rest my entire case for the Christian religion's being a divine revelation on the arguments drawn from this point alone. But in order to consider the subject from every possible angle, I shall carry through the proposition I began with, in each of its several parts. And having proved, I hope, to the satisfaction of any fair-minded person, that St. Paul was not an impostor—one who said what he knew to be false, intending to deceive—I come next to consider whether he was instead an enthusiast, a man whose overheated imagination had deceived himself.

Now, enthusiasm is generally made up of the following ingredients: a strongly excitable temperament, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity or self-conceit. That the first of these qualities was present in St. Paul may be inferred from the fervent zeal with which he acted, both as a Jew and as a Christian, in defending what he believed to be right; and this is probably why, along with the sheer impossibility of his having been an impostor, some unbelievers have chosen to regard him as an enthusiast instead. But this quality alone is not enough to prove that he was one, in the judgment of any reasonable person. The same temperament has been common to others who were certainly not enthusiasts—the Gracchi, Cato, Brutus, and many more among the best and wisest of men. Nor does it appear that this trait had such a hold over St. Paul's mind that he was unable, at all times, to govern and control it by the dictates of reason. On the contrary, he had such mastery over it that, in matters of no essential importance, he could become "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22), adapting his views and manners to those of others—so far as his duty to God allowed—with the most accommodating flexibility: conduct that fits neither the rigidity of a bigot nor the uncontrolled impulses of fanatical delusion. His zeal was eager and warm, but tempered with prudence, and even with the ordinary civilities and decorum of life, as is clear from his conduct toward Agrippa, Festus, and Felix—nothing like the blind, thoughtless, unseemly zeal of an enthusiast.

Let us now see whether any of the other qualities I listed as inclining the mind toward enthusiasm, and as characteristic of it, can be found in St. Paul. First, as to melancholy—which, of all conditions of body or mind, inclines most readily toward enthusiasm—it does not appear, either from his writings, or from anything told of him in the Acts of the Apostles, or from any other evidence, that St. Paul was any more inclined to it than other men. Though he was full of remorse for his earlier, ignorant persecution of the church of Christ, we read of no gloomy penances, no extravagant self-mortifications, of the kind the Brahmins, the Yogis, the monks of La Trappe, and other melancholy enthusiasts inflict upon themselves. His holiness consisted simply in living a good life with simplicity, and in the tireless performance of the apostolic duties to which he had been called. He bore cheerfully, and even rejoiced in, the sufferings he endured on that account for the love of Christ Jesus, but he brought none of them on himself; on the contrary, we find him claiming the privilege of a Roman citizen to avoid being whipped. I could

point to further examples of his using every prudent means available to escape danger and avoid persecution, whenever this could be done without betraying the duty of his office or the honor of God.

A notable instance of this appears in his conduct among the Athenians. There was a law at Athens making it a capital offense to introduce or teach the worship of any new gods in the state. So when Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection to the Athenians, some of them brought him before the court of the Areopagus—the regular judges of criminal matters, who were particularly charged with overseeing religion—on the grounds that he had broken this law and was "a setter forth of strange gods" (Acts 17). Now, in a case like this, an impostor would have taken back his teaching to save his life, while an enthusiast would have thrown his life away rather than try to save it by any honest means. St. Paul did neither. He made use of an altar he had found in the city, inscribed "To the Unknown God," and argued that he was not introducing to them the worship of some new god, but was simply explaining to them one whom their own government had already acknowledged: "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23). By this he kept within the law and escaped condemnation by the Areopagus, without departing in the least from the truth of the gospel or compromising the honor of God. This seems to me an admirable proof of the good sense with which he acted, and one that shows there was no mixture of ...in none of the instruction he gave to those under his charge is there any tincture of melancholy — which is yet so essential a characteristic of enthusiasm that I have scarcely ever heard of an enthusiast, ancient or modern, in whom some very evident marks of it did not appear.

As to ignorance, which is another ground of enthusiasm, St. Paul was so far from it that he appears to have been master not only of Jewish learning but of Greek learning as well. This is one reason why he is less open to the charge of having been an enthusiast than the other apostles were — though none of them were enthusiasts any more than he was, as can be proved just as conclusively by other arguments.

I have mentioned credulity as another characteristic and cause of enthusiasm, and the history of St. Paul's life shows undeniably that it was not in him. On the contrary, he seems to have been slow and hard of belief in the extreme. He paid no regard to any of the miracles done by our Savior, of which he could not have been ignorant, since he lived in Jerusalem — nor to that notable one performed after Christ's resurrection, in his name, by Peter and John, on the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, nor to the testimony Peter gave afterward, in the presence of the high priest, the rulers, the elders, and the scribes, that Christ had been raised from the dead. He must also have known that when all the apostles had been shut up in the common prison, and the high priest, the council, and the whole senate of the children of Israel had sent their officers to bring them in, the officers came back and found them not in the prison, but reported, "The prison truly found

we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within" (Acts 5:23). He must also have known that the council was immediately told that the men they had imprisoned were standing in the temple teaching the people, and that when they were brought before the council they spoke these memorable words: "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:29-32). All of this he resisted, and he consented to the murder of Stephen, who preached the same truth and confirmed it by miracles (Acts 8:1). So his mind, far from being disposed to a credulous faith or too ready an acceptance of any miracle offered in proof of the Christian religion, appears to have been barred against it by prejudices as stubborn as any man's could possibly be. From this we may fairly conclude that nothing less than the irresistible evidence of his own senses, placed beyond all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief.

Vanity, or self-conceit, is another trait that for the most part is found in the character of an enthusiast. It leads people of a warm temperament and a religious bent to think themselves worthy of God's special regard and extraordinary favors, and the "inspiration" to which they lay claim is often nothing more than the gust of this vanity, puffing them up into extravagant notions of themselves. This shows up plainly in the writings and lives of various enthusiastic heretics, in mystics both ancient and modern, in many founders of religious orders and in saints both male and female among the Roman Catholics, in several Protestant sects of the last age, and even in some of the Methodists of our own day. (See the accounts of Montanus and his followers, the writings attributed to the counterfeit Dionysius the Areopagite, Saint Teresa, Saint Catherine of Siena, Madame Bourignon, the lives of Saint Francis of Assisi and of Ignatius Loyola; see also the accounts of the lives of George Fox and of Rice Evans, and Whitefield's Journal.) All the divine communications, illuminations, and ecstasies to which such people have laid claim plainly sprang from a great deal of self-conceit working together with the vapors of melancholy upon a heated imagination. This is one reason — besides the contagious nature of melancholy, or fear — that enthusiasm spreads so readily among weak minds. Such minds are especially prone to vanity, and when they see others claiming extraordinary gifts, they are quick to flatter themselves that they too may share in such gifts, since they rate those other people's merit no higher than their own. Vanity, then, may justly be reckoned a principal source of enthusiasm. But that St. Paul was as free from it as any man can, I think, be gathered from everything we see in his writings or know of his life. Throughout his letters there is not a single word that smacks of vanity, nor is any action recorded of him in which the least trace of it appears.

In his letter to the Ephesians he calls himself "less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8). And to the Corinthians he says he is "the least of the apostles," not fit to be called an apostle, "because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9). In his letter to Timothy he writes: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

It is true that in another letter he tells the Corinthians that he was "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5). But we must consider the occasion that drew these words from him. A false teacher, through faction and slander, had brought his apostleship into question among the Corinthians. Faced with such an attack, failing to assert his apostolic standing would have amounted to betraying the office and duty God had entrusted to him. He was therefore compelled to do himself justice and not let fall the authority on which the whole success and effectiveness of his ministry among them depended. But how did he go about it? Not with the self-indulgence a vain man shows when given any chance to praise himself; not with a showy recital of all the astonishing miracles he had performed in different parts of the world, though he had every opportunity to do so — but with a modest, plain account of his abundant labors and sufferings in preaching the gospel, merely reminding them that "the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Corinthians 12:12). Could he have said less than this? Is such "boasting" not humility itself? And yet even for this he offers many apologies, expressing the greatest discomfort at being forced to speak of himself at all, even in his own defense (2 Corinthians 11:1,16).

When, in that same letter and for that same purpose, he mentions the vision he had of heaven, how modestly he does it! He speaks not in his own name but in the third person: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago... such an one caught up to the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2). And immediately afterward he adds, "but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me" (2 Corinthians 12:6). How different this is from a spirit of vanity! How unlike the practice of enthusiastic claimants to raptures and visions, who never think they can dwell on such subjects long enough, but fill whole volumes with accounts of them! Yet St. Paul is not even satisfied with this restraint; he goes on to confess some infirmity, which he tells the Corinthians was given to him as a counterweight, "lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations" (2 Corinthians 12:7). I would also point out that he says this rapture, or vision of paradise, had happened to him more than fourteen years before he wrote. Now, had it been the product of mere enthusiastic fancy, is it conceivable that in so long a stretch of time he would not have had many more raptures of the same kind? Would not his

imagination have been forever carrying him up to heaven, the way we find Saint Teresa, Saint Ignatius, and Saint Francis were carried by theirs? And if vanity had been the ruling trait in him, would he have kept silent for fourteen years about so great a mark of divine favor? No — we should certainly have found his letters filled with nothing but long accounts of these visions, conversations with angels, with Christ, with God Almighty, mystical unions with God, and all the things we read in the writings of those celebrated enthusiasts I mentioned earlier. Instead, he mentions this vision only in answer to the false teacher who had challenged his apostolic authority (2 Corinthians 12:1-4), and he covers the whole of it in three sentences, with many apologies for even having to mention it at all.

Nor does he take any credit to himself, even for the success of the apostolic labors he is chiefly boasting of in this letter. For in an earlier letter to the same church he writes: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). And elsewhere in the same letter he says, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

I think it unnecessary to give more examples of St. Paul's modesty. I am certain that not one instance can be found that bears any trace of vanity — and in particular not the kind of vanity that shows up so plainly in all enthusiasts, who set their imagined gifts above the virtues that make up the very essence of true religion and the real excellence of a good person, or, in the language of Scripture, of a saint. In his first letter to the Corinthians he 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 have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Is this the language of enthusiasm? Did any enthusiast ever rank that universal benevolence which includes all moral virtues — and which, as the following verses show, is what is meant here by "charity" — above faith and above miracles, above the religious opinions he had embraced, above the supernatural graces and gifts he imagined he possessed, even above the merit of martyrdom? Is it not the very essence of enthusiasm to rank moral virtue far below the merit of faith, and, among moral virtues, to value least the one St. Paul here presses hardest — a spirit of candor, moderation, and peace? Certainly neither the temperament nor the opinions of a man given to fanatical delusion can be found in this passage. Rather, it may justly be concluded that a man who could value charity so far

above miraculous gifts could not have claimed such gifts if he had not genuinely possessed them.

Since it is clear, then, from this whole examination, that the qualities needed to make a man an enthusiast are not to be found in St. Paul's disposition and character, it is reasonable to conclude that he was no enthusiast. But even granting, for the sake of argument, that all those qualities were present in him, or that the heat of his temperament alone were sufficient ground for such a suspicion, I shall now try to prove that he could not have deceived himself by any power of enthusiasm — whether with regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the effects that followed from it, or to certain other events to which he himself bears witness in his letters.

The power of imagination in enthusiastic minds is no doubt very strong, but it always works in keeping with the opinions already impressed upon it at the time, and can no more act against them than a swift river can carry a boat upstream against its own current. Now, nothing can be more certain than that when Saul set out for Damascus carrying authority from the chief priests to bring back to Jerusalem in chains any Christians he found there (Acts 9:2) — an authority he himself had sought and had been granted at his own urgent request — his mind was strongly possessed by opinions hostile to Christ and his followers. These opinions were given still greater force by his passions at the time, which were inflamed to the highest degree: by the irritating awareness of his own past conduct toward the Christians, by pride in carrying through a role he had voluntarily taken on, and by the standing it won him among the chief priests and rulers whose commission he carried.

If, in such a state and frame of mind, an enthusiast had imagined he saw a vision from heaven pronouncing God's anger against the Christians and commanding him to persecute them without mercy, that could be explained by the ordinary power of enthusiasm. But that at the very moment he was engaged in the fiercest, hottest persecution against them — with nothing having happened to change his opinions or alter the bent of his disposition — he should suddenly imagine himself called by a heavenly vision to become the apostle of the very Christ whom, a moment before, he had considered an impostor and a blasphemer justly put to death on the cross, is in itself wholly unbelievable. Far from being a plausible product of enthusiasm, it is exactly the opposite of what enthusiasm would naturally produce. The heat of his temperament was driving him violently the other way, and whatever delusions his imagination might have raised to deceive his reason would have had to arise, at that moment, in keeping with the notions already impressed on it — notions that were heating it toward enthusiasm, not notions directly contradicting themselves while still in full force.

This point is so clear that I might rest the whole argument on it alone. But to show further that this vision could not have been a phantom of St. Paul's own making, let me point out that he was not alone when he saw it — there

were many others with him, whose minds were no better disposed toward the Christian faith than his own. Is it possible that the imaginations of all these men were struck in exactly the same strange way at the same moment, so that they believed they saw a great light shining around them, brighter than the sun at noonday, and heard the sound of a voice from heaven — though not the words it spoke (Acts 9:3; 22:9) — when in reality they saw and heard no such thing? Could they all have been so carried away by this trick of fancy that they fell to the ground together with Saul and stood speechless with fear (Acts 26:14; 9:7), when nothing extraordinary had happened to any of them? This is all the more striking given that the vision did not occur at night, when the senses are more easily deceived, but at midday. If a sudden frenzy had seized Saul, from some disorder of body or mind, can we suppose his whole company — men of different constitutions and different minds — were struck in exactly the same way at the same instant, so that not only the disorder but its precise effects matched exactly? If they had all gone mad together, would not the frenzy have taken different forms in different people, presenting different images to each? This supposition runs so contrary to nature and to all possibility that unbelief must find some other explanation, or else give up the point.

Let me suppose, then, in an attempt to account for this vision without resorting to a miracle, that as Saul and his companions were traveling toward Damascus, some extraordinary meteor actually appeared and cast a great light, as certain meteors are known to do, and that they, frightened by it, fell to the ground as described. This is possible, and fear born of ignorance of such phenomena might lead them to imagine it a vision from God. Even the voice or sound they heard in the air might, on this theory, have been some explosion accompanying the meteor — or at least there are those who would rather resort to so improbable an explanation than admit a miracle. But how does this account for the distinct words St. Paul heard and answered? How does it account for what followed when he arrived in Damascus, matching exactly the sense of the words he had heard? How did it come about that Ananias went to him there and said that he "was chosen by God to know his will, and see that Just One, and hear the voice of his mouth" (Acts 22:14)? Or why did Ananias urge him to be baptized (Acts 22:16)? What connection could there be between the meteor Saul had seen and these words from Ananias? Will it be claimed that Ananias was shrewd enough to take advantage of Saul's fright at that spectacle in order to make him a Christian? But could Ananias have put into Saul's mind a vision in which Saul saw him coming before he arrived (Acts 9:10-12)? If that vision was merely a product of imagination, how did it turn out to match the facts so exactly? But suppose, for argument's sake, that Saul happened by chance to dream of Ananias's coming, and that Ananias happened by chance to come as well — or, if you like, that having heard of Saul's dream, Ananias came to take advantage of it, just as he supposedly took advantage of the meteor Saul had seen — does this get around the difficulty? No, there is more still to account for. Saul was

struck blind, and remained so for three days. Now, had this blindness arisen naturally from the effects of a meteor or a flash of lightning, it would not have been possible for Ananias to heal it, as we are told he did, simply by laying his hands on him and speaking a few words. This plainly exceeded the power of nature. And if that was a miracle, it proves the other event was a miracle too, and a miracle done by that same Jesus Christ. For when Ananias healed Saul, he said to him, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:17-18; 22:13). And that Paul saw Christ both at that time and afterward is clear not only from his own account (Acts 22:17-18) but from other passages in his letters (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8). From Christ himself, as Paul asserts in many places in his letters, he learned the gospel by direct revelation, and by Christ he was sent to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 23:11). Among those Gentiles, from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, he preached the gospel of Christ (Romans 15:19) with mighty signs and wonders worked by the power of the Spirit of God, to bring them to obey his preaching, as he himself testifies in his letter to the Romans, and as is recounted in detail in the Acts of the Apostles — signs and wonders, indeed, beyond the power of nature to produce, beyond the skill of imposture to fake, and beyond the reach of enthusiasm to imagine. Now, does not such a whole series of miraculous acts, every one of them tied to and dependent on that first revelation, put the truth of that revelation beyond all possibility of doubt or deceit? And even if he could have deceived himself into thinking he performed these miracles when he had not — a supposition that cannot be allowed unless he was completely out of his senses the whole time — how could so deranged an enthusiast have made the kind of progress we know he made in converting the Gentile world? If the obstacles already shown to have stood in the way of that work were more than the ablest impostor could have overcome, how much more insurmountable would they have been to a madman?

It is a far harder task for unbelievers to account for St. Paul's success in preaching the gospel on the theory that he was an enthusiast than on the theory that he was an impostor. Neither theory can actually account for it, but the impossibility stands out even more glaringly on the enthusiast theory than on the other. I could go through every miracle recorded in Acts as having been performed by St. Paul and show that none of them was of a kind in which enthusiasm — whether in him, in the people on whom the miracles were worked, or in the onlookers — could have played any part. I will mention only a few. When he told Elymas the sorcerer, at Paphos, before the Roman deputy, that the hand of the Lord was upon him and that he would be blind, unable to see the sun for a time — and immediately a mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand (Acts 13:11) — did enthusiasm, in either the one who spoke or the one who suffered, play any part in this? If Paul, acting as an enthusiast, had made this threat and nothing had come of it, then instead of converting the deputy, as

we are told he did, he would have brought the man's rage and contempt down on his own head. But the effect produced on Elymas cannot be attributed to enthusiasm in Paul, still less can it be attributed to an enthusiastic belief, in Elymas himself, that he had been struck blind when he had not — produced merely by the words of a man whose preaching he had so strenuously and bitterly opposed. Nor can we attribute the conversion of Sergius, which followed from this, to any kind of enthusiasm. A Roman proconsul was not a likely candidate for enthusiasm; and even if he had been one, he would have been devoted to his own gods, and so all the less inclined to credit any miraculous power in St. Paul.

When, at Troas, a young man named Eutychus fell from a high window while Paul was preaching and was picked up dead (Acts 20:9), could any enthusiasm, either in Paul or in the congregation present, have made them believe that the apostle's falling on him and embracing him restored him to life? Or could the young man who was restored have contributed anything to it himself through any power of his own imagination? When, on the island of Malta, where St. Paul had been shipwrecked, a viper fastened itself on his hand, which he simply shook off and suffered no harm (Acts 28:3-5), was that an effect of enthusiasm? An enthusiast might perhaps have been mad enough to hope for safety from a viper's bite without any remedy being applied — but would that hope have kept him from dying? Or were the native islanders, to whom this apostle was a complete stranger, somehow prepared by enthusiasm to expect and believe that a miracle would be worked to save him? On the contrary — when they saw the viper hanging from his hand, they said among themselves, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live" (Acts 28:4). I will add no further examples. These are enough to show that the miracles attributed to St. Paul can no more be explained by enthusiasm than by imposture.

But beyond this, the power of working miracles was not confined to St. Paul himself; it was also given to the churches he planted throughout the world. In many parts of his first letter he tells the Corinthians that they had among them many miraculous graces and gifts (1 Corinthians 12), and he gives them instructions for using these gifts in a more orderly way in their assemblies. Now I ask: is everything he says on this subject to be put down to enthusiasm? If the Corinthians knew that no such miraculous powers existed among them, they would have had to regard the author of this letter as a man out of his senses rather than revere him as an apostle of God.

Suppose, for instance, that a Quaker, at a meeting of his own sect, told everyone assembled that some among them had been given the gift of healing by the Spirit of God, others the power to work other miracles, others various kinds of tongues. They would surely take him for a madman, because they claim no such gifts. If, instead, he had merely told them that they were inspired by the Spirit of God in some indescribable way that only they

themselves could perceive, and which showed itself through no outward, distinct actions or signs, they might mistake the stirring of enthusiasm for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But they could not, against the plain conviction of their own minds, believe that they were speaking languages they were not actually speaking, or healing diseases they had not healed, or working other miracles when they had worked none at all. If someone objects that the Corinthians might have made such claims even though the Quakers do not, I ask: in making that claim, were they impostors, or merely enthusiasts? If they were impostors, and St. Paul was one too, how absurd it would be for him, in a letter written only to them and for their own use, to advise them not to value themselves too highly on account of those gifts, to pray for whichever gift was lacking, and to rank charity above them all! Do partners in fraud talk to one another that way? But if instead we suppose that their claim to all these gifts was a product of enthusiasm, let us consider how it was even possible for Paul and the Corinthians alike to be so deceived by that enthusiasm as to imagine they possessed powers they did not actually have.

Suppose enthusiasm could make a man believe he was able, by a word or a touch, to give sight to the blind, movement to the lame, or life to the dead. Would that belief, by itself, actually make the blind see, the lame walk, or the dead rise? And if it did not, how could he go on holding such a belief without being shut up as a madman for persisting in it? Yet such madness could not possibly have infected so many people at once as St. Paul says were endowed at Corinth with the gift of healing or with other miraculous powers. One of the miracles they claimed was the ability to speak languages they had never learned, and St. Paul says he possessed this gift more than all of them (1 Corinthians 14:18). If this had been nothing but a trick of fancy — if they had spoken only gibberish or meaningless sounds — this would soon have become obvious the moment they tried to use it where it actually mattered: namely, in converting people who did not understand any language they themselves naturally spoke. St. Paul in particular, who traveled so far on that very mission and had such frequent occasion to use this gift, would quickly have discovered that this supposed gift of the Spirit was no gift at all but a ridiculous bout of frenzy that had taken hold of both him and them. But if the people he addressed in various tongues actually understood what he said, and were converted to Christ as a result, how could this possibly be a delusion? Of all the miracles recorded in Scripture, none is more clearly free from any possible charge of being the product of an enthusiastic imagination than this one. For how could any man believe he had this gift if he did not — or, if he mistakenly believed he had it, fail to be undeceived the moment he put it to the test? And indeed, I find that no enthusiast, ancient or modern, has ever claimed such a power.

If, then, St. Paul and the church at Corinth were not mistaken in attributing this miraculous power to themselves, but genuinely possessed it, there is every reason to believe they were likewise not mistaken about the other powers they claimed, since the same Spirit who gave them that gift

could — and most likely would — give them the others as well, for the same holy purposes the first gift served. And it follows that St. Paul was no enthusiast in what he wrote to the Corinthians on this subject, nor in the other similar instances where he attributes supernatural graces and gifts to himself or to the churches he founded. Indeed, anyone who would attribute to mere imagination the kinds of effects St. Paul attributes to the power of God accompanying his mission must be crediting imagination with the very omnipotence Paul attributes to God.

Having, I hope, shown convincingly that St. Paul could not have been an enthusiast who deceived himself through the force of an overheated imagination, I will now ask whether he was deceived by the fraud of others, and whether everything he said about himself can be attributed to the power of such a deception. But little needs to be said to show how absurd this supposition is. It was morally impossible for the disciples of Christ even to conceive the idea of turning their persecutor into Christ's apostle — let alone to carry this out by fraud at the very moment of his fiercest fury against them and against their Lord. But even if we grant that they could have been reckless enough to conceive such a plan, it was physically impossible for them to carry it out in the way we find his conversion actually to have happened. Could they produce a light in the sky brighter at midday than the sun itself? Could they make Saul hear words coming from that light (Acts 22:9) that no one else in the group heard? Could they strike him blind for three days after that vision, and then make scales fall from his eyes and restore his sight with a word? Beyond question, no fraud could accomplish these things. Still less could the fraud of others have produced the miracles that followed his conversion, in which he was not merely a passive recipient but an active agent — miracles he himself performed, and which he appeals to in his letters as proofs of his divine commission. I will therefore take it as settled that he was not deceived by the fraud of others, and that what he said about himself cannot be attributed to the power of such deceit, any more than to deliberate imposture or to enthusiasm. It follows, then, that everything he reported as the cause of his conversion, and as happening afterward as a consequence of it, really did happen — and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation.

I think it must be granted that this conclusion follows fairly and undeniably from the premises, unless some probable alternative cause can be found to account for these facts — facts so authentically recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and attested to in his own letters by St. Paul himself — some cause other than any I have already considered. And I am confident that no such cause can be found. It must, therefore, be accounted for by the power of God. That God should work miracles to establish a most holy religion, which, given the insurmountable obstacles standing in its way, could not have established itself without such help, is in no way contrary to human reason. But that such things should have happened without any miracle at all, with no

adequate natural cause that can be assigned for them, is something human reason cannot accept.

To attribute them to magic, or to the power of demons — which was the resort of the pagans and the Jews when faced with the undeniable miracles performed by Christ and his disciples — is in no way consistent with the outlook of those who, in our own age, disbelieve Christianity. It is therefore unnecessary to point out the weakness of that supposition. But the very fact that such a supposition was ever needed is itself no small argument for the truth of the facts in question. Next to the apostles and the evangelists, the strongest witnesses to the undeniable force of that truth are Celsus and Julian, along with other ancient opponents of the Christian religion, who were forced to explain away what they could not deny by resorting to such an irrational and absurd notion.

The dispute, then, was not between faith and reason, but between religion and superstition. Superstition attributed to cabalistic names or magical secrets those actions which plainly carried the marks of divine power; religion attributed them to God; and reason sided with religion. On what grounds, then, can we now overturn that verdict? On what grounds can we reject the unquestionable testimony St. Paul gives that he was called by God to be a disciple and an apostle of Christ? It has already been shown that we cannot attribute this to either enthusiasm or fraud — so how, then, shall we resist the force of such proof? Does the doctrine he preached contain any teaching contrary to the moral law, that natural law God has written in the hearts of mankind? If it did, I admit that none of the arguments I have offered could prove such a doctrine came from him. But this is so far from being the case that even those who reject Christianity as a divine revelation acknowledge that the morals taught by Christ and his apostles are worthy of God. Is it, then, because of the mysteries contained in the gospel that these facts are denied — facts which, in any other case, would be regarded as supported by evidence of the clearest and most convincing kind, and which cannot be rejected here without reducing the mind to total skepticism and overturning the very rules by which we judge all evidence and the truth or credibility of every other fact? But this amounts to abandoning the use of our understanding precisely where we are best equipped to use it, in order to apply it instead to matters it is not competent to judge. The motives and reasons behind divine wisdom's actions, as well as the manner in which it acts, must often lie beyond the reach of our understanding. But the motives and reasons behind human actions, and the manner in which they are carried out, lie entirely within the sphere of human knowledge, and on these we may judge with well-founded confidence, once they are fairly presented to our consideration.

It is far more probable that a revelation from God concerning the ways of his providence should contain matters beyond our minds' capacity to fully grasp, than that St. Paul — or indeed any of the other apostles — acted, as we

know they did, on any foundation other than certain knowledge that Christ had risen from the dead, or that they succeeded in the work they undertook without the aid of miraculous powers. To the first of these propositions I can give my assent without setting reason directly against faith. But to accept the second, I would have to believe against all the probabilities that form the rational grounds of belief.

Nor do those who reject the Christian religion because of difficulties in its mysteries consider how far that same objection would apply to other systems of religion and philosophy that they themselves accept. Even deism, the simplest of all religious views, contains several difficulties that human reason can scarcely resolve, and which might therefore not improperly be called articles of faith. One such is the origin of evil under the rule of an all-good and all-powerful God — a question so difficult that the inability to answer it satisfactorily has driven some of the greatest philosophers into the monstrous and senseless views of Manichaeism and atheism. Another is reconciling God's foreknowledge with human free will, which, after much thought on the subject, Mr. Locke honestly confessed he could not do, even though he believed in both (see Locke's letter to Mr. Molyneux, vol. 3, p. 509). And what Mr. Locke could not accomplish in reasoning about matters of this metaphysical kind, I suspect few people, if any, can hope to achieve.

So too is the question of the creation of the world at some particular time, as opposed to its eternal production from God — a question nearly as hard either way on purely philosophical grounds. On the one hand, it is difficult to accept that the goodness of God could have remained unexercised through an entire eternity before the time of such a creation, however far back we set that time. On the other hand, it is difficult to conceive of an "eternal production," since those words, used together this way, are self-contradictory terms. The usual solution — comparing it to the way light streams from the sun — does not really fit, for light is a quality inherent in fire and naturally flows from it, whereas matter is not a quality inherent in, or flowing from, the divine essence, but is a wholly different substance and nature. If matter is not independent and self-existing, it must have been created by a sheer act of God's will — and if created, then it is not eternal, since the very idea of creation implies a time when the thing created did not yet exist. But if, to escape this difficulty, we resort, as many ancient philosophers did, to the idea that matter exists independently of God, then we are forced to admit two self-existing first principles, which is wholly inconsistent with genuine theism, or with natural reason. And even if that were granted, it still would not resolve the problem, unless we also suppose not only that matter existed eternally, independent of God, but that it had existed from eternity in the very order and beauty we see it in now, without any action by divine power at all — for otherwise the same difficulty returns: why was it not arranged in that order and perfected state before now, and how could God's goodness have remained inactive, unexercised and unused, for so long? However far back we push the moment of such activity — even if, instead of five or six thousand

years, we suppose millions upon millions of ages have passed since the world (and by "the world" I do not mean this earth alone, but the whole material universe with all its inhabitants — even created spirits fall under the same reasoning, for they too must have had a beginning, and before that beginning an eternity must have preceded) was brought out of chaos into its present harmonious and orderly form — still, a whole eternity must have come before that moment, during which the divine attributes did not exercise themselves in that beneficent work so fitting to them, a delay for which human reason's speculations can find no cause at all.

But because of these difficulties — or any others that may arise within the system of deism — no wise person will deny the existence of God, or his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, which are proven by evidence carrying the clearest and strongest conviction, and which cannot be denied without plunging the mind into far greater difficulties, even outright absurdities and impossibilities. The only course left to us, then, 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 in the certainty that our own imperfect knowledge and judgment cannot be the measure of divine wisdom, nor the universal standard of truth. The very same holds true of the Christian religion. Certain difficulties do arise in that revelation which human reason can hardly resolve. But since the truth of the Christian religion rests on evidence so strong and convincing that it cannot be denied without facing far greater difficulties than those involved in believing it — as I have already tried to show — we ought not to reject it on account of such objections, however much they may wound our pride. To want everything made perfectly plain to us would indeed satisfy our pride, but God has chosen instead to measure our knowledge against our needs, not our pride. Everything that concerns our duty is made clear, and as for other matters, whether of natural or revealed religion, if he has left some things obscure, is that any reasonable cause for complaint? To refuse to rejoice in what he has graciously allowed us to know, out of a presumptuous resentment at not being allowed to know more, is as absurd as refusing to walk simply because we cannot fly.

From the arrogant ignorance of metaphysical speculation, reaching after matters beyond our knowledge, arose all the speculative impiety, and many of the worst superstitions, of the old pagan world, before the gospel was preached to bring mankind back to the original faith. And from that same source have since flowed some of the greatest corruptions of gospel truth, along with the most stubborn prejudices against it — an effect just as natural as our eyes growing weak, even blind, from straining to look at objects too distant, or never meant for them to see.

Are our intellectual faculties, then, of no use in religion? Yes, certainly — of the most necessary use, when rightly employed. Their proper task is to distinguish religion's genuine teachings from those wrongly or corruptly attributed to it; to weigh the importance and meaning of these teachings and

how they connect with one another; but above all, to examine with the strictest care the evidence on which religion rests, both internal and external. If the external evidence is convincingly strong, and there is no internal evidence of falsehood but much to support and confirm its truth, then surely no difficulties should keep us from giving it our full assent and belief. It is indeed our duty to try to find the best solutions we can to such difficulties; but where no satisfactory solution can be found, it is no less our duty to submit humbly, and to believe that what lies beyond us, belonging to a wisdom higher than our own, is nonetheless right.

Nor let it be said that this reasoning would justify accepting any doctrine, however absurd, that has ever been grafted onto the Christian faith. Doctrines that can plainly be shown not to belong to it — and certainly none belong to it that contradict either our clear, intuitive knowledge or the plain principles and dictates of reason — fall outside the reasoning I have laid down here. I am speaking only of the difficulties that attend belief in certain pure and essential doctrines of the gospel, doctrines plainly and clearly set forth there. Since these doctrines are made known to us through a revelation supported by evidence our reason ought to accept, and since they are not things reason can be certain are false, they must be received by reason as objects of faith — even though reason could never have discovered them by any natural means, and even though they are difficult to conceive of or to explain fully within reason's limited powers. If the glorious light of the gospel is sometimes clouded over with doubt, so too is the light of our own reason. But shall we deprive ourselves of the benefit of either, simply because those clouds cannot, perhaps, be entirely cleared away while we remain in this mortal life? Shall we stubbornly and willfully shut our eyes against that dawn from on high which has visited us, merely because we are not yet able to bear the full brightness of its rays? Indeed, not even in heaven itself — not even in the highest state of perfection a finite being can ever attain — will all the counsels of providence, all the height and depth of God's infinite wisdom, ever be fully disclosed or understood. Even there, faith will still be necessary, and there will be mysteries that not even the most exalted archangel can penetrate, and truths that even he can know only by revelation, and can believe only on the same ground as any other ground of assent — a submissive confidence in divine wisdom. What, then, shall mere man presume that his weak and limited understanding is enough to guide him into all truth, with no need of revelation or faith at all? Shall he complain that the ways of God are not like his own ways, and are past his finding out? True philosophy, no less than true Christianity, would teach us a wiser and more modest part. It would teach us 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" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

FINIS.