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COMMON SENSE;

OR,

THE PLAIN MAN'S ANSWER TO THE QUESTION,

WHETHER

CHRISTIANITY

Be a Religion worthy of our Choice in this

AGE of REASON?

IN

TWO LETTERS TO A DEISTICAL FRIEND.

BY PHILALETES.

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

COMMON Sense is no Friend to *Atheism*, and therefore the *plain Man* has nothing to say to the abettor's of that species of *Infidelity*, but that he pities them; and wishes them *clearer heads* and *better hearts*; taking it for granted, that his other Readers, in general, will admit of the following preliminary Truths, viz.

I. That there is one living and true God, the *moral* as well as the *natural* Governor of the World, and particularly of Mankind.

II. That by the Constitution of this Government, *Virtue* is made necessary to *Happiness*.

III. That *Religion* is indispensibly necessary to *Virtue* and *Happiness*. By Religion, I mean such a realizing idea and belief of God, as unites the affections of our Hearts to him as the supreme good, and disposes us to reverence, worship, trust, and obey him.

IV. That as Religion is of universal concernment, all its main, leading, essential principles, should be adapted to the capacities of the *lowest* of the people.

V. That Mankind are not *so* religious and virtuous as they should be, and consequently not *so* happy as they *might* be.

VI. That in order to render *Religion* the effectual means of restoring Mankind to *Virtue* and *Happiness*, it must be accompanied with a divine supernatural power, exercised in a manner suited to the rational nature and moral liberty of the human mind; that is, by *Conviction*, not blind *Compulsion*. There is certainly nothing absurd in this idea; for if we ourselves can influence one another's minds in this manner, by suggesting particular thoughts, reasons, and motives for determining our conduct, even contrary to our first purpose; why may not the Father of our Spirits be supposed to possess such a power, and exercise it *when* and *how* he sees it fit and necessary?

And I would here add,

I. That a Religion suited to the present *moral condition* of Man, could not possibly be the product of his own weak reason, instructed by the book of nature only; but of a Being of infinite wisdom, perfectly acquainted with the case in every circumstance, and who knew how to adapt it to it so as effectually to answer the end; i. e. it must be matter of *Divine Revelation*. Thus,

II. By *Christianity* I mean a Revelation from God of the Doctrine of Man's *Salvation*, or deliverance from *Vice* and *Misery* to *Virtue* and *Happiness*, begun in this World, and perfected in the next, by the gracious power of God, through the mediation of JESUS CHRIST.

III. By *Deism* I mean the opinion, that this deliverance may be effected by our own Reason, and the belief of a God, and a future State of Rewards and Punishments.

COMMON SENSE, &c.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

YOU will, I am persuaded, agree with me, that there *must* be *some* Religion in our World. It is an idea connatural to the human mind, and confirmed by the sentiments and practice of mankind in general. The question with *us*, in this *Age of Reason*, is, whether *Deism*, or *Christianity*, should be ours?

Here much has been said by the learned on both sides; but I, a *man of plain common sense*, desirous of knowing and embracing the TRUTH, naturally look for such evidences to determine my choice, as are suited to my capacity and powers of comprehension. Such, for instance, as the *consonancy* of the principles of the proposed Religion, to the moral feelings, wants, hopes, fears, desires of the human mind;—its *fitness* to answer all the great ends of Religion; and that upon trial it has actually answered them in undeniable instances. And I think I find all these particulars in *Christianity*, but not in *Deism*.

Were you, therefore, to ask me, how, in this enlightened age, I could be so weak as to believe the *Christian* Religion to be a Revelation from the GOD of TRUTH? I would answer; — because I find it a Religion every way adapted to my nature and condition.—I perceive that I am a rational being, possessed of the powers of thinking, reflecting, judging, &c. and particularly of a *moral sense*, or capacity of perceiving the difference between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, and of feeling a peculiar pleasure in the one, and pain in the other. I am persuaded also, that the one living and true GOD, who rules over all, is infinitely wise, powerful, just, and good; and administers the whole of his Government, *natural* and *moral*, in perfect consistency with those perfections; and that he has given to me, as a subject of his moral Government, certain laws, or rules of duty, (and indeed, written the general outlines of them on my heart) sanctioned by the idea of my existence in a future State or World; and that as my Judge, he will appoint me there a portion of happiness or misery, according to my obedience or disobedience to his laws, during my continuance here. The sum of these laws is, — That I should reverence, love, trust, worship this GOD with all the powers of my nature, love my neighbour (i. e. all mankind) as myself, and keep all the powers and propensities of body and mind in an entire subjection to all the known will of GOD; and this perfectly, all the days of my life. This is the

sum and substance of what I call *Religion and Virtue*, both which I consider as necessary to my *happiness*. And where is the Man (the absolute Atheist excepted) who will not assent to all this ?

But, when I come to consider, and compare my temper of mind, and conduct in life, with this divine law, or what I *actually have* done, with what I *ought* to have done, I find I have fallen very short of my duty in many instances, and am indeed a *Sinner*; with much darkness in my understanding, perverseness in my will, great irregularities in my appetites and passions, which often lead me wrong, and bring a sense of guilt or painful remorse upon my conscience; for though I have escaped the grosser vices, I find I have not loved my God so ardently and constantly, nor my neighbour so nearly as myself as I ought to have done; and indeed fallen far short of my duty in many respects, and therefore cannot think of appearing before the Tribunal of the Judge Eternal, and my future state of existence, without distressing fears.

In this situation of mind (which is all perfectly consonant to the intellectual and moral powers my Maker has given me) I look into the system of what is called *Natural Religion* or *Deistical Philosophy*; but can find nothing there that reaches my case, or can give ease to my conscience, as a transgressor of the law of God, and exposed to the awful penalties with which it is sanctioned. I do, indeed, learn

from thence, and from what I enjoy and perceive in the world about me, that God must be good, bountiful, merciful; but I also learn, that he is most holy, powerful, just, and highly offended by my disobedience; and though I may in some degree repent, and be sorry for it, and resolve to do better for the future, I can find nothing there to *assure* me that my repentance will be accepted, my past offences forgiven me, or strength granted me to do better for time to come; or, in other words, that the *Divine Mercy* could be so far extended to me, as to remit the punishment due to me, and make me happy for ever, consistently with the regard due to the awfully sacred rights of the *Divine Justice*, and the great ends of the moral Government of God;—or, in a word, *tell me what I must do to be saved*. No, all there appears involved in the most distressing darkness; at the best I can perceive only the faint shadow of a mere *maybe*, on which to rest my trembling hope.

With the deep concern of one anxious for the security of his dearest interests, I turn to the book called the BIBLE; and there, though I meet with the most striking displays of all the adoreable perfections and Majesty of God, of his spotless purity and abhorrence of all sin, and of the tremendous power and resolution of his justice to punish the guilty, and consequently much to alarm my fears of inevitable ruin;—yet there I also find, on the other

hand, such strong and express assurances of his gracious goodness and tender mercies, his readiness to pardon every humble Penitent, and to bestow upon him the Grace necessary to Repentance, as at once not only silences my fears, but inspire me with the most lively hope of an interest in his favour, that *loving-kindness which is better than life*. For there I read that **GOD** so loved the world, of sinful men, as to send his dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ into it, to be a propitiation for its sin; declaring that whosoever penitently believes in him, should not perish but have everlasting life; — be delivered not only from the guilt and punishment of his sins, but from their power also; be restored to the moral likeness of **GOD**, and the enjoyment of his paternal love; or, in a word, find it true, that, as the Apostle expresses it, **JESUS CHRIST** is made of **GOD** unto me *Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption*; just such a Saviour as I feel I want, and can find no where else but in the Christian's Gospel.

The Infidel will tell me very probably, “ That he has none of these feelings, and that they are all the effect of a vain deluded imagination.” I answer; — If man be really the subject of **GOD**'s moral government, and there be any difference between virtue and vice, and their consequences, as most certainly there is, then such ideas and apprehensions of things as above hinted, must be just, rational, real, and every way connatural to the human mind in its

present state. It is true they may, through the prevalence of false principles, or vicious indulgencies, be stupified, and seemingly lost for a time, in some individuals, but they cannot be totally destroyed.

And as I find the *Christian Doctrine*, taken as it lies in the BIBLE, not only perfectly consonant to my *moral sense*, or the law written in my Heart, but also that it pours a far more clear and abundant light upon all its leading principles; enlarges my views of duty, and of the evil of sin and its consequences, from the justice of God; of the greatness of his mercy and the all-sufficiency of his grace for my deliverance. Hence I am fully persuaded of its Divinity and Truth, and receive it accordingly with joy and gladness, as *a word worthy of all acceptation*.

Should you object “That all I have said depends upon the *reality* of certain facts mentioned in the Gospel History, particularly the *Resurrection* of Christ from the dead, his *Ascension* into Heaven, and his possessing the power of universal Sovereignty; *facts* which no sensible man in *this Age of Reason* believes:”

To this I answer—That these facts, and indeed all that is said in the Gospel, respecting the birth, life, doctrine, miracles of CHRIST, and his Apostles, depend entirely on that of his *Resurrection*. If that be *really true*, all the rest must be so, if not, then, indeed, as our Apostle

confesses, *our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins.* But the *reality* of this important event will appear beyond all reasonable doubt, when we impartially consider the circumstances attending it, and the number and character of the witnesses attesting it.

That JESUS CHRIST did really die, and that his corps was deposited in a sepulchre is not disputed. That the sepulchre was closed by a stone of great weight; and, to prevent all possibility of collusion, or a pretended Resurrection by his Disciples stealing the body, this stone was sealed with the seal of government, and a guard of soldiers ordered to attend there, for the still more effectual security against any such imposition;—all this is also highly-probable considering the temper of the Jews and the apprehensions they were under from the prediction of CHRIST. But, notwithstanding this care and precaution, the body was actually missing early the third day, according to that prediction. The question is, was it taken away by the Disciples, they affirming it to be alive, though still dead; or, was it *really* raised again to life by the almighty power of GOD? The former could not possibly be the case, the Disciples were then under too great a consternation to think of forming so deep a plot as that of a pretended Resurrection, and build upon it such a comprehensive and sublime system of doctrine, as what they taught. They had themselves no expectation of such an event, and would not

believe it; when informed of it, 'till they were compelled by the evidence of their own senses. And had they entertained the wild design of stealing the body from the sepulchre, how could they possibly have carried it into execution, under such circumstances as those above hinted? The story of their having stolen it, while the guards slept, confutes its self, and shews to what miserable shifts the Jewish Rulers were driven. And then the witnesses of the *fact* of a real Resurrection, were no less than five hundred who had conversed with Jesus before his death, and who all appear to be plain honest artless people, every way incapable of laying the plan of such a design, as imposing on the world the belief of a pretended Resurrection required.— Nor is at all likely that such a number of persons of different dispositions, circumstances, connections, and views of life, should unite with such inflexible perseverance as they did, to carry into execution so wild a project; and this not only without the least prospect of any kind of advantage to themselves, but at the hazard, every moment, of being detected, and, detected or not, exposing themselves unavoidably, not only to the scorn and contempt, but to all the miseries that the rage and malice of their enemies could devise against them, and this without the least probability of success; as they must have to contend with the inveterate prejudices of *Jewish* bigotry, and Gentile superstition, supported by all the wisdom, learning, and power of this world united to oppose them.

If all this be fairly, and without prejudice considered, the evidence in favour of a *real Resurrection* must appear with the utmost clearness, and put the matter beyond all rational doubt.

And whoever believes the *reality* of the *Resurrection* of CHRIST, will find no difficulty in believing his *Ascension* into Heaven, and his being possessed of the *power of universal Sovereignty*. Especially when he considers that all this is still farther confirmed by the events that followed; particularly on the Day of Pentecost, when a number of mean illiterate men appeared to be endued, instantaneously, with the ability of discoursing in various languages to which before they were utter strangers; and, at the same time, declaring, that this amazing power was bestowed on them by God, in consequence of the *Resurrection* and *Ascension* of CHRIST, and his possessing the Sovereignty of the World, and, therefore, a clear evidence of the reality of those *facts*, and of the truth and divinity of the doctrine built upon them, which they preached; for if CHRIST had not been raised from the dead, and possessed such extraordinary power, these consequences could not possible have taken place.

And as a still farther confirmation of these *facts*, I may add the extraordinary conversion of that pharisaical persecuting bigot, *Saul of Tarsus* (afterwards called Paul) to the christian faith; an event so surprisngly out of the usual course of things, could never have taken place, in the

manner it did, had CHRIST remained in the state of the dead, and not in *reality* possessed those powers the Apostles ascribed to him.

This great event the late Lord *Lyttleton* has finely illustrated, as a most striking evidence of the divine original of the *Christian Religion*, in a small tract, which one would think it was impossible for any Infidel, who was a friend to virtue, to read with any degree of honest intention without becoming a Christian.

Should you object, “That what I have al-
 “ ledged in favour of the Resurrection of
 “ CHRIST, is, at best, but the tale of the
 “ parties concerned, and therefore unworthy
 “ of credit,” I would answer;—The *reality*
 of this event may be demonstrated from circum-
 stances independent of those detailed in the
 Gospel History of it;—for it is observable, that
 soon after the death of CHRIST, we find a few
 poor illiterate men, of the meanest natural abili-
 ties, constantly asserting, in the very face of the
 great people concerned in his crucifixion, that
 he was *alive*, invested with Sovereign power,
 and the Saviour of men, and other particular
 doctrines grounded upon these, all diametri-
 cally opposite to the ruling passions, taste, pur-
 suits, and religious prejudices of Jews and
 Gentiles, who, therefore, united all their wis-
 dom, power, and indignation against them;
 and yet, notwithstanding all this, the belief
 both of the *fact*, and the doctrine built upon
 it, spread far and wide with the most amazing

rapidity, and triumphed over its most strenuous opposers. Could this possibly have been the case, had not both the *fact* and the *doctrine* grounded upon it, been from GOD, attended with his gracious power and blessing ?

As to the arguments derivable from the accomplishment of prophecy, the number and splendour of the miracles wrought by JESUS CHRIST, and his first followers, which have been so forcibly and repeatedly urged, by the friends of Christianity in its favour (and which afford still more abundant evidence of its truth) they have never been refuted, or indeed can be, and need not be introduced *here*, where the appeal is made to *common sense*. I would, however, beg leave to enlarge a little farther on this *internal* evidence, the *fitness* of the Christian doctrine to produce all the beneficial effects intended by Religion. But this in my next.

In the mean time I am, dear Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

IF, my dear Sir, we take a survey of things, as they appear in the general history of our world, we must see, that it has been, from the earliest ages of its existence to this day, one continued scene of impiety, vice, and misery; mankind rebelling against their Maker, setting his justice at defiance, and despising his mercy; hating, deceiving, and destroying one another, and often drenching the earth with human blood to gratify the pride and ambition of oppressive tyrants, or their own insatiable thirst after riches. The divine goodness interposed at first by means of what is called *natural Religion**, or *Deism*; this soon lost its influence,

* I say, called so, because it is beyond the power of *common sense*, to conceive it possible, that so weak, dark, and depraved a creature as *man* appears to be, should be capable of forming a system of religion suited to his condition, and that should effectually restore him to the likeness and favour of *God*. So we Christians, however, conclude from the biblical account of the matter; particular from the first hint of a Saviour, Gen. iii. 15. The institution of sacrifices; the separation of *Abraham*, from the idolatrous world; the peculiar instructions *God* gave to him, and his posterity, especially by the hand of *Moses*; all which was in reality nothing less than *Christianity* in its first openings, under various types and shadows of good things to come, 'till *CHRIST* the *Sun of Righteousness* should arise. See *Ja^o*. viii. 56. *Gal.* iii. 8.

and the grossest idolatry and wickedness, with their attendant miseries, every where prevailed, and provoked the Almighty to give up the gross abusers of his goodness to blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, with their concomitant evils, as a punishment justly due to such enormous guilt. But still delighting in mercy, he was pleased afterwards to select *Abraham* and his seed by *Isaac*, and favour them with farther discoveries of his adorable perfections, and moral government; giving them many peculiar laws and institutions of Religion, eminently calculated to impress upon their minds the idea of *one only living and true God*, the Maker and Sovereign of the world; secure them from the reigning sin of idolatry, and its attendant vices, and lead them into the practice of genuine piety and virtue. This measure had a more extensive and happy effect than the former; yet sin and misery still abounded, and the greatest part, even of this favoured people, paid little regard to their God, who had done such wonders for them, but gave themselves up to idolatry and wickedness, to a most shameful degree, and were, therefore, visited with many dreadful judgments from time to time. Last of all God sent his beloved SON JESUS CHRIST, with the highest reason for saying — *they will reverence my SON*; one who appeared in a character so infinitely superior to even the greatest of their prophets; whose whole life amongst them was that of the most exemplary piety, benevolence,

self-denial, humility, patience, and every virtue; always going about doing good, teaching the most gracious doctrines, and the purest morals in the most engaging manner, to the astonishment of the multitudes who heard him;—but instead of reverencing this SON, or paying any serious regard to the glad tidings of Salvation which he brought them, and reforming their vicious conduct, they treat him with the utmost contempt and cruelty, and at last put him to death by crucifixion, calling for his blood upon them and their children*.

The Disciples of CHRIST by mistaking the nature and design of his appearance in our world, had no expectation of this awful event, and therefore were at the first alarmed and confounded; but being soon afterwards persuaded of his real *Resurrection* and *Ascension* into Heaven, receiving farther light into his doctrine, and a greater measure of his spirit, they recovered their confidence in him; and with the greatest intrepidity, in the face of the

* And, indeed, this horrid imprecation soon afterwards took place, agreeable to the prediction of CHRIST. Jerusalem was desolated, their Temple, with its sacrificial worship, and their civil polity, utterly destroyed, by the Romans. Many hundred thousands of the people perished, and those that survived were scattered abroad through almost all nations, and exposed to a variety of miseries; though still distinguished by their peculiar character as the seed of *Abraham*, apparently reserved, by the Divine Providence, for some extraordinary purposes; and in the mean time are living, though awful, witnesses of the Truth of *Christianity*.

most dreadful dangers, from the malice and cruelty of their enemies, published his doctrine with the most astonishing success; the hypocritical *Jezeu* became a worshipper of God in *Spirit and Truth*; and the superstitious *Gentile* turned from his dumb idols to adore and serve him, all forsaking their vicious course of life; and practising all the virtues that adorn human nature, in a degree of perfection never before known.

This I take to be (in every material circumstance at least) a just statement of *facts*; from all which it is plain, that what is called *Natural Religion*, (or rather the Christianity of the patriarchal age) did something for a little while towards meliorating the condition of mankind; that of the Israelites much more; but *Christianity*, in its present form, infinitely more still; having been the happy instrument of converting myriads, from the lowest deeps of the grossest profaneness and vice, to the most exalted degrees of piety and virtue. A clear proof that it could not be the invention of any Man, or set of Men, however artful and designing, much less of such simple illiterate Men as the first propagators of its doctrines appear to be; but a wise and gracious Revelation from God, intended for the happiness of a sinful world, and accordingly accompanied with his power and blessing. In short, it appears with the fullest evidence of truth, that all the piety, virtue, and happiness,

that has ever existed in our world, is owing to Divine Revelation, or the doctrine that holds forth the mercy of GOD to *Man*, through the mediation of JESUS CHRIST.

It is true, profaneness, vice, and misery still exist, and shockingly abound in every part of the earthly globe, which naturally leads every friend to the human race to wish for better times. The question before us is, whether *Christianity* or *Deism* is most likely to produce this desirable change?

To answer this question properly, we must lay aside our prejudices, and fairly consider what has been before hinted, as to the superior *fitness* of the *Christian Doctrine* for effecting this important purpose, and the infinitely more numerous instances in which it has actually done it, and the decision must be in its favour.— Where you can shew me one instance of any thing like a *real* conversion from profaneness and vice, to piety and virtue, by *your* system, I can shew you thousands brought from the lowest deeps of the one, to the highest attainments in the other, by the *Gospel* of CHRIST*, which shews it must be indeed what our Apostle calls it, *the power of GOD unto Salvation*. Were this Gospel received by mankind in its vital energy, and genuine purity, we should see a surprisngly

* And 'tis remarkable, that more has been done towards reforming the world, in a few months, by the preaching the Gospel, than by Philosophy in many ages.

new face of things in the moral world!—should hear no more of the pride and luxury, the tyranny and oppression of the rich; nor of the unavailing sighs, and groans, of the suffering industrious poor, or of the thefts and robberies of the idle and profligate; but, instead of this, of every man, from the prince on the throne, to the labourer in the field, filling up his place in society with propriety, and all uniting their respective endeavours to promote the happiness of the whole.

You will say, “Were *Deism* as universally received as the *Christian Doctrine*, it would have the same effect.” I say no: it never yet has, where received; nor *can* have, because its instructions at best are not so clear, nor its motives so animating;—its light is but as the faint dawn of the morning; that of *Christianity* as the sun risen in unclouded glory, *shining more and more unto the perfect day*; and what is still a stronger objection, ’tis not, *to us*, the *divinely appointed means*, and therefore not attended with that divine power and blessing necessary to render even the *Christian Doctrine*, under its present dispensation, effectual.

You will say—“There always have been and still are, great numbers of pious and virtuous Heathens, and multitudes of most shockingly impious and wicked professors of *Christianity*, who hate, persecute, oppress, and even destroy one another, and have done so for ages.” I grant it, but it is nothing to

your purposes, for as to these Christians, they are such in *name* only, not in *nature*. The true and real Disciples of CHRIST possess *his* benevolent spirit, and therefore, though they may differ in opinion, in many cases, and rank under party names and denominations, are known by their still loving one another, with Christian affection, and their disposition to do good to all mankind. This is their genuine characteristic by which they are distinguished from the rest of the world, as *the children of God*. And as to the piety and virtue of the Heathens, the instances are very few at most, and very imperfect at best; and even that owing to the same *Grace* of GOD through *Jesus Christ*, as ours, though his *name* was not known. And the impiety and wickedness, that still prevails so lamentably, in the Christian world, is not owing to the want of *fitness* in our religious system, but to mens willfully shutting their eyes against its light, and resisting its remonstrances, and those of their own consciences and *Common Sense*, which accompany them, and thereby provoking GOD in righteous judgment to withhold that gracious power and blessing, which is absolutely necessary to render any means effectual. But, however, the *truth* is *great*, and will prevail in the appointed time, when it will be accompanied with that power and blessing in a far more abundant degree than ever; when the *veil* shall be taken away from the heart of the blinded *Jew*, and CHRIST be indeed the *light of the Gentiles*; and genuine

piety, virtue, and happiness reign universally, in a fulness of glory never known before. Nothing then can be less to the purpose, than arguing against *Christianity* on this ground, for here it must and will triumph.

Our half-enlightened Philosophers and Hyper-Critics raise a great many objections against *Christianity* from the many supposed absurdities, contradictions, and unsurmountable difficulties, that attend it; upon which they are fond of declaiming, imagining they find there very convenient materials for the support of their plausible reasonings in favour of *Infidelity*.

But most of them arise from their ignorance of the languages in which our sacred books were originally written; or of the manners and customs of the times and countries in which the writers lived; and have all been so fully answered, by our learned advocates, that it is surprising they should be so repeatedly urged against us. However 'tis certain that none of them, in the least degree, affect the leading essential principles of the Christian Doctrine, and therefore are not worthy of the notice of *Common Sense*. As to the *scoffer*, who would laugh me out of my faith, it is enough to tell him,—That *ridicule* is not *argument*; and though it may serve to display the *brilliancy* of his wit, it is no evidence of the *depth* of his *wisdom*; often an enemy to virtue, and infinitely below the DIGNITY of TRUTH.

You will, perhaps, remind me,—“ That
 “ *Christianity*, no longer able to stand the test of
 “ *Reason*, aided by that more abundant light of
 “ *Philosophy*, which distinguishes the present day,
 “ is now fast declining, and *Infidelity* in all its
 “ forms, encreasing with the greatest rapidity.”

There is, I grant, great reason to believe that *Infidelity* increases, even in this country; but if we fairly examine into the reasons and causes of it, we shall find the result in favour of *Christianity*, by corroborating the evidences of its Divinity.

One of the principal causes of this boasted increase of *Infidelity* amongst the more rational and thinking few is—The *Pride of Reason*, or the unqualified confidence they have in its sufficiency. They forget they are but men; creatures whose reasoning powers are extremely limited, and fallible; weak and incapable of comprehending the *how* and the *why*, even in many of the most common operations of nature; much more, in those of the God of nature, carrying into execution the most extensive plans, laid in his eternal counsels; many of which must, necessarily, be often attended with a combination of circumstances, causes and effects, involved in darkness, utterly impenetrable by the feeble eye of man, and directed to ends infinitely beyond the reach of his powers of comprehension. Let them keep Reason in its proper place, within the bounds prescribed to it by *Common Sense*, and I am sure they will find

nothing in *real Christianity*, contrary to its sober dictates. But they are apt to think and reason too superficially about it, and decide too precipitately against it.

Another cause of this increase is, our Infidels are too ready to take up with false appearances, and look upon Christianity in that truly disgusting light, in which our half enlightened Philosophers, superstitious Priests, time-serving Politicians, and creed-making Bigots have set it. Could they be persuaded to strip it of these disguises, and contemplate it in its native simplicity and dignity, just as it came out of the hands of CHRIST and his Apostles, they would find all their objections entirely removed, be charmed with its beauty, and devote themselves to its interest. But the case is, they want a Religion suited to their *capricious fancy*, rather than to their *moral condition*; that would gratify the pride of their philosophy, rather than reduce it to the humiliating dictates of *Common Sense*. But certainly a system of Religion worthy of an infinitely wise and good God, must be suited to the capacities, conditions, and moral feelings of the *bulk of Mankind*; be *the Religion of Man, as Man*, or as he really is; the Religion of the *illiterate multitude*, as well as of the *learned sage*. And this is notoriously the case with respect to the Religion of CHRIST. For though there the rich, and the great, of the most enlarged and cultivated minds, may learn truths of infinite

dignity and importance to their happiness, and may therefore *sometimes* receive it; yet, as 'tis still *more peculiarly* adapted to the condition of the *poor illiterate many*, the mere babes in human knowledge, they more generally and readily embrace it. And no wonder; for they find its instructions suited to their capacities; its great and precious promises afford them the most effectual support and consolation, under the many great and distressing calamities to which they are more particularly exposed; so that they sometimes even *rejoice in their tribulation, through the love of God shed abroad in their hearts*; assuring them that their sufferings here tend to work for them a far more exceeding and *eternal weight of glory in the world to come*.

But the most general cause of this triumph of Infidelity, is the depravity of human nature; and particularly that ardent love of the false pleasures and fashionable vices of the world, which is now the *ruling passion* with the thoughtless and half-thinking many, especially with those of rank and fortune, and their humble imitators. Christianity, though it forbids us not *one rational* enjoyment, sets its face against every vicious indulgence; they therefore, at once, without a moment's hesitation, reject it, and embrace with the greatest ardour the system of *Infidelity*, because it pleases their false taste, and countenances them in the gratification of their vicious propensities. This, however, is no recommendation of their system;

but, on the contrary, affords every lover of virtue a very powerful motive for his embracing the *Christian Doctrine*.

Hence, therefore, though we lament the great progress of the Infidel cause, we have no reason to be ashamed of ours, or discouraged about it. *Infidelity*, after all, has no *real* foundation in *Common Sense*, and therefore, notwithstanding its present growth, and the most strenuous efforts of its friends to support it, its reign will be short, and those efforts serve, but as a foil, to set off the excellencies of Christianity to the more advantage, give a stronger lustre to the evidences of its Divinity, and the greater eclat to its triumphs at last, when CHRIST shall take his great power and reign, the light and life of Men, the SALVATION OF GOD to the ends of the earth; and Jew and Gentile unite in celebrating his praise.—That happy day is approaching. A voice from Heaven is heard, saying, *behold I come quickly!* AMEN! *even so come Lord JESUS!*

To sum up the whole,—you, my dear Sir, ask me why I am a *Christian*? my answer is, because I see myself a *Sinner*, exposed to the displeasure of my offended God; but find in the *Christian Doctrine* what is every way perfectly suited to my condition, moral feelings, wants, and desires. It pours a divine light upon my understanding, tends to purify my heart, spiritualize my affections, and preserve me from the evil influences of this world:—

informs me how I may find pardon and acceptance with GOD, be restored to his likeness in righteousness and true holiness, and enjoy his paternal love. It *brings life and immortality to light*, so as to illuminate the dark valley and shadow of death; and assures every humble penitent believer in it, of unutterable felicity and glory world without end.

This internal evidence I find much strengthened by what we call the *external*; — such as arises from the accomplishment of prophecy, miracles, and other extraordinary *facts* recorded in the BIBLE; for here also I clearly perceive the same traces of a divine interposition. These evidences, therefore, go hand in hand, mutually illustrating and improving each other, so that if one be true, the other must be so. And both united form a strength of evidence so powerful in favour of the Christian Doctrine, that *Common Sense*, under that divine influence that leads to, and always accompanies the proper use of it, cannot possibly resist, but feels itself compelled to embrace the TRUTH thus demonstrated, with the greatest ardour, and rejoice in it *with joy unspeakable and full of glory*. It is, however, by the *internal* evidence set home upon the heart with divine power, that the common people are generally led to embrace this doctrine. They find in JESUS CHRIST just such a Saviour as they want, and therefore welcome him to their hearts.

In fine, the more I read the Bible, and consider the genuine spirit and tendency of its doctrine, and the wonders it has done in promoting the interest and happiness of the human race, the more I am confirmed in the belief of its Divinity; especially when I think over the character of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, who is the life, and soul, and glory of it. Think upon the peculiar circumstances attending his appearance on earth, in our flesh;—his humiliation, self-denial; and contempt of the false glory of this world;—the fervor of his piety; the benevolence of his heart; the moral purity and vital power of his doctrine; the lustre of his example; the pains he took, and the many great and good things he did, towards promoting the happiness of all about him; the patience and fortitude with which he suffered; his praying for his murderers, amidst their cruel mockeries of his dying agonies on the cross; and all this for the salvation of sinful men!—When I contemplate this truly great and illustrious character, as it is delineated in the sacred writings, I am filled with wonder, love, and praise; persuaded that he must be indeed, the SON of GOD, *able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto GOD by him*, and feel my soul cleave to him.—In him I see the most astonishing object ever presented to the notice of the human mind,—*GOD reconciling the world to himself!* the most awful *justice*, tempered with the most tender *mercy*.—See that dear friend, *who loved me, and*

gave himself for me, redeeming me to GOD by his blood. Yes, it was the grace of GOD in him, that saved me from the dangerous fervours of my youthful passions; was my constant guide and support, through all the various duties and trials of advancing life; and is now, in the eighty-eighth year of my age, the source of all my strongest consolations. To think of him, and what he has done and suffered, and is still doing for me to bring me to GOD; of the assurances his faithful promises give me of *his* presence *with me* here, and when this mortal life is finished of my being *with him* where he is, to behold and enjoy his glory! This, this is, indeed, *beatitudo past utterance.*

You will be ready, perhaps, to say—“ This “ is all mere Delusion.” —SWEET DELUSION, that leads me to piety, virtue, and happiness! What can REALITY do more or better? In this Delusion I wish to live, and hope to die, and then find the fulness of its joys my portion through the endless ages of Eternity! And that you, my dear Sir, may be thus happy, is the fervent prayer of your sincere friend,

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PHILALETHERS.

P. S. If any doubts and difficulties arise in your mind, from what you have read on the Infidel side of the question, read what our learned advocates for Christianity have written, of which there are plenty, and particularly Bishop *Watson's* most excellent *Apology for the Bible*, in answer to *T. Paine's* Age of Reason.