

The Works
of
George Whitefield

Volume IV

Controversial Writings and Tracts

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THE
W O R K S

OF THE REVEREND

GEORGE WHITEFIELD, M. A.

Late of PEMBROKE-COLLEGE, OXFORD,
And Chaplain to The Rt. Hon. the Countess of HUNTINGDON.

CONTAINING

All his SERMONS and TRACTS
Which have been already published:

WITH

A SELECT COLLECTION of
LETTERS,

Written to his most intimate Friends, and Persons of Distinction, in
England, Scotland, Ireland, and America, from the Year 1734 to 1770,
including the whole Period of his Ministry.

ALSO

Some other PIECES on IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,
never before printed; prepared by Himself for the Press.

To which is prefixed,

An ACCOUNT of his LIFE,
Compiled from his Original PAPERS and LETTERS.

VOLUME IV.

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A N S W E R
TO THE
BISHOP of LONDON'S
LAST
PASTORAL LETTER.

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My Lord,

I need make no apology for troubling your Lordship with this. As your Lordship was pleased to make me the chief subject matter of your *last Pastoral Letter*, I think it my duty to answer in the best manner I can.

Your Lordship is highly to be commended, for the care you have taken in watching over the souls of those, who are committed to your Lordship's charge. Lukewarmness and enthusiasm, are the two rocks against which even well-meaning people are in danger of splitting. All ought to be thankful to that pilot, who will teach them to steer a safe and middle course. I would gladly hope, that "a zeal for GOD in the discharge of your duty, and a hearty concern for the safety of souls," moved your Lordship to write. These are the principles, I trust, which now excite me, to direct this answer to your Lordship. And, blessed be GOD, that I can write with, somewhat of that love and meekness, which becomes a disciple of JESUS CHRIST, and with all that humility and reverence, which is due from a presbyter to a bishop of the church of GOD.

Lukewarmness and enthusiasm, my Lord, are certainly the bane of true Christianity. I thank your Lordship again for your kind cautions against them. The only query is “Whether there was any occasion for your Lordship’s warning the people of your diocese, against running into either of these extremes, upon account of any thing, I have either spoken or written?” Your Lordship thinks there was, and quotes passages out of my Journal to prove it; if it can be proved, I will ask public pardon, both of your Lordship and them, with all my heart.

As for your Lordship’s cautions against *lukewarmness*, I am not much concerned in them. You do not seem to point at me in particular; unless it is, where your Lordship (page 10.) informs your people, “That a diligent attendance on the duties of the station wherein Providence has placed them, is, in the strictest sense, the serving of GOD.” None but those, who condemn me unheard, can justly charge me with affirming to the contrary.

However, I beg leave to observe, that your Lordship (p. 8.) calls that a very imperfect state of Christianity, which is *no state of Christianity* at all. St *Paul*, writing to the *Corinthians*, 2 *Corinthians* 13:5, says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” And that they might have a certain rule, whereby to judge whether they were in the faith, truly so called, or not; he immediately adds, “Know ye not your own selves, how that CHRIST JESUS is in you, except ye be reprobates?” So that, according to St *Paul*’s rule, “He that finds, he has hitherto contented himself with a bare bodily attendance upon the public worship of GOD, and with following his daily employment on other days, and with abstaining from the more gross and notorious acts of sin, and from doing any hurt or injury to his neighbour, and has rested finally upon these, as the whole of what Christianity requires of him;” is so far from being in a very imperfect state, as your Lordship is pleased to affirm, page 8. that he is in no state of Christianity at all. No, my Lord, he is a *reprobate*, or, one who at present is out of a state of salvation, nor can he ever have any assurance that he is in a state of salvation, till he knows that Jesus CHRIST is in him, by the

indwelling of his Holy Spirit. If I have mistaken your Lordship's expression, I will freely beg your Lordship's pardon.

Another thing, my Lord, to me seems darkly expressed, in page 18. (let not your Lordship be angry, for indeed I will endeavour to speak with all gentleness and humility): your Lordship's words are these: "Nor need they any other evidence besides those *good dispositions* they find in their hearts, that the Holy Spirit of GOD co-operates with their honest endeavours to subdue sin and grow in goodness." If by good dispositions, your Lordship only means *good inclinations* or desires, I deny that to be a sufficient evidence, that the Spirit of GOD co-operates with their honest endeavours to subdue and grow in goodness. For there is a great difference between good desires and good habits: many have one, who never attain the other. Many have good desires to subdue sin, and yet, resting in those good desires, sin has always had dominion over them. A person sick of a fever may desire to be in health, but that desire is not health itself. In like manner, many have good dispositions, or desires to be good, but that is not goodness itself. And consequently men need more evidence than good dispositions, to prove to themselves or others "that the Holy Spirit of GOD co-operates with their honest endeavours to subdue sin." If by good dispositions, your Lordship means good habits wrought in the heart by the Spirit of GOD, such as peace, love, joy, long-suffering, goodness, truth, &c. I then agree a man needs no other evidence: for these are the proper and genuine fruits of the Spirit itself.

Your Lordship immediately adds, "Nor that, persevering their course, and praying to GOD for his assurance, and relying upon the merits of CHRIST for the pardon of all such sins, failings, and imperfections, as are more or less unavoidable in this mortal state." I beg leave to ask your Lordship whether this does not favour too much of the common divinity, That we are to do something for ourselves: or, in other words, that we have partly a righteousness of our own, and that JESUS CHRIST is to make up the deficiencies of that righteousness? What else can your Lordship mean, by saying, That we must rely on the merits of CHRIST for the pardon of "all such sins as are more or less

unavoidable in this mortal state?" Did JESUS CHRIST come into the world, my Lord, only to save us from the guilt of such sins, as are more or less unavoidable in this mortal state? The Scriptures every where affirm, that man hath no righteousness of his own, "That there is none righteous, no not one;—that all our righteousness is as filthy rags;" and that Jesus Christ died, not only to save us from the guilt of all such sins, failings, and infirmities, as are more or less unavoidable in this mortal state, but from all wilful sins, and also from that original corruption, which every man naturally engendered of the offspring of *Adam*, brings into the world with him. I hope I have not misunderstood, or overstrained your Lordship's expression.

I come now to your Lordship's caution against *enthusiasm*. For that, I suppose, your Lordship intended more particularly against me.

And here, my Lord, I beg leave to observe, That, in my opinion, your Lordship has by no means been clear enough in your definition of the word *enthusiasm*.

According to the fair rules of writing, was it not first incumbent on your Lordship to show, that the word *enthusiasm* had a good as well as a bad meaning: that it signifies no more than *a person in God*, and consequently every Christian, in the proper sense of the word, is an enthusiast? For St *Peter* writes, "That to us are given exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature."

And our church says, "If we receive the sacrament worthily, we are one with CHRIST, and CHRIST with us: we dwell in CHRIST, and CHRIST in us." For which she hath sufficient warrant from our LORD'S prayer, *John* 17:20, &c "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, I in them, and they in me, that they may be made perfect in one: that the love wherewith thou hath loved me, may be in them, and I in them."

But indeed your Lordship's definition of *enthusiasm*, when examined, does not convey any ill idea at all. "Enthusiasm is a

strong persuasion on the mind, that they are guided in an extraordinary manner, by immediate impulses and impressions of the Spirit of GOD.” Had your Lordship said, a strong but *groundless persuasion*, that they are guided in an extraordinary manner, it would have been to your Lordship’s purpose. But to affirm, without any restriction, that a strong persuasion that we are guided in an extraordinary manner by immediate impulses, is enthusiasm in the worst sense of the word, when your Lordship yourself says, (p. 54.) “There is no doubt, but GOD, when he pleases, can work upon the minds of men by extraordinary influences,” to me seems a little inconsistent.

Your Lordship proceeds thus: “And this is owing chiefly to the want of distinguishing aright between the ordinary and extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit. The extraordinary operations were those, by which the apostles and others, who were entrusted with the first propagation of the gospel, were enabled to work miracles, and speak with tongues, in testimony, that their mission and doctrine were from GOD.”

I suppose, by extraordinary operations, your Lordship means the same as being guided in an extraordinary manner, just above. And if so, according to your Lordship’s own definition, I am no enthusiast. For I never did pretend to these extraordinary operations of working miracles, or speaking with tongues, in testimony that my mission and doctrine were from GOD; I only lay claim to the ordinary gifts and influences of the Spirit, which your Lordship (page 20.) says, “Still continue:” and what need was there then, my Lord, that the people of your Lordship’s diocese should be cautioned against enthusiasm upon my account?

But your Lordship farther adds, “The ordinary gifts, however real and certain in themselves, are no otherwise discernible, than by their fruits and effects.” Had your Lordship said, No otherwise discernible *to others*, than by their fruits and effects, it would have been right: but if your Lordship means, they are no otherwise discernible to ourselves, in my opinion, it is wrong; for it is possible, my Lord, for a person to feel and discern these

ordinary gifts and influences of the Spirit *in himself*, when there is no opportunity of discovering them to others.

For instance, on supposition that your Lordship was assisted by the blessed Spirit, in writing your pastoral letter; might not your Lordship be sensible of an inward joy and complacency, wrought by that self-same Spirit, which was not then discernible to others? So is it possible for another to feel joy in the Holy Ghost, with the rest of his fruits, which at that time may not be discernible to others; and which they, who have never experienced the like, may not believe, though a man declare it unto them. I hope, my Lord, these reasonings carry with them their own evidence.

But to proceed: (pages 21, 22, 23, 24, 25.) your Lordship has taken pains to collect several passages out of the public liturgy, to prove the doctrine of regeneration, or our new birth, to be the doctrine of the Church of *England*. Your reason for so doing, appears (page 25.) “to arm your people against any suggestions, as if our church were so regardless of the doctrine of regeneration and new birth, as if there were need for any member of it, to seek elsewhere for a more spiritual service.” If this, my Lord, was intended to arm your people against any such suggestions made by me; indeed your Lordship does not do me justice. As your Lordship, I find, has done me the honour to peruse my Third Journal, your Lordship may remember this observation, (page 39.) that after I had baptised an adult, I proved the necessity of the new birth, from the office of our church.

In my sermon, upon the *indwelling of the Spirit of GOD*, which I have made bold to send to your Lordship with this letter, you will find, I have quoted the expressions of our own church offices, to prove the doctrine of the new birth, as your Lordship does in your pastoral letter. My constant way of preaching is, first, to prove my propositions by Scripture and then to illustrate them by the articles and collects of the church of *England*, Those that have heard me, can witness, how often I have exhorted them to be constant at the public service of the church. I attend on it myself, and would read the public liturgy every day, if your

Lordship's clergy would give me leave. What further satisfaction can your Lordship require, that I do not suggest to your Lordship's people, "as if our church were regardless of the doctrine of regeneration, and new birth, and as if there were need for any member of it, to seek elsewhere for a more spiritual service."

In the following paragraph, your Lordship has the same insinuation, as though I wanted to introduce *extempore prayer*, and to lay aside the public liturgy of our church. For after your Lordship had been speaking against praying by the Spirit, and affirming that the Scripture nowhere tells us, that prayer is the single work of the Spirit, your Lordship says to your people, "you have great reason to be thankful to GOD, for a public service prepared to your hands." My Lord, I never said to the contrary. But does not your Lordship seem to insinuate at the same time, that we are not to depend on the Spirit of GOD, to enable us to pray extempore, either in public or private? That prayer is not the single work of the Spirit, without any co-operation of our own, I readily confess. But that the Spirit of GOD does assist true Christians to pray extempore, now, as well as formerly, is undeniable, if the Scriptures be true. For what says the Apostle? "We know not what to pray for, as we ought; but the Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." And this is founded upon a general promise, made to all GOD's people, *Zechariah* 12:10. "I will pour upon the house of *David*, and upon the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, the Spirit of grace, and of supplication." And I believe, my LORD, we may appeal to the experience of all true Christians, whether or no they did not find the Spirit of supplication, or a power of praying without a form, increase in proportion to the increase of GOD's Grace or Holy Spirit in their hearts. This is all, my LORD, that I pretend to: and where is the impropriety of this, when your Lordship confesses in the same page, that "the Spirit of GOD does particularly assist us, in a due performance of religious offices?"

Further, as your Lordship seems to deny the immediate assistance of the Holy Spirit, in our particular addresses at the throne of grace, so your Lordship seems to deny it also in our

particular actions. “In like manner, (you say) we are firmly persuaded in general, that we live under the gracious influence of GOD’s Holy Spirit, and that he both excites and enables us to do good. But that this or that thought or action is an effect of the sole motion, or immediate impulse of the Spirit, without any co-operation of our own mind “—[My Lord, who ever affirmed, that there was no co-operation of our own minds, together with the impulse of the spirit of GOD?] Your Lordship adds, “or that the Holy Spirit, and our natural conceptions, do respectively contribute to this or that thought or action, in such a measure, or to such a degree; these are things we dare not say.” Indeed, my Lord, I do dare to say them. For if there be any such thing as a particular providence, why may we not expect particular direction from GOD’s Holy Spirit in particular cases? Does not our church; my Lord, teach us to pray, “that GOD’s Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts?” But your Lordship says, we dare not say this, because our Saviour has told us, that we know no more of the working of the Spirit, than we know of the wind, from whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. Neither need we know any more of them: but you must allow, that we know as much. Cannot your Lordship feel the wind then? Does not your Lordship know when it makes any impression upon your body? So easy it is for a spiritual man to know when the Holy Spirit makes an impression upon his soul. Without acknowledging this, all the expressions of being *led by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit*, and such like, must be only so many words without any real meaning. Your Lordship acknowledges, that the Holy Spirit does act in general, and why not in the particular actions of our lives also? For, can the one be without the other? Does it not frequently happen, my Lord, that the comfort and happiness of our whole lives, depend on one particular action? And where then, my Lord, is the absurdity of saying, that the Holy Spirit may even, in the minutest circumstance, direct and rule our hearts? I have been the more particular, my Lord, on this part of your Lordship’s letter, because if this be proved, many of your Lordship’s objections against my Journals, will fall to the ground.