THE RELIGION OF DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

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THE RELIGION OF DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

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Chapter I

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE AGE OF JOHNSON

Since this study is of the philosophy and religion of Samuel Johnson as revealed in his writing, it is appropriate that attention be given to the background of both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because the age of rationalism, in which Johnson is a major figure, has its origin in the seventeenth century with the movement in which scholasticism was rejected for an interest in science.

People in the seventeenth century began to want to understand by scientific explanation because they wanted to be free from the fear of unknown things, such as gods, devils, or the stars; therefore, when scientific explanations were given, people generally gradually began to accept them as the revelation of truth. There were some doubters who were confused and distressed by the scientific explanations; but as the century progressed, people were more and more satisfied that the new philosophy was the answer to their needs and demands. However there was no one general truth or answer; various explanations and different truths were offered and recognized.

In studying the intellectual movement of the seventeenth century, one must consider such outstanding figures
as Hobbes, Descartes, Shaftesbury, and Locke.

Hobbes is noted for his statement on what is real - "the universe is corporeal; all that is real is material, and what is not material is not real."\(^1\) He believed that the soul is a separate immaterial thing and "that the death of the body is the death of the soul, since 'soul' for him simply means 'life'."\(^2\) To be more in keeping with the thought of the day, he mentioned resurrection in the last day, but only to appear more evangelical. Hobbes always managed to include enough of the Scripture to make his philosophy seem orthodox. He said that there was not such a thing as free will, but that there is some hidden impulse that causes one to do as he does. Since it was characteristic of this age that most English writers admitted there was some divine meaning behind the universe and agreed that there was some truth in the old orthodox doctrines about the Bible, Hobbes, even though he was very radical, used tact in shielding with Biblical quotations his interpretation of the Bible, in which he considered the laws of God as the laws of nature, by which he means reason.

Hobbes's account of the origin of religion does not suggest that he had a very high opinion of it. In four things, he tells us, 'consisteth the natural

\(^1\) Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, p. 89.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 105.
seed of religion: opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion to what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics."

Descartes, who is "generally recognized as the father of modern philosophy," certainly had a major influence on the intellectual movement of this age, probably because the conditions of the century were such that his reasoning was accepted and is usually regarded as the foundation of modern thought. The basis of his philosophy was the idea, "I think, therefore I exist," which halted his resolution, "to take nothing for truth without a clear knowledge that is such." Descartes knew that, since he could think, he existed and that he was, therefore, a substance. He realized there was some source of his learning and it was more perfect than he; this source was Nature, which was more perfect; and this Nature was God. Descartes proved there is one thing which cannot be doubted - the consciousness called a thought or feeling. Then, one can say the chief influence of Descartes was that he made a complete break with the past so that it became natural to appeal to reason.

Bridging the gap between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Locke with his utilitarian philosophy,

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3Ibid., p. 113.  
4Ibid., p. 76.  
5Charles W. Eliot (editor), French and English Philosophers, p. 3.  
contradicting the theory of innate ideas contributed what the country was ready to receive, a compromise which was to be the basis of eighteenth-century thought. "It has been said that Locke ... may truly be called, after Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy." 7

Locke's view, in short, is that every man who accepts allegiance to Christ as his king becomes a Christian. The world, as Locke conceived it, had been in trouble owing to a mysterious alienation from its ruler, for the law of God is the only stable law; others vary.

Christianity was a great legislative reform. The law was codified, published, and enforced by adequate sanctions, but not materially altered. In that sense, Christianity was reasonable in the highest degree. 8

Locke said knowledge comes through three degrees of certainty: "intuition, demonstration, and sensation" 9 and that "there are three kinds of realities which correspond to the three degrees of certainty: our own existence, God's existence, and other things." 10 Thus, he believed, all knowledge comes from experience. Locke, realizing that there was dissatisfaction with the existing philosophy, in his new theology argued that God's existence could be proved. Aware

7 Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, p. 267.
9 Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, p. 275.
10 Ibid., p. 279.
of the power of the opposite schools of thought, Locke tact-
fully showed his disapproval of and disgust with the old
thought and was eager to produce a sensible, rational the-
ology which would end religious questioning.

An outstanding optimist and thinker of the age was
Shaftesbury, who "is the 'friend of man' in the sense that
he makes it his business to defend human nature against the
traditional detractions."11 Shaftesbury readily accepted
the importance of nature, which, in his view was the basis
of truth and the source of reward and punishments. Shaftes-
bury, who ably defended the divinity of nature against both
the atheists and the orthodox, believed people possessed by
nature the faculty enabling them to distinguish right from
wrong - a natural moral sense. In his optimistic theory of
the natural morality of man, Shaftesbury, realizing that
superstition and warped ideas of honor could influence one
to make a false decision, was convinced that nature has im-
planted in man a correct moral conscience, which, aided by
reason, cannot fail to lead to a satisfying solution. "But
Shaftesbury is no 'primitivist' . . . For him the natural
condition of a thing, and so of man, is not its original
state, but rather that state in which it realizes most fully
its inner intention."12

11Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, p. 57.
12Ibid., p. 69.
The movement begun by the seventeenth century philosophers and theologians, one could say, culminates in an atmosphere of willingness to accept new concepts of the laws of nature as the laws of reason and to relinquish the superstitions and dogma previously existing. It is obvious from new ideas relating to the nature of man and his conception of religion and also from the growing interest in science and art that there was a sincere desire for stability. Of course, many people among the uneducated masses were entirely unaffected by this scientific and rational movement. Leaders of the age, such as Samuel Johnson, although they were concerned about improving the nation, still did not believe in universal education. When questioned about the salvation of those who did not know Christianity, leaders replied that those people would not be held responsible for what they were unable to know. In this age science and reason as seen in nature were the foundation of thought.

... it was not the ambiguity of 'Nature' which people felt most strongly; it was rather the clarity, the authority, and the universal acceptability of Nature and Nature's laws. The laws of Nature are the laws of reason; they are always and everywhere the same, and like the axioms of mathematics, they have only to be presented in order to be acknowledged as just and right by all men. The historic rule of 'Nature' at this time was to introduce, not further confusion, but its precise opposites, - peace, concord, toleration, and progress in the affairs of men, and, in poetry and art, perspicuity, order, unity, and proportion.13

13 Ibid., p. 2.
The eighteenth century considered itself an age of enlightenment in which Christianity, science, nature, and reason were synonymous terms through which truth was revealed. "Bacon believed that since science was the study of the works of God, scientific study could be as pious a pursuit as the study of his word."\textsuperscript{14} All theories had to be tested by nature and reason, and as a result of this new thought there were improvements in the social and economic life of the people. Each philosopher of this age, as was true of the seventeenth-century thinkers, felt that he had discovered a truth which would bring a period of leisure, restoring happiness and creating opportunities for creative works; and for a time there was a semblance of harmony between scientific investigation and principles of religion. Knowledge of science and nature was no longer looked upon as forbidden knowledge but as a means of revelation from God in addition to his revelation in the Scriptures. Scientific knowledge played such an important part in the nature movement of the eighteenth century that it furnished religion with a basis of a divine universe because the new theories were so introduced that they blended with the previous beliefs or certainties of Christianity rather than wholly contradicting them. This was possible because Christianity had

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 4.
not produced the desired peace and progress, but had re-
sulted in sects, disputes and wars so that the time was ripe
for an acceptable and universal creed.

One solution for the problem of salvation was
the suggestion to follow one's conscience, since one's
own nature gave the true answer, which was to follow
reason, the god within; then creed and salvation were
secure. The solution was that nature offered every-
thing needed for salvation, for nature's law was God's
law; and to follow nature's law was natural.\textsuperscript{15}

Another reason for the acceptance of the power of nature was
the fact that people were ready to accept an outlook more
cheerful and optimistic than the pessimistic generalization
of the tragedy of life in the previous age.

Another argument for the saving grace of nature was the
evidence introduced by travelers to foreign lands. The re-
port of the natural religion and natural morality of the
noble savage caused people to think that the savages, in
following nature, had escaped all the vices of civilization
and were apparently living in an ideal state.

The pagan conceptions of the Natural law and of
a life according to Nature were assimilated and modi-
fied by Christianity. The Law of Nature now becomes
the Law of God, or rather that part of the Law Eternal
which is made known to man through his reason. Christi-
nanity was thus able to use the conception of a natural
state, i. e. of a state in which the laws of God and of
reason . . . should prevail as a perpetual check upon
existing ways of life. From the past, however, Christian
Natural Law had two aspects corresponding to the
'original' and the fallen natures of man; there was on
the one hand, what was natural in Eden, and on the other,
what was natural in Europe.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 8. \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 15.
Thus, nature came to be a liberating principle and came to be used by the ruling forces as a means whereby the old order could be condemned and eliminated to make way for the freedom and optimism in this age of enlightenment, as the eighteenth century was to be known. Although the general trend was towards belief in the laws of nature as the laws of God, all was not completely calm and harmonious. It was still an era of confusion and contradiction, showing the inadequacy of nature.

The eighteenth century was an era of conflict and change in religious customs; both the traditional belief and the revolutionary doctrines had their followers. Since traditionally the church and the state were practically one and the same, what affected one also influenced the other; however, parliament was nor more powerful. There was still a feeling of doubt, cynicism, and scepticism resulting from the speculations of seventeenth-century theologians and philosophers. Prevalent was the principle of subordination, approved or tolerated, in which the poor became poorer and the wealthy wealthier. Out of the apparent optimism of the age came the gospel of hopelessness for some, for the accepted idea seemed to be that there was a scale or ladder of creatures in the universe. The poor of London slums were hardly touched by this age of enlightenment with its rational religion; however, the spiritual needs of the poor
were better satisfied at the end of the century by Wesley and his followers, although the privileged class considered Wesley and his philosophy as radical and temporary. Class distinction in the social and religious world remained so that the wealthy must have enjoyed themselves fully, for it was for them a time when philosophy, the arts, liberty, and progress were unh hampered by the traditional doctrines. This period of inequality did not escape the attention of all leaders, however, for Samuel Johnson on Good Friday, 1775, criticized:

No man, for instance, can now be made a bishop for his piety and learning, his only chance for promotion is his being connected with somebody who has parliamentary interest. Few bishops are now made for their learning; to be a bishop, a man must be learned in a learned age, factious in a factious age, but always of eminence.17

The eighteenth century was marked by advanced thinkers and a change in the mood of the church. The church also moved with the times and, although it did not entirely abandon the doctrine of the supernatural, let itself be influenced by the scientific movement, thereby bringing upon itself some criticism. It seems that the reformed church of the Reformation and the Renaissance was not perfect, but it had its faithful followers who were quite willing to accept its standards, traditions, practices, and doctrines; in fact, many, like Johnson, vigorously protested any change in the social, political, religious, or economic world. In

reply to a criticism that the reformed Church of England was probably the most unreformed of all churches, a majority of Churchmen would likely have repeated Archbishop Sharp's words:

The Church of England is undoubtedly both as to doctrine and worship the purest church that is at this day in the world: the most orthodox in faith, the freest on the one hand from idolatry and superstition, and on the other hand, from freakishness and enthusiasm of any now extant.\(^\text{18}\)

Another criticism of the Church was that, in accepting the advance of scientific and natural religion, it would soon be controlled by a group of atheists. Partly in reaction against the theological disputes of the seventeenth century and partly under the influence of the new scientific movement, people became rather indifferent to doctrines of the church. Even orthodox leaders turned to the patterns of natural religion, sermons changed from the old dogma; preachers began trying to teach morality and Christianity by appealing to the reason rather than to the emotions. Samuel Johnson held to the established form, even though he did not hold to all the dogma and the lofty method of preaching by the clergy, and opposed the Deistic movement by saying that "no honest man could be so \(\text{Deistic}\) after a fair examination of the proofs of Christianity."\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{18}\)Ibid., II, 239.

\(^{19}\)James Boswell, Life of Johnson, edited by C. B. Tinker, I, 337.
From all the confusion and arguments, however, evolved an agreement in which leaders generally concurred that religion was to a certain extent reasonable and rational. The orthodox, although agreeing that religion could be based on reason, held to their doctrine of the supernatural and Revelation. The deists believed that the earth was created by God but that God had ceased to control his handiwork except that there was an understood moral system which would reward or punish man. This eighteenth-century concept of religion is explained by Willey:

Two chief views about the moral order of the universe are to be found in the eighteenth century (often held simultaneously by the same thinkers): one, that the world is a system which automatically works together for good, and the other, that in order to secure good results we must make good efforts. On the whole, the eighteenth century thought well of human nature, and it was generally believed that men were 'by nature' sociable, sympathetic, and benevolent. Good results, therefore were to be expected from the nature of man, and as for vice (which undeniably existed), the wise ordinances of Providence could be relied upon to turn it to good ends (or at least set matters right in the hereafter.) So that even if we made no good efforts, 'good' would ultimately triumph just the same. On the whole, man's good nature was supposed to be a part of the beneficent automatism of things.\(^{20}\)

The consideration of the theories, then, resulted in a natural religion which held there was a rational universe with a rational deity.

Besides the beliefs in orthodox Christianity and deism,

\(^{20}\) Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, p. 95.
there was also the belief in primitivism, which advocated man's return to his original state, as the savage of nature who enjoys perfect tranquility and peace. In considering this theory, one thinks of Pope and his optimistic "whatever is, is right," although in general, primitivism did not encourage optimism and progress. If one were fortunate enough to be pleasantly situated in this Chain of Being, Pope's belief was agreeable. In further consideration of primitivism, one also thinks of Rousseau, a great writer and philosopher in spite of his own misspent life, which he revealed in his Confessions.

Rousseau's ideas are said to be the origin of the democratic movement, for he emphasized the value of the individual. Very definitely Rousseau expressed his ideas on education, the position of woman in society, nature and the noble savage, government, and religion. Not approving of formal learning, he said "a taste for letters always means the beginning of corruption among people." To overcome the desire for learning, Rousseau suggested that it, like any other natural impulse, be restrained. The mind is corrupted with knowledge of the arts and sciences, whose evils can be seen in their origin. Education should be progressive and training should adjust itself to the needs of mind and

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21 W. H. Hudson, Rousseau and Naturalism in Life and Thought, p. 123.
character; for example, a child should not be exposed to new theories until he was in a receptive mood. There was no need to tell him about the soul; give the child to nature and let nature have her way.

Woman, Rousseau believed, should stay within the home; her duties should not go beyond those of wife and mother. "Against the alarming prevalence of woman-worship Rousseau entered a fervent protest. Man's natural duty is to command; woman's to obey." 22

Rousseau, in defending his theory of the noble savage, said that as civilization progresses, some people are made powerful and wealthy and some weak and poor - the condition of the master and the slave. As people, upon leaving the savage state, form families and communities, tender sentiments and understanding are replaced by jealousy, fury, and bloodshed. Savage man did not have a fear of death; civilized man does. There are natural physical inequalities among men; however, most of man's inequalities are social and political as a result of convention. Rousseau is never weary of contrasting man in his original state with man in his civilized state. His theory of placing all people on the same level was not universally received; Johnson, believing in subordination, especially disagreed.

22 Ibid., p. 128.
"In religion Rousseau was a sentimental deist."\(^{23}\) Natural religion appears sufficient. Revelation is unnecessary, for it can add nothing to what man learns for himself in his own way. "Observe the spectacle of nature - listen to the inner voice."\(^{24}\) Rousseau did not consider miracles as revelation, because they would have to be proved to be accepted; he did not completely deny them, but he was very sceptical. "In brief, his argument comes pretty much to a declaration of Christianity without supernaturalism - that is, of Christianity as the religion of nature."\(^{25}\) An example of Rousseau's consideration of the individual, the basis of democracy, is his suggestion of a meeting at which reasonable men of all creeds would gather to find a religion for all. The suggested plan was that

... the first article of their faith would be, that all men should treat each other with brotherly love; the second, that they have a universal Father, maker of heaven and earth; that man is a mixed being, composed of two elements, one mortal, the other immortal.\(^{26}\)

One can see, then, there is an agreement, with reservations, that religion is natural and rational. Rousseau recognizes man as being basically good, maintains there is a wise Creator behind the universe, and teaches there is a

\(^{23}\) The Encyclopedia Britannica, XIX, 586.
\(^{24}\) Hudson, op. cit., p. 215.  
\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 219.  
\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 218.
system of justice in which the good are happily regarded and the wicked duly punished. However, in contrast to the general feeling of optimism, there were leaders who differed, such as Hume.

Between the years 1739 and 1752 Hume published his philosophical thoughts which marked him as the sceptic who changed the general trend of the century from accepting the traditional forms of Christianity, thereby establishing himself as the defender of nature against reason. He not only introduced new ideas but disputed old ones. Hume in *A Treatise on Human Nature* makes a very extensive discussion of the mind and the body. In answer to the question of what the mind is, he said:

> The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance, pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations...  

Then, discussing what the body and the soul are, he said:

> The body is the sum of phenomena which make up our corporeal existence; the soul is of mental existence.

To these mental activities Descartes gave the name "thoughts," Locke and Berkeley called them "ideas;" now Hume gives them the term "perceptions."

It seemed at the time Hume made his defense of nature

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28Ibid., I, 263.
that he had few readers; however, he must have been influential because of the shift in thought at this time. With the publication of Hume's philosophy "a cold blast of scepticism seems to have chilled the very marrow of speculative activity." A reason for his powerful influence was that his few readers were a well-educated and select group whose ideas were gradually felt everywhere. Another reason for the far-reaching effect of Hume's scepticism was that social and political conditions were favorable to its introduction; these same doubts had been expressed before. Hume wanted to show that trusting to pure reason was poor judgment, but that trusting to instinct and nature was good logic. This association of nature and instinct is a new approach, having replaced that of nature and reason. Hume did not deny the existence of an external order and said this belief was not founded upon reason alone. He said, "Belief is more properly an act of the sensitive than of the cogitative part of our natures." Disliking anything mysterious, Hume rejected religion, since it was based on mystery; and he disapproved the possibility of miracles by saying they violated the laws of nature. A basis for his dislike of established religion was that church-Christianity represented the powers of delusion and superstition which he held as false.

29 Stephen, op. cit., I, 2.
30 Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, p. 115.
Admiration and respect are due Hume because he seemed to be consistent and sincere in assailing the pretensions and dogma of his time. Hume condemns excessive scepticism but recommends and adopts a "mitigated scepticism" under the title of "academical philosophy." He was the systematic sceptic and, in confronting all the questions underlying philosophy and logic, probably did expect the bulk of mankind to follow him in his conclusions. He did, however, conform to accepted social standards in that his scepticism was directed against traditional dogma, not against common sense; he criticized older theories, not existing moral standards based upon sentiment and approved by man.

The critical movement of which Hume gave the last word amounted to the final destruction of the old assumptions by which philosophers... had reconciled the doctrines of the regularity of the universe and the validity of reason with the observation that all phenomena are incessantly changing, and that knowledge of the visible universe can only be derived from the impressions made by these changing phenomena of the senses.

In concluding the discussion of Hume, one can safely credit him with revolutionizing the field of philosophy and religion, apparently with no specific desire or effort to do so, through his generalization that nature was a habit of the mind, morality was a sentiment of the heart; and religion

31 Huxley, op. cit., p. 67.
32 Stephen, op. cit., I, 54.
was based on faith, not reason. Reason became an instinct. "For Hume the whole order of Nature, with its so-called laws of causation is itself a bundle of ideas connected together in our minds by customary association."\(^{33}\) Further, Hume declared that "we are in the hands of a Creator who judges our intentions by the actions of our hearts . . . and is always more ready to extend His mercy than we are to ask it."\(^{34}\)

Thus, Hume appears to believe that a Deity exists and that the Deity possesses attributes more or less allied to those of human intelligence, but he refused to accept either orthodox Christianity or deism.

Another non-conformist and assailant of Christianity was the eighteenth-century historian Gibbon, who, in striking his heavy blow with frank sarcasm, was surprised at the wrath which he aroused. He had not realized so many people were followers of Christianity, which he was accused of not understanding. He ridiculed the Christians for believing, in their stupidity, the supernatural and the miraculous. Gibbon was pleased with his philosophy that the doctrine of future life was originated for worldly purposes, morality was imperfect, and Christian endurance of suffering was not remarkable. The triumph of Christianity Gibbon could not

\(^{33}\)Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, p. 137.

\(^{34}\)Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the XVIII Century*, p. 279.
ignore; therefore, he ironically explained its success. To him, it was absurd to think it was God's will that Christianity had flourished in such a phenomenal way. He was even cruel enough to say the origin of Christianity was not divine, but was pagan retrogression explained as a descent into ignorance and barbarism. Since there were sceptics who had been questioning Christianity and considering it as a superstition, Gibbon, with his capable pen, made himself heard.

Although Thomas Paine did not write until after the death of Johnson, it is interesting to notice the type and subject of his writing. Through his philosophy he attracted much attention to the already popular belief in reason. Paine was a bitter opponent of Christainity, which he attacked in The Age of Reason. Like Gibbon, he considered the followers of Christianity as uneducated people whose emotions were aroused, rather than their reason. Some of Paine's frank statements are:

The Christian theory is little else than the idolatry of the ancient Mythologists, accommodated to the purposes of power and revenue.\textsuperscript{35}

That such a person as Jesus Christ existed and that he was crucified . . . are historical relations strictly within the limits of probability.\textsuperscript{36}

The God in whom we believe is a God of moral

\textsuperscript{35} Thomas Paine, \textit{The Age of Reason}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 14.
truth and not a God of mystery and obscurity. Religion, being the belief of a God and the practice of a moral truth, cannot have connection with mystery.37

Interest in theology, during the latter part of the century, noticeably declined while there was a corresponding mounting of interest in politics. Both the deists and the orthodox were in a state of lethargy. The scene shifted from political stagnation and fiery religious zeal to an absorbing interest in political and social life. In summarizing the background of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one can conclude that both centuries were marked by a series of extremes. At one time the orthodox would be predominant with their philosophy of truth; then the opposing faction would gain control and submit its theory of truth. The eighteenth century was, for the most part, an age of reason, in which an alliance between nature and science was expected to establish a foundation for an accepted universal doctrine. Both the orthodox and the non-orthodox more or less followed this basis, the difference being that each thought his doctrine was the truth. It seems that the eighteenth century was not entirely an age of enlightenment but rather an age of controversy resulting in a partial decay of religion.

Outstanding in this period, marked by the scientific

37Ibid., p. 80.
movement, in which Christianity, deism, primitivism, scepticism, and rationalism were major factors, is Samuel Johnson, literary dictator. Johnson was a rationalist in everything except religion, which, to him, was an adherence to the established Church with its traditional forms. His efforts to maintain his orthodox views in the midst of the controversial beliefs of his age will be the subject of subsequent chapters in this study.
Chapter II

RELIGIOUS VIEWS IN CERTAIN WORKS OF JOHNSON
PUBLISHED DURING HIS LIFETIME

In order to know Johnson as a man of letters and as a moralist, it seems fitting that some mention be made of his personal life. When one realizes the extent of the poverty, illness, neglect, and tragedy surrounding him in his childhood and youth, one marvels at Johnson's literary genius flowering in such squalor and dejection.

Samuel Johnson was born in 1709 at Lichfield. His father, Michael Johnson, was a very ordinary man of somewhat unstable temperament who sold books in various towns; his mother Sarah Johnson, was an unlearned but pious woman who early implanted in her son Samuel's mind a belief in the existence of heaven and hell. His mother's religious instruction was probably the basis for his constant and sincere interest in religion. Johnson's melancholy and fits of gloom possibly resulted from his parents' lack of congeniality towards each other and towards him; at least modern psychologists would attribute his idiosyncrasies to some childhood maladjustment.

Be that as it may, probably Johnson's close association with difficulties as a boy and as a young man was responsible
for his sympathy towards unfortunate men and women and his intolerance of some of the abuses heaped upon them. Perhaps this memory or these experiences also helped him to adjust himself so readily everywhere he went. It was said that Johnson was equally as comfortable and assured walking the streets with beggars as he was conversing with the king.

Johnson had occasion to meet Queen Anne when he was so small he had only a slight recollection of the event. From his nurse, young Sam contracted scrofula and was taken by his mother to the Queen to be cured of the malady by her royal touch; however, the touch had no effect and Johnson’s vision became impaired and his face badly scarred.

Among Johnson’s first teachers were Dame Oliver, who said he was the best scholar she ever had, and Mr. Hunter, who was a severe and demanding master. Under Mr. Hunter, also, Johnson’s intellectual ability, if not his athletic strength, was acknowledged by both master and classmates. When he was fifteen, he was sent to Stourbridge school, where he had another severe master, Mr. Wentworth. Johnson’s retentive memory continued to amaze his associates, for he never forgot anything he read or heard, and he was able to repeat from memory many long passages after hearing them only once. "Johnson preserved in his mind all sorts of out-of-the-way verses, which in the first instance he could hardly have done more than scan in a hasty reading."¹ This early

¹E. S. Roscoe, Aspects of Doctor Johnson, p. 89.
display of intellectual power was marked by even further skill and knowledge, because his talent of written and oral expression, combined with his dynamic personality, soon marked him as master of any situation and leader among men. If Johnson came to be a domineering dictator, it was because through his keen intellect he deserved that position. With all his vigorous mental power, Johnson did not become overly vain or conceited; he was his own severest critic.

After leaving Stourbridge at the end of a year, Johnson spent two years at home in apparent idleness, but even then he was reading and studying. Then he went to Oxford, where he did well, in spite of occasional lapses into neglect and hypochondria, which made him so listless and melancholy that his friends feared he might become insane. At Oxford Johnson studied Greek and Metaphysics and devoured books in his own unique way. It was at Oxford that he first became seriously concerned about religion, for he said:

When at Oxford, I took up 'Law's Serious Call to a Holy Life,' expecting to find it a dull book (as such books usually are), and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry. 2

Many people have wondered how Johnson was financially able to attend Oxford. Though Johnson was poor, his account

2Alexander Main, Life and Conversations of Dr. Samuel Johnson, p. 11.
books do not show that he starved. Probably he used some money inherited by his mother. He was very proud and angrily threw away a pair of shoes mysteriously placed on his doorstep when his worn shoes were observed. The state of his shoes also caused him to abandon his habit of asking another student to relay to him information from the tutor Johnson could not afford.

Even though Oxford was in a state of decline at this time, Johnson became very indignant when Oxford or any other system of education was criticized. His defense was that any system of education, however inadequate, was better than none. Johnson had a tender feeling for all systems of education and for the Church, feeling that any attack was unjustified. However, he enjoyed annoying his tutors and inciting other students to rebellion against college discipline.

Johnson, because of a severe attack of hypochondria and a lack of money, was forced to leave Oxford, where he had won friends and enjoyed the happiest time of his life. Never did he criticize Oxford, and never did he appreciate anything more than the honorary degree later conferred upon him there.

After an unbearable six-months period of teaching, Johnson went to Birmingham, where he made his first entrance into the literary world, of which he was to be dictator, and
where he met Mrs. Henry Porter, who was to be his wife.

At Birmingham the essays, now lost, which he is supposed to have contributed to the local newspaper were probably his first published prose compositions and his translation from the French of the Voyage to Abyssinia by the Spanish Jesuit, Jeronimo Lobo, published in 1735, his first considerable literary chore.\(^3\)

Johnson received five guineas for his translation, but, probably more important, he must have found in A Voyage to Abyssinia an inspiration for Rasselas, which came from his pen some years later in 1759. Also Johnson embarked on his literary career through this translation, for as Boswell says, "in the Preface the Johnsonian style begins to appear."\(^4\) Johnson in 1734, eager to launch farther into the literary world and to improve his financial condition, unsuccessfully applied to Mr. Edward Cave, the editor of the Gentleman's Magazine, for employment as a writer of literary articles. That Johnson wrote for money is indicated in his statement:

I look upon this [plays of William Shakespeare] as I did upon the dictionary; it is all work, and any inducement to it is not love or desire of fame, but the want of money, which is the only motive to writing that I know of.\(^5\)

Perhaps Johnson exaggerated here, for he undoubtedly loved literature and could lose himself in the reading of

\(^3\)Joseph W. Krutch, Samuel Johnson, p. 21.

\(^4\)James Boswell, The Life of Johnson, I, 23.

\(^5\)Krutch, op. cit., p. 4-5.
both poetry and prose. He especially enjoyed biography because he could meet people; he appreciated poetry because in it he could meet the ideal. Loving literature as he did, Johnson, the scholar and moralist, could not be called bookish or priggish. He was sociable and much preferred meeting people first hand; thus he was not a bookish recluse. He considered himself a man of the world, enjoying the associations, as well as the wine, to be found in tavern meeting and delighting in his acquaintance with people like Savage, Bet Flint, and Beauclerk; thus he was not priggish. However, lest a false impression be created, Johnson so far as is known, was always loyal to his moral standards; in fact, in tavern hilarity he was always more of a spectator than a participant.

But let us speak of Johnson's marriage on July 9, 1735, to Mrs. Lucy Porter, a widow about twice his age, whom he had met at Birmingham. Johnson's marriage was very happy, although at times he and his wife maintained separate residences, probably from both preference and necessity. Apparently she was wise enough to appreciate her husband's genius, as is evidenced by her remark when he was writing The Rambler: "I thought very well of you before; but I did not imagine you could have written anything like this." 6

6 Boswell, Life, I, 141.
In 1730 Johnson opened for young men a school in which Latin and Greek were to be emphasized. It might be added that Johnson was an apt scholar in these languages as well as in French, German, and Italian. Johnson's school had only a few students, among whom was David Garrick, later to become a famous actor and bosom friend of his former schoolmaster. Johnson, although he was a brilliant scholar, was unsuccessful in this venture and closed his school after only eighteen months; he was so much the brilliant genius and gifted scholar, with the typical eccentricities and peculiar mannerisms common to a master mind, that to his students he was a source of amusement rather than of instruction. Johnson and his students did not understand each other; naturally, neither he nor his pupils received any satisfaction from such a situation.

Finally Johnson did succeed in attracting the attention of Cave, who, Johnson admitted, was a "penurious pay-master," but "a good man." Johnson, nevertheless, was grateful for this means of livelihood. He showed his originality in that he revised reports of Parliamentary debates, which Cave published in the Gentleman's Magazine under the thin disguise of "Debates of Magna Lilliput." Sometimes Johnson attended these debates and took notes; however, he sometimes relied on the notes or reports his friends brought him, or simply
wrote from his own imagination. Naturally, there was a certain amount of inaccuracy in the published reports; in fact, quite a discussion grew out of the affair. Johnson even revised speeches, one of which had been delivered by Pitt, so that they were superior in both thought and composition to the originals. Upon hearing Pitt's speech discussed, Johnson remarked: "That speech I wrote in a garret in Exeter-street." \(^7\) Johnson's sense of humor or prejudice against the Whigs, or both, is evident when he admitted he polished the speeches of the Tories, for he said: "I saved appearances tolerably well; but I took care that the Whig Dogs should not have the best of it." \(^8\) Johnson later contradicted this statement by saying he had no idea he was being untruthful and refused to submit any more reports of debates.

Just how long Johnson remained in the employ of Mr. Cave is uncertain, but it was probably six or eight years, a period in which he had the opportunity to submit poems, essays, and miscellaneous items, also a time in which his financial condition improved somewhat. The Gentleman's Magazine did give Johnson sufficient employment and support to enable him to provide a fairly satisfactory establishment for him and his Tetty, who had remained in Lichfield

\(^7\) Krutch, op. cit., p. 49.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 49.
until 1737. He was now more content than ever before, since he was in London, his favorite city. It was in 1737 while Johnson was in Lichfield for three months that he finished his tragedy *Irene*, which was not produced until 1749.

During the time Johnson was employed by the *Gentleman's Magazine*, he wrote *London*, one of his two long poems, which was warmly received by many, who said: "Here is an unknown poet, greater even than Pope." An explanation of "unknown poet" is necessary. Johnson, after being unable to sell the poem to anyone else, wrote Mr. Cave a rather flattering letter, saying that he (Johnson) was acquainted with a person whose poem was so worthy of publication that he knew Mr. Cave, "an ingenious and candid man," would want to publish it, with, of course, "advantageous terms." After Johnson wrote Mr. Cave this first letter about *London*, three more followed in close succession. Mr. Cave evidently fulfilled Johnson's request for Mr. Cave to show the poem to Mr. Dodsley, a bookseller, for Johnson thanked Mr. Cave for sending the poem to Dodsley, who liked the poem and shared in its publication. In fact, Dodsley in 1738 gave Johnson ten guineas for sale rights to *London*. Of *London* Boswell said:

But what first displayed his transcendent powers, and 'gave the world assurance of the Man', was his

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London, a poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal, which came out in May, this year, and burst forth with splendor, the rays of which will for ever encircle his name. 10

Krutch criticizes London by saying that as a lyric poem it has a weak basis for thought; he further believed Johnson could have produced prettier and more satisfying lyrics had he used as a basis of poetic expression some of the fancies and ideas which were recorded in his prayers and meditations. Krutch questions Johnson's honesty and originality thus:

But that London is more of an exercise than a poem is further demonstrated by the fact that its opinions and attitudes are usually not really Johnson's. They are, on the contrary, those supplied in part by the satiric cliches current in Johnson's own time. 11

Johnson all his life considered London "a paradise on earth"; therefore, he must have had some original thought of praise and sincere purpose of reform when he wrote:

Behold her cross triumphant on the main,
The guard of commerce, and the dread of Spain,
Ere masquerades debauch'd, excise oppress'd,
Or English honor grew a standing jest. 12

In further defense of London, one can conclude, using Johnson's own method of reasoning, it must have had some literary value or it would not have received such wide-spread praise. Whether or not London had any particular literary.

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10 Boswell, op. cit., I, 80.
11 Krutch, op. cit., p. 63.
merit, it, with other contributions to the Gentleman's Magazine, laid the foundation of his career as a "man of letters", because he added to his literary knowledge both social and political information.

But the man of letters required sustenance, and again he turned to his former, though brief, profession of teaching; however, Johnson was unable to accept the offered position as master of Appleby school because he had no Master of Arts degree. He requested Oxford to grant him the required degree, but he was refused. Discouraged, Johnson embarked upon his literary career by complementing his journalistic writing with hack-writing.

At this period Johnson produced The Life of Savage, which illustrated, on the one hand, Johnson's sympathetic understanding of the unfortunate, weak character of Savage and, on the other, his desire to show the ill effects of over-indulgence. The biography was well-written and interesting, even if its subject was an ungrateful and immoral weakling. Of it Boswell remarked

... the various incidents are related in so clear and animated a manner, and illuminated throughout with so much philosophy, that it is one of the most interesting narratives in the English language.13

Although Johnson and Savage apparently had little in common, except poverty and interest in people, it is easy

13 Boswell op. cit., I, 115.
to see why Johnson was attracted to Savage; they had walked and suffered together in the streets of London in a time of depression. Perhaps, too, Johnson in his compassion saw something good in Savage's being. The Life of Savage, in depicting the hardships of a "Grub Street" writer, portrays the results of both virtue and sin; therefore, Johnson, the moralist, is seen. Johnson shows his partiality to his subject in believing and recording the story which Savage told about his (Savage's) early life in which his mother declared him illegitimate and disowned him. Johnson explained the murder committed by Savage as self-defense and praised Savage for his behavior during his trial and imprisonment. Johnson, often accused of being the stern moralist, showed his commiseration for Savage by saying:

It may be alleged, and perhaps justly, that he was petulant and contemptuous . . .; but it is to be remembered that his conduct . . . therefore ought rather to have been pitied than resented. 14

Johnson was never an optimist and, as has been stated, vigorously opposed Pope's complacent "whatever is, is right." He belonged to the common-sense school and had the conviction that

. . . the structure of the universe and the essential nature of man are so overwhelmingly the most important factors in determining the good and evil of the human lot as to render climate, government, or social institutions secondary at best and insufficient in

themselves to do more than make it somewhat better or somewhat worse.\textsuperscript{15}

Under Johnson's pretended hardness lay a nature tender and forgiving, or he would not have had a wastrel like Savage or a rake like Boswell for companions. Besides these two men, his compassion and generosity gave refuge or support to other unfortunates, such as, Goldsmith, Miss Williams, the negro Francis Barber, his mother, Catherine Chambers, and the unfortunate ill woman of the streets. As evidence in support of his theory that virtue was unnecessary to friendship, Johnson had such people as Savage and Boswell as his companions and as evidence of his loyalty stoutly defended them whenever they were criticized. These charitable acts show Johnson's innate kindness toward the poor and the wicked; yet he did have a high moral code for himself. He was always aware of religion; yet he was aware of his own faults and was always uncomfortable. His own sins he exaggerated and despised; the sins of other people he overlooked or forgave. Johnson believed that if one's intentions were honorable, he would not commit any heinous crime.

In 1749 Johnson published \textit{The Vanity of Human Wishes}, his other long poem, which was important only in that it was an indication of how Johnson's name and work were becoming better known. He received five guineas more for it than for

\textsuperscript{15} Krutch, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
London; Johnson’s fame was established. The poem creates an atmosphere of melancholy and dejection by using phrases such as "wavering men", "the massacre of gold", or "unperceived decay".

The Vanity of Human Wishes, the theme of which is "What is life"?, is typical of eighteenth-century moralizing. Long life is not to be desired, because it means disease, trouble, disillusionment - a sentiment to be expected from one as troubled about life as Johnson was. There is a very noticeable contradiction in this poem, not in that it is lacking in Johnson’s customary gloom and dejection, but in that he deplores a long life, which is synonymous with debility or senility. Since Johnson always had such a terror of death, it is difficult to understand his change of attitude because, in spite of his poverty and ill health, he was never ready to surrender to death. But there is a bit of optimism, or resignation, in the admonition to accept in confidence whatever befalls, because it will be the best. The suggestion of trust and confidence is also a deviation from his usual style.

Johnson shows his feeling of uncertainty about life in

Enlarge my life with multitude of days!
In health, in sickness, thus the suppliant prays;
Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know,
That life protracted is protracted wo.16

his hope and trust in prayer in

Inquirer, cease; petitions yet remain
Which Heaven may hear, nor deem Religion vain.
Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice.17

and his occasional optimism in life in

These goods for man the laws of heaven ordain,
These goods he grants, who grants the power to gain;
With these celestial Wisdom calms the mind,
And makes the happiness she does not find.18

One of Johnson's major works, The Dictionary, definitely established him as a literary genius, as well as a man of wit, prejudice, opinion, energy, and patience. One of his most common petitions to God was for forgiveness of indolence; an indolent person could not have produced such a masterpiece. The Dictionary, although it did establish Johnson as an eminent scholar with wit and humor, obviously does not illustrate his religious philosophy, except possibly for the comment he made concerning the remark by Mr. Andrew Millar, the publisher of The Dictionary. Boswell reports the incident thus:

When the messenger who carried the last sheet to Millar returned, Johnson asked him, "Well, what did he say?" - "Sir" (answered the messenger) he said, "Thank God, I have done with him." - "I am glad (replied Johnson with a smile) that he thanks God for any thing."19

17Ibid., p. 550.  
18Ibid., p. 551.  
19Boswell, op. cit., I, 192.
In 1750 Johnson "came forth in the character for which he was eminently qualified, a majestic teacher of moral and religious wisdom." The Rambler, the means by which he accomplished this recognition, was a series of dignified lectures published twice a week until 1752, which was also the year of his wife's death. As nothing of this nature of any particular importance had been attempted since the discontinuation of Addison and Steele's publications, Johnson had reason to believe his venture would be warmly received. Johnson gave Sir Joshua Reynolds the following reason for his choice of the title, "The Rambler":

What must be done, Sir, will be done. When I was to begin publishing that paper, I was at a loss how to name it. I sat down at night upon my bedside, and resolved that I would not go to sleep till I had fixed its title. The Rambler seemed the best that occurred, and I took it.  

However, according to Boswell, the public was so slow in accepting the papers that Johnson in discouragement remarked, "I have never been much of a favourite of the public." As time passed, the public did recognize the worth of the philosophy in these moralizing essays, which were in reality his code of ethics and his conception of life.

That Johnson was conscious of his need of Divine help is evident in his "Prayer on the Rambler":

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Almighty God, the giver of all good things, without whose help all labor is ineffectual, and without whose grace all wisdom is folly; grant, I beseech Thee, that in this my undertaking, thy Holy spirit may not be withheld from me, but that I may promote thy glory, and the salvation both of myself and others; grant this, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.  

Although these essays are all similar in that they moralize in high-sounding, polished sentences, the very characteristic which Johnson had deplored, they do treat of separate subjects. The treatment in some cases is somewhat satirical, but in other instances Johnson portrays a sense of humor. Generally, the Rambler presents his theory that human life is a state in which much is to be endured, but he chooses various subjects to establish his belief; therefore, it will be timely to analyze some of the essays revealing his religious and moral principles. As has been mentioned, Johnson invoked the guidance of God in the preparation of the Rambler. It is very noticeable, too, that even when Johnson discusses political and social affairs, he is unable to restrain his desire to be the moral teacher.

In essay No. 175 Johnson clearly revealed his belief that all men are by nature evil, and also proved he was bold enough to express himself. Further, he said that any observant person could not avoid knowing the corruption of

the world; even a person not of the world must surely be aware of this corruption. Johnson said, in this paper, that every person, having been warned of the folly of riotous living, believed that he would be strong enough to resist temptation; nevertheless, most people would not escape the disappointments of an unhappy and mispent life because of overconfidence in their strength and ability. It seemed queer that when virtue was presented in all its graces so that it was a recommendation as a pattern of life, mankind would choose to ignore it, thereby failing to receive its benevolence. Johnson explains this depravity thus:

We frequently fall into error and folly, not because the true principles of action are not known, but because for a time they are not remembered. . . .

Johnson, showing his understanding and patience of the gullible people, said that those who helped others were the ones most likely to be victims of wickedness because, in their willingness to assist, they were face to face with treachery. In these words he explains the folly of a young person's entering a field of activity in expectation of doing and receiving good:

... to enter the road of life without caution or reserve, in expectation of general fidelity and justice, is to launch on the wide ocean with the instruments of steerage, and to hope that every wind will be prosperous, and that every coast will afford a harbor.

\[24\] Johnson, "The Rambler", op. cit., I, 265.

\[25\] Ibid., I, 266.
Universal traits of wickedness are vanity, deceit, envy, jealousy, ignorance, and resentment, and one may escape these pitfalls only by being wise enough to avoid these dangers. Johnson concludes by saying if people will remember the maxim, the majority are wicked, there is a possibility that they may "become wise without the cost of experience." 26

In Rambler No. 6 Johnson delivers a discourse on the absurdity of depending upon external circumstances for happiness. One should educate and discipline himself so that if he is forced to rely upon himself, instead of depending on other people for diversion, he will not be bitterly disappointed if some change or accident mars his plans. Further, if one accomplishes his first goal and has his wishes granted, he soon becomes dissatisfied and pursues some other worldly attraction. Johnson evidently means to criticize selfishness and lust for power, not worthy ambition and good leadership; he is being the teacher showing the path to salvation and happiness. He says:

It was, perhaps, ordained by Providence, to hinder us from tyrannising over one another, that no individual should be of such importance, as to cause, by his retirement or death, any chasm in the world. 27

Philosophy of a similar nature, that of the religious benefits of seclusion, is depicted in essay No. 7. Johnson says that in all ages those people with rare intelligence

26 Ibid., I, 266.  
27 Ibid., I, 21.
have been the ones who sought retirement. Even kings in their privacy were best able to forget the flattery and deceit of their subjects. Johnson believed there was a universal reason for the desire of solitude—the examination of everything which relates to life. In this consultation and self-appraisal one reaches a position at which he is farther from temptations; in short there is a partial conquest of the world and self.

As a means of accomplishing this state of sublimation, Johnson suggests:

The great task of him who conducts his life by the precepts of religion, is to make the future predominate over the present, to impress upon his mind so strong a sense of the importance of obedience to the Divine will, of the value of the reward promised to virtue, and the terrors of the punishment denounced against crimes, as may overbear all the temptations which temporal hope or fear can bring in his way...28

Johnson approved of occasional retirement from the active affairs of the world for meditation to strengthen one's religious convictions; however he did not approve of retirement to monasteries or convents. Johnson suggests a sanctuary from noise and pleasure so that prayer can be fervent and sincere, a necessary attribute of the piety which he associated with Christianity. This characteristic trait Johnson explains thus:

The great art of piety, and the end for which all the rights of religion seem to be instituted, is the perpetual renovation of the motives to virtue, by

28 Ibid., I, 22.
a voluntary employment of our mind in the contemplation of its excellence . . ., till in time they become the reigning ideas, the standing principles of action, and the test by which every thing proposed to the judgment is rejected or approved.²⁹

To attain a pious state, then, one must escape the noises and pleasures which conflict with piety and retire to serenity, where in contemplation one may be assured of the authority of religion.

One of the most interesting and common-sense essays in the Rambler is No. 11, in which Johnson discusses the ill effects of anger. Anger, he said, is the result of uncontrolled pride and finally results in evil. Anger in its final stages brings unhappiness in the family, discontent in the community, and wars between nations; in general, society is disturbed and man’s private reason is permanently confused. If a man does not control his anger, it will rush in unbidden and cause him to be an object of contempt among his fellowmen. "When a man has once suffered his mind to be thus vitiated, he becomes one of the most hateful and unhappy beings."³⁰ Evidently, this moral lesson was one of Johnson’s "good intentions", for he certainly let his anger and dissatisfaction be known. Oftentimes with Savage, Beaufclerk, and Boswell he became so angry that he, after making some caustic remark, would retire to let the venom of his caustic

²⁹Ibid., I, 23. ³⁰Ibid., I, 29.
statement have full sway. It is to be supposed, however, his saving grace was his ability to forgive. In this essay Johnson points out that habitual surrender to anger makes one peevish, despised, unhappy, and, finally, depraved. Johnson admitted that as he grew older, he had become more tolerant. Perhaps his increasing tolerance was due to his prayer that he would always possess strength of mind, even if he did lack strength of body.

Another contradiction in Johnson's philosophy and practice of philosophy is illustrated in No. 14 of the Rambler. In his private life he did not, and he admitted the fact, live up to the ideals he set and constantly prayed for forgiveness for being lax in his religious duties and for strength to be true to his creed of Christianity. He said, however, that man needs to maintain an idea of perfection so that he will not sink as deep in corruption as he otherwise could. Explaining, or condoning, the failure to live up to one's goal, Johnson in this discourse said:

For without entering into refined speculations, it may be shown much easier to design than to perform. A man proposes his schemes of life in a state of abstraction and disengagement, exempt from the enticements of hope, the solicitations of affection, the importunities of appetite, or the depressions of fear, and is in the same state with him that teaches upon land the art of navigation, to whom the sea is always smooth, and the wind always prosperous.31

Johnson, evidently believing his mission as a moralist

31Ibid., I, 41.
would be in vain without including lectures on marriage and single life, composed several essays on these topics. The basis for them must have come directly from his imagination, because, in his essays, for the most part he seemed very bitter towards marriage; whereas, in his own life, marriage had been a happy state. The unhappiness of marriage, he said, was often the result of a contract entered into without honesty or admiration on the part of either the man or the woman; each usually disguised his true character and personality. Then, after the vows had been taken, each discovered the pretenses of the other; all confidence, sympathy, interest, and feeling were lost. Naturally, the miserable state following was not to be admired or recommended. On the requirements of marriage, Johnson certainly shows that he keeps in mind certain principles by stating thus:

... all whom I have mentioned failed to obtain happiness, for want of considering that marriage is the strictest tie of perpetual friendship; that there can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity; and that he must expect to be wretched, who pays to beauty, riches, or politeness, that regard which only virtue and piety can claim.32

Another contrast between the living and the writing of people is revealed in No. 24, in which Johnson deplores the fact that great philosophers speak in such learned phrases concerning life that to the common man the meaning of life

32Ibid., I, 41.
becomes more and more complicated. Furthermore, he seems to forget his theory that men are by nature evil and selfish. He believes ignorance can influence life, as he shows in the following:

... every error in human conduct must arise from ignorance in ourselves, either perpetual or temporary; and happen either because we do not know what is best and fittest, or because our knowledge is at the time of action not present to the mind.\textsuperscript{33}

Johnson in this same essay, explaining that natural character must not be overlooked, condemns the false or pretentious philosopher for confusing men so that they "struggle against nature and contend for that which they can never attain."\textsuperscript{34} Johnson is criticizing the learned philosopher for encouraging common man to quit his station in life - an impossible thing to Johnson, who believed in subordination. In their false pride of learning the philosophers overlook the wonderful opportunity of helping the common man in his native setting; instead they cause man to be dissatisfied and confused.

One of the most interesting essays in the Rambler is No. 44, which was contributed by Mrs. Elizabeth Carter. In spite of the fact that it is not Johnson's work, it seems fitting to include it in this discussion, for it represents religious views which apparently were acceptable to Johnson,

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., I, 49. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{34}Ibid., I, 49.
or he would not have published it. In allegorical form Mrs. Carter presents superstition and religion in conflict, with religion being winner through her impassioned, but reasonable and dignified, arguments. The person of the allegory in the midst of gaiety is visited by a horrible creature, superstition, accompanied by dismal sounds. Superstition says that man was born to be wretched and that "misery is the duty of all sublunary beings, and every enjoyment is an offense to the Deity." 35 The person, reclining in dejection and resigning himself to the oblivion of death, has another visitor, Religion, who says she is "the offspring of Truth and Love, and the parent of Benevolence, Hope, and Joy." 36 Further, Religion (it could be Johnson instead of Mrs. Carter playing the moral philosopher) points out that life, indeed, is visited by sorrow and disappointment, that genuine happiness does demand diligence, patience, resignation, and worship of the Deity.

Johnson seems to be attempting to console himself in No. 69 that old age and death are not the "terrors" he has suspected them to be. By a strange quirk of reasoning he comforts himself with the thought that "we shall all by degrees certainly be old" 37 and that death is a universal thing, even in all forms of plant and animal life. Repeating his conviction of the necessity of man's need of

35Ibid., I, 78. 36Ibid., I, 79. 37Ibid., I, 114.
religion, Johnson states:

Piety is the only proper and adequate relief of decaying man. He that grows old without religious hopes, as he declines into imbecility, and feels pains and sorrows incessantly crowding upon him, falls into a gulf of bottomless misery, in which every reflection must plunge him deeper, and where he finds only new gradations of anguish and precipices of horror. 38

Through No. 71 one has a real insight into Johnson's view of the religious life. He recognized that it is an inherent weakness among mankind for people to feel concerned, through curiosity or sincere regard, about the social, religious, and economic affairs of their neighbors and to neglect their own affairs, which are likely in a worse state. Using this fact as a basis for a religious discussion, Johnson says that we should be not only concerned about the religion of our neighbors but also should devote meditation to our own salvation. We all admit that life is short; yet we refuse to devote any thought to the termination of our own life, evidently with the wistful hope that it is the other person whose life will be short, not ours. We should not neglect the least duty of any day; the next day's tasks are simply doubled. Everyday we hear and repeat cant phrases regarding the brevity of life and the folly of sloth and dissipation. Knowing life is short, we even formulate plans which would require several lifetimes to accomplish.

38 Ibid., I, 114.
Johnson agrees with Hearne of Oxford when Hearne said, "It is the business ... of a good man to have morality always before him." But Johnson concedes that always has it been difficult for man to do this. Illustrative of Johnson's wish to forget death are these words:

Divines have, with great strength and ardour, shown the absurdity of delaying reformation and repentance; a degree of folly, indeed, which sets eternity to hazard. It is the same weakness, in proportion to the importance of the neglect, to transfer any care, which now claims our attention, to a future time; we subject ourselves to needless dangers from accidents which early diligence would have obviated ... and make provision for the execution of designs, of which the opportunity once missed never will return.

Using simple, matter-of-fact, but dramatic and forceful writing, Johnson approaches the very essence of his religious convictions in No. 110, which treats of the necessity and comfort of repentance. It seems most appropriate to give Johnson's own definition of repentance:

Repentance is the relinquishment of any practice, from the conviction that it has offended God. Sorrow, and fear, and anxiety, are properly not parts, but adjuncts of repentance; yet they are too closely connected with it to be easily separated; for they not only mark its sincerity, but promote its efficacy.

The necessity of repentance is the outcome of man's desire of comfort after having sinned. All people must be aware of their misconduct and must, as a natural consequence,

39 Ibid., I, 116. 40 Ibid., I, 117. 41 Ibid., I, 174.
fear God's punishment. Man looks on God as benevolent and forgiving, not as an unmerciful Being; if he did not have this conception, he could have no hope of forgiveness. If man had to be completely perfect, there would be no reason to have any hope because humanity cannot be perfect. Therefore, man does have hope of forgiveness if he sincerely repents; this trust and hope of final Divine favor are the essence of religion. If there were no hope in the world, an atmosphere of lethargy and indolence would pervade the universe. In Johnson's words:

That God will forgive, may indeed, be established as the first and fundamental truth of religion; for, though the knowledge of his existence is the origin of philosophy, yet, without the belief of his mercy, it would have little influence upon our moral conduct. There could be no prospect of enjoying the protection, or regard of him, whom the least deviation from rectitude made inexorable for ever; and every man would naturally withdraw his thoughts from the contemplation of a Greater, . . . whom he could neither deceive, escape, nor resist.\(^2\)

The discussion of repentance is not different from the religion Johnson actually practiced and believed, as is seen in his "Prayers and Meditations," the only difference being that Johnson appears more optimistic in this essay than he did in the "Prayers and Meditations" and in his real life. In this essay on repentance and hope of forgiveness he does not voice the doubts which Boswell knew kept Johnson

\(^2\)Ibid., I, 173.
in a tumult. Johnson concludes this essay with a poem worth quoting:

What better can we do, than prostrate fall
Before him reverent; and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek. 43

Miss Catherine Talbot contributed No. 30, which is an allegory (as was Mrs. Carter's discussion of superstition and religion) depicting the cruel treatment of the personified Sunday and recommending a more pious observation of all Sundays. On Sunday some people lie abed late; some go on excursions to the country; some play cards; and some deplore Sundays. On the extreme there are those whose stern observances of Sunday makes it a thing of gloom and abhorrence to children and young people. Johnson's suggestion is a compromise so that Sunday would be both a day of worship and a time of gentle pleasures.

In the Rambler Johnson is the wise teacher in every field of social, religious, political, and economic life. The folly of pride of personal appearances, the evil of too much political power, the standards of marriage, the necessity of work, the art of living, the purpose of poetry, the state of unmarried women, and, most emphatically, the wisdom of following the principles of orthodox Christianity are some of the subjects of his religious essays.

43 Ibid., I, 174.
Using a death-bed scene, which he admits is purely imaginary, Johnson in No. 54 portrays the emotions of the survivors of the deceased friend. He says after the death of a friend, we are always prone to magnify our friend's virtues and minimize his faults. Too, we are forced to contemplate death and our lack of preparation for it, the same sentiment expressed in the essay on the brevity of life. Moralizing further, Johnson admonishes us to prepare by true repentance for that day when death, the conqueror, will inevitably take our lives. In this essay Johnson gives voice to his dread of death:

At the sight of this last conflict, I felt a sensation never known to me before; a confusion of passions, an awful stillness of sorrow, a gloomy terror without a name. The thoughts that entered my soul were too strong to be diverted, and too piercing to be endured; but such violence cannot be lasting; the storm subsided in a short time, I wept, retired, and grew calm.44

Johnson's prayer at the beginning of the Rambler, it will be remembered, was a supplication to God for ability to accomplish the task he had set for himself, that of portraying through his essays the advantages of following the principles of orthodox religion. With the help of God and by the use of his keen intellect, Johnson was able to accomplish that goal, for he certainly created for himself a position as moral philosopher and teacher of Christianity.

44Ibid., I, 93.
Although Johnson often seemed caustic and bitter towards those whose principles he opposed, he could also be very understanding, as is illustrated in the biography of Milton in the *Lives of the Poets*. Johnson, in the life of Milton, digressed from biographical facts long enough to show his difference of opinion and to deliver some of his religious beliefs. On the importance of the study of nature, Johnson said:

But the truth is, that the knowledge of nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. Whether we provide for action or conversation, whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong.

In relating the story of the life of Milton, Johnson, forgetting his task as a biographer, assumes again his preferred role and becomes the religious philosopher. However, Johnson, conscious of this digression, makes no apology; rather he admits it is well to teach people to do good and to avoid evil. Johnson is ever the religious philosopher repeating his belief that church affiliation of some nature is to be desired, for, if a person neglects outward worship of his Maker, he is likely to become permanently apathetic in his church attitude. Consequently, Johnson believes:

To be of no church is dangerous. Religion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated
only by faith and hope, will glide by degrees out of the mind, unless it be invigorated and repressed by external ordinances, by stated calls to worship, and the salutary influence of example.\footnote{45}{Ibid., II, 37.}

Further evidence that Johnson is unable to withhold his religious teaching, especially that of salvation by repentance, is observed throughout Johnson's works. In the life of Milton this philosophy is revealed in the following comment on the characters of Paradise Lost:

Of human beings there are but two: but those two are the parents of mankind, venerable before their fall for dignity and innocence, amiable after it for their repentance and submission. In the first state their affection is tender without weakness, and their piety sublime without presumption. When they have sinned, they show how discord begins in mutual frailty... how confidence of the divine favour is forfeited by sin, and how hope of pardon may be obtained by penitence and prayer.\footnote{46}{Ibid., II, 43.}

Johnson's conviction that life is a state of uncertainty from youth to old age and that death is always in the subconscious mind is the subject of No. 89 of the Idler. He also explains that philosophers have never been able to explain why man must spend his life in such dread. He reasons that physical ills and evils can terminate in moral good, because thinking people expect punishment for their sins and worldly pleasure and, in contemplation of the misery resulting from over-indulgence, relinquish some of their pleasures - thus evil can cause good. Johnson admits that
misery does not make all virtuous, but he maintains there would probably be less virtue if pain were not the penalty of sin. This coincides with the theory that a wise Creator planned a universe controlled by a system of balances. Johnson shows his scepticism of rationalism and reason, however, by commenting, "Reason has no authority over us, but by its power to warn us against evil."\(^47\)

When Johnson's mother died in 1759, he wrote *Rasselas* to secure enough money to defray the funeral expenses. Perhaps this was a method by which he was repenting of his neglect of his mother, whom he had been unable to visit in years, although it was always his good intention to visit her. This does not mean that he ignored or abandoned his mother; he wrote her often and provided for her care as much as his financial state permitted.

*Rasselas* contains Johnson's interpretation of life, an interpretation cleverly and forcefully unfolded. Rasselas, the young prince, represents youth trusting in perfection and happiness and his belief that life is a road of increasing joy; Imlac, the learned man, is the mouthpiece of Johnson's gloomy philosophy. When Rasselas approaches Imlac for advice and assistance in escaping from the happy valley, the old man tells Rasselas that everywhere in life

\(^47\)Johnson, "The Idler", *op. cit.*, I, 442.
unhappiness and discontent will be encountered. The reply of Rasselas is that he will not be content until he, too, has found by personal experience that such is the case. When Rasselas and Imlac, accompanied by Imlac's sister, Nekayah, leave the peaceful valley and travel over the world, Rasselas finds that among savages, kings, men, women, ignorant people, and learned people there is, as Imlac had told him, a feeling of jealousy and unhappiness. Through Imlac Johnson presents his conception of life: "Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed."48

One of the greatest disillusionments Rasselas encountered was the old philosopher's failure to be comforted by his own belief about death, which he had maintained he understood and accepted in confidence because of truth and reason. Yet, when his daughter died, the old philosopher could not be consoled. This criticism of the philosopher is a means of criticizing priests, of whom Imlac remarks, "... they discourse like angels, but they live like men."49

As Rasselas continued his search for happiness, he encountered other philosophers, but the only one willing to advise Rasselas was the one who interpreted the meaning of living in accordance with nature. However, as Rasselas

49 Ibid., I, 469.
listened to the old man, he became more confused by his philosophy, which was:

The way to be happy, is to live according to nature, in obedience to that natural and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed; which is not written on it by precept, but engraven by destiny; not instilled by education, but infused at our nativity.

Nekayah, too, presents Johnson's views; her conception of life is very similar to that of Imlac. Using Nekayah as a medium for expounding his philosophy, Johnson says that happiness and goodness can no more be attained in secluded areas than in congested ones, gaiety cannot be had by joining a merry party, piety cannot be reached by retreat from temptation. Marriage is usually a miserable state, upon which Nekayah, after much debate with Rasselas, made the famous remark: "Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures."  

Johnson's moralizing in Rasselas shows his belief that unhappiness, tragedy, pessimism form the theme of life and that this tragedy results from people possessing an abundance, and yet wanting additional wealth or power. People are discontented because they continually want and do not know what they want. When a desire or want is satisfied, a new wish replaces the one fulfilled; hence man is always in a state of discontent, confusion, and doubt.

After the travelers have visited many countries outside

\[50\text{Ibid., I, 471.}\] \[51\text{Ibid., I, 473.}\]
their happy valley and found everywhere and among all people unhappiness and greed, Rasselas agrees with Imlac's philosophy of life and admits the folly of expecting to find complete happiness in himself or in others. Following this disillusionment, Imlac lectures on the meaning of the soul, which to him is not material, and says he does not understand how thinking people could have such an erroneous conception. Rasselas becomes weary of the discourse on the nature of the soul and suggests they leave the gloomy thoughts of death and think about life. Nekayah, convinced of the truth of Imlac's principles, with something of haughtiness, yet with sadness and resignation, remarks: "To me the choice of life is become less important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity." 52

Thus, one sees that in Rasselas Johnson provided means to express his religious principles, a teaching device perhaps more interesting and effective than the essays of the Rambler and the Idler. In the words of Main, Rasselas is

... simply a great moral treatise, over the pages of which a sort of grave moral imagination has cast a gloomy grandeur which makes it one of the most impressive ever written. 53

Thus, it is evident that Johnson is an able religious philosopher who takes advantage of every opportunity to

52 Ibid., I, 489.
53 Main, Life and Conversations of Johnson, p. 93.
present his religious principles for the sake of Christianity. But a more complete view of this phase of Johnson's life is had through Boswell's immortal Life, which will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter III

JOHNSON'S RELIGION AS REFLECTED IN BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON

The close friendship of James Boswell and Samuel Johnson is one of the most perfect examples of trust and love between two men; also, it is one of the most difficult to understand. At first glance, it seems the two men had nothing in common; however, in considering the disparity between the two, one realizes that they did have many factors in common. Boswell, it must be admitted, was clever enough to attract the attention of Johnson so that the attention developed into a warm friendship which lasted until Johnson's death in 1784. It seems strange that Johnson would have been attracted to Boswell, for Boswell was a Scotchman, a representative of the nationality which Johnson despised, or pretended to despise, and a very intemperate and over-indulgent person. Also Boswell was one who was at times doubtful about the truth of Christianity and Johnson was a devout believer of Christianity, whose advanced ideas appealed to Boswell so that he was drawn to Johnson as a source of comfort. Perhaps it was this very doubt that brought the two together, for

... Boswell found in Johnson a never-failing source of comfort. Though Johnson himself was beset with doubts, his decided ability to defend Christianity
with reasonable arguments was for Boswell a welcome
haven in the stormy seas of rationalism. This was
undoubtedly one of the major reasons why the young
Boswell became so devoted a disciple of Johnson and
hence is a significant item in the genesis of the
great biography.1

Also Boswell's changing from his family's religion,
Presbyterianism, to Roman Catholicism and then to the Church
of England appealed to Johnson, the ardent supporter of the
Church. Another item making this friendship unusual was the
great difference in their ages, Johnson being thirty-one
years older. Johnson and Boswell were alike in that each
possessed a keen intellect, enjoyed people and conversation,
and appreciated literature.

Boswell ingratiated himself with Johnson through a great
deal of flattery and persistent effort, which was not diffi-
cult, for Johnson was susceptible to praise. Boswell
apparently hoped, by attaching himself to one as famous as
Johnson to win personal glory as well as to make Johnson
immortal. However, whatever the basis for the unusual friend-
ship, Johnson and Boswell became so close in their relation-
ship that a person hardly thinks of one without the other.

It was on May 16, 1763, that Johnson and Boswell first
became acquainted, when Mr. Thomas Davies introduced them at
a meeting in his shop. It seemed doubtful at this first
meeting that a friendship would ever develop because of

Boswell's nationality. Attempting to be pleasant, Boswell remarked that he could not help coming from Scotland. Johnson's reply was: "That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." Johnson meant by this remark that London did not especially welcome the scores of Scotchmen who were coming from Scotland.

Although Boswell did not fare too well at this first meeting, he planned to meet Johnson again very soon; however, for unrevealed reasons, Boswell did not see Johnson again until May 24, when the conversation, as before, did not go as smoothly as Boswell would have wished. However, Boswell did have an opportunity to see and record an interesting experience which was an indication of Johnson's character and belief. Very often Johnson defended some person being criticized; at this particular time Christopher Smart's practice of saying his prayers in the street was under attack. Johnson said it was better to pray in the street than not to pray at all, and he also delivered an oration on the intention in prayer and the evidences of religion. He said:

So, religious exercises, if not performed with an intention to please God, avail us nothing . . . .
The Christian religion has very strong evidences.
It, indeed, appears in some degree strange to reason.  

Boswell's admiration for the "Great Cham" was so sincere

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3*Ibid.*, I, 266.
that he recorded as much as possible of Johnson's conversation and kept his letters. During their twenty years of acquaintance Boswell and Johnson were actually together only a little over two years, because Boswell's father did not want his son to go to London as often as he wanted. Too, over-indulgence and other interests of Boswell prevented his hearing and recording as much of Johnson's conversations as was possible. When the two were absent from each other, they did maintain a fairly regular correspondence; however, at one period of over a year Johnson did not write Boswell, who rebuked his master so sternly, yet humbly, that Johnson wrote Boswell an apology for the long neglect. The result of Boswell's efforts is his Life of Johnson, which is recognized as one of the greatest biographies in literature. Even if the motive for writing the Life was a selfish one, Boswell deserves much gratitude and praise for making Johnson immortal. In 1765 Boswell and Johnson together made a three-month tour of Scotland and the Hebrides, about which Boswell wrote Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides. It is in these two works that Boswell has so vividly pictured Johnson as a man of religion and philosophy. It is true that there is much repetition of Johnson's ideas; this Boswell admits. Boswell said he received so much pleasure from hearing Johnson's remarks on his religious beliefs that often he purposely questioned Johnson about such things as ghosts, spirits,
mysteries, religious sects, and death just to hear Johnson expound his opinions.

Boswell has been accused of being partial to his subject in that he omitted, or revised, some of Johnson's remarks and experiences. If Boswell were guilty of this accusation, he was probably, through his great affection for Johnson, unaware of any omission. However, the account of Johnson's life as given by Boswell coincides with much of the same belief and philosophy which Johnson presented in Rasselas, the Rambler, and the Idler; therefore, it must be largely authoritative. Illustrative of Boswell's opinion of his master is this statement: "Dr. Johnson's character, religious, political, moral, and literary, nay his figure and manner, are, I believe, more generally known than those of almost any man." 4

An example of Boswell's shielding his master, or of Johnson's contradictions, is the incident growing out of Johnson's reporting in the Gentleman's Magazine the parliamentary debates. Johnson wrote them from memory, brief notes, or imagination and published them, as has already been discussed, and the question of the originality of the speeches arose. At one time Johnson admitted he favored the Tory speeches, but Boswell tells us that Johnson was remorseful and would write no more, and "such was the

tenderness of his conscience, that a short time before his death he expressed regret at his having been the author of fictions, which had passed for realities."⁵

Although Boswell did not know Johnson until 1763, he gives a complete biographical history of the dictator, explaining Johnson's early religious precepts, then his scepticism as an adolescent, and finally his serious consideration of religion after reading at Oxford Law's Serious Call to a Holy Life. Boswell repeats a birthday prayer Johnson gave in 1763, showing Johnson's early consciousness of the need of religion:

Mayst thou, O God, enable me for Jesus Christ's sake, to spend this in such a manner that I may receive comfort from it at the hour of death, and in the day of judgement! Amen.⁶

Boswell, through his portrait of Johnson, has given various views of the literary dictator and the religious teacher. The reader is made familiar with Johnson's views on politics, family life, subordination, toleration, literature, and religion. Especially well does Boswell record Johnson's religious views and arguments for Christianity, from which Johnson apparently derived little comfort.

Johnson is revealed as a person quick to anger and remorse. His wrath and indignation were not spared when his

⁵ Boswell, Life, I, 103.
⁶ Boswell, Tour to the Hebrides, p. 43.
religious principles were attacked or opposed; as Leslie Stephen said, "Johnson turns the roughest side of his contempt to anyone suspected of scepticism."\(^7\) Usually, if Johnson were being defeated, or confused, in an argument, which was seldom, he refused to continue in the conversation and left his opponent, or opponents, alone.\(^>\) Boswell shows us that Johnson was uncertain in this age of rationalism; Johnson did not believe man to be wholly bad, as did Swift; nor did he think man was by nature entirely pure and good, as did Shaftesbury. He did, however, maintain certain ideas upon the meaning of goodness, and, in reply to Boswell's defense of a man whose principles had been confused by an infidel, said that a man of uncertain principles was a menace to society, for he confused others.\(^<\) Johnson further stated: "We can have no dependence upon that instinctive, that constitutional goodness which is not founded upon principle."\(^8\) Perhaps this uncertainty was due to the conflict between the Evangelical and sentimental movements. Of the Evangelical movement, beginning about 1749, Fairchild says:

> It \(^>\) the Evangelical movement\(^7\) asserts very precise Christian beliefs; it stresses the innate depravity rather than the innate goodness of man; it tolerates no confusion of God, man, and nature; it is resolutely supernaturalistic.\(^9\)

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\(^7\)Stephen, op. cit., II, 369.

\(^8\)Boswell, Life, I, 296.

Johnson would agree with this theory except in the "innate depravity of man"; however, he had no sympathy with the deistic argument about nature and benevolence and reason. When Johnson and Boswell were in Scotland, a Mrs. MacLeod asked if no man was naturally good. Johnson's reply was: "No, madam, no more than a wolf."\(^{10}\) He denied that any child possessed more natural goodness than another, but because of methods of teaching, attention, and other causes, it was possible that one child might appear better or worse than another. In fact, it is a well-known fact that Johnson believed that children are by nature cruel and selfish. Although he had no children of his own, Johnson had his ideas on rearing children and gave the following discourse on the moral and religious teaching of children:

The rod produces an effect which terminates in itself. A child is afraid of being whipped and gets his task, and there's an end on't; whereas by exciting emulation and comparisons of superiority, you lay the foundation of lasting mischief; you make brothers and sisters hate each other.\(^ {11}\)

Johnson, as portrayed by Boswell, was both tolerant and intolerant. Johnson usually sympathized with most plans if they were at all reasonable or sincere, but he could also be very intolerant. In 1763 when Boswell and Johnson were dining at an inn, Johnson became involved in an argument with

\(^{10}\) Boswell, Tour to the Hebrides, p. 170.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 71.
a woman who commented on the extreme measures of the Inquisition. To the surprise of all except Boswell, Johnson defended the Inquisition by saying:

False doctrine should be checked on its first appearance; that the civil power should unite with the church in punishing those who dared to attack the established religion, and that such only were punished by the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{12}

Since, according to Lea, "the Inquisition was ever on the watch to punish any irreverence,"\textsuperscript{13} Johnson would naturally defend it and its suppression of unpopular opinions. He was tolerant to the extent that he believed every person should have liberty of conscience in religion. \textquotesingle\textquotesingle Man has the right to think as he pleases, for his thoughts are his own, but Johnson believed man did not have the moral right to think as he pleases and ought to inform himself and think justly.\textquotesingle\textquotesingle In 1773, engaging Goldsmith and Rev. Mayo, a dissenting minister, in conversation on toleration, Johnson said: "But, Sir, no member of a society has a right to teach any doctrine contrary to what the society holds to be true."\textsuperscript{14} When Rev. Mayo, on this same occasion, questioned Johnson on his belief in martyrdom, Johnson said martyrdom was necessary to establish truth. When Goldsmith remarked

\textsuperscript{12} Boswell, Life, I, 311.

\textsuperscript{13} H. C. Lea, A History of the Inquisition of Spain, IV, 509.

\textsuperscript{14} Boswell, Life, I, 511.
that martyrdom could be the same as suicide, Johnson's answer was that such was not necessarily the case - no more than men serving in an army. However, Johnson agreed with Goldsmith that there were limits to the extent to which one could safely go in defending or furthering his cause. He said:

In the same manner it is a duty to instruct the ignorant, and of consequence to convert infidels to Christianity; but no man in the common course of things is obliged to carry this to such a degree as to incur the danger of martyrdom, as no man is obliged to strip himself to the shirt in order to give charity. I have said, that a man must be persuaded that he has a particular delegation from heaven.15

Speaking further on martyrdom, toleration and the Inquisition, Johnson, in reply to Goldsmith's statement that the first reformers were burned for believing bread and wine to be Christ, Johnson's defense of the action of the Inquisition on transubstantiation was:

Sir, they were not burnt for not believing bread and wine to be Christ, but for insulting those who did believe it. And, Sir, when the first reformers began, they did not intend to be martyred: as many of them ran away as could.16

Johnson was very concerned about the wave of infidelity which was sweeping the nation, but he was optimistic enough to think that perhaps a brighter time would come and break away the gloom of infidelity. Also, he refused to believe there were as many infidels as were reported. When Boswell

15 Ibid., I, 513. 16 Ibid., I, 513.
mentioned the way infidels should be treated, Johnson's reply was that, although infidels were robbers in that they were attempting to deny the world religious principles, there was no reason to become angry in dealing with them. He suggested the use of ridicule in engaging in controversy with infidels.

While many people hated Charles II, Johnson said he had admirable qualities; for example, although "Charles II was licentious in his practice, he always had a reverence for what was good."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, I, 579.} Charles II did not require that his people be Roman Catholics, and, as a result, the Church was well attended during his reign. This is also an example of Johnson's tolerance and readiness to defend one whom he admired.

The mark of perfection in humanity, according to Johnson, is Christianity. A characteristic of Christianity is the wish to do good to others, which, to Johnson, was advancing the cause of Christianity. To fail to do so was criminal because to know happiness one had to know God, and it was the duty of man to bring Christianity to those who were ignorant of religion so that these unlearned people might also have happiness. By wider instruction in Christianity, Johnson did not mean making everybody equal, for he said it was better that a few people be miserable than for all to be miserable, as would be the case if all men were
put on the same basis. Therefore, in his argument for religious teaching, Johnson was not forgetting his approval of subordination, because he said that people are so unequal in natural abilities that an observant person could easily detect in a very short time this inequality.

It seems that Boswell wished to prod Johnson into an outburst in order to record his points of argument; many times Johnson more than fulfilled Boswell's expectations, often, however, the result being quite different from what he had expected. For example, not long after the two became acquainted, Boswell revealed to Johnson, who graciously listened, the story of his life and confessed his lack of religious ardour. Boswell said he had come to realize the folly of his infidelity and needed guidance and advice. Perhaps this appealed to Johnson's love of playing the role of teacher and counselor; for, according to Boswell, Johnson with the utmost patience and sympathy said: "Give me your hand; I have taken a liking to you." Then he assured Boswell that the exact points of orthodox Christianity were not so important as to merit unnecessary consideration. Astounding Boswell even further, Johnson on different occasions, in 1763 and in 1772, made the following statements, which are alsoindicative of his tolerance of other

theories or ideas when they were sincere:

For my part, Sir, I think all Christians, whether Papists or Protestants, agree in the essential articles, and that their differences are trivial, and rather political than religious.\textsuperscript{19}

True, Sir: all denominations of Christians have really little difference in points of doctrine, though they may differ widely in external forms. There is a prodigious difference between the external form of one of your Presbyterian churches in Scotland, and a church in Italy; yet the doctrine taught is essentially the same.\textsuperscript{20}

Johnson was always impatient with those who denied Christianity. He said Hume's denial of Christianity was based upon ignorance of the Scriptures, since Hume admitted he had never read the new testament. It was always easy to be on the negative side, but even so the evidence for Christianity was stronger than it was against it. In fact, Johnson said he had even thought of Hume's own arguments against Christianity before Hume ever published them, but that he had stronger arguments for Christianity than Hume could possibly produce against it. It was in 1763 in this same conversation that Boswell mentioned Hume's argument against the miracles, which Boswell himself doubted, since there was no concrete evidence of them. Johnson agreed that caution should be taken in believing the miracles, as they were hard to prove. On miracles as evidence of the truth of

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., I, 271. \quad \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., I, 438.
Christianity, Johnson reasoned:

... although God has made Nature to operate by certain fixed laws, yet it is not unreasonable to think that he may suspend those laws in order to establish a system highly advantageous to mankind. Now the Christian religion is a most beneficial system, as it gives us light and certainty where we were before in darkness and doubt. The miracles which prove it are attested by men who had no interest in deceiving us... Indeed, for some centuries the heathens did not pretend to deny the miracles... This is a circumstance of great weight. Then, Sir, when we take the proofs derived from prophecies which have been so exactly fulfilled, we have most satisfactory evidence. Supposing a miracle possible, as to which, in my opinion, there can be no doubt, we have as strong evidence for the miracles in support of Christianity, as the nature of the thing admits.\textsuperscript{21}

Johnson said that even if there were not already strong evidences for Christianity, the fact that Christianity had been followed by great scholars who, after due deliberation, had accepted it as truth was sufficient evidence to warrant its value. "Grotius was an acute man, a lawyer, a man accustomed to examine evidence, and he was convinced... Sir Isaac Newton set out to be an infidel, and came to be a firm believer."\textsuperscript{22} Johnson, being such a devout subject of the Church of England and condemning any opposition to orthodox Christianity, had little sympathy with any points of extreme radicalism in any different belief, and he did not overlook the possibility of winning his point in any argument. If a person were in doubt concerning religious principles, Johnson was ever the patient teacher; but if a

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., I, 297.  \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., I, 303.
person were directly different from Johnson in his views, Johnson seemed to consider the matter a personal affront and did not hesitate to use "the butt of his pistol" to win the argument. At a meeting at the Mitre tavern in 1760, Boswell told Johnson of a person who was so doubtful of immortality that he cynically remarked that since man dies like a dog, let him lie like a dog. Johnson's tart and apt reply was: "If he dies like a dog, let him lie like a dog." Another example of Johnson's loyal support of Christianity and his ready anger at what he considered foolish statements is the incident in 1760, when a discussion arose over the essay of Mr. Deane, a divine of the Church of England. The essay advanced the theory that animals have a future life, an unorthodox theory that angered Johnson, as did any unorthodox matter. When a gentleman said that he did not know what to think of the very intelligent dog, Johnson made the very pertinent answer: "True, Sir, and when we see a very foolish fellow, we don't know what to think of him."

Johnson also considered Divine punishment and forgiveness as evidence of Christianity. A conception of the punishment of sins and the great sacrifice for sin, which was the death of Christ, seemed to Johnson also evidence of

\[23\] Ibid., I, 337.  \[24\] Ibid., I, 371.
the truth of Christianity. Johnson said God could have punished every sinner without having permitted the death of Christ, but that He wished to show his repugnance for moral evil and to prove the wisdom of being virtuous. Johnson told Boswell that

... his notion was that it [the death of Christ] did not atone for the sins of the world. But by satisfying divine justice, by showing that no less than the Son of God suffers for sin, it showed to men and innumerable created beings the heinousness of sin, and therefore vengeance to be exercised against sinners, as it otherwise must have been.25

This painful death was a very concrete evidence of the power of God and this manner of atonement showed that the purpose of punishment is to warn and to show the ill effects of moral evil. Then finally through this punishment borne by Christ man will know mercy through individual repentance and obedience, a procedure which was God's fulfillment of the law, not His destruction of it.

Boswell tells us that when he visited Johnson in London in 1766, he found Johnson still bitter towards any effort to weaken good principles. As an example, Boswell cites an incident in which a young man mentioned a servant's refusal to accept the scriptures because the servant could not read them in the original and could not be sure they were not invented. Johnson's indignant reply was: "Why, foolish

25 Boswell, Tour to the Hebrides, p. 63.
fellow, has he any better authority for anything he believes?"  

Johnson believed that the unlearned should submit to the learned in matters of religion and education, which is further evidence of his belief in subordination and his disagreement with Rousseau, who believed in equal opportunities for all. Showing his firm conviction of the value of subordination, Johnson said:

So far is it from being true that men are naturally equal that no two people can be half an hour together, but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other.  

Boswell, then, gives further evidence that Johnson prefers being the teacher even in conversation. While he enjoyed sociable talk and lively argument, he soon became the teacher; but he was not priggish, being conscious of his own faults, or haughty, having an interest in the salvation of the common man. It was the faults of the average person which concerned him, pointing out broad and general truths based on Christianity. The advice he gave, therefore, was of such a nature that it appealed to the ordinary man and gave him courage. Johnson would have indeed been a happier man if he could have found for himself some of the comfort which he provided for others. Even though religion formed such an important element in Johnson's life that he did not

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26 Boswell, Life, I, 341.

27 Ibid., I, 340.
abandon his religious precepts at church but carried them with him every day, he was never completely satisfied. His religion must have meant a series of difficult rules, from which he felt he continually digressed. His wish to gain perfection and his feeling that he had not attained it were not conducive to happiness. Perhaps Johnson's reason for praising Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was that he felt a kinship with Christian in his journey through life, a journey in which Johnson was beset by many burdens and temptations, but hoped he would some time know the reward Christian knew.

As has been mentioned, Johnson had little patience with those who opposed Christianity. Neither did Johnson approve of anyone changing his religious faith. Angered by a young lady of his acquaintance who had accepted the Quaker religion, Johnson in 1778, according to Boswell, made the following remarks:

The heathens were easily converted, because they had nothing to give up; but we ought not, without very strong conviction indeed, to desert the religion in which it may be said Providence placed you. If you live conscientiously in that religion, you may be safe. But error is dangerous indeed, if you err when you choose a religion for yourself.  

Johnson was also the wise teacher in offering advice on the choice of a profession. One should choose a profession that would please one's family and one's Creator, as a

Ibid., II, 225.
great measure of happiness results from pleasing others. Also of prime importance in realizing happiness and security in one's profession are diligence and honesty. Work should not be chosen only as a means of providing luxury but also as a challenge to conquer difficulties and accomplish good. In a letter to Boswell in 1766, Johnson wrote the following:

Life is not long, and too much of it must not pass in idle deliberation, which those who begin it by prudence, and continue it with subtility, must, after long expense of thought, conclude by chance. To prefer one mode of life to another, upon just reasons, requires faculties which it has not pleased our Creator to give us.\(^{29}\)

Every person believes he is strong enough to abide by his rules of conduct and to fulfill his resolutions. Johnson says this is seldom true, a conclusion probably based upon his own experiences, but that some good is derived from just the good intention lying behind the resolution. Johnson contradicts himself on the value of good intentions, for he at another time made the oft-quoted statement: "Sir, Hell is paved with good intentions."\(^{30}\) He did, however, believe enough good is derived from making resolutions to warrant the advice of not neglecting to make resolutions just because one has failed to keep them. A person who lives day by day without some sort of restraint or plan seldom fulfills his original hopes, hence the constant need of a goal. Man needed to hear and engage in more serious and religious

\(^{29}\)Ibid., I, 348. \(^{30}\)Ibid., I, 591.
conversation so that he would be exposed to worthwhile ideas and thoughts and would thus have a basis on which to begin to think for himself.

Johnson lamented that society had so changed that people seldom had the opportunity of deriving benefits from instructive conversations on religion. People, when they see their hopes frustrated, instead of becoming more determined to conquer their problems, retire and permit their problems to conquer them. Johnson again contradicts himself in that he laments the passing of the simplicity of life in which there were serious and learned conversations and quietness for meditation. However, Johnson said, "No wise man will go to live in the country, unless he has something to do which can be better done in the country." Johnson showed that he believed that some well-defined plan of spending one's life should be made so that every day or year will have its purpose," if every part of time has its duty, the hour will call into remembrance its proper engagement." He admitted that he had failed to abide by his own suggestions, but he wanted others, through observation of his experiences, to escape the evils he had known. In the midst of delivering his treatise on how to secure happiness and realize the best from life, Johnson thinks he has failed as a teacher because

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of being a poor example and seems to become even more despondent.

Although Johnson was doubtful about many things, he did have definite convictions, one of which was punishment for sins. Boswell, using his clever technique of influencing Johnson to be the philosopher, asked him if probably the description and account of punishment discussed in the scriptures were not figurative. Johnson replied that he doubted he had fulfilled the conditions which insured salvation and feared that he would be one of those damned, that is, sent to hell and punished eternally; for God had promised punishment. While on a visit to Dr. Taylor in 1777, Johnson remarked to Boswell:

Sir, you are to consider the intention of punishment in a future state. We have no reason to be sure that we shall then be no longer liable to offend against God. We do not know that even the angels are quite in a state of security; nay we know that some of them have fallen. It may, therefore, perhaps be necessary, in order to preserve both men and angels in a state of rectitude, that they should have continually before them the punishment of those who have deviated from it; but we may hope that by some other means a fall from rectitude may be prevented.\(^{33}\)

Johnson believed in original sin and dictated Boswell the following passage on the fall of man and Christ's atonement:

With respect to original sin, the inquiry is not

\(^{33}\textit{Ibid.}, II, 153.\)
necessary; for whatever is the cause of human corruption, men are evidently and confessedly so corrupt, that all the laws of heaven and earth are insufficient to restrain them from crimes.

Whatever difficulty there may be in the conception of vicarious punishments, it is an opinion which has had possession of mankind in all ages. There is no nation that has not used the practice of sacrifices. Whoever, therefore, denies the propriety of vicarious punishments, holds an opinion which the sentiments and practice of mankind have contradicted, from the beginning of the world. . . .

Johnson received more comfort from his conviction that death is followed by punishment or reward than he could from the theory that death means annihilation, and he refused to believe that anyone else felt complacent about it. He said Hume was untruthful when he said he had no horror of such a state, but, as a humorous afterthought, remarked that if Hume really believed in annihilation, his word was not to be trusted anyway and accordingly whatever Hume said had no significance. In reply to a statement by Miss Seward that annihilation was a pleasing sleep without a dream, Johnson retorted:

It is neither pleasing, nor sleep; it is nothing. Now mere existence is so much better than nothing, that one would rather exist even in pain, than not exist. . . . It is in the apprehension of it that the horror of annihilation consists.

Boswell, appearing to have an inhuman delight in tantalizing Johnson on the subject of death, described the execution of some convicts and told Johnson they seemed to

\[34\text{Ibid.}, \text{II}, 424.\]  
\[35\text{Ibid.}, \text{II}, 224.\]
have no fear of death, an unusual scene because he thought fear of death was natural to man. Johnson said if they had no fear of death, it was because they had never thought at all, because fear of death is so natural to man that he shuns the thoughts of it. Johnson admitted his fear of death and said that in thinking of his death he had not decided whether he wanted some friend to be with him or to be just with God. Although Johnson feared the state after death, he was not a coward and had great physical courage. Boswell, determined to prove to Johnson that not every person feared death, said that there were frequent accounts of famous public officials having approached death without any apparent dread. Johnson's ready reply was: "The better a man is, the more afraid he is of death, having a clearer view of infinite purity."^36

To the statement that St. Paul approached death without hesitation, Johnson said he had been converted by a supernatural interposition and had every reason to be assured. But, as man's salvation depends on his obedience and repentance, he can never be perfectly sure that God has accepted his repentance.

When Boswell's father died in 1782, Johnson wrote Boswell a letter, in which he said the contemplation of death

[^36]: Ibid., II, 117.
filled him with a very disturbing emotion. His melancholy was so great that he wrote Boswell:

... when the thoughts are extended to a future state, the present life seems hardly worthy of all those principles of conduct, and maxims of prudence, which one generation of men has transmitted to another. ... 37

Boswell discusses at length Johnson's last days and his fear of death. Johnson's opinion of one who fearlessly faced death is:

... I never thought confidence with respect to futurity, any part of the character of a brave, a wise, or a good man. Bravery has no place where it can avail nothing; wisdom impresses strongly the consciousness of those faults, of which it is, perhaps, itself an aggravation. ... 38

In spite of the fact that Johnson in his last days suffered from dropsy and asthma, he preferred that condition to the ease of death; but Boswell tells us that in May, 1784, preceding Johnson's death in December, Johnson was granted a sudden reprieve from his illness and seemed so calm that God surely must have recognized the sincerity and humility in Johnson's repentance and granted him peace and certainty. The scene impressed Boswell so vividly that he hesitated to describe it, saying many might consider the account as superstitious; nevertheless, he asserted his conviction that even the most rational thinkers would have been persuaded that the hand of Providence was evident.

37 Ibid., II, 450. 38 Ibid., II, 629.
In Boswell's picture of Johnson, one sees Johnson as an unhappy, but brilliant, youth growing into a man who was to be annoyed the remainder of his life by illness, grief, doubts, fears, and terrors of death. However, if one is to believe Boswell, Johnson, in the very last days of his life, seemed more calm and satisfied than ever before. To the very last Johnson's intellectual power was keen and dominant. Always Johnson had feared madness and death; death he knew would come and madness he feared would come. He prayed that he would always have understanding, a wish which was granted. Even when he was so stricken that he was unable to speak, he composed Latin verse. Only a few days before Johnson's death, when he was suffering great pain, he refused opiates, saying:

I will take no more physick, not even my opiates; for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to God unclouded.39

One of the most interesting topics of conversation between Johnson and Boswell was that of life in a future state and what it would be like. Since neither knew, both agreed there was no harm in conjecture beyond what the Scriptures revealed. Johnson said the happiness of an unembodied spirit would be the consciousness of God's approval, and Boswell believed a great happiness would be the reunion of

39 Boswell, Life, II, 644.
friends. However, Johnson reminded Boswell that many friendships which had existed on earth would be terminated in this state, for not all those forming friendships on earth would be eligible for this state after death; also the same would be true of our relatives. Johnson at this time made his famous remark: "After death, we shall see everyone in a true light."\textsuperscript{40} On the discussion of a middle state after death, Johnson believed that it could be true and that if one had friends or relatives in this middle state, it would not be wrong to pray for the salvation of their souls.

Johnson did not condemn the Catholic belief in purgatory and said that if there really were souls in purgatory, it certainly was not wrong to pray for their salvation. The doctrine of purgatory was acceptable, but the selfish practice identified with purgatory, buying salvation for souls, was a violation of Christian laws. Johnson believed that the will is free and was not inclined towards the belief in predestination, although he avoided its discussion.

Johnson, as Boswell points out, was always deeply grieved at the death of a friend, or the death of one close to his friends, and usually sent a letter of sympathy, which was, in reality, a sort of sermon. He always mentioned the hope of a future meeting and delivered the admonition to the

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., I, 446.
survivors to accept without rancour the will of God. In a letter of sympathy in 1750 to Mr. Elphinston, whose mother had died, Johnson suggested that Mr. Elphinston write a sketch of the life of his mother, including minute details of her conversation and habits, so that, when grief had subsided, the mother would always seem near. On the possibility of being reunited, Johnson wrote Mr. Elphinston:

... yet, surely, there is something pleasing in the belief, that our separation from those whom we love is merely corporeal; and it may be a great excitement to virtuous friendship, if it can be made probable, that that union that has received the divine approbation shall continue to eternity.\footnote{Ibid., I, 143.}

Thus, we see Johnson as the moralist; yet he was, like the wise philosopher whom Rasselas met, unable to console himself when Mrs. Johnson died. Boswell clearly portrays the extent of Johnson's grief for his departed wife and proves that Johnson did love her. Johnson always said special prayers in commemoration of her death. Johnson sometimes felt that "Tetty" was very near, a circumstance which, no doubt, was the basis for his halting belief in a middle state after death. On Easter, 1753, in a prayer for the salvation of his wife's soul, Johnson shows this belief by praying:

And, O Lord, so far as it may be lawful in me, I commend to thy fatherly goodness the soul of my
departed wife; beseeching Thee to grant her whatever is best in her present state, and finally to receive her to eternal happiness. ... 42

Johnson prayed that through his grief for his wife he would become more pious so that when he died, there would be a reunion. In the midst of his great sorrow he prepared for her funeral a beautiful sermon, but it was not found until after Johnson’s death. Also at the time of his wife’s death, Johnson, in tears, joined the Reverend Dr. Taylor in prayer and through this pious act was somewhat comforted. For many years after the death of his wife, Johnson kept the memory of her and her death before him, which bears out his suggestion that one would be more pious if he kept the idea of mortality before him. However, Johnson, although he never forgot his wife, was able to stir himself from his grief, as Boswell relates:

... and once, when he was in a placid frame of mind, he was obliged to own to me that he had enjoyed happier days, and had many more friends, since that gloomy hour than before. 43

As has been seen, Boswell took great delight in mentioning to Johnson topics on Christianity, moral principles, and ghosts. In the ensuing argument, if there was any, Johnson often chose the negative side because he could produce more evidence for that side, not necessarily that he believed


43 Boswell, Life, I, 200.
that way. His arguments for following religious principles and for believing in ghosts and spirits were often given as a result of the technique Boswell employed in getting Johnson to talk. Boswell says the reason ghosts are discussed so often in his Life is that he deliberately led Johnson into such discussions, knowing Johnson's willingness to discuss, or debate, their possibility.

When Boswell questioned Johnson about his belief in ghosts, Johnson refused to commit himself, saying that if he heard a voice telling him to repent, it could be his imagination, probably resulting from a guilty conscience. On the other hand, if he should be told of the death of someone and then have the news of the death verified, he would believe he had supernatural intelligence. Johnson was made the victim of a joke or story concerning the Cock-Lane Ghost, when in reality he had been active in determining, largely for his own satisfaction, that the entire story was the result of the imagination of an overly-sensitive child.

On another occasion, when belief in ghosts was the topic of conversation, Johnson told Boswell that Mr. Cave, Johnson's old and very dependable friend of the Gentleman's Magazine, once reported that he saw a ghost, but that it was such a horrible shadowy being that Mr. Cave did not like to mention it. At this same time the subject of the belief in witches was added to the discussion. Johnson said witches
were those who made use of evil spirits, and he did not at
all discredit the idea. Apparently weighing all the evi-
dence, Johnson told Boswell there had been confessions by
persons possessed with evil spirits. In fact, Boswell
credits Johnson with the following statement:

Why, sir, if moral evil be consistent with the
government of the Deity, why may not physical evil be
also consistent with it? It is not more strange that
there should be evil spirits than evil men; evil
unembodied spirits than evil embodied spirits. And
as to storms, we know there are such things, and it
is no worse that evil spirits raise them than that
they rise.∗

Johnson's general attitude towards ghosts and witches
was that all reason was against their existence, but instinct
was generally for it. Johnson quoted John Wesley as be-
lieving in ghosts; also he was familiar with the story con-
cerning Parson Ford's ghost, a story which he admitted could
have some basis of truth. Too, Johnson had enough respect
for scientific reasoning to want to investigate stories he
heard; and if there were sufficient evidence to warrant the
truth of the existence of ghosts, he accepted it. He said
that people for five thousand years had been wondering if
there were ghosts but that there had never been a definite
example of a person's returning after death.

Johnson was unwilling to believe extraordinary things,
as is evidenced by his refusal to believe the story of an

∗Boswell, Tour to the Hebrides, p. 28.
underground river bursting forth as a spring, which was indeed true. Boswell rebuked him by saying Johnson came near believing Hume's arguments against miracles. Johnson replied:

But the Christian revelation is not proved by the miracles alone, but as connected with prophecies, and with the doctrines in confirmation of which the miracles were wrought.45

Johnson did not entirely disbelieve in apparitions, for to him, to have done so would have been to deny the existence of the soul between death and resurrection. To Johnson an apparition was a departed spirit making itself known, and he cited an experience which he had at Oxford. He recalled that once when he was entering a door, he distinctly heard his mother call to him. Johnson admitted that the belief in ghosts and returning spirits was a very personal thing and not something one would accept from another person, regardless of how truthful that person might be.

One can see that Johnson was easily enticed into lecturing on ghosts simply because he enjoyed delving into discussions of the supernatural. If he had not been willing to engage Boswell in conversation concerning the spiritual world, Boswell could not have directed the discussion so easily.

Johnson's ability to defend himself in arguments other

45 Boswell, Life, II, 144.
than on religion and to smother his opponent in confusion is undisputed. One of the most amusing incidents is the one in which Johnson showed his dislike for profanity or vulgarity. In 177 when Johnson was visiting Dr. Taylor, a gentleman-farmer, Taylor attempted to defend Mungo Campbell, who had shot the Earl of Eglintoune. It seems there had been trouble between the two, and the farmer made an unfortunate remark to the effect that Eglintoune was a "damned" fool to go near Campbell. Then, according to Boswell, the wrath of Johnson so overflowed that in angry sarcasm he replied:

He [Eglintoune] was not a damned fool: he only thought too well of Campbell. He did not believe Campbell would be such a damned scoundrel, as to do so damned a thing. 45

There can be no doubt that the farmer was subdued and convinced of Johnson's dislike of swearing. Another example of Johnson's manner of arguing for victory is his debate with the Irishman. On June 25, 1763, while Boswell was dining at Clifton's eating-house on Butcher-row, he was surprised to see Johnson enter. Boswell says that soon Johnson and the Irishman became engaged in a heated argument about the origin of negroes. Johnson, always abhorring unpleasant language, walked away when his opponent became rather abusive and profane in his speech. The argument is interesting,

46 Ibid., II, 145.
because it shows Johnson's tendency to be both emotional and rational in his reasoning. Johnson's answer to the Irishman was:

"Why, Sir, it has been accounted for in three ways: either by supposing they are the posterity of Ham, who was cursed; or that God at first created two kinds of man, one black and another white; or that by the heat of the sun the skin is scorched, and so acquires a sooty hue. This matter has been much canvassed among naturalists, but has never been brought to any certain issue." 47

Though very loyal to the Church of England and preferring it to all others, Johnson conceded that there was good in the others. He had a very sympathetic feeling towards the Catholic Church but did not admire the Presbyterian church at all, although he maintained a pleasant relationship with people affiliated with it. Boswell described Johnson's behavior on an occasion when he told Johnson that Hume had said Johnson would stand before a cannon to see the Convocation restored. Johnson became very angry and said:

"And would I not, Sir? Shall the Presbyterian Kirk of Scotland have its General Assembly, and the Church of England be denied its Convocation?" 48

Although Johnson was, to a certain extent, tolerant, he did not wholly approve the custom of publicly denouncing sinners. It was the purpose of the clergy to rebuke and shame his flock for the sake of their salvation, but a

47Ibid., I, 268.  
48Ibid., I, 310.
minister could become too suspicious and condemn when no censure was due. If a person was unjustly accused from the pulpit, he was made so bitter and resentful that the purpose lying behind the reprimand was lost.

Showing his respect for the Catholic Church, Johnson said:

A man who is converted from Protestantism to Popery may be sincere: he parts with nothing: he is only superadding to what he already had. But a convert from Popery to Protestantism gives up so much of what he has held as sacred as any thing that he retains; there is so much laceration of mind in such a conversion, that it can hardly be sincere and lasting.  

As previously mentioned, Johnson agreed that most church doctrines are similar; it is the external forms that are different. He said the purpose behind compelling students of the Universities to subscribe to the articles was not to make them understand the articles, but to cause them to adhere to the Church of England. Few people know the difference between church doctrines and understand what is meant by certain churches.

Although Johnson did not denounce the Catholic Church, he said that he could never be a Papist but that he wished he could be, since in the Roman Church there were so many helps to Heaven, which he feared he would never attain. He believed that even the Catholics themselves did not subscribe

\[49\text{Ibid.}, I, 403.\]
to all the articles of their faith. Johnson said, "I would be a Papist if I could. I have fear enough; but an obstinate rationality prevents me."\(^{50}\) Usually Johnson allowed no great criticism of the Catholics, but on one occasion, when he was rather annoyed, Boswell said Johnson expressed resentment towards them by saying: "In everything in which they differ from us they are wrong,"\(^{51}\) and by agreeing that there was much corruption practiced and condoned by the priests. As to giving the bread only to the communicants in the celebration of the mass, Johnson said the Catholics had probably changed gradually from primitive forms of worship. Furthermore, this practice was no more to be criticized than that of substituting sprinkling for the old rite of baptism.

The Methodists Johnson did not approve, arguing with the general trend of thought that Methodism was a sentimental movement that would not survive; however, some of their characteristics he did admire. They expressed themselves so that the common man could understand and be impressed, a practice Johnson believed all clergymen would do well to follow. There were practices in Methodism which Johnson thought could be applied to all religions; if variety and modifications could make other things more interesting and acceptable, why would not the same be true of religion? Too,

\(^{50}\) Ibid., II, 548. \(^{51}\) Ibid., II, 305.
he admitted most Methodist clergymen must be sincere; otherwise, they would not spend so many hours walking and talking for such a small sum. However, Johnson had no patience with the Methodist claim to possessing an inner light. He thought such beliefs were a detriment to society. Johnson approved the expulsion of six Methodist students from Oxford, saying it was the correct procedure for students who, instead of being taught, wanted to teach. He said:

If a man pretends to a principle of action of which I can know nothing, nay, not so much as he has it, but only that he pretends to it; how can I tell what that person may be prompted to do?\(^5\)\(^2\)

Johnson believed that church rituals should be simple and dignified; he believed in careful observance of baptism and keeping of certain church holidays. These holidays were not to be superstitious festivals, but to be memorials of important events. A certain day for commemorating the birth of Christ should be kept, as well as Easter. Certain periods should be devoted to prayer, which to Johnson was a basis of salvation.

Johnson particularly enjoyed attending church services on Good Friday and on Easter, and he and Boswell formed the habit of attending these services together. Boswell often comments on Johnson's rigid abstinence on these days, even to his refusal to take milk in his tea because the milk

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\(^5\)\(^2\)Ibid., I, 419.
contained animal fat; neither would he perform menial labor on Good Friday. On one Easter when Boswell and Johnson were unable to attend church together because of Johnson's illness, Johnson wrote Boswell of his great disappointment and expressed the wish that they pray for each other.

Boswell said Johnson always seemed more content at an Easter church service than at any other church service; the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ seemed to give him proof of the immortality of man. Johnson said he received hope and courage on Easter Sunday and wrote some of his most impressive prayers after such experiences. He preferred church services devoted to prayers, for he said they were easier to listen to and to give than to listen to the sermons which were neither interesting nor learned. Even in the last two years of his life Johnson gives accounts of attending church, even after he is barely able to speak or walk. In 1783 he wrote Boswell that he had attended church the preceding Sunday and that he believed his health was greatly improved; then in August, 1784, he wrote again of being at church and still hoping for relief from his asthmatic condition.

Sunday was an unpleasant day to Johnson when he was a child because of his mother's insistence that he attend church. He says when he was about nine years old, he became very rebellious against church attendance. The fact
that the nine-year-old boy was able to form such definite opinions was indicative of his ability to be a leader. Then when he attended Oxford, he again became interested in religious philosophy. As has been mentioned, Johnson always maintained this interest in religion; yet he could never become completely satisfied with it. In October, 1765, according to Boswell, Johnson made the following entry in his journal:

At church, Oct. --65.
To avoid all singularity. Bonaventura.
To come in before service, and compose my mind by meditation, or by reading some portions of scriptures. Tettv.
If I can hear the sermon, to attend it, unless attention be more troublesome than useful.
To consider the act of prayer as a reposal of myself upon God, and a resignation of all into his holy heart.53

Johnson believed Sunday should be different from other days, as he expressed in the Rambler; it should be a time of relaxation and reflection and not an occasion for excessive pleasure. Children, he thought, should not be forced too strictly to observe the Sabbath, or they would hate Sundays rather than respect them. It was his belief that if reading were done on Sunday, it should, in general, be of a theological nature. He would, he remarked, look at a newspaper if a friend should show him one, but it would not be his preferred reading material. Concerning the observance of

53 Ibid., I, 333. In explaining Bonaventura Boswell gives the following footnote: "He was probably proposing to himself the model of this excellent person, who for his piety was named the Seraphic Doctor." Boswell makes no particular explanation of Johnson's use of the word Tettv.
Sundays, Johnson on July 13, 1755 wrote in his journal:

Having lived not without an habitual reverence for the Sabbath, yet without that attention to its religious duties which Christianity requires;

1. To rise early, and in order to do it, to go to sleep early on Saturday.
2. To use some extraordinary devotion in the morning.
3. To examine the tenour of my life, and particularly the last week; and to mark my advances in religion, or recession from it.
4. To read the Scripture methodically with such helps as are at hand.
5. To go to church twice.
6. To read books of Divinity, either speculative or practical.
7. To instruct my family.
8. To wear off by meditation any worldly soil contracted in the week.  

In these regulations Johnson set up for himself, hope and doubt are seen. It is easy to see that he wanted to find a common-sense basis for salvation that would be in conformity with his belief in orthodox Christianity. In the midst of his pessimism there is something pathetic and desperate in his vague hope that by some means there will evolve a way of life not doomed to disappointment.

Some people, perhaps, might accuse Johnson of being a hypocrite, but Boswell pictures him as a person who in privacy prayed to his Maker for salvation and as a person who was sincere in his repentance and prayer. Johnson prayed that he would not be completely destroyed after death and that his sins would be forgiven.

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54 Ibid., I, 203.
Boswell's words concerning Johnson give a clear picture of Johnson as a man of religion and politics, because to give an evaluation of Johnson was Boswell's stated purpose. In Boswell's words:

Man is, in general, made up of contradictory qualities. . . . In proportion to the native vigour of the mind, the contradictory qualities will be the more prominent, and more difficult to be adjusted; and, therefore we are not to wonder, that Johnson exhibited an eminent example of this remark which I have made upon human nature. At different times, he seemed a different man, in some respects not, however, in any great or essential article, upon which he had fully employed his mind. . . . He was prone to superstition, but not to credulity. Though his imagination might incline him to a belief of the marvellous and the mysterious, his vigorous reason examined the evidence with jealousy. He was a sincere and zealous Christian, of high Church-of-England and monarchical principles, which he would not tamely suffer to be questioned; and had, perhaps, at an early period, narrowed his mind somewhat too much, both as to religion and politics... and, from a spirit of contradiction and a delight in shewing his powers, he would often maintain the wrong side with equal warmth and ingenuity; so that, when there was an audience, his real opinions could seldom be gathered from his talk . . . but he was too conscientious to make error permanent and pernicious, by deliberately writing it; and, in all his numerous works, he earnestly inculcated what appeared to him to be the truth; his piety being constant, and the ruling principle of all his conduct. 55

Since Johnson was conscious of his need of Divine help and spent much time in meditation and prayer, the next division of this study will concern his prayers and meditations, which are a means of insight into Johnson's religious philosophy.

55Ibid., II, 656.
Chapter IV

PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

Nothing could better reveal the true religious nature of a person than his prayers and personal notes; therefore, to gain further insight into Johnson's instinctive religious philosophy and to understand his fervent adherence to Christianity, one can turn to the Prayers and Meditations of Johnson, the title he gave to his prayers and religious comments.

Johnson, although he was an excellent biographer, left no written account of his own life. Shortly before Johnson's death, he gave Reverend George Strahan the manuscript forms of Prayers and Meditations and asked him to publish them and also requested him to prepare a brief sketch of his life to be printed with Prayers and Meditations.

Boswell, the constant admirer of Johnson, commented on Prayers and Meditations thus:

This admirable collection . . . evinces, beyond all his compositions for the publick, and all the eulogies of his friends and admirers, the sincere virtue and piety of Johnson. It proves with unquestionable authenticity, that amidst all his constitutional infirmities, his earnestness to conform his practice to the precepts of Christianity was unceasing, and that he habitually endeavoured to refer every transaction of his life to the will of the Supreme Being.1

1Boswell, Life, II, 615.
One of the most noticeable characteristics of the prayers of Johnson is his petition for forgiveness and his supplication for strength to perform better the will of his Master. This trait bears witness to the fact that Johnson seems to have been possessed with a great desire to please God and to have been tormented with the terrible doubt that he had not fulfilled his duty to God; then underlying this wish was the earnest plea for a means or message which would enable him to overcome his past weaknesses and give him assurance of pardon for past transgressions.

Johnson prayed regularly and irregularly. Boswell says that when he and Johnson were touring Scotland, oftentimes he could hear Johnson talking or mumbling to himself as he strolled along in deep thought. Upon listening closely, Boswell discovered that Johnson was offering prayers, which indicated that even when Johnson was on a vacation, he did not neglect his pious duties. Johnson always spent in prayers and meditations particular days, such as New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the day of his wife's death, and his own birthday.

All the prayers are similar in that they show a tenderness of conscience and a desire for improvement. Johnson was careful not to violate orthodox principles in his prayers. For example, when, after the death of his wife, he was praying and asking for comfort, he showed that he wanted to avoid offending God by saying:
And, O Lord, so far as it may be lawful for me, I commend to thy fatherly goodness the soul of my departed wife.  

His prayers for the salvation of his wife's soul show that he considered the possibility of a middle state after death, for he said:

... if Thou hast ordained the souls of the dead to minister to the living, and appointed my departed wife to have care of me, grant that I may enjoy the good effects of her attentions and ministration, whether exercised by appearance, impulses, dreams, or in any other manner agreeable to thy government.  

Also characteristic of Johnson's prayers is the repetition of the wish that he could have strength and diligence to fulfill his resolutions not to be negligent and unmindful of his duties. He often prayed to be delivered from his bad habit of lying in bed late and of wasting time. However, he must not have been so lazy as he would have us think, because, as Boswell says, a lazy, indolent person could not have accomplished, in the face of physical odds, what Johnson did. Considering his poor vision and his asthma and heart conditions, one is astonished at the stupendous work he did in an age when there were such poor physical comforts and little means, other than superstitious methods, to derive any ease or relief from physical pain. When these conditions are considered, it is not difficult to understand why Johnson considered life a state in which much was to be

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2Johnson, op. cit., II, 675.  
3Ibid., II, 674.
endured and why he prayed for relief, apparently the only thing he knew to do. Although Johnson did not realize it, his prayers to conquer idleness must have been granted; his contribution to literature is concrete evidence that he was employed a great part of his life.

There is a vast difference between Johnson as the man of social affairs and Johnson as the man of religious affairs. In everyday affairs with his acquaintances Johnson was blunt, arrogant, sure, over-bearing, and egotistical. In an argument he usually won, which is illustrated by Goldsmith's repetition of Cibber's comment: "There is no arguing with Johnson; for when his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt of it," or by Goldsmith's remark that Johnson's little fishes would be like whales. However, when Johnson was engaged in prayer, he was a most humble and contrite person, showing doubt and insecurity, certainly not displaying any of his dictatorial powers.

From the time he was a young man, Johnson always had this uncertainty about life and doubted his ability to fulfill his wishes or desires, as shown in his prayer on the Rambler; yet when he was challenged on his ability to complete his Dictionary, his reply showed his confident assurance in himself, not any misgiving.

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4Boswell, op. cit., I, 398.
Nevertheless, in reading his prayers, one is prone to believe that Johnson's true personality is the one revealed in his prayers, a person contrite and penitent and desirous of accomplishing a good deed, showing people the need of being pious and the pleasure of following Christianity. Also, he is seen as a person who always keeps in mind the thought of salvation, hoping that he will not be destined to annihilation.

It is obvious that as Johnson grew older, his prayers were different. They are longer, show more humility and desperation, and, at the last, portray resignation and hope. As a young man in 1738 Johnson was conscious of his physical and religious imperfections and realized his debt to his Creator for the talents he had. He realized that he had not used his abilities to his own honor or to the glory of God, as is shown in this prayer given on his birthday in 1738:

Grant, O merciful Father, that I may have a lively sense of the mercies. Create in me a contrite heart, that I may worthily lament my sins and acknowledge my wickedness, and obtain remission and forgiveness through the satisfaction of Jesus Christ. And, O Lord, enable me, by thy grace, to redeem the time which I have spent in sloth, vanity, and wickedness; to make use of the gifts to the honor of thy name; to lead a new life in thy faith, fear, and love; and finally to obtain everlasting life.

Even as early as 1744 Johnson became obsessed with the fear of death, which was to torment him the remainder of his life.

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life. This fear of death is illustrated in his New Year's Prayer in 1745:

        Let me remember, O my God, that as days and years pass over me, I approach nearer to the grave, where there is no repentance; and grant, that by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, I may so pass through this life, that I may obtain life everlasting, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. 6

Not all of Johnson's prayer is devoted to asking God for favors; he thanks God for his life, even though it is miserable, and for his merciful treatment from his Master, to whom he gives all credit for whatever he has accomplished or will accomplish. Johnson also thanks God for each day and year he is permitted to live, probably because each day of life means a day of victory over death.

Although Johnson always seemed sincere in his prayers, there seems to be even greater genuine feeling and less affectedness in his supplication to God at and after the death of his wife. The general sentiment appears to be a resignation to the will of God, whose judgment and acts are for the best and not to be questioned, and a sincere desire to become stronger and more mature through his grief for his wife. He hopes he will have the strength and will power to perform the tasks which his wife had believed him capable of accomplishing and that his manner of executing these resolutions will be pleasing to God.

6 Ibid., II, 673.
Apparently Johnson realized he was not reforming as he had resolved, and the consciousness of his failure to use wisely his time troubled him greatly. This dejection and admission of failure are shown in this prayer:

O Lord, ... look down upon me with pity. Forgive me, that I have this day neglected the duty which Thou hast assigned to it, and suffered the hours, of which I must give account, to pass away without any endeavour to accomplish thy will, or to promote my own salvation. Make me to remember, O God, that every day is thy gift, and ought to be used according to thy command.

As has already been mentioned, Johnson suffered much physical pain and often prayed for relief from his misery. A line of prayer, "... glory be to Thee for my recovery from sickness, and the continuance of my life," illustrates his dependence upon God's guidance and ministration. Johnson's offering of thanks upon the improvement of his vision is also indicative of his humility before his Creator and of his fear and reverence of God. Johnson's gratitude for the recovery of his sight is expressed thus:

Almighty God, who hast restored light to my eye, and enabled me to pursue again the studies which Thou hast set before me; teach me, by the diminution of my sight, to remember that whatever I possess is thy gift, and by its recovery, to hope for thy mercy; and, O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit away from me.

By 1758 Johnson's manner of prayer was changed. More and more he deplores his weakness which hinders his obedience to God's will, and he steadily resolves to apply himself to

7Ibid., II, 675. 8Ibid., II, 675. 9Ibid., II, 675.
preparing for the death which he realizes is eventually inevitable. Again and again he asks Divine forgiveness for neglecting his Christian duty and hopes that he may grow steadfast in obedience and resolute in endeavor.

Johnson shows genuine grief in his prayer which he gave on the day of his mother's burial, asking forgiveness for any unkindness towards his mother and trusting God would strengthen him through this sorrow so that when he died, he might have everlasting life. He thanked God for his good mother and the good examples she had set for him.

In 1759 on the date of his wife's death Johnson prayed not only for her salvation but also for his brother, mother, and father. In this same prayer is found another example of his belief in a middle state after death and his wish not to offend either the principles of Christianity or God, for he said:

And, O Lord, so far as it may be lawful for me, I commend to thy Fatherly goodness, my father, my brother, my mother. I beseech Thee to look mercifully upon them, and grant them whatever may most promote their present and eternal joy. 10

No church holiday or observance meant so much to Johnson as did Easter, for he was reminded of Christ's great sacrifice, from which he gained comfort and assurance of the truth of Christianity. Furthermore, Easter seemed a time of

10 Ibid., II, 677.
rededication and sacred rites, which Johnson approved. Although Johnson did not approve all the dogma and rituals of some forms of worship, and considered them pretentious, he did believe there should be some outward manifestation in religious services, else church attendance would become mechanical and meaningless.

Johnson's Easter Eve prayer shows his appreciation for Easter and also his meditation on the Easter service. Johnson once told Boswell that he received more inspiration from attending church when he had by meditation prepared himself for attending. His habit of meditation is shown thus:

"... yet I propose to present myself before God tomorrow, with humble hope that he will not break the bruised reed."\(^{11}\) As Johnson grew older, he became increasingly eloquent in his prayers so that they are very impressive testimonials of a person beset by the doubts and fears of death. Years have passed, and Johnson realizes that he is approaching old age and death without the fulfillment of his life's ambition, to promote salvation, further the cause of religion, to enjoy happiness, and to be assured of everlasting life. This state of mind is shown in:

\[
\text{Have mercy upon me, O God, have mercy upon me; years and infirmities oppress me, terror and anxiety beset me. Have mercy upon me, my Creator and my Judge.}^{12}\]

Johnson composed a prayer on the study of religion, which shows an earnest desire to gain much knowledge of the Holy Faith so that he may impart it to others, thereby aiding in the salvation of others and accomplishing one of his resolutions.

Tormented by a sense of failure and beset by physical ills, Johnson at times became so despondent and weary he seemed tempted to quit making resolutions, but the fear of Divine retribution forced him year after year to forget worldly affairs and material things and consecrate himself to the task of establishing himself in Divine favor.

Towards the last years of his life, Johnson's prayers lose something of their manner of mad entreaty and subside to a state of calmness and relaxation; nevertheless, something of his uncertainty remains. There seems to be a semblance of wise acceptance of life's pattern in the following prayer given on his birthday in 1780.

Take not from me thy Holy Spirit, but let me pass the remainder of the days which thou shalt yet allow me, in thy fear and to thy glory; and when it shall be thy good pleasure to call me hence, grant me, O Lord, forgiveness of my sins, and receive me to everlasting happiness. . . .\(^\text{13}\)

Further evidence of Johnson's tranquility in his last days is found in a note written on his seventy-third birthday. In an account of that day's activities he said he went

\(^{13}\text{Ibid., II, 694.}\)
to church, prayed, and read the Bible. He also remarked that he had never before entered a year in so placid a manner, an evidence of peaceful resignation. He also said that he gave thanks at church for his creation, preservation, and redemption, which marks the beginning of a different view for Johnson.

It will be remembered that Johnson had always hoped to have a clear, active mind through his old age and that he refused the comfort of opium so that he could meet his Creator with an unclouded mind. That wish was granted, as is seen in his last prayer given on December 5, 1784, following his receiving the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper only eight days before his death. In simple, yet eloquent, sentences Johnson asked God to accept his repentance and to receive him into everlasting life. A very impressive part of Johnson’s final request for mercy is:

... make this commemoration available to the confirmation of my faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my charity, and make the death of thy Son Jesus Christ effectual to my redemption.\(^{14}\)

Thus, one sees that Johnson truly hoped to gain personal comfort and assurance from his religion. Although he was a devout and pious man, he was so beset by doubts and tormented by fear of death that he was in a constant state of turmoil and uncertainty. Yet, as Johnson came to be an old man, if

\(^{14}\)Ibid., II, 698.
one is to believe his prayers and Boswell's comments, he became soothed and calmed. In this composed state Johnson died, apparently perfectly resigned and free from his old fear of death.
Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Samuel Johnson, the literary dictator of the eighteenth century, was a man who dared to be original and different. His bold and self-asserting manner of defending Christianity in an age marked by rationalism, deism, and scepticism among the many intellectuals won for him respect and recognition in an age when one of his belief, had he not possessed a dynamic personality and keen intellect, could not have endured the censure of his opponents and maintained his position. Furthermore, in an age of scientific investigation, scepticism, and rationalism, he asserted his belief in Christianity, which he approached from both a rational and emotional point of view.

The eighteenth century, although known as the age of enlightenment, was an age marked by a pattern of extremes and controversial movements. In the face of scientific investigation, social changes, and religious philosophy, many old beliefs disappeared and new theories were advanced. Predominant among the various theories advanced was the theory that nature was the basis of life and that the pattern of nature had been set by a wise and benevolent Creator. Therefore, man, nature, and God were synonymous terms; then man
was by nature good. The natural goodness of man became the
trend of thought fostered by many leaders of the age, whose
optimism influenced social and economic conditions so that
by the latter part of the century the common people were
allowed more recognition, and interest in religion was re-
vived. An example of increasing interest in religion among
common people is John Wesley's movement, which advocated
departure from the cold and staid religion of the Church of
England to the emotional and personal religion of Methodism,
which was presented in simple terms appealing to and im-
pressing the average person.

The revival of interest in religion was a result of less
regard for political affairs and of the dissatisfaction with
traditional Christianity. People were eager for a religious
philosophy which would eliminate the superstitions and tra-
ditions connected with disputes in the Church and which would
bring peace, understanding, and benevolence. Since the
revival of interest in nature prompted by the scientific
study had resulted in a religion based on nature, the logical
result would be a natural religion pleasing to a majority of
people. Man naturally prefers the pleasant explanation of
life to the unpleasant; hence the welcome reception given
to the theory of the universe as rational and created by a
rational benevolent Creator whose plan is best for all. By
the same reasoning one could believe all partial evil to be
universal good; otherwise God would not permit it because He would prevent the existence of evil if it did not serve some purpose. Thus, the attitude of "Whatever is, is right" came to be accepted in many quarters because it was comforting, assuring, and satisfying.

Johnson, although he was tolerant of sincere belief and work, had little sympathy towards the optimism of the age which seemed to assure man an automatic salvation, if, as questioned by the sceptics, there were any salvation for a future life. It was Johnson's conviction that man's will is free and that, since he is a free agent, man is responsible for his own salvation, which is to be had through privation, diligence, sacrifice, constant resolution, and humble repentance. He felt that the deists would contradict themselves and realize the folly of their belief if they would subject it to their theory of reason. Sceptics and infidels were foolish, ignorant people who had not even given serious thought to religion.

'The return to nature, as advocated by primitivism, Johnson believed was absurd, for men are by nature cruel and wicked, not pure and good. Civilized man with his educational and religious opportunities was far more fortunate than the savage.' Johnson experienced or observed little in life to cause him to tolerate the optimistic point of view; instead he was pessimistic in that he considered life a state in
which much was to be endured. In addition he was obsessed with a fear of death that filled him with uncertainty.

Other faiths, Johnson admitted, did have their good points and his own beloved Church of England did have its imperfections in manner of preaching and in the choice of officials. Nevertheless, the Church of England represented the means through which one could be assured of forgiveness and acceptance by God.

To be assured of Divine favor, Johnson believed, man must conform to church laws, observe certain rituals, and promote the salvation of others. Realization that he was lacking in pious duties did not hinder Johnson from being a capable religious teacher through his conversation and writing, although it did bar him from satisfaction and happiness. Through his abundant writing, in spite of his physical handicap and sense of failure, he was the religious philosopher. The Rambler, the Idler, and Rasselas contain his philosophy; his sermons and his Prayers and Meditations reveal his deep religious convictions, which show the unhappiness and uncertainty in the first part of his life but point out his gradual understanding and acceptance of death in the latter part of life so that he became calm, resigned, and untroubled. One sees Johnson as a pious man whose desire for Divine pardon and hope of everlasting life form the pattern or theme of his activities.
No person's opinion of Johnson should be more valid than that of his companion, friend, and biographer, James Boswell, who said:

Such was Samuel Johnson, a man whose talents, acquirements, and virtues, were so extraordinary, that the more his character is considered, the more he will be regarded by the present age, and by posterity, with admiration and reverence.¹

¹Boswell, Life, II, 656.
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