Dr. Chauncy's Sermon
Cautioning against Enthusiasm
and speak to him from Scripture? It will be to as little purpose. For if he pays any regard to it, 'tis only as it falls in with his own pre-conceived notions. He interprets the scripture by impulses and impressions, and sees no meaning in it, only as he explains it from his own fancy.—'Tis infinitely difficult convince a man grown giddy and conceited under the false notion, that the good Spirit teaches him every thing. His apprehended inspiration sets him above all means of conviction. He rather despises than hearkens to the most reasonable advices that can be given him.

But as the most suitable guard against the first tendencies towards enthusiasm, let me recommend to you the following words of counsel.

r. Get a true understanding of the proper work of the Spirit; and don't place it in those things wherein the gospel does not make it to consist. The work of the Spirit is different now from what it was in the first days of Christianity. Men were then favoured with the extraordinary presence of the Spirit. He came upon them in miraculous gifts and powers; as a spirit of prophecy, of knowledge, of revelation, of tongue, of miracles: But the Spirit is not now to be expected in these ways. His grand business lies in preparing men's minds for the grace of God, by true humiliation, from an apprehension of sin, and the necessity of a Saviour; then in working in them faith and repentance, and such a change as shall turn them from the power of sin and Satan unto God; and in fine, by carrying on the good work he has begun in them; assisting them in duty, strengthening them against temptation, and in a word, preserving them blameless thro' faith unto salvation: And all this he does by the word and prayer, as the great means in the accomplishment of these purposes of mercy.

Herein, in general, consists the work of the Spirit. It does not lie in giving men private revelations, but in opening their minds to understand the publick ones contained in the scripture. It does not lie in sudden impulses and impressions, in immediate calls and extraordinary missions. Men mistake the business of the Spirit, if they
they understand by it such things as these. And 'tis, probably, from such unhappy mistakes, that they are at first betrayed into enthusiasm. Having a wrong notion of the work of the Spirit, 'tis no wonder if they take the uncommon fallies of their own minds for his influences.

You cannot, my brethren, be too well acquainted with what the bible makes the work of the Holy Ghost, in the affair of salvation: And if you have upon your minds a clear and distinct understanding of this, it will be a powerful guard to you against all enthusiasmical impressions.

2. Keep close to the Scripture, and admit of nothing for an impression of the Spirit, but what agrees with that unerring rule. Fix it in your minds as a truth you will invariably abide by, that the bible is the grand text, by which every thing in religion is to be tried; and that you can, at no time, nor in any instance, be under the guidance of the Spirit of God, much less his extraordinary guidance, if what you are led to, is inconsistent with the things there revealed, either in point of faith or practice. And let it be your care to compare the motions of your minds, and the workings of your imaginations and passions, with the rule of God's word. And see to it, that you be impartial in this matter: Don't make the rule bend to your pre-conceiv'd notions and inclinations; but repair to the bible, with a mind dispos'd, as much as may be, to know the truth as it lies nakedly and plainly in the scripture it self. And whatever you are moved to, reject the motion, esteem it as nothing more than a vain fancy, if it puts you upon any method of thinking, or acting, that can't be evidently reconcil'd with the revelations of God in his word.

This adherence to the bible, my brethren, is one of the best preservatives against enthusiasm. If you will but express a due reverence to this book of God, making it the great rule of judgment, even in respect of the Spirit's influences and operations, you will not be in much danger of being led into delusion. I.e. that be your inquiry under all supposed impulses from the Spirit,
What faith the scripture? To the law, and to the testimony: If your impressions, and imagined spiritual motions agree not therewith, 'tis because there is no hand of the Spirit of God in them: They are only the workings of your own imaginations, or something worse; and must at once, without any more ado, be rejected as such.

3. Make use of the Reason and Understanding God has given you. This may be tho' an ill-advised direction, but 'tis as necessary as either of the former. Next to the Scripture, there is no greater enemy to enthusiasm, than reason. 'Tis indeed impossible a man should be an enthusiast, who is in the just exercise of his understanding; and 'tis because men don't pay a due regard to the sober dictates of a well informed mind, that they are led aside by the delusions of a vain imagination. Be advised then to shew yourselves men, to make use of your reasonable powers; and not act as the horse or mule, as tho' you had no understanding.

'Tis true, you must not go about to set up your own reason in opposition to revelation: Nor may you entertain a tho' of making reason your rule instead of scripture. The Bible, as I said before, is the great rule of religion, the grand test in matters of salvation: But then, you must use your reason in order to understand the Bible: Nor is there any other possible way, in which, as a reasonable creature, you should come to an understanding of it.

You are, it must be acknowledged, in a corrupt state. The fall has introduced great weakness into your reasonable nature. You can't be too sensible of this; nor of the danger you are in of making a wrong judgment, thro' prejudice, carelessness, and the undue influence of sin and lust. And to prevent this, you can't be too solicitous to get your nature sanctified: Nor can you depend too strongly upon the divine grace to assist you in your search after truth: And 'tis in the way of due dependance on God, and the influences of his Spirit, that I advise you to the use of your reason: And in this way, you must make use of it. How else will you

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know what is a revelation from God? What shou'd hinder your entertaining the same tho't of a pretended revelation, as of a real one, but your reason discovering the falsity of the one, and the truth of the other? And when in the enjoyment of an undoubted revelation from God, as in the case of the scripture, How will you understand its meaning, if you throw by your reason? How will you determine, that this, and not that, is its true sense, in this and the other place? Nay, if no reasoning is to be made use of, are not all the senses that can be put on scripture equally proper? Yea, may not the most contrary senses be receiv'd at the same time since reason only can point out the inconsistency between them? And what will be sufficient to guard you against the most monstrous extravagancies, in principle as well as practice, if you give up your understandings? What have you left, in this case, to be a check to the wantoness of your imaginations? What shou'd hinder your following every idle fancy, till you have lost yourselves in the wilds of falsity and inconsistency?

You may, it is true, misuse your reason: And this is a consideration that shou'd put you upon a due care, that you may use it well; but no argument why you shou'd not use it at all: And indeed, if you shou'd throw by your reason as a useless thing, you would at once put your selves in the way of all manner of delusion.

But, it may be, you will say, you have committed yourselves to the guidance of the Spirit; which is the best preservative. Herein you have done well; nothing can be objected against this method of conduct: Only take heed of mistakes, touching the Spirit's guidance. Let me enquire of you, how is it the Spirit preserves from delusion? Is it not by opening the understanding, and enabling the man, in the due use of his reason, to perceive the truth of the things of God and religion? Most certainly: And, if you think of being led by the Spirit without understanding, or in opposition to it, you deceive yourselves. The Spirit of God deals with men as reasonable creatures: And
they ought to deal with themselves in like manner. And while they do thus, making a wise and good use of the understanding, God has given them, they will take a proper means to prevent their falling into delusions; nor will there be much danger of their being led aside by enthusiastic heat and imagination.

4. You must not lay too great stress upon the workings of your passions and affections. There will be excited, in a less or greater degree, in the business of religion: And 'tis proper they should. The passions, when suitably mov'd, tend mightily to awaken the reasonable power, and put them upon a lively and vigorous exercise. And this is their proper use: And when address'd to, and excited to this purpose, they may be of good service: whereas we shall mistake the right use of the passions, if we place our religion only or chiefly, in the heat and fervour of them. The soul is the man: And unless the reasonable nature is suitably mov'd upon, the understanding enlightened, the judgment convinc'd, the will persuaded, and the mind entirely chang'd, it will avail but to little purpose; tho' the passions should be set all in a blaze. This therefore you should be most concern'd about. And if while you are solicitous that you may be in transports of affection, you neglect your more noble part, your reason and judgment, you will be in great danger of being carried away by your imaginations. This indeed leads directly to enthusiasm: And you will in vain, endeavour to preserve yourselves from the influence of it, if you aren't duly careful to keep your passions in their proper place, under the government of a well informed understanding. While the passions are uppermost, and bear the chief sway over a man, he is in an unsafe state: None knows what he may be bro't to. You can't therefore be too careful to keep your passions under the regimen of a sober judgment. 'Tis indeed a matter of necessity, as you would not be led aside by delusion and fancy.

5. In the last place here, you must not forget to go to God by prayer. This is a duty in all cases, but in none more than the present. If left to yourselves, your own wisdom and strength, you will be insufficient
sufficient for your own security; perpetually in danger from your imaginations, as well as the other enemies of your souls. You can't be too sensible of this; nor can you, from a sense of it, apply with too much importance to the Father of mercies, to take pity upon you, and send you such a supply of grace as is needful for you. You must not indeed think, that your duty lies in the business of prayer, and nothing else. You must use your own endeavours, neglect nothing that may prove a guard to you: But together with the use of other means, you must make known your request to God by prayer and supplication. You must daily commit the keeping of your soul to him; and this you must particularly be careful to do in times of more special hazard; humbly hoping in God to be your help: And if he shall please to undertake for you, no delusion shall ever have power over you, to seduce you; but, possessing a sound mind, you shall go on in the uniform, steady service of your maker and generation, till of the mercy of God, thro' the merits of the Redeemer, you are crowned with eternal life.

But I shall now draw towards a close, by making some suitable application of what has been said. And,

1. Let us beware of charging God foolishly, from what we have heard of the nature, and influence of enthusiasm. This may appear a dark article in God's government of the world; but it stands upon the same foot with his permission of other evils, whether natural or moral. And, if we shou'd not be able to see perfectly into the reason of this dispensation, we shou'd rather attribute it to our own ignorance, than reply against God. We may assure ourselves, a wife, and good, and holy God, would not have suffered it thus to be, if there were not some great and valuable ends to be hereby answered.

Greater advantages may, in the end, accrue to true religion, by the sufferance of an enthusiastic spirit, and the prevalence of it, at certain times, than we may be capable of discerning at present.
It may furnish both opportunity and occasion for the trial of those, who call themselves Christians; whether they have just notions of religion, and courage and faithfulness to stand up for real truths, against mere imaginary ones. It may serve as a foil to set off the beauty and glory of true, genuine Christianity. It may tend to the encouragement of reasonable and solid religion; and, in the run of things, recommend it, in the most effectual manner, to men's choice and practice. In a word, it may put men upon a more thorough examination into the grounds of the Christian religion, and be the means of their being, more generally, established in its truth, upon the best and most reasonable evidence.

These are some of the ends capable of being answered by the permission of a spirit of enthusiasm, and the prevalence of it, for a while. And as to the persons themselves led aside by it, it is, in the same way to be reconciled with the general goodness of God towards men, as in the case of distraction, and the evil effects consequent thereupon. The persons, heated with enthusiastic imaginations, are either, in a faulty sense, accessory to this unhappy turn of mind, or they are not. If the latter, they may depend upon the pity and mercy of God, notwithstanding the extravagancies they may run into; yea, if they are good men, as is, doubtless, sometimes the case, it may be hoped, that this evil which has happened to them, will, after the manner of other sufferings, work together for good to them: But if thro' the pride of their hearts, a vain-glorious temper, accompanied with rashness and arrogance, or the like, they are really accessory to their own delusion, and mad conduct following therefrom, let them not think to call the blame on God: They do but reap the fruit of what they themselves have sown. And if they should be totally delivered up, as has sometimes been the case, to the devices of their own hearts, and the lying inspirations of wicked spirits, they can fault no body but themselves. God is just while he makes them an example for the warning of others, left they also be given up to believe lies. And he is good as well as just; good to others, in putting them hereby upon their guard, too he is severe towards them.
2. Let none, from what has been offered, entertain prejudices in their minds against the operations of the Spirit. There is such a thing as his influence upon the hearts of men. No consistent sense can be put upon a great part of the Bible, unless this be acknowledged for a truth: Nor is it any objection against its being so, that there has been a great deal of enthusiasm in the world, many who have mistaken the motions of their own passions for divine operations. This, it must be acknowledged, should make us cautious; putting us upon a careful examination of whatever offers itself, as a communication from the Spirit, that we deceive not ourselves: But its no argument, why we should conceive a slightly thought, either of the Spirit, or his influences, really made upon the minds of men. Much less is it a just ground of exception against the Spirit's operations, that they may be counterfeited; that men may make an appearance, as if they were acted by the Spirit, when, all the while, they have no other view in their pretences, but to serve themselves. This has often been the case; and points it out as a matter of necessity, that we take heed to ourselves, if we would not be imposed upon by a fair shew, and good words: But at the same time, 'tis no reason, why we should think the worse of the blessed Spirit, or of those influences that are really his.

Let us be upon our guard as to this matter. Many, from what they have seen or heard of the strange conduct of men, pretending to be under divine impressions, have had their minds insensibly leaven'd with prejudices against the things of the Spirit. O let it be our care, that we be not thus wrought upon! And the rather, least it should prove the ruin of our souls. This, perhaps, we may not be afraid of: But the danger is great, if we take up wrong notions of the Spirit, or encourage an unbecoming thought of his influences in the business of salvation, least we should grieve the good Spirit, and he should leave us to perish in a state of alienation from God, and true holiness.

'Tis worthy our particular remark, it is by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men,
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men, that they are chang'd from the love and practice of sin, to the love and practice of holiness; and have those tempers form'd in them, whereby they are made meet for the glory to be hereafter revealed: Nor can this be done, in any way, without the special influence of the blessed Spirit.

And is it likely, He shou'd be present with men to such gracious purposes, if they suffer their minds to be impressed with contemptuous tho'.ts of him? If they begin to call in question his office, as the great dispenser of divine grace, or look upon his operations as all delusion and imagination.

We must have upon our minds a just tho' of the good Spirit, and of his influences. This is a matter of necessity. O let us encourage a steady faith in him, as that glorious person, by whom, and by whom alone, we can be prepared in this world, for happiness in the world that is come. And let nothing, no wildness of enthusiasm, ever be allowed to tempt us to call this in question. And let us so believe in the Holy Ghost, as to put ourselves under his guidance; and let our dependance be on him for grace to help us in every time of need.

Only let us look to it, that we take no impressions for his but such as really are so: And let us not be satisfied, 'til we experience within ourselves the real effects of the Spirit's operations; such as are common to all that are in Christ Jesus; and always have been, and always will be, accompanied with a holy frame of soul, and a conversation becoming the Gospel.

3. Let not any think ill of religion, because of the ill representation that is made of it by enthusiasm. There may be danger of this; especially, in regard of those who have not upon their minds a serious sense of God and the things of another world. They may be ready to judge of religion from the copy given them of it, by those who are too much led by their fancies; and to condemn it, in the gross, as a wild
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wild, imaginary, inconsistent thing. But this is to judge too hastily and rashly. Religion ought not to suffer in the opinion of any, because of the imprudencies or extravagancies of those, who call themselves the friends of it. Any thing may be abused: Nor is there any thing but has actually been abused. And why should any think the worse of religion, because some who make more than ordinary pretences to it, set it forth in an ugly light by their conduct relative to it?

There is such a thing as real religion, let the conduct of men be what it will; and 'tis, in its nature, a sober, calm, reasonable thing: Nor is it an objection of any weight against the sobriety or reasonableness of it, that there have been entusiasts, who have acted as tho' it was a wild, imaginary business. We should not make our estimate of religion as exhibited in the behaviour of men of a sanctified mind; to be sure, we should not take up an ill opinion of it, because in the example they give of it, it don't appear so amiable as we might expect. This is unfair. We should rather judge of it from the conduct of men of a sound judgment; whose lives have been such a uniform, beautiful transcript of that which is just and good, that we can't but think well of religion, as display'd in their example.

But however religion may appear as viewed in the lives, even of the best men, 'tis a lovely thing, as required by God, and portrayed in the Bible. We should take our sentiments of it from this book of God; and this, in the calm and sober exercise of our understandings: And if we view it, as 'tis here delineated, we can't but approve of it, the doctrines it teaches, and the duties it requires, whether they relate to God, ourselves, or our neighbour; they are all so reasonable in themselves, and worthy of the God, the stamp of whose authority they bear.

Let us fetch our notions of religion from the scripture: And if men, in their practice, set it in a disadvantageous light, let us be upon our guard, that we don't take up prejudices against it. This will blind our eyes, and may, by degrees, prepare the way to our throwing off all con-
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cern about religion; yea, we may be bro’t to treat it even with contempt; than which, nothing can be more dangerous, or put our salvation to a greater risque.

4. Let us esteem those as friends to religion, and not enemies, who warn us of the danger of enthusiasm, and would put us upon our guard, that we be not led aside by it. As the times are, they run the hazard of being call’d enemies to the holy Spirit, and may expect to be ill-spoken of by many, and loaded with names of reproach: But they are notwithstanding the best friends to religion; and it may be, it will more and more appear, that they have all along been so. They have been stigmatised as opposers of the work of God; but ’tis a great mercy of God, there have been such opposers: This land had, in all probability, been over-run with confusion and distraction, if they had acted under the influence of the base heat and zeal, which some others have been famous for.

’Tis really best, people shou’d know there is such a thing as enthusiasm, and that it has been, in all ages, one of the most dangerous enemies to the church of God, and has done a world of mischief: And ’tis a kindness to them to be warn’d against it, and directed to the proper methods to be preserved from it. ’Tis indeed, one of the best ways of doing service to real religion, to distinguish it from that which is imaginary: Nor shou’d ministers be discouraged from endeavouring this, tho’ they shou’d be all-tho’it, or evil-spoken of. They shou’d beware of being too much under the influence of that fear of man, which bringseth a snare; which is evidently the case, where they are either silent, or dare not speak out faithfully and plainly, left they shou’d be called Pharisees or hypocrites, and charged with leading souls to the devil. ’Tis a small matter to be thus judged and reviled; and we shou’d be above being affrighted from duty by this, which is nothing more than the breath of poor, ignorant, frail man.

There is, I doubt not, a great deal of real, substantial religion in the land. The Spirit of God has wrought essentially on the hearts of many, from one time to another.
And I make no question he has done so of late, in more numerous instances, it may be, than usual. But this, notwithstanding, there is, without dispute, a spirit of enthusiasm, appearing in one place and another. There are those, who make great pretences to the Spirit, who are carried away with their imaginations: And some, it may be, take themselves to be immediately and wonderfully conducted by him, while they are led only by their own fancies.

Thus it has been in other parts of the world. Enthusiasm, in all the wildness, and fury, and extravagance of it, has been among them, and sometimes had a most dreadfully extensive spread. Ten thousand wildenthusiasts have appear’d in arms, at the same time; and this too, in defence of gross opinions, as well as enormous actions. The first discovery therefore of such a spirit, unless due care is taken to give check to its growth and progress, is much to be feared; for there is no knowing, how high it may rise, nor what it may end in.—

The good Lord gives us all wisdom, and courage, and conduct, in such a Day as this! And may both ministers and people behave after such a manner, as that religion may not suffer; but in the end, gain advantage, and be still more universally established.

And, may that grace of God, which has appeared to all men, bringing salvation, teach us effectually, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world: so may we look with comfort for the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ: And when he shall appear in the glory of his Father, and with his holy angels, we also shall appear with him, and go away into everlasting life: Which God, of his infinite mercy grant may be the portion of us all; for the sake of Christ Jesus.

A M E N.