

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

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CONFESSIONS OF  
AN INQUIRING SPIRIT

Reprinted from the third edition 1853  
with the introduction by Joseph Henry Green  
and the note by Sara Coleridge

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY  
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edition 1853**

By Coleridge, S.T.

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ADVERTISEMENT TO THE FIRST  
EDITION

The following Letters on the Inspiration of the Scriptures were left by Mr. Coleridge in MS. at his death. The Reader will find in them a key to most of the Biblical criticism scattered throughout the Author's own writings, and an affectionate, pious, and, as the Editor humbly believes, a profoundly wise attempt to place the study of the Written Word on its only sure foundation,—a deep sense of God's holiness and truth, and a consequent reverence for that Light—the image of Himself—which He has kindled in every one of his rational creatures.—  
H. N. C.

LINCOLN'S INN,  
September 22 1840

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE SECOND  
EDITION

The following Introduction was composed by Mr. Green in consequence of my consulting him on the subject of my Father's obligations to Lessing in the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, and was intended by him to be used as materials for a preface to this new edition of the work. As it appears however to require no remodelling, either by omission or addition, I present it just as it came from the author's pen.—S.C.  
1849.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE THIRD  
EDITION

The present edition of the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* differs from the last, only by the removal of some miscellaneous pieces, which appeared to take from the unity without adding to the completeness

of the work. These will appear in their proper places in a forthcoming volume. The Introduction by Mr. Green, and the defence of the Author's views by his lamented daughter, will still be read with interest.—D.C.

ST. MARK'S COLLEGE, CHELSEA,

*April, 1853*

A MANUSCRIPT OF  
THE CONFESSIONS OF AN INQUIRING SPIRIT

There is a manuscript of the Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit in the British Museum, which by the kindness of the authorities I have been allowed to inspect. It is listed in the *Catalogue of Additions to the MSS. in the British Museum MDCCCLXXXVIII-MDCCCXCIII*, and is item 15 in Add. MS. 34,225. In the catalogue it is very justly described as 'probably an early draft, with many slight variations from the printed edition.'



CONFESSIONS OF AN INQUIRING  
SPIRIT

Faith subsists in the *synthesis* of the Reason and the individual Will. By virtue of the latter it must be an energy, and, inasmuch as it relates to the whole moral man, it must be exerted in each and all of his constituents or incidents, faculties and tendencies:—it must be a total, not a partial—a continuous, not a desultory or occasional—energy. And by virtue of the former, that is, Reason, Faith must be a Light, a form of knowing, a beholding of Truth. In the incomparable words of the Evangelist, therefore,—*Faith must be a Light originating in the Logos, or the substantial Reason, which is coeternal and one with the Holy Will, and which Light is at the same time the Life of men.* Now as *Life* is here the sum or collective of all moral and spiritual acts, in suffering, doing, and being, so is Faith the source and the sum, the energy and the principle of the fidelity of Man to God, by the subordination of his human Will, in all provinces of his nature, to his Reason, as the sum of spiritual Truth, representing and manifesting the Will Divine.—*Literary Remains*, vol. iv, p. 437.

## INTRODUCTION

BY JOSEPH HENRY GREEN, ESQ.

In preparing a new edition of this work, it is scarcely less than a duty to its revered Author to draw the attention of the reader to the theological writings of Lessing, in order to obviate any mistake, similar to that which has been already made, with regard to the Author's originality, or at all events to exhibit, without reserve, the grounds upon which a charge of plagiarism might possibly be founded. It will be discovered, namely, on a comparison of this essay with certain works of the German writer, that there exists so marked a similarity of opinion on some points of doctrine, that the reader might be inclined to adopt, as the most obvious explanation of the resemblance, the supposition that Coleridge had not only derived the advantage, which every writer is likely to do from the acumen and labours of a predecessor, but that he had transferred without acknowledgment Lessing's thoughts to his own pages; nor will the supposition want the support derived from the capability of tracing here and there similar language, if not identical phrases. Nay, it cannot be denied that Coleridge was a student of Lessing's writings; since, in a fly-leaf of one of the volumes of a copy of his works, which belonged to Coleridge, the latter says: "Year after year I have made a point of re-perusing the *Kleine Schriften* as masterpieces of style and argument."

Notwithstanding these admissions, it may be reasonably doubted, however, that any candid person, after the perusal of Lessing's works here in question, and a careful collation of them with the "Confessions," would venture to assume that Coleridge had forfeited his claim to originality in the view which he has here taken of "the bounds between the right and the superstitious use and estimation of the Sacred Canon:" and it may far rather be anticipated that the result of such comparison would be the conviction that, whatever portions of the "Confessions" may be justly ascribed to Lessing, they were no less the growths and natural educts of the different and deeper principle out of which Coleridge's scheme of theology had shaped itself. It is

indeed highly probable that Coleridge had received a lasting impression from the perusal of the *Kleine Schriften*, and that when engaged in producing a work, the tendency of which was in some respects similar, the recollections of those writings would blend with his own thoughts, and lead him to adopt similar arguments, and even in some instances the same expressions. It is true that no reference is anywhere made to the German author; but when we consider that the "Confessions" were written with an object, which can scarcely be said to have anything in common with Lessing's controversial essays, and were the result of a different process of reasoning, which presented only insulated points of contact with Lessing's arguments, it will not surprise us if the reminiscences in question did not become objects of conscious remembrance. For Coleridge, truth was impersonal; and if he adopted from others, it was because it was alien to the habit of his mind to consider the perception or discovery of truth as any thing which belonged exclusively and appropriately to the individual. He was ever ready to assist others in the elaboration of their thoughts, and ever reckoned as little of the rights of his own intellectual proprietorship as if truth and knowledge were the same common property as light and air.

That the correspondences and resemblances, to which we have above adverted, and which after all do not amount to much, afford any just ground for impugning the originality of Coleridge may be safely denied. In the case of a work, which is an aggregate and not a growth, in which by eclectic ingenuity

"Purpureus, latè qui splendeat; unus et alter  
Assuitur pannus;"—Horace, *A. P.*, l. 15,

it would be as just to reclaim, as it would be easy to detach, the borrowed fragments: but where the work is the result of a formative principle which gives it unity and totality, where the thoughts and reasonings are the development of a living principle to an organic whole, it may be safely assumed that the author who interweaves with his own the kindred products of other men's minds, is impelled only by the sense and pleasurable sympathy of a common intellectual activity, and that he would, or might have arrived at the same or similar results, where these are potentially contained in the principle, which gave birth to his reasonings. That Coleridge's theology was the growth of his own mind, and inseparably united with his philosophy, it is not