

# Religious conviction in robinson crusoe



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Critics disagree about Robinson Crusoe's religious convictions, but they generally concur that Crusoe's faith begins when he acknowledges that his sins are a major cause of his island captivity. Beyond that, opinions diverge. Karl Marx writes that Crusoe's beliefs are a source of "pleasure" and "recreation" and reflect no genuine piety. This essay argues that Crusoe's religious conviction is sincere, as evidenced by his Biblical references, change in attitude, and mission to convert Friday. Before his acceptance of Christianity, Crusoe feels wretched and ashamed: "I left them to mourn over my Folly, and now I am left to mourn under the consequences of it; I refus'd their help and Assistance who would have lifted me into the World, and wou'd have made every Thing easy for me" (p. 67). His most fervent hope is for deliverance from the island; not coincidentally, one of the first Bible passages he reads is Psalms 50: 15: "'Call on me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me'" (p. 69). Crusoe then becomes very sick and believes his failure to glorify God is the cause of the sickness: "Now I look'd back upon my past life with such horror, and my sins appear'd so dreadful, that my Soul sought nothing of God, but Deliverance from the Load of Guilt that bore down all my comfort" (p. 71). The illness catalyzes Crusoe's religious conversion. He realizes that through faith in God his solitude will become more tolerable. Indeed, he comes to see the island not as a prison but as a kingdom God wishes him to rule: "There was my Majesty the Prince and Lord of the whole island; I had the lives of all my subjects at my absolute command" (p. 108). Crusoe willingly accepts the role and commits himself to serving God: "[God] was able to deliver me; that if he did not think fit to do it, 'twas my unquestion'd duty to resign myself absolutely and entirely to his Will: and on the other hand, it was my Duty also to hope in him, pray to him,

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and quietly to attend the Dictates and Directions of his daily Providence” (p. 114). Crusoe comes to rely on God for comfort. For example, he becomes afraid when he sees the footprint and realizes he is not alone. He opens his Bible to Psalms 27: 14: “ Wait on the Lord, and be of good Cheer, and he shall strengthen thy Heart; wait, I say, on the Lord” (Defoe 114). As a result of his trust in his religion, Crusoe is able to find a brighter outlook on his situation and to retain his sanity. We see how significant Crusoe’s conversion has been when we observe his determination to convert Friday, portrayed as a savage, to Christianity as well. Crusoe “...seriously prayed to God that he would enable me to instruct savingly this poor Savage, assisting by his Spirit the Heart of the poor ignorant Creature, to receive the Light of the Knowledge of God in Christ, reconciling him to himself, and would guide me to speak so to him from the Word of God, as his Conscience might be convinc’d, his Eyes open’d, and his Soul sav’d” (p. 158-159). His desire to convert Friday shows that Crusoe has become a faithful Christian who believes it noble to help others find God as well. Crusoe’s faith does not dissolve as soon as he is rescued. As he leaves the island, Crusoe states: “ I forgot not to lift up my heart in Thankfulness to Heaven; and what Heart could forbear to bless him, who had not only in a miraculous manner provided for one in such a Wilderness, and in such a desolate condition, but from whom ever Deliverance must always be acknowledged to proceed” (p. 197). Someone with only superficial religious conviction, or one developed only to cope with a challenging situation (i. e. island captivity), would not have bothered with grateful prayers afterward. At the novel’s conclusion, Crusoe uses a Biblical allusion to suggest that he believes the hardships he endured would allow him to lead a better life than before (p. 205). He has

become a more humble person who recognizes the value of helping others (i.e. Friday and the sea captain) and placing one's faith in a higher power. His experience of religion is sincere, not a "mockery" nor for "pleasure" as Marx would have it. Defoe's novel is a testament to the redeeming power of religious conviction. Works Cited: Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. Ed. Michael Shinagel. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994.