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DISCOURSES

TO MIXED CONGREGATIONS.

BY JOHN HENRY NEWMAN,

PRIEST OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI.

DISCOURSE IX.

ILLUMINATING GRACE.

When man was created, he was endowed with gifts above his own nature, by means of which that nature was perfected. As some potent stimulant which does not nourish, a scent or a draught, rouses, invigorates, concentrates our animal powers, gives keenness to our perceptions, and intensity to our efforts, so, or rather in some far higher sense, and in more diversified ways, did the supernatural grace of God give a meaning, and an aim, and a sufficiency, and a consistency, and a certainty, to the many faculties of that compound of soul and body, which constitutes man. And when man fell, he lost this divine, unmerited gift, and instead of soaring heavenwards, fell down feeble to the earth, in a state of exhaustion and collapse. And, again, when God, for Christ's sake, is about to restore any one to His favor, His first act of mercy is to impart to him a portion of this grace; the first-fruits of that sovereign, energetic power, which conforms and attunes his whole nature, and enables it to fulfil its own end, while it fulfils one higher than its own.

Now, one of the defects which man incurred on the fall, was ignorance, or spiritual blindness; and one of the gifts received on his restoration is a perception of things spiritual; so that, before he is brought under the grace of Christ, he can but inquire, reason, argue, and conclude, about religious truth; but afterwards he sees it. "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jona," said our Lord to St. Peter, when he confessed the Incarnation, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father, which is in heaven." "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto little ones." No one knoweth the Son but the Father, and no one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him." In like manner St. Paul says, "The animal" or natural "man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God;" and elsewhere, "No one can say the Lord Jesus, but in the Holy Ghost." And St. John, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." The Prophets had promised the same gift before Christ came;—"I will make all thy sons taught of the Lord," says Isais, "and the multitude of grace upon thy sons." "No more," says Jeremias, "shall men teach his neighbor, and man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know Me from the least of them even to the greatest of them."

Now here you may say, my brethren, "What is the meaning of this? are we men, or are we not? have we lost part of our nature by the fall, or have we not? is not the reason a part of man's nature? does not the reason see, as the eye does? cannot we, by the natural power of our reason, understand all kinds of truths, about this earth, about human society, about the realms of space, about matter, about the soul? why should religion be an exception! why then cannot we understand by our natural reason about Almighty God and heaven? If we can enquire into one thing, we can enquire into another; if we can imagine one thing, we can imagine another; how then is it that we cannot arrive at the truths of religion without the supernatural aid of grace?" This is a question which may give rise to some profitable reflections, and I shall now attempt to answer it.

You ask, what it is you need, besides eyes, in order to see the truths of revelation: I will tell you at once; you need light. Not the keenest eyes can see in the dark. Now, though your mind be the eye, the grace of God is the light; and you will as easily exercise your eyes in this sensible world without the sun, as you will be able to exercise your mind in the spiritual world without a parallel gift from without. Now you are born under a privation of this blessed spiritual light; and, while it remains, you will not, cannot, really see God. I do not say you will have no thought at all about God, nor be able to talk about Him. True, but you will not be able to do more than reason about Him. Your thoughts and your words will not get beyond a mere reasoning. I grant then what you claim; you claim to be able by your mental powers to reason about God: doubtless you can, but to infer a thing is not to see it in respect to the physical world, nor is it in the spiritual.

Consider the case of a man without eyes talking about forms and colors, and you will understand what

I mean. A blind man may pick up a good deal of information of various kinds, and be very conversant with the objects of sight, though he does not see. He may be able to talk about them fluently, and may be fond of doing so; he may even talk of seeing as if he really saw, till he almost seems to pretend to the faculty of sight. He speaks of heights, and distances, and directions, and the dispositions of places, and shapes, and appearances, as naturally as other men; and he is not duly aware of his own extreme privation; and, if you ask how this comes about, it is partly because he hears what other men say about these things, and he is able to imitate them, and partly because he cannot help reasoning upon the things he hears and drawing conclusions from them; and thus he comes to think he knows what he does not know at all.

He hears man converse; he may have books read to him; he gains vague ideas of objects of sight, and when he begins to speak, his words are tolerably correct, and do not at once betray how little he knows what he is talking about. He infers one thing from another, and thus is able to speak of many things which he does not see, but only perceives must be so, granting other things are so. For instance, if he knows that blue and yellow make green, he may pronounce, without a chance of mistake, that green is more like blue than yellow is; if he happens to know that one man is under six feet in height, and another is full six feet, he may, when they are both before him, boldly declare, as if he saw, that the latter is the taller of the two. It is not that he judges by sight, but that reason takes the place of it. There was much talk in the world some little time since of a man of science, who was said to have found out a new planet; how did he do it? did he watch night after night, wearily and perseveringly, in the chill air, through the tedious course of the starry heavens, for what he might find there, till at length, by means of some powerful glass, he discovered in the dim distance this unexpected addition to our planetary system? Far from it: it is said, that he sat at his ease in his library, and made calculations on paper in the daytime, and thus, without looking once up at the sky, he determined, from what was already known of the sun and the planets, of their number, their positions, their motions, and their influences, that, in addition to them all, there must be some other body in that very place where he said it would be found, if astronomers did but turn their instruments upon it. Here was a man reading the heavens, not with eyes, but by reason. Reason then is a sort of substitute for sight; and so in many respects are the other senses, as is obvious. You know how quick the blind are often found to be in discovering the presence of friends, and the feeling of strangers, by the voice, and the tone, and the tread; so that they seem to understand looks, and gestures, and dumb show as if they saw, to the surprise of those who wish to keep their meaning secret from them.

Now this will explain the way in which the natural man is able partly to understand, and still more to speak upon supernatural subjects. There is a large floating body of Catholic truth in the world; it comes down by tradition from age to age; it is carried forward by preaching and profession from one generation to another, and is poured about into all quarters of the world. It is found in fullness and purity in the Church alone, but portions of it, larger or smaller, escape far and wide, and penetrate into places which have never been illuminated by divine grace. Now men may take up and profess these scattered truths, merely because they fall in with them; these fragments of revelation, such as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, or the Atonement, or the religion which they have been taught in their childhood; and therefore they retain them, and profess them, and repeat them, without really seeing them, as the Catholic sees them, but as receiving them merely by word of mouth, from imitation of others. And in this way it often happens that men external to the Catholic Church write sermons and instructions, draw up and arrange devotions, or compose hymns, which are faultless, or nearly so, which are the fruit, not of his own illuminated mind, but of his careful study, sometimes of his accurate translation, of Catholic originals. Then again Catholic truths and rites are so beautiful, so great, so consolatory, that they draw one on to love and admire them with a natural love, as a prospect might draw them on, or a skilful piece of mechanism. Hence men of lively imagination profess this doctrine or that, or adopt this or that ceremony or usage, for their very beauty-sake, not asking themselves whether they are true, and having no real perception or mental hold of them. Thus too they will decorate their churches, stretch and strain their ritual, attempt candles, vestments, flowers, incense, and processions, not from faith, but from poetical feeling. And moreover the Catholic Creed, as coming from God, is so harmonious, so consistent with itself, holds together so perfectly, so corresponds part to part, that an acute mind,

knowing one portion of it, would often infer another portion, merely as a matter of just reasoning. Thus a correct thinker might be sure, that, if God is infinite and man finite, there must be mysteries in religion. It is not that he really feels the mysteriousness of religion, but he infers it; he is led to it as a matter of necessity, and from mere clearness of mind and love of consistency, he maintains it. Again, a man may say, "Since this or that doctrine has so much evidence in its favor, of course I must accept it;" he has no real sight or direct perception of it, but he takes up the profession of it, because he feels it would be absurd, under the conditions with which he starts, to do otherwise. He does no more than load himself with a form of words, instead of contemplating, with the eye of the soul, God Himself, the Source of all truth, and this doctrine as proceeding from His mouth. A keen sagacious intellect will carry a man a great way in anticipating doctrines which he has never been told;—thus, before it knew what Scripture said on the subject, it might argue; "Sin is an offence against God beyond conception great, for, if it were not, why should Christ have suffered?" that is, he sees that it is necessary for the Christian system of doctrine that sin should be a great evil. Nay, I can fancy a man conjecturing that our bodies would rise again, as arguing it out from the fact that the Eternal God has so honored our mortal flesh as to take it upon Him as part of Himself. Thus he would be receiving the resurrection or eternal punishment merely as truths which follow from what he knew already. And in like manner learned men, outside the Church, may compose most useful works on the evidences of religion, or in defence of particular doctrines, or in explanation of the whole scheme of Catholicism; in these cases reason becomes the handmaid of faith: still it is not faith; it does not rise above an intellectual view or notion; it affirms, not as grasping the truth, not as seeing, but as "being of opinion," as "judging," as "coming to a conclusion."

Here then you see what the natural man can do; he can feel, he can imagine, he can admire, he can reason, he can infer; in all these ways he may proceed to receive the whole or part of Catholic truth; but he cannot see, he cannot love. Yet he will perplex religious persons, who do not understand the secret by which he is able to make so imposing a display; for they will be at a loss to understand how it is he is able to speak so well, except he speak, though out of the Church, by the Spirit of God. Thus it is with the writings of some of the ancient heretics, who wrote upon the Incarnation; so it is with heretics of modern times who have written on the doctrine of grace; they write sometimes with such beauty and depth, that one cannot help admiring what they say on those very subjects as to which we know without that at bottom they are unsound. But, my brethren, the sentiments may be right and good in themselves, but not in them; these are the solitary truths which they have happened to infer in a range of matters about which they see and know nothing, and their heresy on other points, close upon their acceptance of these truths, is a proof that they do not see what they speak of. A blind man, discoursing upon form and color, might say some things truly, and some things falsely; and what he said falsely, though single, would betray that he had no real possession of what he said truly, though manifold; for, had he had eyes, he not only would have been correct in many, but would have been mistaken in none. For instance, supposing that he knew that two buildings were the same in height, he might perhaps be led boldly to pronounce that their appearance was the same when we looked at them, not knowing that the greater distance of the one of them from us might reduce it to the eye to a half or a fourth of the other. And thus men who are not in the Church, and who have no practical experience of the Catholic devotion to the Blessed Mother of God, when they read our prayers and litanies, and observe the strength of their language, and the length to which they run, confidently assert that she is, in every sense and in every way, the object of our worship, to the exclusion, or in rivalry, of the Supreme God; not understanding that He "in whom we live, and move, and are," who new-creates us with His grace, and who feeds us with His own body and blood, is closer to us and more intimately with us than any creature; that Saints, and Angels, and the Blessed Virgin herself, are necessarily at a distance from us, compared with Him, and that whatever language we use towards them, though our words were the same as those which we used to our Maker, they would only carry with them a sense, which is due and proportionate to the object we address. And thus these objectors are detected by their objection itself, as knowing and seeing nothing of what they dispute about.

And now I have explained sufficiently what is meant by saying that the natural man holds divine truths merely as an opinion, and not as a point of faith; grace believes, reason does but think; grace gives

certainly, reason is never decided. Now it is remarkable that this characteristic of reason is so felt by the persons themselves of whom I am speaking, that, in spite of the extent to which they carry their opinions, whatever that be, conscious that they have no grounds for real and fixed conviction about revealed truth, they boldly face the difficulty, and consider it a fault to be certain about revealed truth, and a merit to doubt. For instance, "the Holy Catholic Church," is a point of faith; as being one of the articles of the Apostles' Creed; yet they think it an impatience to be dissatisfied with uncertainty as to where it is, and what it is. They are well aware that no man alive would put undoubting faith and reliance in the Establishment except he were in a state of gross ignorance, or by doing violence to his reason; they know that the great mass of its members in no sense believe in it, and that of the remainder no one could say more than that it indirectly comes from God, and that it is safest to remain in it. There is, in these persons, no faith, only an opinion, about this article of the Creed. Accordingly they are obliged to say, in mere defence of their own position, that faith is not necessary, and a state of doubt is sufficient, and all that is expected. In consequence they attribute it to mere restlessness, when their own members seek to exercise faith in the Holy Catholic Church as a revealed truth, as they themselves profess to exercise it in the Holy Trinity or our Lord's resurrection, and hunt about, and ask on all sides, how they are to do so. Nay, they go so far as to impute it to a Catholic as a fault, when he manifests a simple trust in the Church and her teaching. It sometimes happens that those who join the Catholic Church from some Protestant community, are seen to change the uncertainty and hesitation of mind which they showed before their conversion into a clear and fearless confidence; they doubted about their old community, they have no doubt about their new. They have no fears, no anxieties, no difficulties, no scruples. They speak as they feel; and the world, not understanding that this is the effect of the grace, which (as we may humbly trust,) these happy souls have received, not understanding that, though it has full experience of the region of the shadow of death in which it lies, it has none at all of that city, whereof the Lord God and the Lamb is the light, measuring what Catholics have by what itself has not, cries out, "How forward, how unnatural, how excited, how extravagant!" and it considers that such a change is a change for the worse, and a proof that the step was a mistake and a fault, because it produces precisely that effect which it would produce, were it a change for the better.

It tells us that certainty, and confidence, and boldness in speech, are unchristian; is this pleading a cause, or a judgment from facts? Was it confidence or doubt, was it zeal or coldness, was it keeness or irresolution in action, which distinguished the Martyrs in the first ages of the Church? Was the religion of Christ propagated by the vehemence of faith and love, or by a philosophical balance of argument? Look back at the early Martyrs, my brethren, what were they? why, they were very commonly youths and maidens, soldiers and slaves;—"a set of hot-headed young men, who would have lived to be wise, had they not chosen to die; who tore down imperial manifestos, broke the peace, challenged the judges to dispute, would not rest till they got into the same den with a lion, and, if chased out of one city, began preaching in another!" So said the blind world about those who saw the Unseen. Yes! it was the spiritual sight of God which made them what they were. No one is a Martyr for a conclusion, no one is a Martyr for an opinion; it is faith that makes Martyrs. He who knows and loves the things of God has not power to deny them; he may have a natural shrinking from torture and death, but such terror is incommensurate with faith, and as little acts upon it as dust and mire touches the sun's light, or scents or sights could stop a wheel in motion. The Martyrs saw, and how could they but speak what they had seen? They might shudder at the pain, but they had not the power not to see; if threats could undo the heavenly truths, then might it silence their confession of them. O my brethren, the world is inquiring, and large-minded, and knows many things; it talks well and profoundly; but is there one among its Babel of opinions it would be a Martyr for? Some of them may be true, and some false; let it choose any one of them to die for. Its children talk loudly, they declaim angrily against the doctrine that God is an avenger; would they die rather than confess it? They talk eloquently of the infinite mercy of God; would they die rather than deny it? If not, they have not even enthusiasm, they have not even obstinacy, they have not even bigotry; they have not even party spirit to sustain them,—much less have they grace; they speak upon opinion only, and by an inference. Again there are those who call on men to trust the Established communion, as considering it to be a branch of the Catholic Church; they