

Account of Religious Sects at Present Existing in England

by J.H. Newman

The sermon highlights the importance of understanding the differences between various religious bodies and the consequences of rejecting the truth of Christianity.

Scripture: Romans 16:17, Ephesians 4:14, 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Timothy 4:3, Jude 1:3

Topics: "Church Doctrine", "False Teachings"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the importance of recognizing and avoiding those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the true doctrine of the Church. He categorizes the opponents of the Church into three classes: those who reject the Truth, those who receive only a part of the Truth, and those who teach more than the Truth. Newman emphasizes the need for believers to remain steadfast in the teachings of the Scriptures and the Church, highlighting the historical persecutions faced by the Church from various opponents throughout the centuries.

Transcript

"I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

Rom. xvii. 17.

IT is conceived, that many members of the English Church, whom late events have awakened to a knowledge of the religious differences which exist in the world, are but insufficiently acquainted with the chief points which distinguish the various religious bodies which are among them; and may be anxious for information on the subject. The following statement, drawn up by a Clergyman at the request of a parishioner, is submitted to their consideration.

The English Church, which is a true branch or portion of the "One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church" of Christ, receives and teaches the entire Truth of God according to the Scriptures; the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. This may be proved by reference to the Scriptures; in which no fundamental doctrine can be pointed out, which the Church does not teach: nor can it be shown that the Church teaches any thing, as necessary to salvation, but what is contained in the Scriptures, or can be proved by them,--this being the acknowledged rule of teaching set forth in the 6th Article of the Church.

The parties which are separated from, and opposed to, the Church, may be arranged into three classes. 1. Those who reject the Truth. 2. Those who receive and teach a part, but not the whole, of the Truth. 3. Those who teach more than the Truth.

I. Those who reject the Truth.

Under this head are included all who deny that JESUS "is the CHRIST, the SON of the living GOD, and that salvation is through His blood. Such are

1. SOCINIANS, (so called from Socinus, a chief teacher of their error), who profess to receive the Old and New Testament, but reject these fundamental doctrines as there set forth, and reject also the doctrine of the Personality and operations of the Holy Ghost. These men commonly call themselves Unitarians.

2. JEWS, who profess to receive the Old Testament, but denounce our LORD as an Impostor. These contradict the Prophets of the Old Testament, to whose evidence our LORD appealed while fulfilling their prophecies and they forget the living witness they themselves afford to our SAVIOUR'S truth, who foretold concerning their Church and nation, the evils which have since happened, and under which they are now suffering.

3. DEISTS (SO called from professing to acknowledge merely a Deity), who reject both the Testaments, denying that GOD has ever revealed His will to men. Thus they contradict reason, which suggests that He would not leave the beings whom He created capable of happiness, without instruction how to attain that happiness: they contradict also the unanswerable evidence of history, miracles, and fulfilment of prophecy, which prove that He actually has revealed His Will, and that the Book which we call the Bible contains that Revelation.

4. ATHEISTS (i. e. men "without God"), who deny altogether the existence of a GOD. These contradict the voice of nature, which, by the regularity of seasons, the succession, growth, and decay, of plants, of animals, and men, by the course of the planets and all its other wonderful works, attest the existence, power, and goodness of a Superior Being, who must have made all these things at the first, and now continues and preserves them.

These four Classes may be placed together, because to all four the same passage of St. John is applicable. "Whosoever denieth the SON, the same hath not the FATHER," and of all four it may be truly said, "They have trodden under foot the SON of GOD, and counted the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of Grace."

II. Those who receive and teach a part but not the whole of the truth, erring in respect of one or more fundamental doctrines.

Under this head are included most of what are called "Protestant Dissenters." The chief of these are,

1. PRESBYTERIANS, SO called from maintaining the validity of ordination by Presbyters or Elders only, in other words, by the second order of the clergy, dispensing with and superseding the first.

2. INDEPENDENTS, SO called from being opposed to and independent of all ecclesiastical government.

3. METHODISTS (subdivided into an immense variety of sects; the chief are Wesleyans, Whitfieldians, or Lady Huntingdon's, Ranters, or Primitive Methodists, Brianites, or Bible Christians, Protestant

Methodists, Tent Methodists, Independent Methodists, and Kilhamites).

These three do not receive or teach the Truth respecting the doctrine of "laying on of hands," which St. Paul classes among the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and by which the Christian ministry receives its commission and authority to administer the Word and Sacraments. For they one and all reject the first (i. e. the Apostolic, or, as we now call it, Episcopal) order of clergy, who exercised that rite according to the New Testament, and without whom there is no warrant from Scripture for believing that the Clergy can be appointed, or the Sacraments be duly administered.

4. BAPTISTS, who have departed from the Truth not only as concerns the doctrine of "laying on of hands," but also as concerns the doctrine of Baptism; another of the fundamental doctrines, according to St. Paul. For they refuse to permit their children to receive that sign of admission into the Christian covenant. Thus they contradict the Old Testament, for there we find that to the Christian Covenant, or Covenant in Christ, which God confirmed with Abraham, children were enjoined to be admitted; and those children whose parents withheld them from receiving the sign of the covenant, were counted by God to have broken His covenant. They contradict also the New Testament, for there our Saviour says, "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not;" and St. Paul declares that where either parent is a believer, then "are the children holy," i. e. admissible to the covenant of grace.

5. QUAKERS, who reject altogether laying on of hands, and both the Sacraments.

Besides these are, especially in Wales, JUMPERS and SHAKERS, a chief part of whose religious worship consists in violent exercise and contortions of the body.

III. --Those who teach more than the truth.

Under this head are included all who teach besides the Scriptures, something else as of equal authority with what is contained in them. The chief of these are, --

1. ROMANISTS, or PAPISTS, (so called because they are the followers of the Pope or Bishop of Rome,) who teach that the images of God and of the Saints ought to be worshipped; that the Virgin Mary and other Saints ought to be prayed to; that in the Lord's Supper, after consecration, the bread is no longer bread, the wine no longer wine; that all Churches owe obedience to the Pope of Rome, &c. &c. They have at different times attempted to confirm these doctrines by pretended miracles.

2. NEW JERUSALEMITES, or SWEDENBORGIANS, so called from their leader, who pretended to have received a new revelation.

3. SOUTHCOTIANS; the followers of Johanna Southcote, who pretended to be a prophetess.

4. IRVINGITES; so called from one of their chief leaders, who pretend to have received a new Revelation, and a new order of Apostles, which, like the Papists, they attempt to confirm by pretended gifts of unknown tongues, prophecy, and miracles; like all under this head, a mixture of delusion and imposture.

Churchman, whosoever thou art, that readest the list of follies and errors in the 2d and 3d classes, into which the pride of man's heart and the wiles of Satan have beguiled so many of those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, first give to God your hearty thanks for having preserved you a member of the "One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church," which teaches the way of God in truth, "neither handling the word of God deceitfully," like the second class, nor following cunningly devised fables, like the third,

but, by manifestation of the truth, commending itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Next pray to Him for yourself, that you may have grace to walk worthy of your high calling and privilege; in repentance, faith, and holiness, and in close communion with the Church, especially by a frequent participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which is at once the highest and most essential act of Christian worship, and the surest token of Church membership. Next pray to God for mercy upon all, both those who have gone beyond or fallen short of the Truth, and those who have altogether rejected it; that He may be pleased so to turn their hearts, and fetch them home to His flock, that they may be saved together with His true servants, and be made one fold under one Shepherd.

One word more. From each of these three Classes, which have been here considered, the Church in England has undergone persecution. 1st. In the 4th and 6th centuries, from those who reject the Truth, when they who denied that JESUS is the CHRIST the SON of the living GOD, expelled and murdered those who believed in Him, and called upon His Name. 2nd. In the 16th century, from those who teach more than the Truth, when the Papists or Romanists burned alive those who rejected their corrupt additions to the Catholic faith. 3rd. In the 17th century, from those who teach less than the Truth, when the Protestant Dissenters expelled and barbarously treated the Clergy, shut up the Churches, and forbade the use of the English Liturgy. But on each occasion, though it pleased God for a while to try the faith and constancy of his servants by sufferings, He failed not finally to deliver his people, and to protect and strengthen His Church.

At the present time, these three Classes of opponents have united their forces, and Unbeliever, Papist, and Protestant Dissenter, obeying Satan's bidding, are endeavouring to do that together, which they have failed to do singly, namely, to overthrow and destroy our branch of the Catholic and Apostolic Church. And it is not improbable that GOD, for our correction and improvement, or for the glory of His name, may again put the faith and constancy of His servants to the proof, by permitting them to suffer afflictions for His name's sake. But as He is "the same yesterday and to-day and for ever," His power undiminished, His truth unchanged, we may rest assured, that if we will be true to Him, He will be true to us; and will protect the Church of His Son, which is "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, JESUS CHRIST Himself being the Chief Corner-stone," and concerning which Church, that SON has said, that "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Fear not, therefore, neither be faint-hearted; has not GOD commanded you? Be strong, and of good courage!

OXFORD,

The Feast of St. Barnabas.

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