

# Ancient Mysticism as Applied to the Interpretation of New Testament

by J.H. Newman

---

*The sermon explores the nature and purpose of ancient mysticism in New Testament interpretation, highlighting its importance in understanding the spiritual significance of the events and people in the Bible.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 8:20, Matthew 21:1, John 2:1, John 9:39, John 10:16

**Topics:** "Mystical Interpretation", "Divinity Of Christ"

---

## Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the mystical interpretation of the New Testament, emphasizing the deep sense of the Divinity of Jesus Christ and the Communion of Saints as the foundation for understanding the hidden meanings and symbolic actions in the Gospels. The ancient interpreters, like Origen and Clement, applied allegorical interpretations to reveal the spiritual significance of Christ's words, actions, and miracles, considering them as prophetic and moral lessons for the Church and individual believers. The mystical approach to Scripture is justified by the belief that Christ's actions and teachings hold profound, multi-layered meanings that transcend the literal sense, inviting believers to seek a deeper understanding through reverence, prayer, and self-discipline.

---

## Transcript

The object of this section is, allowing the fact, that the ancient interpreters did apply the mystical principle very largely to the New Testament, to point out some of the rules by which they conducted that process, the limits within which they confined it, and the good purposes, which, under such rules and limits it was calculated to answer.

But the very mention of mystical interpretation, as applied the Christian Scriptures, suggests in limine a plausible objection, which it may be as well to anticipate in some measure, before proceeding any further. It may and will be said, "Whatever one may think of the degree and manner in which they allegorized the Old Testament, all must allow that to a certain extent they were borne out by Scripture in so doing. But to allegorize the New Testament at all, what is it but turning the substance into a shadow, and by consequence unsettling the very foundations of the religion ?" Those accordingly, who wish to be very severe upon the Fathers, have thought proper, in treating of this head, to make mention of the wild and cloudy dreams of the early Quakers<sup>151</sup>, and other modern enthusiasts ; as if the two things admitted some kind of comparison.

Again, taking another point of view, it may be argued that such a line of interpretation coincides too nearly with that which St. Paul so earnestly deprecates in the Epistle to the Galatians. This, it may be said, is the very essence of the Law, that it had but a shadow of good things to come. By allegorizing the Gospel, you are so far making it also a shadow ; and what is but going back to the Law, and incurring at once all the anathemas which the zealous Apostle pronounces on all such disturbers of Christian perfection.

This way of objecting would be as just as it sounds plausible, if either the truth of the New Testament history, or what we may call the completeness of the dispensation, were impugned by the mystical interpretations current in antiquity. But such is by no means the case. As to the truth of the history ; something was said in a former section, to shew that even Origen and his followers who are most censurable on that head, never thought of denying or doubting the main facts ; and that even where they speak most freely of minor details, as though the apparent discrepancies of the evangelical narrative could only be reconciled by supposing an admixture of allegory, it is not so much real contradiction, which they impute to the sacred historians, as an appearance of contradiction, which they assume to be intended and providential.

Again, as to the other point, of completeness ; the danger of sweeping negatives is proverbial, yet I suppose one might safely challenge the production from any orthodox writer, or from any of the school of Origen who had not been condemned as a heretic, of a single passage, tending to make out the Gospel scheme imperfect, in the sense here alleged, "Judaically imperfect"--a shadow and forerunner of better things to come even on this earth ; or as any other than the last and best of God's appointed ways of preparing His banished for restoration. Those blasphemies were reserved for such as Manes and Mahomet, and for that kind of infidelity, so current in our days, which allowing that the Gospel was well enough in its time, expects more however, in this and in coming generations, from the spirit of the age, than from the Spirit of the Church. We do not find even Origen's licentious disciples who incurred Church censures in the fifth general council, stigmatized with any opinion of the kind.

History then does not warrant our attributing either of the supposed ill tendencies to the mystical way of expounding the New Testament ; and a little consideration will show that in reason and argument they are quite separable from it : as will be presently evident, on proceeding to inquire calmly, what this Mysticism, which has such an ill name, really amounts to ; and on what great principles it is grounded.

(2.) The nature and amount of it may be best understood, by producing a few examples ; which will serve also incidentally to shew, how early it prevailed in the Church of God, and by what high authorities it was undoubtingly sanctioned. Hear, for instance, St. Clement of Alexandria, descanting on the circumstances of the parable of the Good Samaritan. "Which of the three," says our Lord, "was neighbour to the sufferer?" The other answering, "He that showed mercy on him;" Says Clement<sup>152</sup> :

"Who then is our neighbour, rather than the Saviour Himself ? To whom, rather than to Him, are we indebted for pity, all but slaughtered as we were by the rulers of darkness of this world, with so many wounds, with fears, desires, angers, griefs, deceits, pleasures ? Of all these wounds the only healer is Jesus, cutting out entirely every passion by the roots, not as the Law did, the produce merely, the fruits of the pernicious plants, but laying His own axe to the roots of iniquity. This is He who pours the wine, the blood of the vine of David, into our wounded souls ; who from the tender mercies of the Father brings oil, and that in abundance : this is He who makes known to us the indissoluble bands of health and salvation ; charity, faith, hope ; this is He who hath enjoined angels and authorities and powers to minister to us for a great reward : i. e. for the deliverance which themselves also shall receive from the vanity of the world at

the revelation of the glory of the Sons of God."

Besides the main lesson or moral of the parable, he assumes it to be full of designed allusions (and surely as he exhibits them they are very beautiful allusions) to the mystery of the Gospel, the process of our salvation by Christ. Neither would it be safe to attribute this to the play of Clement's own imagination, or to the manner of the Alexandrian school. For we find the same turn given to the parable by Irenaeus, a far graver and less diffuse writer, and trained in a remote part of the Church, where there is no cause to believe that the writings of Philo or other Jewish mystics had any particular influence. Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp, argues thus on a circumstance of this parable<sup>153</sup>.

"The dew of God [the Holy Ghost] is necessary to us, that we be not scorched nor made unfruitful, and that where we have an accuser, there also we may have an advocate [Paracletum] : For the Lord commends to the Holy Ghost that man of His who had fallen among thieves, whom Himself pitied, and bound up his wounds ; him Christ commends to the care of the Holy Spirit, giving two pence, of royal coinage : in order, that we, who receive by the Spirit the image and inscription of the Father and the Son, may improve the penny committed to us, accounting for it with manifold increase to our Lord."

It will be perceived that Irenaeus is even more express than Clement in sanctioning the allegorical exposition of this parable. Clement's language might be accounted for, by supposing him merely to be indulging in a vein of half poetical allusion ; but Irenaeus produces his exposition as a theological argument against an error of the Gnostics ; a part of whose creed was that the Aeon Christ descended on the Man Jesus at His Baptism. In opposition to which, St. Irenaeus, maintaining, of course, that it was the Holy Spirit which so descended, proceeds to show by many scriptural arguments, how comfortable that circumstance was to the office assigned to the Comforter in the economy of salvation : e. g. to His regenerating influence in Baptism ; to the miracle of Pentecost, as fulfilling the promise of our Lord ; to the images of water, and dew, under which He is repeatedly described ; and, for his last instance he adduces, as we have seen, the circumstance of the good Samaritan on his departure committing the rescued traveller to another's care, until Himself should return ; this Irenaeus brings forward as a known and acknowledged type or the office of the Holy Ghost, so well known and acknowledged, as to warrant him in reasoning from it to the interpretation of disputed passages.

So early, and in such high quarters, do we find warrant for considering our Lord's parables, with a view not only to the immediate moral of each, but also to certain hints of things future or supernatural, which even their minute details are supposed to convey ; which is one considerable branch of New Testament Mysticism.

(3.) Another, and a yet more extensive one, relates not to His words, but to His conduct. It consists in tracing through details, apparently indifferent, of what befel our Divine Master on earth, providential illustrations of His dealings with His people, or of their future fortunes, trials, and behaviour. To take an instance, which occurs not seldom, and is met with very early : the minute enumeration, varying in the different Evangelists, of the circumstances attending His last entry into Jerusalem. Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Tryphon, writes thus of a part of the dying prophecy of Jacob<sup>154</sup>.

"The expression, 'binding his foul, to the vine, and his ass's colt to the choice vine,' was a foreshowing of the works wrought in His first coming, and of the Gentiles also, who were to believe in Him. For these as a foal that had never borne a burden, nor taken any yoke upon his neck, until such time as this our Christ came, and sent His disciples, and made them followers of His own. Then they submitted to the yoke of His

word, and bowed their backs to endure all things, for the blessing's sake which they waited for, and which he had foretold. And in fact, there was a certain she-ass with her colt, bound at the entrance of a certain village by name Bethphage, which our Lord Jesus Christ, on the point of entering Jerusalem, commanded His disciples to bring to Him and sitting thereon, He made His entry into the city. Which being notoriously done by Him, according to what had been prophesied of the future doings of Christ, made it evident that He was the Christ. . . . But as to the circumstance, that the Prophetic Spirit agrees with the Patriarch Jacob, in mentioning the ass before accustomed to the yoke, as well as her colt,... as also that He Himself enjoined His disciples, as I said before, to bring both animals ; these things were a prophetic intimation to those also of your synagogue, who should concur with certain of the Gentiles in believing on Him. For as the colt unharnessed was a sign to those of the Gentiles, so also to those of your people the she-ass under her burthen. For the law given you by the Prophets is as a burthen laid on you."

(4.) The same interpretation is mentioned by Origen ; accompanying it however, as his manner is, with a conjecture of his own, which on the whole he seems to prefer. He writes<sup>155</sup> :

"I know that some have interpreted the ass tied, to be the believers of the Circumcision, released from many bonds by those who truly and spiritually had become disciples of the Word. The colt, on the other hand, they expound to be the Gentile believers, who were at large before they received the doctrine of Jesus, and who in respect of their unbridled and self-pleasing ways, might be regarded as having shaken off every yoke. These expounders have omitted the circumstance of the multitude going before and following. However, one might perhaps, with some plausibility, make the former answer to Moses and the prophets, the latter to the Holy Apostles, entering all together into some mystical Jerusalem ;"

The meaning of which he next proceeds to point out.

The whole passage may serve as an instructive specimen of the difference between Origen and the generality of the Fathers. The exposition which he produces as second best, is evidently that in which the Church commonly acquiesced ; as may further appear from the sanction afterwards given to it both by Ambrose and Augustin--Ambrose thus expressing himself<sup>156</sup>. "Well is it written, 'on which never man sate ;' since none ever before Christ ever called the Gentile nations into the Church." Augustin again, speaking as of an allowed point<sup>157</sup> :

"By the ass's colt on which never man had sat, we understand the people of the Gentiles, who had not received the law of the Lord. By the she-ass, (since both beasts were brought to the Lord) that portion of His congregation which came from the people of Israel ; not altogether untamed, but such as to have known her

master's crib."

But Origen, not contented with this prophetic interpretation the event in question, states also as possible, and recommends as on the whole preferable, the following moral interpretation of same : which however he advances (it is but justice to him to remark it) with expressions denoting unaffected reverence and modesty<sup>158</sup>. He conjectures:

"Jesus is the Word of God, entering into the soul, here called Jerusalem, borne on the she-ass which His disciples had loosed from her bonds : i. e. on the uncorrupt writings of the Old Testament expounded by the disciples, whose business it is to solve them, and who are two in number : i. e. the two kinds of mystical interpretation, moral and the prophetic : the one referring all things that are written to the

healing of the soul, and with that view allegorizing them ; the other exhibiting the good and true things to come, through those set before us in shadow. But He rides also the young colt, the New Testament ; (for in both we may the word of truth,) to purify us, and expel those thoughts which buy and sell within us. And into Jerusalem, the soul, He enters not alone, nor yet with some few only ; for many things must take place in us to go before the Word of God, which protects us, and very many to follow Him ; all however hymning and praising Him, and spreading under Him their own array and vesture, that those which are His vehicles may not touch the earth, while He deigns to abide on them, who came down from Heaven."

Such is Origen's descant on this part of our Lord's history : into which he was probably led, as was before hinted, by his wish to preserve as much as might be of the moral mysticism of Philo and others, in addition, not in preference, to the kind of allegory more properly Christian. Whatever may be thought of the general principle, it will perhaps be allowed, that in this instance it is beautifully applied, and may remind us of one of the Advent Hymns of Bishop Taylor<sup>159</sup>.

(5.) The arguments too are not contemptible by which Origen in the first instance vindicates the looking out for some mystical meaning in this passage<sup>160</sup>.

"I should like to ask those who think that nothing beyond the literal history was in St. Matthew's mind when writing his Gospel, what was the urgent necessity of sending the two disciples into the village over against Bethphage, to find and loose the ass tied and the colt with her, and bring them to Jesus. What was there especially worth recording in the fact that our Lord sat on the ass and colt, and so entered into the city ? . . . If the prophecy of Zechariah merely predict the outward and bodily event as narrated by the evangelists, let us see how those who stay themselves on the letter keep entire the connecting thread of the prophecy ; what they make of the passage immediately following, about cutting off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem, &c. (an argument, [he adds] wherewith the Jews press us not slightly.) . . . They cannot say that the two animals were needed on account of the length of the way, that being only fifteen furlongs. . . . Nor do I suppose that it suits well with the majesty of the Son's Divinity, to say that so great a Being avowed Himself to have need of an ass tied and a colt with her."

There are other particulars which he mentions : but these may suffice for a specimen of the kind of criticism, by which the allegorical method was supported, when it began to be called in question : which does not appear to have been until Origen's time ; the attack being most likely provoked by his incautious use of it. Certainly there seems to be a good deal of weight in such points of detail as he here alleges, not so much in behalf of his particular interpretation, as in establishing the general fact, that some spiritual meaning lies hid in these things ; and if in them, then by parity of reasoning in other narratives, the particulars of which are (speaking humanly) as unaccountable as in this instance.

(6.) It may be worth while to add on this head one passage from Tertullian, as a striking example of the manner, in which those primitive readers of the New Testament caught up things which we esteem casual and transient, and improved them to spiritual purposes. He is showing how full Scripture is of allusions to the doctrine of Salvation by Water, and thus he sums up the incidental evidence of the Gospel history on that subject<sup>161</sup>.

"Christ is found never without Water; since Himself also is baptized in Water. It is by Water, at a marriage feast, that He makes what may be called the first inaugural essay of His power. In His discourse He invites the thirsty to that Water which is His, and eternal. Teaching of charity, He selects among works of kindness for special approbation, a cup of Water offered to a brother. It is by a Well that He recruits His

strength ; He walks on the Water, as though of set purpose ; He [repeatedly] passes the Lake ; He ministers Water to His disciples ; nay, His testimony concerning baptism lasts even to His passion ; when He is surrendered to crucifixion, Water comes in--witness the hands of Pilate ; when He is wounded, Water bursts from His side--witness the spear of the soldier."

(7.) To this head belong the many spiritual allusions, which the ancient commentators seem to themselves to find, in the Names of places and persons, throughout our Lord's history. The principle on which they proceeded is laid down in a fragment of St. Clement of Alexandria<sup>162</sup>.

"When we are accurately searching the Scriptures, since it is acknowledged that they are written in parables, we ought by the names to trace out those notions of the things, which were so to speak, in the mind of the Holy Ghost, and which He there teacheth, having stamped His own meaning on the words."

And for this they seemed to find warrant, not only in the speculations of Pythagoras, (whom Clement quotes in illustration of his maxim,) and in the natural forebodings of mankind in general, as expressed in a well-known and very noble stanza of Aeschylus<sup>163</sup> ; but also still more in the history of the Old Testament, abounding as it does with names, both of persons and places, imposed (if one may so speak) sacramentally ; i. e. by way of token from the Most High of some future event, or hidden purpose. It probably seemed to Origen and those who followed him, but an extension of the same rule of interpretation, when they took pains (e. g.) to ascertain the Hebrew meaning of the names of the Baptist and his parents. He says<sup>164</sup> :

"It may be profitable, as in many cases the true force of names is worth knowing, so in this place to consider the meaning of the names John and Zacharias : for as though it were a matter of no small consequence, at the time of naming him there was a providential interference."

Then he proceeds to explain the three names :

"John, i. e. grace from God, was born of Zacharias, i. e. the remembrance of God, according to the oath of our God, which is denoted by the name Elisabeth :"

the three names together teaching that divine grace is the result of God's covenant blessing man's pious endeavours.

(8.) This example relates to persons : it may be well to give another which relates to this names of places. Origen had noticed a various reading of the name Bethabara, where John was baptizing ; some copies write Bethania or Bethany, but Origen shews that this is geographically impossible, and follows up his argument, by remarking<sup>165</sup> :

"The interpretation of the name [Bethabara] suits the baptism of one who was making ready a people prepared for the Lord ; for being translated it is, 'The House of Preparation :' whereas Bethany means, 'The House of Obedience.' For where else did it become him to baptize, who was sent as a messenger to prepare Christ's way before Him, than in the House of Preparation ? and what more suitable birthplace than the House of Obedience, for Mary, who chose the good part which could not be taken away from her ? for Martha, who was cumbered about waiting on Jesus ? and for their brother, who was called Friend by the Saviour ? He therefore who wishes to understand the Holy Writings without omission must not despise minute attention to names."

Here, it will be perceived, he assumes his rule so entirely, as to think it of some consequence in settling the preference among various readings of the name of a place. And so just after 166, among other reasons for reading Gergesa instead of Gerasa or Gadara, as the scene of the miracle of the evil spirits and the herd of swine : He says :

"The interpretation of Gergesa is, 'the abode of those who did cast out ;' perhaps named, by a prophetic instinct, from the way in which the Saviour was treated by those who besought Him to depart out of their coasts."

The like interpretations abound in St. Jerome, an author little likely to be biassed in their favour by the example of Origen, but qualified for them as Origen was, by his knowledge of the Hebrew, the want of which is probably the reason of their occurring less frequently, if ever, in Ambrose and Augustin. One might specify in particular the elegant way in which he has introduced more than one of them in the letter to Eustochium, which contains the itinerary of her mother Paula. He represents Paula addressing Bethlehem as follows 167 :

"Hail, Bethlehem, the House of Bread, wherein was born that Bread which cometh down from heaven. Hail, Ephrata, region most abundant and fruitful, the fertility whereof is God Himself."

"Not far from thence she went down to the tower of Ader, i. e. the dock; near which Jacob fed his flock, and the shepherds watching by night were counted worthy to hear, 'Glory to GOD in the highest.' Presently after, quickening her pace, she began to travel along the old way which leads to Gaza, i. e. to the power or riches of God ; when she thought of the Ethiopian eunuch."

Again, on the passage of Jeremiah, he writes 169 :

"Behold, I will send fishers and hunters, who shall hunt you out of every hill and mountain ; These are they whom the Lord sends out to fishing, and from fishers in the sea causes them to become fishers of men. Whence also the village of Peter and Andrew comes to be called by this name : for Bethsaida in our tongue is interpreted the House of Hunters."

It will have been observed, that some of these instances of allegorical names are taken not from our Lord's own history, but from that of St. John the Baptist ; and it is certain that the Fathers generally consider all that happened to him, at least before our Lord's manifestation, as capable of and requiring an allegorical exposition : e. g. says Clement 170 :

"The silence of Zacharias had a symbolical meaning, awaiting that offspring, which should be the forerunner of Christ ; that the light of the light of the truth, the word of the prophetic riddles, might become a gospel, or voice of good tidings, and so free itself of the mystical silence."

(9.) But when we come to the times after our Lord's Ascension, it may appear that we no longer find the same frequency, the same unhesitating freedom, of mystical exposition. Neither the Acts of the Apostles, nor the historical notices in the Epistles, are treated by them with the same constant allusion to mystical meanings, supposed to be undoubtedly contained in them. Instances of the kind are certainly not wanting ; as where St. Augustin on the conversion of St. Paul, reasons on the name Ananias, which he supposes to mean a sheep 171 ; and where Origen descants in the following way on St. Paul's recommendation of a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He says 172 :

"Every one who is spiritual, i. e. who serves God in the Spirit, and lives not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, he dwells in Jerusalem, i. e. in the place of Peace, and abides in the Vision of Peace : and he is one of the poor saints, i. e. one of those blessed poor, to, whom our Lord said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' . . . Being such he abides always in Jerusalem, possessing spiritual wealth. . . . On the other hand, it seems to me that those whom he calls Gentiles mean the less perfect souls, as standing, in need of, the instruction of the more perfect : and who, if so be they are accounted worthy to become partakers with them in spiritual understanding and knowledge, ought themselves to minister unto them in carnal things : and so, when their spirit begins to be imbued with something of loftier contemplation, the flesh also, taking on itself the reins of continence and of chastity, ought to minister to the spiritual precepts."

And even Chrysostom, who in general is very jealous of producing allegorical meanings, has an intimation that he does not consider them as out of place in this part of Scripture history. For, speaking of the name Dorcas, as repeated in the verse, He remarks<sup>173</sup> :

"They showed the garments which Dorcas had made for them. Not without significance is her name added in this place, but with a view of giving us to understand that she answered to her name, watchful and alert as the animal which it signifies, the antelope. For no less than a special providence goes to the assigning of many names, as I have often remarked to you."

In spite, however, of scattered instances of this kind, it will perhaps hold, as a general observation, that mystical exposition is the exception, and not the rule, of the ancient commentators on the Acts and Epistles ; whereas through all former parts of the sacred history, it undoubtedly constituted the rule and not the exception. If this be really so, it is remarkable in several ways : and one thought which it obviously suggests is, that it proves the Mysticism of the ancients, right or wrong, not to have been practised at random, not to have been merely an unthinking accommodation to the taste of the age, the school, or the individual. In such case, it will be hard to assign a reason why it should not have been applied to the fortunes of Christ's people after His ascension, as largely as before His coming, or as to the events of His own life. Were the whole a matter of mere ingenuity, it will not surely be pretended, that the character and adventures of St. Paul, (for instance) might not be as dexterously turned into allegory, whether of the prophetic or moral kind, as those of David or St. John the Baptist. The abstinence of the ancient writers in this respect indicates their proceeding on some definite rule or principle, whether we can succeed in ascertaining the rule or no.

(10.) The several heads of New testament Mysticism having thus been briefly noticed and exemplified, and appearing to be first, the affixing of spiritual import to the detail of parables, and to other imagery adopted by our Lord in His discourses ; secondly, the application of the like process to the circumstances of His history while on earth ; thirdly, to the names of persons and places any how connected to that history ; fourthly, and much more scantily, to the records of His Church after His departure ; we are in a condition to say something of the principles on which the whole depended, and the authorities by which, when challenged, they were accustomed to vindicate it : and in the course of the discussion it will perhaps sufficiently appear, what weight is due to the difficulty mentioned in the outset, viz. That allegorizing the New Testament at all is inconsistent with the idea of its being, *h a l h q e i a* , the final dispensation--the substance and not the shadow.

It may seem, then, that the mode of interpretation we are considering arose chiefly from the deep sense which those who used it entertained of two great truths--fundamental truths--of the Gospel : the

Divinity of our Lord, and the Communion of the Saints.

(11.) First, did we really lay it to heart, as we read verse after verse of the Gospels--did we in earnest put our minds to the thought,--that this Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, is indeed the Most High God, Creator and Possessor of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible ; did we realize our conviction of this truth in connection with each and all of His actions and discourses, and of the scenes and circumstances in which we find Him engaged ; we should of course feel on all these subjects, that which considerate persons feel in regard of all God's words and works ; viz. That the least of them is far too deep for us ; the most trivial of His is exceeding broad ; the slightest, to our conception, of His acts must have eternal and infinite associations and consequences. The words then and doings of our Blessed Saviour, being as they are the words and doings of God, it cannot be but they must mean far more than meets the eye : they cannot but be full-charged with heavenly and mysterious meaning, whether we are as yet competent to discern some part of that meaning or no ; and to look at them in that light may be called Mysticism, but is it any more than the natural and necessary result of considerate faith in His divine nature ? Or can it be doubted, that so far as the Mysticism of the old interpreters is traceable to this conviction, so far it not only admits of justification, but the disuse of it is a fearful symptom of irreverent forgetfulness at least of that vital doctrine?

On grounds like these, we may perhaps be excused in thinking, whatever we may judge of the particular examples, that the fathers could not be wrong in the general principle, which guided their comments in such instances as shall be now specified.

(12.) Knowing our Lord to be the Governor and Overruler of all things, even the least, by His good providence, knowing from His own lips that not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him : they could not be wrong in noting those circumstances and accompaniments of His conduct, which in ordinary human language would be called accidental, as being in fact divinely ordered : worthy, from their nearness to Him, of being contemplated with particular awe, as forming part of the clouds and darkness that He gathers round about Him : which if we can at all penetrate by the help of other revelations, it is well ; if not, at least we may adore in silence.

For example ; according to men's usual way of talking, it would be called an accidental circumstance, that there were five loaves, not more nor less, in the store of our Lord and His disciples, wherewith to provide the miraculous feast. But the ancient interpreters treat it as designed and providential, in this surely not erring : and their whole conjecture is, that it represents the sacrifice of the whole world of sense, and especially of the Old Dispensation, which being outward and visible, might be called the dispensation of the senses, to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be a pledge and mean of communion with Him according to the terms of a new or evangelical law. This idea they arrive at by considering the number five, the number of the senses, as the Mystical exponent of the visible and sensible universe : *t a a i s z h t a* , as distinguished from *t a n o h t a* . Origen lays down the rule in express terms. "The number Five frequently, nay almost always, is taken for the five senses."

Accordingly St. Clement<sup>174</sup>, speaking of the Tabernacle door, which was hung on five pillars, says it was accounted by some a token of the separation between the intellectual and sensible worlds ; and he adds,

"Thus, by a process full fraught with mysterious meaning, Five loaves are broken and multiplied by the Saviour, to the crowd of ordinary hearers ; for many one there be who regard the things of sense as if there were really nothing besides them."

Origen more plainly<sup>175</sup> : "By the five loaves they perhaps might signify the outward and literal words of the Holy Scripture, literal and sensible, and therefore represented by the number of the five senses." Ambrose again<sup>176</sup>, "It may seem that those five thousand, as though made up of the mere bodily senses which are five, received from Christ nourishment as yet little more than bodily." And Augustin<sup>177</sup> :

"To pass over this subject rapidly ; the five loaves are understood to be the five books of Moses, with reason not represented as of wheat, but of barley, because they belong to the Old Testament. And barley, as you know, is so formed, that you come with difficulty to the nourishing part of it, wrapped up as it is in a covering of chaff, and that chaff stiff and cleaving, so as not to be stripped off without some trouble. Such is the letter of the Old Testament, clothed with the wrappings of carnal sacraments, or tokens ; but if you once come to its marrow, it nourishes and satisfies. If we ask, who was the lad that bare the loaves, perhaps it was the people of Israel ; with no more than childish thought, bearing them only, not tasting them."

And elsewhere, expressing himself in such a way as to connect his view obviously to that of St. Clement<sup>178</sup>.

"The five barley loaves, wherewith the Lord fed the multitudes in the mountain, signify the old Law ; either because it is given to persons not yet spiritual, but still carnal i. e. devoted to the five bodily senses ; or because the Law was given by Moses, and the books written by Moses are five."

It should still be recollected, that neither in this nor in other like instances is the tone of the Fathers at all dogmatical. They are positive only in one, point, that there is a spiritual meaning, could we but find it<sup>179</sup> ; but of their own special exposition they commonly speak as doubtfully as Origen on this very place whose language is<sup>180</sup> :

"Thus far have I been able to reach in conjecturing the sense of the five loaves and the two fishes. But in all likelihood those who are better able to store themselves with [the spiritual food meant by] these symbols will be able to give a fuller account of these things."

It may be added, perhaps, in support of the exposition which he thus modestly suggests, that it suits well with the nature of the miracle, considered as an intimation of the future Eucharistical sacrifice : in which light the subsequent discourse of our Lord undoubtedly teaches us to consider it. For the offering of bread and wine, to be received back again as the Lord's Body and Blood, is in effect, as far as in each of us lies, the sacrifice of all the things of sense, of our whole earthly being, to be made heavenly by participation of Jesus Christ.

(13.) It is clear, again, referring to some examples given above that the names of the several places which our Lord chose wherein to utter His discourses and work His miracles, will come under the head which we are now considering--that of circumstances which in ordinary history might be called insignificant, but in this can hardly be less than providential. Our Lord's moving from place to place, among the towns, mountains, and rivers of Israel, was the moving of the God and King of Israel, among the places which He Himself had marked out, from all ages, to be the scene of His mighty words and works, when He should literally visit His people.

So also, applying the same remark to His discourses, the imagery which He used, His references to natural objects, are to be looked at with other and far higher feelings than those of mere wonder and delight, such as the same words would cause, could we imagine them proceeding from human lips. Hiss

mention (e. g.) of the birds of the air, the lilies, the vine and its branches, the wheat and tares, and whatever else occurs of the like kind, are so many instances of the Creator applying to moral or spiritual uses His own outward and visible works ; which works He had created, knowing in His Omniscience, that He should so apply them, and therefore (among their other final causes) with the, very purpose of doing so. And it is but carrying the same observation one step further, to say, that His not unfrequent allusions to domestic processes also, and the simpler modes of trade, and husbandry work, are in like manner allusions to things which Himself had prepared by His, providence, no doubt with a view to such application.

The great use to be made of this will be seen by and by : at present it may serve to mitigate the disapproving wonder, with which some readers are apt to receive what may appear to them frigid and overstrained comments of the Fathers on the figurative language of our Lord, and the details of His parables.

(14.) For example, St. Clement<sup>181</sup> applies the Parable of Leaven to illustrate the reserve which all know to have been one great feature of the teaching of the early Church. "By it," he says, "the Lord indicates the method of concealment." Then, quoting the parable, he subjoins :

"Either it is the preservation of the soul which our Lord here describes,--of the soul, made up as it is of three parts, [memory, understanding, and will] and preserved in the way of obedience by the spiritual power hidden in it, according to the faith ; or else, [He speaks thus] the Power of the Word, given unto us, compressed in a scanty space, but of great might, attracts to Itself secretly and invisibly the whole of him who receives It and lays It up within himself, and gathers the whole complex being of that man by degrees into perfect unity."

St. Augustin<sup>182</sup>, and St. Ambrose<sup>183</sup>, in effect give the same exposition ; all agreeing to annex a certain mystical force to the three measures ; to the woman ; whom take to be the Church, or Wisdom ; to the hiding of the leaven : and so in other parables ; those things which modern critics regard as the mere scenery or dress of the narrative, they fear to dispose of so easily, considering that He is speaking of them, who caused them to be what they are, with all their relations, similitudes, and association.

(15.) But if the Fathers considered as providential and mystical the mere ornaments of our Lord's discourses, and the accompaniments of His proceedings on earth, much more would they regard in the same view the substance of His conduct, His own voluntary doings. It would never come into their mind to think they knew the whole meaning and bearings of it, any more than to imagine, as they looked upwards at night, that they saw through the whole depth of the sky, because, gazing more intently than others, more and more stars had become visible to them. They seem to have contemplated the whole subject with that feeling of infinity, which dictated St. John's concluding verse, "If the things which Jesus did should be written every one, I suppose that not even the world itself should be able to contain the books which should be written." Akin to which is the saying Origen<sup>184</sup> :

"That the Gospel of St. John can hardly be understood but by one who should be like the writer of it, lying on the bosom of our Lord, and declared to be the Son of Mary, i. e. as it were another Jesus by communion with the true Jesus."

According to the depth of significance here attributed to the least of our Lord's doings, we are to look at the minute details of His demeanour towards different persons, His modes of dealing with them for their good, as so many exemplifications,--so many visible types,--of His invisible dealings and dispensations

towards the same class of persons always. If even "wise men and scribes," parents, say, or teachers or masters, very often use significant actions, expressing things far beyond any dream, that those who witness them can possibly have of their meaning ; shall it seem strange to be told, that we must regard all the actions of Him, who is infinite wisdom and goodness, as so many deep economies, answering, in all probability, purposes, of which we can no more judge, than a child in arms can judge of the meaning, of the holy services, which he may chance at any time to see performed in a Church.

(16.) But to produce first a few instances, in which it seemed to the Fathers that we might in some measure interpret our Lord's significant actions : Origen<sup>185</sup> has gone through great part of the discourse with the woman of Samaria, as a specimen of the way in which it pleases Him to deal with those who are not unbelievers but heretics : Irenaeus<sup>186</sup> expounds the washing the Disciples' feet to be a token of Christ communicating an interest in His Passion to all the Saints which had gone before, the whole Jewish and patriarchal Church. Thus he speaks :

"In the last times, when came the fulness of the time of liberty, the Word Himself by Himself cleansed away the filth of the daughter of Sion, washing with His own hands the feet of His Disciples. For this [in which we now are] is the end, [or last stage] of the human race entering on its inheritance, even God : that as in the beginning we were all brought into slavery by the debt of death [which we incurred], so in the end, by Him who is the Last, all who from the beginning had been Disciples, being cleansed and washed from the things of death, might enter into the life of GOD. For He who washed the feet of his Disciples, sanctified the whole body, and brought it into a state of pureness. Which is the reason also why He ministered food to them as they reclined, signifying those who were reclining in the earth, to whom He came to minister life."

Origen, and after him Ambrose<sup>187</sup>, assign a parabolical drift to the directions given by our Lord about preparing the Passover.

"No one, keeping the Passover according to the will of Jesus, is below the upper room ; but whosoever feasts with Him, is on high, in a large upper room, in an upper room swept, in an upper room garnished and prepared : and if thou go up with Him to celebrate the Passover, He gives to thee no less a gift than the Bread of blessing, His own Body, and vouchsafes to thee His own Blood. Wherefore I beseech you, go up on high, lift up your eyes on high. And to me too, when I am engaged in teaching the Divine word, the Scripture says, 'Go up to high mountain, thou who tellest good tidings to Zion.'"

And St. Ambrose<sup>188</sup> takes occasion from the command about the pitcher of water, to descant in honour of holy Baptism, carried away, as the Fathers use to be on that subject, perhaps above all others.

(17.) It may be worth considering, whether the view in illustration of which these last examples have been offered, does not tend in some sort to explain and justify the practice which I have frequently mentioned, as not unusual with Origen and Clement, and with others who followed them, of adding to the prophetic or evangelical exposition of historical passages, what may be called a moral exposition also : of which an example has already been adduced from Origen, speaking of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem ; and the following may serve in further illustration of it<sup>189</sup>.

"The Lord in the Gospel affirms, concerning that woman who poured on His head the box of precious ointment, 'She hath wrought a good work on Me;' intimating that he who pours ointment on the Word of God, i. e. who joins actual obedience with that Word, that man worketh a good work. For the adorned with obedience and right actions is rendered, as it were, fragrant, filled with all sweetness of precious

ointments."

Here would seem at first sight a confusion between the two senses of "the Word," standing sometimes for the Scriptures, sometimes for the Person of our Lord. But the difficulty will perhaps vanish, on considering that the Word written or spoken was regarded by Origen as one only among many forms, in which the personal Word vouchsafes to communicate Himself to His servants. The things then which befel our Lord "visibly and personally" might well be taken as symbolical of the mode, in which His inward and invisible presence acts on, and is received by, the hearts of His servants ; as Origen himself gives us to understand, explaining the declaration of St. John the Baptist<sup>190</sup>, "There standeth one among you whom ye know not," of "the presence of our Lord's most high Nature in all reasonable souls, reaching through the whole world." Comments, accordingly, in the Alexandrian and other Fathers, which at first sight, might appear like mere metaphysical disquisitions, about the supremacy and operations of reason, may be understood of Christ, and the operations of His grace; only recollecting that the ancients in their piety ascribed all sound reason to the Word, or Wisdom, of the Father, enlightening the soul.

(18.) The Divinity then of our Lord, and His relation to mankind, would cause us to feel sure that all His words and doings must be so far mystical, as that they mean more, infinitely more, than meets the eye and ear of the mere human observer. But His Incarnation and Economy, of which His words and actions are part, may have had other objects, relative to other races and other states of being. Who knows but any given work or discourse of His may have reference to some of these, and we may have, consequently, to wait for its full explanation until (if ever) our eyes be opened to behold them in another world? Certainly there are obscure hints in Scripture, there is a partial, a very partial, disclosure, of some change in heaven as well as on earth, to be wrought by the Incarnation of the Son of God. "The principalities and powers in heavenly places," it is intimated, have some deep though undefined interest in that unspeakable Work of God, Which is our sanctification and salvation. Such hints unquestionably the New Testament contains : and it was the part of watchful piety, such as that of the Fathers, to notice and store them up : and what more natural, than that they should sometimes remember them, when engaged in the obscurer portions of the Gospel history, and should say within themselves, What if such and such a saying of our Lord, such and such a circumstance of His behaviour, evidently too profound for us, should belong to Him as the Lord of Angels rather than of men,--should allude to His government of heaven rather than of earth?

By this train of thought, they would evidently open to themselves a new source of (what is called) Mysticism : the principle of which can hardly be denied, however unsoundly or presumptuously the details may have been managed. One or two examples shall be produced from Origen, the writer on mind these thoughts appear to have made most impression.

He<sup>191</sup> applies the prophetic Saying of our Lord, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold," in who "look forward," he says, "with the rest of the Creation, to the revelation of the Sons of God, for whom they are commissioned to minister (being so far," as he expounds it, "made subject unto vanity") that they with the objects of their ministration may receive the inheritance of salvation, that of earthly and heavenly things there may be one fold and one shepherd." It may be remarked, by the way, that this comment on the place in the Romans, right or wrong, is not Origen's own. It occurs, as we have seen, in Clement's exposition of the parable of the good Samaritan. "<sup>192</sup>Christ has commanded the authorities and powers to minister to us for a great reward, viz. that themselves may be delivered from the bondage of corruption." Again, Origen<sup>193</sup> considers the case of the fallen Angels to be very probably part of our Lord's meaning, in that very awful Proverb, "There are first which shall be last, and there are last which shall be first." And every where be is full of the presence of the elect Angels, and delights in contemplating our invisible

communion with them ; not always perhaps judiciously, yet surely on the whole more wisely and scripturally, than they who banish the doctrine out of their thoughts, as though it were either a mere figure of speech, or an economy long laid aside, and to us mere matter of history.

(19.) So much for that portion of the New Testament Mysticism, which seems to arise from the constant remembrance of the Omniscience of Jesus Christ, and His Supreme Dominion over things visible and invisible. Another large class of similar instances will be found, derived from another fundamental truth, viz. the Communion of Saints. By the Communion of Saints, is here meant the real, but mysterious and supernatural union of Jesus Christ with His Body the Church, and with every member of that Body : by virtue of which, the actions and sufferings of the Head may be predicated of the Body, and conversely those of the Body, of the Head : Israel may stand for Christ, and Christ for Israel : the one, e. g. where Moses is said to have "esteemed the reproach of Christ," i. e. of God's Church and people, which is in Christ's account one with Him, "more than the treasures of Egypt:" the other, where Hosea, combining in one expression the past and the future, says, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My Son out of Egypt."

Again, David is a type of our Lord, and through Him of the Church which is His Body, and through that again of each individual Christian as being a member of that Body: and therefore the Psalms generally are adopted by the whole Church in her assemblies, and by separate believers in their closets, with equal propriety, as the language of their devotions: they are an inspired Liturgy, provided for all ages and all lands.

As, therefore, the Divinity of our Lord even forces a considerate person to regard His demeanour towards those who, came near Him in the body, as indicative of His ways of grace and trial towards us, with whom He is invisibly present : so the unity between Him and His Church would lead us to inquire, from time to time, whether things which we find happening to Him may not be prophetic tokens of the future fortunes of the Church ; as well as His conduct a lesson to her, how to bear herself in her conflicts with the world.

(20.) But here the nature of the case would enforce an important, distinction between the allegory of the Old Testament and that of the New; i. e. so far as both are prophetic. In the Old Testament the leading idea is, that the Church, whether diffusive, or embodied in her anointed members, king, priest, or prophet, is every where the type of Christ ; in the New, that Christ conversely is the type of the Church. "They, from Sheba shall come, they shall bring gold and incense :--doubtless the immediate aspect of this prophecy is towards the wise men's offering at Bethlehem ; but that offering was itself prophetic of the kings of the earth coming in, and laying their glories at the feet of the Church, as the representative of Christ on earth. Again, "He shall bruise them with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel"--is transferred in the Acts from David to Christ, and in the Revelation from Christ to the Church. Our Lord being in this sense also both Alpha and Omega, the end of the ancient types and the beginning of a new series. In Him all that happened before was, as it were, brought to a point ; and all again that should come after, was but so many developments of what He said, did, and suffered among us.

But it can scarce be necessary to dwell much on this part of the subject, since Christians in general appear to feel that each greater event of our Lord's abode on earth, His Passion, for example, in all its circumstances, was prophetic of the treatment which the Church, His Body, might expect, and at the same time symbolical of the inward process, whereby each one of His members should be trained and purified. The very expression, "taking up the Cross," seems to imply as much as this.

But if so, surely there is something to be said for the introduction of the same idea in other passages also of our Saviour's life, and in explanation of other sayings of His. For example, there is a very ancient gloss on the saying, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." "In this," says Clement of Alexandria<sup>194</sup>, "I suppose there is an allusive meaning ; viz. that with him only who believes, and is perfectly separated from all those who in Scripture are described as wild beasts, does a resting place use to be found for the Head of all beings, the gracious and gentle Word ;" as if our Lord's literal want of a home, when He was here in the body, betokened the scarcity, which should ever be found on earth, of souls apt to receive and lodge Him worthily. Foxes would always find their dens, and birds of the air their nests : crafty and soaring thoughts would always find hearts enough ready to entertain them : not so the frank and open, the meek and lowly, Spirit of Christ.

Such is St. Augustin's explanation<sup>195</sup> (amongst others) ; and it appears to be so far warranted, as that it is only an additional application of the same principle, which teaches us, with St. Cyprian<sup>196</sup>, to consider Christ's coat without seam as a token of the unity of His Church, which her enemies, doing their worst, should be unable to rend : or with Clement<sup>197</sup>, to look on His baptism as a token and type of ours. He affirms :

"The Lord, is consecrated by the bath alone, and sanctified by the descent of the Holy Ghost. So it is ; and the same thing happens in us also, of whom the Lord is the type : by baptism we are enlightened, by enlightening we are adopted, by adoption we are consecrated [or perfected], by consecration [or perfecting] we are immortalized."

St. Paul's language to the Romans and Colossians, implying Christ's death and resurrection to be, sacramentally and virtually, that of each baptized person, is too well known to be more than just alluded to. And there is imagery in the Revelations, in the vision of the Two Witnesses, which may justify us in surmising that the same awful events may in some sense find their counterpart in the history of the Church on earth.

Whoever will consider and follow out these and similar hints, will see reason, perhaps, to excuse many things, which a hasty reader of the Fathers would call over-bold and fanciful : he will understand how Origen might affirm<sup>198</sup>, that there are in fact as many different manifestations of the Word, as many different Christs, as there are believers : and again, that those who rest content with the mere outward meaning of the Gospel history, not recollecting as they go on, that in this same Jesus they live, and move, and have their spiritual being--that He is one with them, and they with Him--they are in the same kind of error as the Judaizers, who could not find Him in the Old Testament.

(21.) So far then as the mystical interpretation of the Gospels depends on the Communion of Saints, it would appear to be amply authorized by the Scripture itself : neither need we be long to seek for similar authority in behalf of that branch of it, which has been already exemplified : that, namely, which results from the constant endeavour to realize, as we read, our Lord's high and transcendent Nature. As to His Parables, it is certain that in those which He has condescended to explain, in that of the Tares for example, every circumstance almost is made to tell ; so far from the attention being limited, as many modern interpreters would limit it, to the general result and moral only. Many of His actions are ascertained to be symbolical, in the way of Prophecy, or moral, or both : some by their correspondence with direct Parables ; as the cursing of the fig-tree, which agrees remarkably with the Parable of the barren fig-tree ; the multiplying the loaves and fishes, illustrated by the subsequent discourse on the Bread from Heaven ; and the miraculous draught of fishes, explained by the Parable of the net. Other actions, or

circumstances of actions, have their figurative nature indicated by the use of some symbol, which God's providence has made appropriate, (o i k e i o n , as the rhetoricians call it,) to some particular subject ; as the change of water into wine, where the appropriation was made known afterwards by the institution of the Holy Eucharist. In other cases, as the choice of the ass and colt for the entry into Jerusalem, above considered, the terms of ancient Prophecy were a key to the mystery of the action. As to the miracles of our Lord's mercy, hearing, cleansing, enlightening, reviving,--there were sufficient hints given by Himself, in the conversations which followed upon some of them, how He would have them interpreted : as when He remarked on the case of the man who had been blind from his birth, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind :" and in the Parable of the relapsed dæmoniac.

(22.) The above considerations may perhaps put us in a condition to account in some measure for the comparative absence of Mysticism in the comments of Antiquity on the Acts and Epistles. Those, with whose words and actions those later Christian Scriptures are conversant, were actually in the Kingdom of Heaven : they were arrived at that final condition,--final as regards this world,--to which all former types and shadows had pointed, and in which, visibly or invisibly, they were now to be realized. They were not themselves, as far as we know, types and shadows of any thing further. Their condition indeed was full of mystery, of high, spiritual, invisible relations and associations : and so is our own condition, for theirs and ours are in substance one. But scantily and seldom, if at all, is any portion of the veil withdrawn, so as to justify the same kind of comment on the hidden bearings of the Apostles' history, or of that of any subsequent generation of believers, which God Himself had taught us to venture on, in all preceding Scriptures. With the exception of those sacramental actions, which being performed according to His command, are to be regarded as purely and indeed His actions, there are now no visible doings of Christ on earth : none, that is, visibly distinct from the doings of men ; none therefore to which we are warranted in specially affixing a mystical character, as being both the doings of God, and of Him who is one with the Church and with each of us. "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every man that believeth:" that verse being once for all realized, the vision and prophecy is of course sealed up ; for there can be nothing beyond the end.

(23.) On the whole, there seems no want of scriptural authority for the allegory as applied by the Fathers to the New Testament, considered both in what it includes, and in what it omits. Most modern interpreters even, and almost all devotional writers, recognise it in principle, some perhaps more or less unconsciously : but the great difference between them and the Ancients seems to lie rather in this; that the Ancients fear not to carry it out, in every part of the Gospels, and as far as it will go in every case; whereas we, in modern times, each draw his own arbitrary line, according to our own taste, or our notions of what is useful or convincing, or out of deference to the judgments we expect from others.

And some perhaps may say, "After all, where is the great harm of this? the other may certainly be more legitimate and consistent in reasoning ; but practically, is it not safer, is it not even more religious and reverent, to abide by the letter, instead of perplexing yourself with expositions of which you cannot be quite sure ?" This, perhaps, is a thought not unlikely to be entertained by many minds. But let us be aware which way it leads :--to what, in reality, it amounts. Discarding high associations from our interpretations of Scripture, under the notion that a plain man may do well enough without them, appears rather like discarding high doctrines from our creed, as if they were only fit for professed theologians. It may be, that the one does not always lead to the other, but they may be symptomatic of the same unhealthy frame of thought : and is it not generally found, in fact, that the two more or less accompany each other, both in

schools of divinity and in the fluctuation of individual minds ? Whitby's intense scorn of the ancient allegories was a step to the Arianism in which he finally acquiesced : and we know too well the region of doctrine towards which the merely critical and historical discussions of the last century were continually gravitating. Surely these are things worth the consideration of those, who shrink not only from promulgating, but even from fairly examining, the old principles of Biblical exposition, for fear of giving too much play, to the imagination, or some such kind of irreverence. Are they not unconsciously behaving like Ahaz, who, when God Himself offered him a sign, refused to ask, under the pretence or notion, that to do so would be tempting the Lord?

(24.) It is most true, there is a great danger in the mystical contemplation of the Scriptures, more especially of the Gospels, by how much the Word of Life is there brought nearer to us, to be not only heard of, but also to be seen with our eyes, to be looked upon and handled with our hands. There is a great, an unspeakable danger, if our practice be not conformable. But this danger is not peculiar to the process of spiritual interpretation ; it belongs equally to all ways of communicating the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven ; to the Creeds and Prayers of the Church ; to the Catechisms which all children learn. And the remedy for it is not, in this or any other instance, to hide our eyes indolently from the light, which we know shines round us, but to strengthen them gradually, that they may be able to bear it ; and this can only be done by moral means ; i. e. by repentance, devotion, and self-denial. As we train ourselves, so also, according to our means, should we endeavour to prepare others for the right study of the Bible. He who looks no deeper than the letter, may simply recommend candour, and patient investigation, and freedom from sensual and other disturbing thoughts : but he who knows beforehand, that the Personal Word is every where in the written Word, could we but discern Him, will feel it an awful thing to open his Bible; fasting, and prayer, and scrupulous self-denial, and all the ways by which the flesh is tamed to the Spirit, will seem to him no more than natural, when he is to sanctify himself, and draw near, with Moses, to the darkness where God is. And this so much the more, the more that darkness is mingled with evangelical light; for so much the more we may hope to see of God ; and we know Who it is, that has inseparably connected seeing God with purity of heart.

As therefore God's people are continually to be told, concerning the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, that it is infinitely dangerous to come near it unworthily, but they are not therefore to leave it out of their minds, but rather to think of it night and day, that they may prepare themselves, and come as God would have them : so is it with this mystical presence of Jesus Christ in every part of the Scriptures. We are not to shrink from the thought of it for fear of irreverence, but hearing it continually in mind, we are to train ourselves so, that we may have grace to discern it, according to our measure, in particulars. This training is no matter of intellectual acuteness, industry, and memory : they will only mislead into some wrong kind of Mysticism, if separated from a single mind, and a heart full of reverence : but he that is willing indeed to do His will, he shall know *perithydiaz*, "concerning the manner of teaching," as well as the substance, "whether it be of God." Common sense surely will add, that one necessary sign of this willing reverence of heart, will be our religiously walking by the clue, which the ancient Church has given us, wherever we can keep satisfactory hold of it ; never daring to contradict the unanimous voice of the Fathers, still less to treat with scorn and mockery the serious opinion, though it be but of one among them.

(25.) On the other hand, no ignorance, not even inability to read, disqualifies men from thus receiving our Lord in His Scriptures. It does not hinder them from seeing God's hand in His natural Providence, in His care of their own and others' welfare : why should it make them incapable of perceiving His supernatural Providence, (if one may so call it)--the presence of His Christ--in all those works of His, the record of

which they hear from time to time in Church, or at home out of their Bibles ? Such perception of o

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jh-newman/ancient-mysticism-as-applied-to-the-interpretation-of-new-testament/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**