

Supplement to Tract Xviii; on the Benefits of the System of Fasting Prescribed by Our Church

by J.H. Newman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fasting as a means of spiritual discipline and self-denial, and provides guidance on how to observe church fasts in a way that is consistent with the teachings of the church.

Scripture: Psalm 35:13, Isaiah 58:6, Daniel 10:3, Joel 2:12, Matthew 6:16, Mark 9:29, Luke 5:35, Acts 13:2, 1 Corinthians 7:5, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Fasting And Prayer"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches on the importance of fasting in the Christian life, addressing various questions and misconceptions surrounding the practice. He emphasizes the significance of fasting as a means of self-discipline, spiritual growth, and preparation for receiving God's blessings. Newman highlights the historical and biblical roots of fasting, pointing to the examples set by Jesus and early Christians. He encourages believers to approach fasting with humility, sincerity, and a focus on spiritual renewal, rather than legalism or outward show.

Transcript

THE following observations were occasioned by some questions, signed "Clericus," addressed to the Editor of the British Magazine, in April last; as they related to my tract, I felt called upon to answer them as far as I could; and they are now re-printed, with some additions, in the hope that they may remove some difficulties, which stand in the way of returning to the wise Rules of our Church, with respect to the Christian duty of Fasting.

E. B. P.

OXFORD.

The Feast of St. James

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I. Wednesday Fast. I did not mean to imply that this was a fast of our church. In p. 6, I meant to speak of the example set us by the early church; in p. 10, "the two-sevenths of the year, which the church has wished to be in some way separated by acts of self-denial and humiliation," include the forty days of Lent, not the Wednesday. Undoubtedly many pious Christians have an especial respect for the Wednesday, as the day on which our SAVIOUR is supposed to have been betrayed, and also because their church has, in consequence, hallowed it by the use of the Litany. It would be natural for any Christian, who would add occasional private fasts, to select the Wednesday: and this it were well to bear in mind, for the church prescribes what is generally necessary only; those who strive at higher degrees of holiness, and are constantly stretching forward, will, when accustomed to them, practise it themselves in private acts of self-denial at other times.

II. Does a feast ordinarily supersede a fast, or how is the fast to be engrafted upon the feast? Our church, in that she has made one exception, (viz. that her weekly Friday fast is to give way to the birth-day of her Lord,) and one only, seems to me to imply, that on all other occasions the fast is to be retained. Yet this does not supersede the feast. The glad remembrance on each such feast-day still remains,--whether that GOD then crowned with exceeding glory the labours and patience of His blessed servants, the Apostles, or whether it were some act of mercy conveyed to us directly in His SON. The act of fasting (when the habit is acquired) chastens, but diminishes not our joy; nay, on the festivals of the blessed Apostles, it carries on the lesson of the vigil, and teaches us how we must "enter into His rest." This, then, seems to me to answer the third question, Are the vigils to be kept as fasts, in such cases, as well as the day itself? I should answer, yes; because the vigil, or fast, of the preceding evening, is intended to prepare the soul, by previous abstinence and meditation, that it may rise disposed, and refreshed, and unencumbered, ready to receive GOD'S holy influences on the morrow, and this ground is even increased by the additional solemnity of that morrow. There appears, however, to be this difference between the vigil and the Friday, or the Lent fast, --that in the vigil, not humiliation, but preparation for a solemn service, is the main object, the fasting is incidental only; as indeed the very name leads one to think of the watching and previous meditation, not of the abstinence, except as far as it facilitates this end.

IV. Rogation days; or, the three days preceding our Lord's ascension. This, according to Bingham, is a Western fast, unknown in the East, where the whole period of Pentecost was one season of joy. This fast appears to have been a sort of extended vigil, preparatory to the day "when the Bridegroom was taken away," and teaching us that, laying aside our worldly appetites, we should "in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell." "Doubtless," says Caesarius, bishop of Arles, "he loves the wounds of his sins, who does not, during these three days, seek for himself spiritual medicines, by fasting, prayer, and psalmody." The council of Orleans, A. D. 511, ordained that they should be kept after the manner of Lent. There is something salutary both in the eastern and the western view; in most periods, however, of church history, the earnestness and distrust of self implied by this preparation for the festival of the Ascension is more fitted and more salutary for us than the unbroken exulting joyousness of the eastern church.

V. Should the observance of the church's fasts be public? and if so, how should it be regulated? Undoubtedly we are not to fast, any more than to pray, or give alms, "to be seen of men:" but as no one has ever interpreted our SAVIOUR'S warning as forbidding public or Common Prayer, so neither can it apply to public or common fasting. If we do publicly only what the church requires, there is no more boastfulness in so doing than in going publicly to church. "In the season of the Passion," says Tertullian, "when the religious observance of fasting is universal and in a manner public, we scruple not to lay aside

the kiss of charity, (this omission was the public avowal that a person was fasting,) not caring to conceal an observance which all are sharing with us."

But further, since fasting is to be accompanied by retirement, all that the world need know is, that we do fast; the degree of self-denial need be, for the most part, known only to GOD, or to those immediately in one's domestic circle, who, it may be hoped, will share our feelings and our practice, and with whom there is no parade. We are not to obtrude our practice on others, but neither (as Clericus well objects) dare we deny it, if discovered, any more than we should deny that we were walking to church, although it should be on some holy day which the world has disused.

Nay, this very denial proceeds (in part, doubtless, from misinterpretation of our SAVIOUR'S precept, but in part also) from some sort of feeling that it is a great thing which we are doing. On the other hand, let a person familiarize his mind to the idea that fasting is but a "plain duty, (obedience to the church,)" and he will feel, that to try to mislead persons as to his performance of that duty must needs be wrong, because it is deceitful, but is also wrong, as countenancing evil, and the neglect of duty.

It is, undoubtedly, often very painful to speak of, or to avow, any of one's own religious practices, especially when asked in an irreverent spirit, Â--it seems like profaning the sanctuary of one's own heart; Â--yet there is in most minds that instinctive respect for a man's honest conviction, as well as for the simple straight-forwardness, which, when called upon, would cheerfully state the truth, that any unaffected avowal that we thought it our duty to fast, would instantly command respectÂ--often perhaps lead to inquiry.

Only, we must beware that we be not inconsistent or forward: a person who should voluntarily go into a mixed or large society, where the very object of meeting was relaxation or amusement, and yet purpose to fast there, would deservedly expose himself to the charge of inconsistency, because he has chosen for his fast a place manifestly unsuited to it, and he must bear the difficulties which he has brought upon himself. On the contrary, should it be convenient to his Diocesan, or Archdeacon, to hold a visitation on one of the church's fasts, (the case proposed by "Clericus,") there would be nothing in the intercourse of a visitation dinner inconsistent with the abstemiousness of a fast-day.

Generally speaking, however, retirement and self-collection seem so essential a part of fasting, that, unless on some extraordinary occasion, which might give a decidedly religious character to the meeting, I should think it best for any one, who would observe the church's fasts, to abstain from all society, except that of his own circle. The Fellows of one of the most respected Colleges in this place have, for years, made it a rule neither to accept nor to give any dinner-invitations on the Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent.

This has been a good beginning, and they have been the more respected for making this rule, even by those persons who have not thought it needful to follow their example. Some other persons, though probably but few, have extended their rule to all the fast-days of the church, except on some extraordinary occasions, such as those above hinted, or where respect to persons in authority seemed to supersede their private judgment; on such occasions, they would practise a quiet unostentatious abstemiousness.

Nor do I think that any charge of singularity (in any obnoxious sense) does or would attach in any case when a person acts simply and unostentatiously. If a clergyman, e. g., were, in declining the invitation of an elder minister, to assign as his ground, that he did not dine out on fast-days, there would be something unbecoming in this sort of tacit reproof to an older labourer in GOD'S vineyard; but though we must not disguise the truth, if asked for, we need not voluntarily put forward the grounds of our actions; we might

leave it to circumstances to lay them open, as far as might be necessary; and if we make no parade of our practice, our Christian liberty will be respected.

But, should it be otherwise we are, of course, not to count that "some strange thing has happened unto us," though our good should be evil spoken of. After all our precautions against ostentatiousness, censure of others, and the like, our very practice, if accounted of any moment, will probably be regarded as implying blame of those who allow themselves in the things from which we think it our duty to abstain; especially shall we have much difficulty in the first outset, but from within, more than from without.

We all, probably, magnify our own importance, and think that our neighbours canvass us more than they do; whereas some passing observation? that "we are good sort of people, but have exaggerated notions about the church's authority;" or that "our state of health or spirits leads us to excited notions about fasting," or that "we have new-fangled notions about Christian antiquity," or, perchance, that "we are half papists in this, though sound in other respects," and the like, and so we are dismissed.

Meanwhile, with a little patience, and a few years, (if GOD allots them to us,) our new-fangled notions will have become old; it will be seen, that in proportion as we love the old Catholic Christianity, we must hate the modern corruptions of it in popery; and, if we do not influence those older than ourselves, which we should not even expect to do, since it is not natural, and we on the contrary shall constantly have to learn something of almost all our elders,) we shall, in our turn, gradually become older, and shall be able to influence those whom GOD in His ordinary dealings intends that we should influence--our younger brethren; and that, too, when we shall not only be convinced, on the authority of the church, and of older Christians, that regular prescribed fasting is good, but have known it for ourselves, and shown it forth, by GOD'S grace, in our lives.

VI. In what is the abstinence of fasting to consist? On this question I can say no more than I have already said. Persons, constitutions, occupations, states of health, habits of mind, vary so indefinitely, that I do not see how a rule, which must take all these into account, can be general. I do not indeed think it a sufficient answer, which some urge, that fasting, e. g., sours their temper, &c. &c., for it remains to be proved, whether, if under taken, not as an experiment, but as a duty, not as an isolated act, but as a habit, it would have that effect.

Undoubtedly the flesh will rebel at first, as it does against every attempt made to subdue it, but this does not prove that it would not be tranquil and weaned at last. Again, the habit of fasting would naturally be accompanied by some degree of corresponding change in our other habits, which might tend to make it lighter; as of old when men, e. g., on fast-days, abstained from all unnecessary exercise or fatigue, which might incapacitate the soul from performing its duties aright, unless the body had its usual refreshment.

And some such arrangement, I should think, parochial ministers, even with extensive cures, might make, allotting to the fast-day such portion of their weekly duty as was least exhausting. Yet, after all, one rule will not apply to all, young or old, in strong health or weakly, engaged in active or in sedentary duties, of full or spare habits; as again, some of the ends of fasting will vary according to the periods of life, habits, or temperaments; and, with the ends, so will the modes also, or degree of fasting.

"As fasting hath divers ends," says Bishop Taylor, speaking of private fasting, "so has it divers laws." And for the temptation peculiar to youth, he remarks, "a sudden, sharp, and violent fast" will often only aggravate the evil. What is then needed is, "a state of fasting, a diet of fasting, a daily lessening our meat and drink, and a choosing such a course of diet as may make the least preparation for the lusts of the

body." This, although belonging directly to private fasts, is so far to our purpose, as indicative of his judgment, that the rules of fasting must be adapted to our several cases; and it was with this view, that, in the second edition of my tract, I alluded (p. 23) to the [xerophagia], the less rigid fast of the ancient church, in hopes that those who, from ill health, were unequal to the harder fasts, might yet not think themselves excluded from the privilege of fasting.

And if the fast serve no other purpose than to distinguish the day from ordinary days, by "eating no pleasant bread," yet even this degree of fasting, where no other is admissible, can be, and has been, blessed by GOD. The rules which I would recommend to one commencing the observance of the church's fasts would be: 1. To abstain, as far as possible, from all mixed society at meals on those days, both as likely to be inconsistent with the frame of mind, which it is the object of the fast to cherish, and as tempting us (were it but to escape notice) to break our rule. 2.

Not to tie himself down to any severe rule at first, as to the degree of fasting; for as our bodies have been inured to ease, so must they gradually be inured to seasonable austerities, If we lay down too strict a rule, it may, in reality, be too much for us at first, and so we may be tempted to lay aside the whole habit; whereas, had we begun more modestly, we might in time have arrived, with comparative ease, at the higher measures of it. 3. To watch carefully the effects upon our own minds of any failures or inconsistencies in our practice; for these failures carefully observed, when we have once begun the practice of fasting, will show its real uses, more, perhaps, than the direct benefits of the practise itself. 4.

Accompany the fast not only with increased prayer and meditation, but with other little outward acts of self-denial, for thus the whole day will be more in keeping, and the mind taken off from dwelling too much on the one act of fasting. Thus the brunt of our enemy's attack will not rest upon this one point, (as is likely to be the case if the fasting stand alone,) but, by being divided, will be weakened. "A man," says Bishop Taylor, "when he mourns in his fast, must not be merry in his sport; weep at dinner, and laugh all day after; have a silence in his kitchen, and music in his chamber; judge the stomach, and feast the other senses."

So again Bishop Taylor instances "hard lodging, uneasy garments, laborious postures of prayer, journeys on foot, sufferance of cold, paring away the use of ordinary solaces, denying every pleasant appetite, rejecting the most pleasant morsels, as being in the rank of bodily exercises," which, though, as St. Paul says, of themselves they 'profit little,' yet they accustom us to acts of self-denial in inferior instances, and are not useless to the designs of mortifying carnal and sensual lusts."

A person would never have selected these instances without having tried them himself, and found their use; and, on the other hand, most persons probably, who have systematically tried fasting, have experienced the benefits of some of these accessories. Some of these also may be irksome at first, as others would be to many no self-denial at all; but every one knows what, however trifling, would be self-denial to him, and the frequent repetition of these acts is a constant, though gentle, self-discipline.

It seems to me part of the foolish wisdom of the day, and its ignorance of our nature, to despise these 'small things,' and to disguise its impatience of restraint under some such general maxim as, that "God has no pleasure in self-torture, or mortification," 1. "God wills to see his creatures happy," and the like: undoubtedly GOD wills not our death, but our life; not our misery, but our peace; but GOD often restores our bodily health by bitter herbs, the knife or cautery, and why not our spiritual?

Our forefathers knew better, and by disciplining themselves in these little things, attained to greater; they knew that religion is concerned about little things, as well as great; that if we look to great occasions or

great instances only, we shall form no habit; and therefore they shrunk not from mentioning all the little instances, if they were only (the case of an aged and pious relative of my own, long since with the Lord,) abstinence from snuff during Lent, or abridging self-indulgence as to morning sleep, which they had found useful to them. 5.

Take especial care to practise self-denial as to food at other times also, lest the fast degenerate into a mere opus operatum, a thing good in and for itself, even if followed by acts of an opposite kind. In Bishop Taylor's words, "Let not intemperance (or self-indulgence) be the prologue or the epilogue to your fast. When the fast is done, eat temperately according to the proportion of other meals, lest gluttony keep either of the gates of abstinence." The importance of this caution will probably be felt by those who have tried to fast; or it may be seen in the corruptions of the Romish Church. 6.

Let young ministers, or those who hope to be ordained to the ministry, beware lest they be led, by the novelty of this duty, to overvalue it, or to undervalue those who have lived in time when it was not systematically practised. Obedience to a parent is a higher duty than fasting: "GOD will have mercy, and not sacrifice." If, therefore, a parent object to any particular mode of fasting, let it be laid aside for the time, and let the individual exercise himself in self-denial in this also; that he relinquishes what a parent objects to, while he looks out for himself other modes to which his parent would not object. 7.

Omit trying no act of self-denial in little things, which without your own thought, suggest themselves to you, merely because they are little; such suggestions are generally proved by the result not to have come from ourselves, and if followed, they lead onward. 8. If one mode of fasting do not suit your health, then, after a time, try another; some persons who could not bear early abstinence, (the loss of a breakfast,) might well endure subsequent privation, such as eating a sparing meal early, as the last in the day, or they might at least decidedly abridge their principal meal, or, again they might be able to strike off all luxury in their food. 9.

Supposing all these attempts to fail, after having been fairly tried, yet a person might keep up the spirit of fasting, by such accessories as those instanced, (No. 4,) and might multiply these in proportion as he is obliged to abandon the other, that so he may be ready to avail himself of his ability to fast, whenever GOD shall restore it to him. A person of weak health is constantly tempted to self-indulgence in matters which do not concern his health, e. g. indolent postures, taking food at the first moment of craving, &c. &c.; and thus he may exercise real self-discipline, even if physicians pronounce him incapable of fasting without impairing his ability to do his duty where GOD has placed him.

Let any one consider what is the boast of our country--our comforts; and he will see what a tendency these have to make him forget his heavenly country, and that he is but a pilgrim,--to make him think it "good for him to be here." How much may be abridged, and yet, by his self-denial, only not be more disadvantageously situated than others. Or, to take another view, does not this show us how many occasions of self-discipline we are furnished with more than our neighbours, from our very national character and circumstances, and that a person need be at no loss for instances of self-government if he but look for them? 10.

If a person acquire the habit, let him recollect how slowly he arrived at the conviction of its necessity, and not be surprised that others are as slow, or appear yet more so; perhaps, without fasting, they are more self-denying than one's self with it. "Let it be done," says Bishop Taylor, "just as a man takes physic, of which no man hath reason to be proud, and no man thinks it necessary but because he is in sickness, or

in danger and disposition to it." 11. Especially let any one recollect how much, which is humiliating in his youth, (even if GOD saved him from open sin,) might have been prevented by the habit of fasting, if he had then practised it; let him bear this in mind, when he fasts, and make his fast an act of humiliation for his own particular sins, as well as a discipline, so can he never be proud of his fasting.

I will only add, that fasting has by no means so many difficulties as Satan would persuade men, for fear they should try it. Even among the poorer, some act of self-denial as to the pleasures of sense might easily be practised, (1 Cor. vii. 5, might be hinted at;) and to instance one case only:--A poor woman mentioned, with much respect, her father's practice never to taste food before receiving the Lord's Supper; (adhering unconsciously to the practice of the universal Church in its better days, and indeed of our own in Bishop Taylor's time;) she added, "I never heard that his bodily health suffered from it." With regard to the rich, (who are obviously called upon to fast in greater degrees,) I have the authority of an eminent physician, whom I well know not to be wedded to any particular theory of medicine, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the degree of fasting recommended in my tract would not only not be injurious, but be beneficial. He added, "Fasting is like the Sabbath--healthy to the body as well as to the soul."

VII. Is there any difference between abstinence and fasting? Not, I imagine, in our Church, although she retained the terms which were used to denote different degrees of abstinence in the Romish; and this I infer from her nowhere saying which are days of fasting, and which of abstinence, whereas the Romish Church does distinguish them; further, as Wheatley remarks, they are called in the second title (where they are enumerated), "days of fasting or abstinence." As in other cases, our Church seems to have used both terms, in order to show that she therein comprehended, without distinction, all to which these several names had been given.

VIII. Vigils. There appears to have been no difference between the regulations of these and other fasting-days. Whether the old vigil was formally abolished is uncertain: (Card. Bona de Divina Psalmod. c. 4. 3, contends that vigils were regulated only, and not abolished, except in a provincial Spanish Synod; they were prohibited also in the Council of Cognac, A. D. 1260.) Yet it fell into desuetude, and then the name was transferred to the fast of the preceding day; which fast probably existed before the vigil was disused. "Since the saints," says Alcuin "arrived at their present happiness through temporal affliction, we, as we rejoice together with them in their eternal joy, so must we needs suffer with them, that following their steps throughout, we mayarrive at the same joys. To mark this, on the days preceding those of their birth (into the other life), which days we call their vigils, eating more sparingly than usual, we devoutly preface those solemnities with the due observance of fasts, and with affliction of the flesh; that, purified by the abstinence of the preceding day, we may the more worthily celebrate the joy of the following festival." Fasting, then, seems to have been a primary part of the solemnity, --to remind Christians, namely in their days of ease, how "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of GOD," and that the "good soldiers of CHRIST must endure hardness,"--not merely as a preparation for the duties-of the morrow. Each day had its peculiar subject of meditation and of resolve; the vigil, --the hardships which the Apostles endured in their conflict; the festival--the Christian graces which through this their patient perseverance they realized, and the glory bestowed upon them. Yet even as a mere preparation, the Christian also might do well to remember (blessed are they who know it not) that *corpus onustum--animam quoque praegravat una, atque affigit humi divinae particulam aurae*.

IX. "Clericus" asks, in connexion with this subject, what is to be done, where there is no daily service, as to the prayers appointed for the Ember-week to be used every day? I own,, the more I hear or think of this subject, or those connected with it, I am the more convinced that the clergy are wrong in withholding daily

prayers, that they underrate the willingness or the wish of their people to go to Church, if invited. To mention two or three facts only: --In a small country village of less than 300, where a clergyman was assured that he would have a congregation on Saints'-days, there assembled in winter, (when there was not much work) to prayers only, above fifty persons. In another, where there was service on the Wednesday and Friday in the Ember-week, with a sermon, the congregation was like that of a Sunday, and the people deeply interested. In a manufacturing town, on the eves of Saints'-days, with a sermon, it averaged 1000. A poor person here told a friend of my own incidentally, that her father, when he had no work, went round to see where there was any service. Surely we are neglecting to supply the cravings which either already exist, or might readily be awakened, when man has no earthly friend. And might not our poor, when destitute of employment, be led to the Church instead of to the ale house? Consider, again, how different would the state of things be, if every Church in our country had but its ten, or eighteen, or fifty worshippers. Would not the holy angels rejoice at such a sight? and might not the evils we dread, per chance, by GOD'S mercy, be averted? Again, how would such simple prayer undermine the world's present maxim, which would make human agency, and so preaching, every thing! How would it, too, build up those who are real Christians, and so raise the standard of Christianity among us! or how would it support, and comfort, and purify, and initiate into the happiness of their coming life, many who are about to part from this! To return to the Ember-days, besides the direct, incalculable blessing which would result from their observation, do not they furnish an opportunity of inculcating, what in these days is much needed, the claims, the importance, the sanctity of the office of the Christian ministry and of the Church, without the appearance of extolling one's self or one's office because it is one's own?

E. B. P.

P.S. Some space being left, it may not be amiss to say a few words on some of the prevailing prejudices against fasting. There is no explicit command to fast in the New Testament. Persons are but little aware how far this argument will go. Any one will find, if he examine, still less proof that he should receive the Communion of his Lord's Body and Blood, still less direct proof that he shall go to Church on the Lord's day, that he may have his infant children ingrafted into Christ, that there is any especial object in morning and evening prayer, that he should read the Scriptures daily, and in fact for almost every practice, which every person who cares about his soul, knows to be needful for him.

I omit others, because some might be glad of an excuse for abandoning them also. Now what is the direction about the Lord's Supper? Our Saviour says, "This do, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me." And of fasting He says, "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites:" in both cases, it is implied that the observance shall be followed, and in both, directions are given concerning how it is to be observed: in the one case, "not as the hypocrites," in the other, "in remembrance of ME."

I do not mean that there is not satisfactory proof, that Christ has given His body and blood to be our spiritual food and sustenance, or not full and condemning evidence, by way of inference, that whoso does not "eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood," in His Supper, "has no life in Him;" but the objection made against the necessity of fasting is drawn from the absence of any explicit direction to fast habitually; let men observe then, that on the same ground they should doubt whether they should habitually receive the Lord's Supper.

Nay, the direct evidence is perhaps the stronger in behalf of fasting: for in answer to the objection "The disciples of John fast oft, but thine eat and drink:" our Saviour replies, "when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast in those days." (Luke v. 34, 35.) Does not this then imply that

the only difference between John's disciples and our Saviour's in this respect, was, that the Apostles had their Saviour still in the body, present with them; but that afterwards they should fast as John's disciples did? and when we find that they did so fast, what farther commentary on our Saviour's words do we want? and if we fast not, are we acting, as He said His disciples would? or if we make a spiritual fast, why do we not adopt spiritual sacraments, i. e. none at all?

If, again, we have indications of frequent communions in the New Testament, so have we of "fastings often:" if we trace up the practice of the early Church in the sacraments to the inspired writings, and so obtain the sanction of GOD'S word for the early practice, why not in the use of fasting, which is equally clear? why not, except that the one is an obvious privilege and costs us nothing, while fasting, though a privilege, is at first painful, and so we shut our eyes and refuse to see?

"Fasting," we are told, "is a legal observance, which may be useful at a certain stage of religious progress, for an infantine state in individuals or in the church; but is unfit for an advanced state, such (it is implied) as we are in." It is remarkable that the same persons, who at one time objected to fasting, as not resting on a positive law, should next complain of it as legal. It might suffice to answer, Why then did our Saviour fast? or, rather, (for we dare not speculate on things too high for us,) since it was part of His Father's will that He should fast, must it not be needful for us? and may not one object of His fasting have been to leave an example to us, (as nothing, which He did, can be without its meaning to us,) and just to shew us that fasting is a spiritual action, and belongs also to a high spiritual state? For His fasting was not required to fulfil the law, since fasting formed no part of the law, and was engrafted upon it by the prophets, or spiritual men among the Jews, as a part of self discipline, and so was an evangelical portion of the old dispensation. And, as matter of history, who, among Christians, have fasted most rigidly? Uniformly, the most spiritual; and they, increasingly, as they went on heavenwards.

And to what else can one attribute it, that so many eminent men in the French Church, amid all the disadvantages of a corrupt religion, attained a degree of spirituality rare among our selves.

"Fasting is Popish." If this means, that it has been preserved amid the errors of Romanism, is not this true of most of the truths of the Gospel? Our charge against the Romanists, generally, is not that they have not preserved the truth, but that, like the Pharisees, "they have made it of none effect by their traditions;" at least, in great measure, to so many of their members. And does not the objection imply that we have forgotten the peculiar character of our church, which is not a mere Protestant, but a Primitive Church? And if we are to prevail in our approaching conflict with Romanism, or to be (as we seem marked out to be) a means of reclaiming that Church, must we not reconsider the character of our own Church, and take our stand in its principles, not in the protestantism of other churches, or of the day?

OXFORD,

Passion-Week

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jh-newman/supplement-to-tract-xviii-on-the-benefits-of-the-system-of-fasting-prescribed-by/>

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