

The Homilies

by J.H. Newman

J.H. Newman emphasizes the enduring significance and doctrinal authority of the Homilies in contemporary Christian practice.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 4:14, Colossians 2:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 5:14, 2 Peter 3:16, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "Church Doctrine", "Theological Discernment"

Description

J.H. Newman discusses the importance of understanding the doctrine of the Homilies in the context of the Thirty-fifth Article, emphasizing that the focus is on the overall doctrine rather than every specific statement. He highlights the need to discern the core teachings of the Homilies and how they align with the Articles of the Church. Newman challenges the idea of blindly subscribing to every detail in the Homilies, pointing out the nuanced nature of doctrine and the need for discernment. He delves into various propositions and statements from the Homilies that are often overlooked but hold significance in understanding the Church's teachings.

Transcript

Art. xxxv. "The Second Book of Homilies doth contain a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times, as doth the former Book of Homilies."

This Article has been treated of in No. 82 of these Tracts, in the course of an answer given to an opponent, who accused its author of not fairly receiving the Homilies, because he dissented from their doctrine, that the Bishop of Rome is Antichrist, and that regeneration was vouchsafed under the law. The passage of the Tract shall be here inserted, with some abridgment.

"I say plainly, then, I have not subscribed the Homilies, nor was it ever intended that any member of the English Church should be subjected to what, if considered as an extended confession, would indeed be a yoke of bondage. Romanism surely is innocent, compared with that system which should impose upon the conscience a thick octavo volume, written exactly, sentence by sentence: I cannot conceive any grosser instance of a pharisaical tradition than this would be. No: such a proceeding would render it impossible (I would say), for any one member, lay or clerical, of the Church to remain in it, who was subjected to such an ordeal. For instance; I do not suppose that any reader would be satisfied with the political reasons for fasting, though indirectly introduced, yet fully admitted and dwelt upon in the Homily on that subject. He would not like to subscribe the declaration that eating fish was a duty, not only as being a kind of fasting,

but as making provisions cheap, and encouraging the fisheries. He would not like the association of religion with earthly politics.

"How, then, are we bound to the Homilies? By the Thirty-fifth Article, which speaks as follows:--'The second Book of Homilies . . . doth contain a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times, as doth the former Book of Homilies.' Now, observe, this Article does not speak of every statement made in them, but of the 'doctrine.' It speaks of the view or cast or body of doctrine contained in them. In spite of ten thousand incidental propositions, as in any large book, there is, it is obvious, a certain line of doctrine, which may be contemplated continuously in its shape and direction. For instance; if you say you disapprove the doctrine contained in the Tracts for the Times, no one supposes you to mean that every sentence and half sentence is a lie. I say then, that in like manner, when the Article speaks of the doctrine of the Homilies, it does not measure the letter of them by the inch, it does not imply that they contain no propositions which admit of two opinions; but it speaks of a certain determinate line of doctrine, and moreover adds, it is 'necessary for these times.' Does not this too show the same thing? If a man said, the Tracts for the Times are seasonable at this moment, as their title signifies, would he not speak of them as taking a certain line, and bearing in a certain way? Would he not be speaking, not of phrases or sentences, but of a 'doctrine' in them tending one way, viewed as a whole? Would he be consistent, if after praising them as seasonable, he continued, 'yet I do not pledge myself to every view or sentiment; there are some things in them hard of digestion, or overstated, or doubtful, or subtle?'

"If any thing could add to the irrelevancy of the charge in question, it is the particular point in which it is urged that I dissent from the Homilies,--a question concerning the fulfilment of prophecy; viz. whether Papal Rome is Antichrist? An iron yoke indeed you would forge for the conscience, when you oblige us to assent, not only to all matters of doctrine which the Homilies contain, but even to their opinion concerning the fulfilment of prophecy. Why, we do not ascribe authority in such matters even to the unanimous consent of all the fathers.

"I will put what I have been saying in a second point of view. The Homilies are subsidiary to the Articles; therefore they are of authority so far as they bring out the sense of the Articles, and are not of authority where they do not. For instance, they say that David, though unbaptized, was regenerated, as you have quoted. This statement cannot be of authority, because it not only does not agree, but it even disagrees, with the ninth Article, which translates the Latin word 'renatis' by the English 'baptized.' But, observe, if this mode of viewing the Homilies be taken, as it fairly may, you suffer from it; for the Apocrypha, being the subject of an Article the comment furnished in the Homily is binding on you, whereas you reject it.

"A further remark will bring us to the same point. Another test of acquiescence in the doctrine of the Homilies is this:--Take their table of contents; examine the headings; these surely, taken together, will give the substance of their teaching. Now I hold fully and heartily the doctrine of the Homilies, under every one of these headings the only points to which I should not accede, nor think myself called upon to accede, would be certain matters, subordinate to the doctrines to which the headings refer--matters not of doctrine, but of opinion, as, that Rome is the Antichrist; or of historical fact, as, that there was a Pope Joan. But now, on the other hand, can you subscribe the doctrine of the Homilies under every one of its formal headings? I believe you cannot. The Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion is, in many of its elementary principles, decidedly uncongenial with your sentiments."

This illustration of the subject may be thought enough; yet it may be allowable to add from the Homilies a number of propositions and statements of more or less importance, which are too much forgotten at this

day, and are decidedly opposed to the views of certain schools of religion, which at the present moment are so eager in claiming the Homilies to themselves. This is not done, as the extract already read will show, with the intention of maintaining that they are one and all binding on the conscience of those who subscribe the Thirty-fifth Article; but since the strong language of the Homilies against the Bishop of Rome is often quoted, as if it were thus proved to be the doctrine of our Church, it may be as well to show that, following the same rule, we shall be also introducing Catholic doctrines, which indeed it far more belongs to a Church to profess than a certain view of prophecy, but which do not approve themselves to those who hold it. For instance, we read as follows:—

1. "The great clerk and godly preacher, St. John Chrysostom" — B. i. I. And, in like manner, mention is made elsewhere of St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Hilary, St. Basil, St. Cyprian, St. Hierome, St. Martin, Origen, Prosper, Ecumenius, Photius, Bernardus, Anselm, Didymus, Theophylactus, Tertullian, Athanasius, Lactantius, (Cyrillus. Epiphanius, (Gregory, Irenæus, Clemens, Rabanus, Isidorus; Eusebius, Justinus Martyr, Optatus, Eusebius Emisenus, and Bede.
2. "Infants, being baptized, and dying in their infancy, are by this Sacrifice washed from their sins . . . and they, which in act or deed do in after this baptism, when they turn to GOD unfeignedly, they are likewise washed by this Sacrifice," &c. — B. iii. 1. init.
3. "Our office is, not to pass the time of this present life unfruitfully and idly, after that we are baptized or justified," &c. — B. iii. 3.
4. "By holy promises, we be made lively members of CHRIST, receiving the sacrament of Baptism. By like holy promises the sacrament of Matrimony knitteth man and wife in perpetual love." — B. vi;. 1.
5. "Let us learn also here [in the Book of Wisdom] by the infallible and undeceivable Word of GOD, that," &c. — B. x. 1.
6. "The due receiving of His blessed Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine." — Note at end of B. i.
7. "In the Primitive Church, which was most holy and godly . . . open offenders were not suffered once to enter into the house of the LORD . . . until they had done open penance . . . but this was practised, not only upon mean persons, but also upon the rich, noble, and mighty persons, yea, upon Theodosius, that puissant and mighty Emperor, whom . . . St. Ambrose . . . did . . . excommunicate." 2 B. i. 2.
8. "Open offenders were not . . . admitted to common prayer, and the use of the holy sacraments" — Ibid.
9. "Let us amend this our negligence and contempt coming to the house of the LORD; and resorting, thither diligently together, let us there . . . celebrating also reverently the LORD'S holy sacraments, serve the LORD in His holy house." — Ibid.
10. "Contrary to the . . . most manifest doctrine of the Scriptures, and contrary to the usages of the Primitive Church, which was most pure and uncorrupt, and contrary to the sentences and judgments of the most ancient, learned and godly doctors of the Church." — 2 B. ii. 1. init.
11. "This truth . . . was believed and taught by the old holy fathers, and most ancient learned doctors, and received by the old Primitive Church, which was most uncorrupt and pure." — 2 B. ii: 2. init.

12. "Athanasius, a very ancient, holy, and learned bishop and doctor."--Ibid.
13. "Cyrillus, an old and holy doctor"--Ibid.
14. "Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamine, in Cyprus, a very holy and learned man."--Ibid.
15. "To whose (Epiphanius's) judgment you have . . . all the learned and godly bishops and clerks, yea, and the whole Church of that age," [the Nicene] "and so upward to our SAVIOUR CHRIST'S time, by the space of about four hundred years, consenting and agreeing."--Ibid.
16. "Epiphanius, a bishop and doctor of such antiquity, holiness, and authority."--Ibid.
17. "St. Augustine, the best learned of all ancient doctors."--Ibid.
18. "That ye may know why and when, and by whom images were first used privately, and afterwards not only received into Christian churches and temples, but, in conclusion, worshipped also; and how the same was gainsaid, resisted, and forbidden, as well by godly bishops and learned doctors, as also by sundry Christian princes, I will briefly collect," &c. [The bishops and doctors which follow are:] St. Jerome, Serenus, Gregory, the Fathers of the Council of Eliberis."
19. "Constantine, Bishop of Rome, assembled a council of bishops of the West, and did condemn Philippicus, the Emperor, and John, Bishop of Constantinople, of the heresy of the Monothelites, not without a cause indeed, but very justly."--Ibid.
20. "Those six Councils which were allowed and received, of all men."--Ibid.
21. "There were no images publicly by the space of almost seven hundred years. And there is no doubt but the Primitive Church, next the Apostles' times, was most pure." --Ibid.
22. "Let us beseech GOD that we, being warned by His holy Word . . . and by the writings of old godly doctors and ecclesiastical histories," &c.--Ibid.
23. "It shall be declared, both by GOD'S Word, and the sentences of the ancient doctors, and judgment of the Primitive Church," &c.--2 n. ii. 3.
24. "Saints, whose souls reign in joy with GOD."--Ibid.
25. "That the law of GOD is likewise to be understood against all our images . . . appeareth further by the judgment of the old doctors and the Primitive Church."--Ibid.
26. "The Primitive Church, which is specially to be followed, as most incorrupt and pure."--Ibid.
27. "Thus it is declared by GOD'S Word, the sentences of the doctors, and the judgment of the Primitive Church."--Ibid.
28. "The rude people, who specially, as the Scripture teacheth, are in danger of superstition and idolatry; viz. Wisdom xiii. xiv."--Ibid.
29. "They [the learned and holy bishops and doctors of the Church of the eight first centuries] were the preaching bishops And as they were most zealous and diligent so were they of excellent learning and godliness of life and by both of great authority and credit with the people."--Ibid.

30. "The most virtuous and best learned, the most diligent also, and in number almost infinite, ancient fathers, bishops, and doctors . . . could do nothing against images and idolatry."--Ibid.
31. "As the Word of God testifieth, Wisdom iv."--Ibid.
32. " The saints, now reigning in heaven with GOD."--Ibid.
33. " The fountain of our regeneration is there [in GOD'S house] presented unto us."--2 B. iii.
36. "Somewhat shall now be spoken of one particular good work, whose commendation is both in the law and in the Gospel [fasting]."--2 B. iv. 1.
37. " If any man shall say . . . we are not now under the yoke of the law, we are set at liberty by the freedom of the Gospel; therefore these rites and customs of the old law bind not us, except it can be showed by the Scriptures of the New Testament, or by examples out of the same, that fasting, now under the Gospel, is a restraint of meat, drink and all bodily food and pleasures from the body, as before: that we ought to fast, is a truth more manifest, then it should here need, to be proved . . . Fasting, even by CHRIST'S assent, is a withholding meat, drink, and all natural food from the body," &c.--Ibid.
38. "That it [fasting] was used in the Primitive Church, appeareth most evidently by the Chalcedon council, one of the first four general councils. The fathers assembled there . . . decreed in that council that every person, as well in his private as public fast, should continue all the day without meat and drink, till after the evening prayer. . . . This Canon teacheth how fasting was used in the Primitive Church."--Ibid. [The council was A.D. 452.]
39. "Fasting then, by the decree of those 630 fathers, grounding their determinations in this matter upon the sacred Scriptures . . . is a withholding of meat, drink, and all natural food from the body, for the determined time of fasting."--Ibid.
40. "The order or decree made by the elders for washing oftentimes, tending to superstition, our SAVIOUR CHRIST altered and changed the same in His Church, into a profit able sacrament, the sacrament of our regeneration or new birth." --2 B. iv. 2.
41. "Fasting, thus used with prayer is of great efficacy and weigheth much with God, so the angel Raphael told Tobias."--Ibid.
42. "As he" [St. Augustine] "witnesseth in another place, the martyrs and holy men in times past were wont after their death to be remembered and named of the priest at divine service; but never to be invocated or called upon."--2B.vii.2.
43. "Thus you see that the authority both of Scripture and also of Augustine, doth not permit that we should pray to them."--Ibid.
44. "To temples have the Christians customably used to resort from time to time as to most meet places, where they might . . . receive His holy sacraments ministered unto them duly and purely."--2 B. viii. 1.
45. "The which thing both CHRIST and His apostles, with all the rest of the holy fathers, do sufficiently declare so."--Ibid.

46. "Our godly predecessors, and the ancient fathers of the Primitive Church, spared not their goods to build churches."--Ibid.
47. "If we will show ourselves true Christians, if we will be followers of CHRIST our MASTER, and of those godly fathers that have lived before us, and now have received the reward of true and faithful Christians," &c.--Ibid.
48. "We must . . . come unto the material churches and temples to pray . . . whereby we may reconcile ourselves to GOD, be partakers of His holy sacraments, and be devout hearers of His holy Word,"--Ibid.
49. "It [Ordination] lacks the promise of remission of sin, as all other sacraments besides the two above name do. Therefore neither it, nor any other sacrament else, be such sacraments as Baptism and the Communion are." 2 Hom. ix.
50. "Thus we are taught, both by the Scriptures an ancient doctors, that," &c.--Ibid.
51. "The holy apostles and disciples of CHRIST . . . the godly fathers also, that were both before and since CHRIST, endued without doubt with the HOLY GHOST, . . they both do most earnestly exhort us, &c.... that we should remember the poor . . . St. Paul crieth unto us after this sort Isaiah the Prophet teacheth us on this wise. . . And the holy father Tobit giveth this counsel. And the learned and godly doctor Chrysostom giveth this admonition But what mean these often admonitions and earnest exhortations of the prophets, apostles, fathers, and holy doctors?" 2 B. xi. 2.
52. "The holy fathers, Job and Tobit."--Ibid.
53. "CHRIST, whose especial favour we may be assured by this means to obtain," [viz. by almsgiving]--2 B. xi. 2.
54. "Now will I . . . show unto you how profitable it is for us to exercise them [alms-deeds] . . . [CHRIST'S saying] serveth to . . . prick us forwards . . . to learn . . . how may recover our health, if it be lost or impaired, and how it may be defended and maintained if we have it. Yea, He teacheth us also therefore to esteem that as a precious medicine and an inestimable jewel that hath such strength and virtue in it, that can either procure or preserve so incomparable a treasure."--Ibid.
55. "Then He and His disciples were grievously accused of the Pharisees, . . . because they went to meat and washed not their hands before, . . . CHRIST, answering their superstitious complaint, teacheth them an especial remedy how to keep clean their souls, . . . Give alms," &c.--Ibid.
56. "Merciful alms-dealing is profitable to purge the soul from the infection and filthy spots of sin."--Ibid.
57. "The same lesson doth the HOLY GHOST teach in sundry places of the Scripture saying, 'Mercifulness and almsgiving,' &c. [Tobit iv.] . . . The wise preacher, the son of Sirach, confirmeth the same, when he says, that 'as water quenqueth burning fire,'" &c.--Ibid.
58. "A great confidence may they have before the high GOD, that show mercy and compassion to them that are afflicted."--Ibid.
59. "If ye have by any infirmity or weakness been touched or annoyed with them . . . straightway shall mercifulness toipl and wash them atoy as sala and remedies to heal their sores and grievous disease."--Ibid.

60. "And therefore that holy father Cyprian admonisheth to consider how wholesome and profitable it is to relieve the needy, &c.... by the which we may purge our sins and heal our wounded souls."--Ibid.

61. "We be therefore washed in our baptism from the filthiness of sin, that we should live afterwards in the pureness of life."--2 B. xiii. 1.

62. "By these means [by love, compassion, &c.] shall we move GOD to be merciful to our sins."--Ibid.

63. "He was dead," saith St. Paul, "for our sins, and rose again for our justification" . . . He died to destroy the rule of the devil in us, and He rose again to send down His HOLY SPIRIT to rule in our hearts, to [endow] us with perfect righteousness."--2 B. xiv.

64. "The ancient Catholic fathers," [in marg.] Irenaeus, Ignatius, Dionysius, Origen, Optatus, Cyprian, Athanasius, "were not afraid to call this supper, some of them, the salve of immortality and sovereign preservative against death; other, the sweet dainties of our SAVIOUR, the pledge of eternal health, the defence of faith, the hope of the resurrection; other, the food of immortality, the healthful grace, and the conservatory to everlasting life."--2 B. xv. 1.

65. "The meat we seek in this supper is spiritual for the nourishment of our souls, a heavenly refectation, and an earthly; an invisible meat and not bodily; a ghostly substance and not carnal."--Ibid.

66. "Take this lesson . . . of Emissenus, a godly father, that . . . thou look up with faith upon the holy body a blood of thy GOD, thou marvel with reverence, thou touch with thy mind, thou receive it with the hand of thy heart and thou take it fully with thy inward man."--Ibid.

67. "The saying of the holy martyr of GOD, St. Cyprian --2 B. xx. 3.

Thus we see the authority of the fathers, of the first councils, and of the judgements of the Church generally, holiness of the Primitive Church, the inspiration of Apocrypha, the sacramental character of marriage other ordinances, the Real Presence in the Eucharist, Church's power of excommunicating kings, the profitableness of fasting, the propitiatory virtue of good works, the Eucharistic commemoration, and justification by a righteousness [within us], are taught in the Homilies. Let it said again, it is not here asserted that a subscription to; and every of these quotations is involved in the subscription of an Article which does but generally approve the Homilies: but they who insist so strongly on our Church holding that the Bishop of Rome is Antichrist because the Homilies declare it, should recollect that there are other doctrines contained in them beside it, which they [themselves] should be understood to hold, before their argument has the force of consistency.

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