

# On the Church as Viewed by Faith and by the World

by J.H. Newman

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*The Church is a divine institution, and its true nature must be remembered in order to understand its importance and avoid the enemy's strategy to obscure it.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:14, Matthew 16:18, John 10:10, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 3:2, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 11:27, 1 Peter 5:8

**Topics:** "Spiritual Vision", "Church Authority"

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## Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the importance of seeing God in all things, even in the midst of trials and challenges, emphasizing the need for believers to have a spiritual vision that goes beyond the tangible and visible aspects of life. He warns against the enemy's tactics to obstruct this view and deceive individuals into focusing solely on earthly matters, particularly in relation to the Church as a divine institution. Newman urges believers to recognize the Church as Christ's own institution, guided by His Spirit, and to stand firm in defending its true nature and authority, even in the face of worldly opposition and attempts to diminish its significance.

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## Transcript

Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me.

JOHN xiv. 19.

MOSES endured his trials, according to St. Paul in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, "as seeing Him who is invisible. And this blessed privilege it is, according to the Apostle's language throughout the same chapter, which has distinguished the true servants of GOD, in every age, from the unbelieving world around them. Even while pilgrims here on earth, "the pure in heart," in one sense at least, "see GOD." They trace, alike in the events which befall themselves, and in the varying scenes which succeed each other before their eyes on the great theatre of life, a Presence and an Agency of which mankind at large know nothing. Things visible and tangible they feel but to be the screen and veil of the things invisible and intangible behind them; or, at most, to be the adjuncts and comparatively unimportant accompaniments of the great system in which their spirits really move. They view the things of earth as being, as in truth they are, necessarily connected with the things of heaven. They habitually look, not only through nature, up to nature's GOD," but through the wide expanse of the social and moral world around them, through the

habits, opinions, and institutions, of their time and country--through the strife of politics, and the din of the unruly multitudes--to that eternal BEING who reigns above them all; whose will and whose counsels are in truth interwoven with them all,--and who works out His own great designs as surely by the operation of these jarring and unruly elements, as by the more tranquil and steady processes of the world of inanimate nature.

And this view of GOD in all things--this habitual contemplation of the ALMIGHTY, His word, and will, in connection, not only with our daily actions, but even with the daily scene before us, it is, of course, the object of the great enemy of the Church to obstruct and to prevent. His most ardent wish is, to thicken the screen before us--to persuade us to regard the tangible things which surround us as the exclusive objects of our moral vision,--to induce in us a belief that the adjuncts to the great scene really open to our ken, are to be identified with that scene itself. And even with regard to things, which from their nature are the most essentially (so to say) connected with Heaven, he would have us forget the connection, and imagine that the things of earth with which, in this world, they are necessarily involved, are the heavenly things themselves. He would have the objects of our contemplation, and by consequence our spirits themselves, of the earth, earthy; he would darken the prospect before us by excluding, if possible, every gleam of celestial light which might burst through the veil; every ray of spiritual brightness which might impart to us, amid the dimness and the haziness of our nearer prospect, a conception of the glories of a world unseen.

These great truths, for such they are, may be illustrated by examples varied as is the manner of Satan's warfare with the Church in each succeeding generation. But the most profitable illustration of them, as far as this generation is concerned, may be drawn from the mode in which he is especially labouring to deceive ourselves and our contemporaries by obscuring, as far as in him lies, from our view, the real nature of the Holy Church itself, to which we belong. That Church, we may presume, as contemplated by CHRIST'S followers, by the light which His Holy Spirit sheds upon their minds, is seen to be His own Divine Institution; to be an institution gifted and blessed by Himself in the first instance, and still presided over by Ministers deriving their authority from those Apostles on whom He deigned to breathe, and with whom, in their Apostolic capacity, He pledged Himself to be even unto the end of the world. They recognize in it a kingdom "not made with hands, not of this world," yet sent into this world, an illustrious guest, to bring to this world Salvation. They behold in it the glorious link which connects together, through every age and in every clime, the blessed company of all faithful people, the school in which the multitude whom no man can number, learn the song which they are hereafter, standing on the sea of glass, to sing before the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne on high. They reverence in it,--but on these subjects I dare not further enlarge,--the body of the Redeemer Himself, and His mystic Bride below.

Such is, we may imagine, some faint outline of the view which would be taken of the Church by its true and approved members. With what reverence, then, must that Church, whether considered collectively or with reference to any given national branches of it--while, at least, such branches continue in their first faith--be by them regarded! And what a triumph must it be for the dark spirit of evil, when he succeeds in blotting from the mind of a baptized member of that Church every vestige of these exalting themes of contemplation; when he induces one entitled to rejoice in the blessed fellowship of the sons of GOD, to turn his eyes from these glories of his inheritance, and to fix them, exclusively, on the earthly accompaniments by which the Church, while here militant below, maintains her connection with the external world.

But, alas! is he not doing this on every side around us? Is he not daily tempting ourselves to regard the Church, a true branch of the Church Catholic, established in these our islands, as a mere human institution? to consider the revenues with which the piety of holy men of old endowed its Ministers, as a provision set apart by the state for the purposes of education, with a view to the temporal advantage of society? and to imagine that those Ministers themselves are the servants of the government, appointed by its authority, primarily responsible to it for the discharge of their duties, and subject (like civil or military officers appointed by the executive), alike with respect to the extent and to the duration of their powers, to its general superintendence and control.

Such views are, in these days, notoriously too common; and a clearer instance cannot well be imagined of that system of forgetting things invisible in things visible, which it must be the most strenuous wish of the Power of evil to maintain.

The Church, in itself, is a divine institution; and as a visible community and body in the state, it is also, in one sense, a political institution. The worldly speculator--he who limits his views to the tangible objects of sense,--will, therefore, regard it as a political institution alone. Its Ministers have spiritual powers, those, for instance, of administering the Sacraments; as possessors of property and privileges, they also, in this country, possess temporal powers. The worldly eye will therefore regard their temporal powers alone. As Ministers of CHRIST, they prepare man for a happy immortality in the next world, and in so doing, incidentally make him a better member of society, and improve his condition in this.--The latter effect of their teaching is all which strikes the worldly eye. As dispensers of religious knowledge, they incidentally promote the general education of mankind; and this latter comes to be considered by the world as their principal business. And lastly, while they derive their primary commission from the REDEEMER, and their secondary character--if I may so call it--from the constitution of the country, the eye of the world can see in them but the servants of the latter; forgetful that their true Master, that He to whom alone they are responsible for the discharge of the most important functions entrusted to them, the functions of their ministerial stewardship, is the Almighty Head of the Church who ever watches over it in Heaven.

To entertain views like these, thus habitually to forget the connection which in truth exists between the ALMIGHTY and His own Holy Institution, is, in the most emphatic sense, to live without GOD in the world. And the line of conduct to which such views, if consistently acted upon, necessarily lead, cannot be contemplated by the serious mind without feelings of the most awful apprehension. The REDEEMER has told us that He is, in truth, ever about us; that He, even while seated in glory, feels, as though He were Himself the object of them, alike each act of kindness done to, and each injury inflicted upon, the humblest of His disciples. And if this be so, if the interests of individual members of His Church be in His view thus identified with His own, how intimately must He sympathize with the fortunes of that Church itself, of that Church which He deigned Himself to found, and especially to commend to our reverential care. Surely if we, blind to His gracious presence, presume to insult, despoil, or irreverently treat as a merely human thing His hallowed institution, we shall one day hear the voice once heard by Saul, "Why persecutest thou ME?" God grant that we may, like Saul, hear it while time yet lies before us; that we may hear it in the gentle accents of mercy, not in the trumpet-tone of judgment.

Let worldly politicians and legislators, then, do as they list. Let them, if they imagine it will further their ambitious views, fearfully insult the Church established in our islands. CHRIST'S true servants, stedfastly refusing any countenance to their irreverent projects, will protest against them, if in no other way, by the quiet and consistent tenor of their lives. They will show the world by their actions that they behold the REDEEMER, as He has taught them to behold Him, in His Church. And if that Church, having

long been an honoured guest in our Islands, is to be cast down from her high estate, and, whether in England or in Ireland, to be trampled under the foot of power, and made to give place to any one of the unauthorized sects which would usurp her place, they will continue to cling in her adversity to her who had been in her prosperity their nursing mother and their guide. Beholding her built upon the rock of apostolical authority, and convinced that she has not forfeited, by apostatizing from the faith, her original commission, they will reverence her Ministers as much when become the objects of the world's contempt, as they had revered them when that world bowed before them with pretended homage.

The rulers of that world may suppose that the Church is in their hands; that they may deal with it according to their plea sure; and that its very existence is at their disposal. Thus thought the rulers of a former day, when the REDEEMER had given Himself into their hands, and when their agents exerted a last malice upon His lifeless remains. They knew it not that even then, in that dark hour, a limit was set to their presumption; the word of Heaven had passed that a bone of Him should not be broken, and the whole power of Heaven, could it have been necessary, would have interfered to prevent the violation of the decree. And thus, to our comfort let us remember, it must be with CHRIST'S body, the Church, even now. A limit has been set to its enemies which they cannot pass; the utmost extent of their successful malice has been fore-ordained, fore-registered, in Heaven; nor can they, even in its weakest hour, wreak one insult upon its apparently lifeless frame, beyond those of which GOD, in His goodness, sees fit to permit the infliction.

The existence of such a limit it is impossible that they should believe, or even understand. Their views of the Church's for tunes and condition are necessarily as imperfect as their notions of the Church itself. Seeing nothing but its tangible frame, conscious of its political existence alone, they naturally deem that the overthrow of these externals is the essential overthrow of the Church; which will, as they suppose, cease to exist at all when they shall have deprived it of all those symptoms of existence, which their faculties can perceive. They know not--the Church's enemies, till taught by fatal experience, never did know--that all which the utmost exertion of their violence can effect, will be but to bruise its heel. Its true, its inherent vitality, as it is beyond their ken, is also beyond their power; and in that vitality it may, if GOD SO please, grow and flourish the most, at the very moment of their fancied triumph in the supposed annihilation of its powers.

Even to the Church's true members, its real glories here on earth, are for the most part the objects of Faith. "The kingdom of GOD cometh not with observation;" the workings of GOD'S Spirit in the assembly of His chosen,--His constantly repeated triumphs in the overthrow of evil, and in the increase of spiritual life among the faithful, are noiseless and unperceived. Churchmen know not, in their generation, what is passing around them, or even in themselves. In silence and in mystery, GOD is working out, now and continually, the accomplishment of those prophecies, the realization of those inspired pictures which describe the earthly glories of the MESSIAH'S kingdom. But the full comparison of those prophecies with their fulfilment, of those pictures with the original events from which, by Divine anticipation, they were drawn, will never perhaps be vouchsafed to mortal eyes. In a future state of being, when the ALMIGHTY'S ways shall be all at length made plain, it may be one of the happy employments of the Blessed to contemplate the Church as it was upon earth; to see how fully all that was predicted of it by the voice of inspiration was, throughout the period of its duration on earth, fulfilled, and how amply GOD redeemed the promises which He had made to His Holy Institution; manifesting in it, from generation to generation, His glory;--not indeed to sinners in the flesh,--but to the countless myriads who surround His throne,--to perfected Saints and unspotted angels,--and, in a word, to all the sinless and glorified

Creation.

In that retrospective view it will undoubtedly be seen, that the world, in systematically afflicting the Church, is but doing its appointed part. May the part assigned to ourselves be the happier one of witnesses for GOD'S truth and defenders of His Holy Institution. May we, seeing GOD in all things,--habitually contemplating the ALMIGHTY as now revealed to the eye of faith alike in His Church and in His world,--prepare ourselves, through His Grace, for that fuller and more perfect contemplation of Him, which shall hereafter be the privilege of the redeemed in Heaven.

OXFORD,

The Feast of the Resurrection.

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