

V. Spiritual Life

A. Faith

b. Philosophical and Theological Issues

172.

Editorial, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, April 24, 1858

"The Importance of Dogma."

One of the principle errors of modern religionists is the conviction, whether real or apparent, that speculative doctrines are not of such importance in the Christian system as to make belief in them a necessary condition of saving faith. We can easily understand, it is argued, the importance of belief in the divinity of Christ; for the divinity of Christianity depends on this truth. But the mystery of the Trinity, the procession of the Holy Ghost, the doctrine of two natures and two wills in Christ, etc., of what practical use are these? And why may we not be true Christians, fulfillers of the law, whatever opinion we may hold on these matters? Whatever may be its religious professions, this is the practical belief of the non-Catholic world at the present day; and from this belief has arisen the ingenious distinction of *essential* and *non-essential* dogmas--a distinction which implies that there are doctrines speculatively true indeed, but of so little practical interest as to represent no serious obstacle to the union of dissenting creeds. This conviction in the Protestant mind is the basis of that charge usually made against the Catholic Church, that she is so unreasonably intolerant as to excommunicate, and even *persecute*, persons for mere speculative opinions. We will try in a few words to unmask this error, and vindicate the conduct of the Church in some of the cases in which Protestantism usually censures and condemns her.

In the first place, belief in the mysteries of religion is not grounded on the intrinsic nature of the mystery itself, nor on the practical effects resulting from it; but on the fact that God has revealed it. If, then, God has revealed what are called *non-essentials*, the motive of faith is the same, viz.: God's testimony. If God has *not* revealed them, then there is no obligation to believe them, not because they are doctrines trivial or practical, but because they are *not* doctrines at all.

In the second place, it is erroneous to conclude that dogmas whose intrinsic nature is hidden from us, and whose place and connexion in the religious system we cannot trace, are therefore superfluous or unmeaning. The pebble we roll at our feet may appear trivial, yet, for all that we know, the equilibrium of creation may depend upon it--the smallest star regulates, perhaps, the harmony of the solar system. Moreover, in the majority of instances, where doctrines are looked upon as unessential, their very presence is logically necessary to the existence of the systems which reject them. Deny the *divine* nature of Christ, and how can you hold His *divinity*? Refuse to him a nature that is *human*, and how consistently believe in the doctrine of the

atonement? The divine nature cannot *suffer*, and therefore cannot *atone*!

No; deny one doctrine, the Trinity or any other, and the equilibrium of the whole system is disturbed, and chaos and confusion succeed: and this is the reason the Catholic Church, the guardian of order and the depository of truth, brands as a rebel and condemns as an errorist whoever advocates a measure or promulgates a view incompatible with her own. Fidelity to her mission, then, compels the Catholic Church to anathematize as false every false [sic] that strikes from its symbol any revealed truth; but in doing this she does not *persecute*. To pronounce erroneous what is erroneous is not persecution.

But, it is objected, the Catholic Church not only condemns the error, but she has, at times, invoked violence and made the corporal chastisement of errorists a bounded duty, as in the case of the Albigenses. Yes; but it was not for holding mere speculative theories: it was for reducing these theories, false in reason and immoral in tendency, to practice. A man may revel in loathsome thoughts and indulge his fancy by foul imaginings; provided they exceed not the boundaries of his own depraved heart, the law which consults the welfare of society may tolerate him. But as soon as he utters these thoughts in the hearing of the young, commits them to writing, or conveys their infection through the medium of impure prints, he no longer stands amenable to God alone in the sanctuary of his own heart, but becomes an open aggressor of public morality, and therefore obnoxious to the penalties of the civil law. So the Albigenses. If they had kept to themselves the opinion that there are two eternal first principles,--the one essentially bad and the author of the visible world, the other good, the author of the invisible world,--they would not have been molested in the exercise of their civil rights. But when they reduced this opinion to practice, and carried it to its logical development, by condemning marriage, indulging unnatural propensities, tracing their path by plunder, pillage, fire, sword, murder, and sacrilege, they were no longer meek men, whose only misfortune was to suffer the delusion of error. They were criminals against law and order, pests of society, whose extermination the public welfare demanded, and distributive justice made it a duty to effect. The Catholic Church, therefore, condemns error; the errorist she lets alone, until his conduct is such as public order and public decency cannot tolerate. Then she assists the course of law; and in this does she *persecute*?

173.

Editorial, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, January 26, 1856

Catholic Theological Studies.

Catholic Theology is an immense field of study. Embracing as it does all that faith reveals to us of God and of His creatures, there is no knowledge that does not

belong directly or indirectly to it, no science that ought not to be made its auxiliary. Whatever pleasure or profit, therefore, exists in intellectual pursuits, can be found in their sublimest degree in the study of this science.

With Protestants the study of Theology, like that of Ecclesiastical History, has justly fallen into disrepute, because Protestantism being a negative system, can have, strictly speaking, no Theology; and their candidates for the ministry very properly confine themselves to the study of Sacred Eloquence, the Hebrew language, a treatise on Justification by Faith, and a diffuse enumeration of the pretended "superstitions and idolatries of Romanism." Catholic Theology is, on the contrary, all positive, and furnished inexhaustible matter for reading and reasoning.

In the first place, although we see God but "darkly through a glass," yet what we know of Him, in Himself, would suffice for the study of a life-time. When, from some mountaintop, the eye takes in a great range of landscape, the first glance does not catch the immense variety of objects by which it is diversified; but after contemplating it a while, and beginning to distinguish city from village and hamlet from villa, we grow weary enumerating its endless details. So the first intellectual glimpse we have of God reveals to us nothing more than that God is, and we are inclined to exclaim--that is the whole of it. But a deeper study shows us that even in our shallow knowledge of His incomprehensible being there is that which passeth wonder. His self-existence, His oneness, His omnipotence, His omniscience, His goodness, and all His attributes must be distinguished from each other and defined. Then through the portal opened by faith we pass into the awful depth of His immense being, to study the tremendous mystery of His Trinity. The distinction of Three Persons in one essence, the generation of the Son from the Father, the procession of the Holy Ghost from both Father and Son, the equality of the Three, are points that will try the edge of the acutest intellect, and exhaust the capacity of the profoundest judgment.

But Theology presents to our contemplation and study not only the being of God in itself, but also His relations to the creatures He has made. Hence a knowledge of the nature of these creatures must be made subservient to Theology. Astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, must teach us the nature of material things; metaphysics, or mental philosophy, that of spiritual beings, of the angels and the human soul.

The destiny God has assigned to the human race leads us to study the great mystery of the Incarnation--[and] the institution of the Church and of the Sacraments. These events, as fulfilment of prophecies, require for their proper understanding a knowledge of all history anterior to Christ; and as facts fill up the annals of the world since His time.

The means given us by God for the accomplishment of our destiny are our obligations--whence we are compelled in Theology to study law. The deepest knowledge of what philosophers have reasoned on natural ethics, will be of service to

us, if not absolutely necessary, in this study. The nature of law, its binding force, the qualifications of legislators; our duties to God, to our neighbors, and to ourselves--the obligations of states of life constitute an immense field for earnest, patient, delightful investigation.

The custom, therefore, prevalent in countries of calling Theology "*the science*," "the sublime science," the "higher study," is a just and proper custom. All the sciences are subservient to it. And as, according to Mr. McLeod's beautiful idea in his lecture on "The Exterior Beauties of the Church," all that is beautiful in material nature can be made subservient to her external worship, so all that is profound and true in thought belongs to her Theology.

174.

Editorial, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, January 13, 1855

The Immaculate Conception.

We have read in the *Daily Commercial* a flaming article on the Immaculate Conception, from the *London Times*. It is written with that audacious assumption of false premises, that lofty flinging of ponderous sarcasms, that multiplication of pretended parities, which characterize that able but unprincipled journal.

To a person well acquainted with topics to which the writer majestically alludes as though perfectly familiar with them, the article seems absurd beyond conception. The false statements of historical events it contains, the impudent misrepresentation of the state of the question on which its ridicule is founded, make it appear to such [to be] a most brazen piece of Protestant clap-trap.

The entire argument, freed from the ornament of grandiloquent words and illustrations by which it is diffused over a column of the daily paper where we read, is this:

"The Catholic Church, by defining the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, has claimed the power of making that true today which was not true yesterday. She has therefore lost her vaunted immutability, she has yielded to the pressure of progress, etc., etc."

Placed in this form, the argument will do no harm to the most untaught mind.

Every one knows that the Church in defining a doctrine does not make true what was untrue before, but only causes that which was believed *implicitly* before, to be believed *explicitly*. All Catholics, at all times, have believed implicitly in the immaculate conception of Mary, not only in so far as their minds were prepared to receive it whenever the Church should propose it, but also in so far as they always believed Mary to the Mother of God. Now, by making belief *explicit* which was before implicit, you do not make any *new truth*. The professor who goes on developing the propositions of

geometry to his pupils, does not make the truth of the theorems and corollaries he enunciates; the historian who enters into details of woes endured in the siege of some city, the blood spilled in some great war, does not create the facts he describes to his readers; the biographer of a just man does not *make* new truths when he details instances of the just man's temperance, fortitude, prudence, patience, love of truth, etc.; no more does the Church, when she declares freedom from every stain of sin to have been a prerogative of Mary, make any new truth, but she only defines an old one. There may be some Protestants ignorant enough of history to believe what the writer audaciously asserts that the devotion of Mary was an invention of the popes, and not in vogue before the time of St. Bernard; there may be some who will credit the falsehood conveyed by brazen innuendo, that the Church has formerly taught the opposite of what she now defines. But to these the article can do no harm. They are as anti-Catholic as they can be already. We are probably wasting time in treating as an argument this flourish of rhetorical impudence. The enemies of the Church in this country having abandoned argument and resorted to political proscription and secret cabal, reasoning is perhaps thrown away on them. Yet we have a secret trust that truth will eventually triumph over calumny and misrepresentation in our beloved country. Let us wait.

175.

Lecture, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, March 7, 1866

Lectures in St. Peter's Cathedral--Lent 1866, No. 1.

Faith and Free Will.

It is no uncommon thing to hear people speak of having faith, as if it were a matter not of choice, but of destiny. "If I had faith," "would that I find faith," are expressions that you hear persons using in the same tone, as they say, "if I had more talents, better health, a comelier figure, greater wealth," as if to believe were gift in no manner within their choice, like their stature, or the color of their hair. It would be hard to imagine the innumerable mistakes and blunders, wasting lives and destroying souls, which this one radical mistake has caused. That it *is* a mistake is certain. For every man is free to have faith, if he wills it, and if he will he is saved by belief, and condemned by unbelief, that is, he pleases God by believing, and *sins* by not believing.

To clear our own mind of this error, let us examine the relation between faith and free will, premising first what we mean by Faith, and what by Free will.

1. FAITH--By "Faith," is meant here the act of believing. This is to be borne in mind, because the word, itself, has many meanings.

Sometimes it is taken for the true religion: as when we say, "the English received the Faith from missionaries sent out by the Pope of Rome," and "lost the Faith under

Henry VIII." when they separated from Rome. Sometimes it is taken for individual belief in religion, as when we say of an apostate, "he lost the faith by corruption of morals." Sometimes it is used for "confidence," "trust," "reliance on one's care and love," as in the case of the Gentile woman, who wanted our Lord to heal her daughter, to whom He said, "O woman, great is thy faith," and in the ordinary colloquialism, "I have no faith in him."

The great body of what are called Evangelical Protestants use faith in this sense of "trust" or "confidence," making it not an act of the intellect, but a frame of the mind or feelings. In our discourse faith is taken not for revealed religion nor for individual belief nor for trust or confidence, but for the *act of believing*.

Now belief is distinguished from knowledge, not in being less certain than knowledge nor by being certain from a different motive. I am as certain that Jesus Christ is present on yonder altar as I am that the congregation is present in those pews. But in the one case, my certainty is faith, and in the other is knowledge. I believe one, I see the other. The things the senses witness and the reason demonstrate make knowledge; the things that I know from authority constitute faith. Faith, therefore, is the act of receiving for true, on account of authority. If the authority is human, as it is in matters of history, geography, or of the feelings, affections or inward emotion of others, the belief is called human faith. If the authority is divine, as it is in what the Holy Catholic Church teaches, the belief is *Divine Faith*. Hence two things are necessary to make an act of Divine Faith. First, the assent of the understanding of what God teaches, and secondly the fact that He teaches must be what moves the understanding to assent. Rationalists are justly said to have no faith because, although they hold professedly to some of the truths of Christianity, they do not receive any of those truths for the reason that God revealed them.

The act of Faith is expressed in these words, "I believe what God says because He says it." It is of that act that choice of predicated. This is the act which St. Paul calls "the substance of things to be hoped for," that is, the foundation on which all we hope for rests, "the evidence," or demonstration, or proof "of things not seen." This act is the root or ground of all justification and constitutes the essential difference between the friends and the enemies of God. The penitent thief believed lovingly and "that day he was with Christ in Paradise." The other blasphemed and scoffed, and that divided him from God forever.

2. FREE WILL is defined to be "the power of *choosing*." Moral philosophers explain it by comparing its acts with other acts proceeding from man.

All the acts that man can do: eating, drinking, watching, sleeping, loving, hating, hoping, fearing, they call "spontaneous."

Out of these there are some which are done understandingly and these are voluntary; these a man does willingly, although he cannot help doing them. Thus, you

cannot help desiring what you think is good. The saints in glory cannot help loving God, yet they do it very willingly.

Of the acts done willingly, there are some which one can do, or not do, at his good pleasure; and these alone are *free*. To make a free choice, therefore, one must act of his own accord; must know, at the same time, what he is doing; and must have the power not to do it if he wishes not to do it.

Hence, you are not accountable for what is done *in you, or to you, against your consent*; nor, for what you do ignorantly, unless you remain ignorant willfully; nor for what you do, of your own accord knowingly, *provided you cannot help it*.

The existence of free will is a FACT, to which every man's consciousness bears witness. No one could feel remorse, did his heart not say to him, I need not have done it. No one could swell with complacency over what he has done, without saying, "I might have chosen the worse; I choose the better." It is by free will alone that what we do is ours; and by it alone that we become objects of praise, or blame, to the Judge of the living and the dead.

Now we are saved by Faith, yet we cannot be saved without our free will. To every lost soul God says, "Thy destruction is thine own work, O Israel." The condition of those separated from God is awfully distressing, even to think of. But no one is in that condition, who did not freely choose it. In the dispensation made by the Redeemer, every one can have faith who wills it; and to have it, must will it.

Now, there are two things in an act of faith that are sometimes used to give a color of truth, the saying of those who think faith a matter of chance, not of choice.

1st. That it is an act of understanding which cannot consent until convinced, and cannot refuse assent when it is convinced.

2d. That it is a gift of God, which He can refuse or bestow at his good pleasure, and not at our own choice.

The first difficulty is the more subtle and hard to answer. Many have wit enough to see the sophism without having the judgment and patience to find the solution of it.

It is true, that I must believe when I am convinced, and that I cannot believe until I am convinced; but it does not follow thence that my faith is the act of destiny. I am not free to disbelieve what I see reason for believing, nor believe what I see reason for disbelieving. But I am free to look for reasons, either on one side or the other; to fix my attention on what *would* convince me, or to refuse to consider it. And so, indirectly I am free to believe.

The Jews, among whom our Redeemer wrought His wonderful works, and preached His sublime doctrine, were without excuse in their incredulity--because they refused to consider those works as proofs of His divine mission, and had their minds made up beforehand not to receive Him as the Messiah, no matter what He might say or do. Some people think they believed, but affected not to believe. The Gospels say no

such thing. They say the Jews did not believe, *through their own fault*. That is, they refused to give attention to His claims, or to consider the evidence of His truth, through sheer pride and prejudice.

Converts to the Church very often imagine that they were not convinced sooner, because there was no one to understand precisely, and to answer their difficulties. Hence, after their conversion, they are always very sanguine of the results that are going to follow the arguments they will be able to frame and put forward [to others in their former state], and bitterly disappointed when they find these arguments received with cool indifference. "Why," they say "those people must be convinced. They must believe in the truth of the Church." No, you are mistaken. They do not believe. Your arguments may have been incontrovertible, but they, listening, paid no attention to them. They did not wish to be convinced. The most you can say of them is that they feared they might be convinced if they allowed reason to take its course, and, therefore, turned their minds to something else. But they are sincere and truthful, when they say they do believe. In other matters, belief is affected by the will in the same way. What absurd lies people will believe about their rivals and enemies, and how obstinately they refuse to credit any testimony that disparages their friends! It is a proverb that a "man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still," and common for people to explain judgments they hear uttered, by saying "the wish was father to the thoughts." When we concede freedom of opinion, we do not mean that no one can be blamed, no matter what his opinions are, but only that God alone is his judge and punisher. All opinion, all belief, is directly or indirectly the result of our volition, and, therefore, we will have to render an account for what we thought, as well as for what we wished, and said, and did. "I could not have believed differently from what I did." You could not with your attention fixed as you fixed it, I grant you. But you could have fixed your attention differently, if you had chosen. The men who forget God and salvation, in the care of their lusts, do not feel the stings of conscience all the time. They make themselves believe that they are securing their happiness in losing their soul. The drunkard who barter his peace, his health, his good name, his soul, for what maddens him, really believes, for the time, that he is going on the right road to find happiness. The man who sells God for silver, thinks, while he is doing it, that he is driving a profitable bargain. The one who throws faith and honesty away, to get popularity, really believes he is playing a winning game. These men do not merely act as if they were deceived against their convictions, but they really are deceived, because they want to be. That "Therefore we have erred," which will burst from the reprobate as they behold the mighty cast down from their thrones, and the lowly lifted up to be the sons of God, will express no feigned astonishment. There is far more sincerity in the world than people think; and there is not in society one who deceives others, for a thousand who deceive themselves. The man whom God made in paradise, and the Holy Ghost

re-created on the day of Pentecost, is a sublime creature, dwelling above the visible, reaching out toward the Eternal, reason-guided, truth-governed, imperishable--a little less than the angels. But the man whom sin and passion have made, the man of avarice and ambition and lust, is but a vile thing--hardly removed from the brute, a thing of huge promises, and mean performances, of vast pretensions and scanty merits, an animated bundle of prejudice, passion, self-conceit, inconsistency, with downward-reaching thoughts, aspirations, and affection--crawling on the earth, the span's length that measures the distance from the cradle to the grave.

How the Angels must loathe the self-conceit, when they hear men speak of having "formed their opinions from careful study," "with unbiased judgment!" Examine your own hearts honestly: what opinion of all the countless ones you hold so tenaciously, and ventilate so complacently, in politics, literature, philosophy or religion, did you form of your own original thought, and without a preconceived wish that it might be so, or without being told by some one that you ought to think it so? What one did not originate in prejudice or education, or interest or caprice, or passion? Some modern authors have undertaken to write histories of opinions, and to set forth their birth and logical development through ages--forgetting that human opinions, especially human errors, are not born of reason, and have no development, according to logic, but only one according to caprice, interest or passion.

If men were guided in believing solely by reason, then, indeed, faith would be inevitable, and error impossible, but as they are not so guided, faith is free and error is free. You can receive faith and be saved by thinking "I will," or reject it, and be condemned by one "I will not."

"But," it is said, "if faith is the gift of God, then, whether one has it or not, depends upon whether God bestows it or not, and not upon his choice."

Faith *is* the gift of God, not due in any way to human nature, to antecedent merit or any other title. But of His free bounty He has decreed to bestow it upon all, leaving them free to receive or reject it. He is the "true light, enlightening every man that cometh into this world." He wills all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. But He will not, and can not, save them against their own will. His gift is the *cause* of faith, but free will is a *condition* of it. That gift is always ready to lift the soul above the stars, if free will does not cling with it to the earth. Before Christ died, or rather, before He decreed to die, God was free to give man faith or not; after, He was bound by promise to give it to *all*.

The fountain, springing up in the house of the Lord, fills the land; but if men will not drink of it they will perish. The city of God is set on a hill and cannot be hid--that is, the Catholic Church is spread through all lands; and whoever wants to learn, has it in his power to be taught of God. If he seeks, he will find; if he knocks, it shall be opened to him.

Faith comes from hearing. God does as much for him who "hearing will not understand," as for those who "receive the word into a good and perfect heart." To both He sends the teacher; the Holy Ghost breathes inwardly upon the hearts of both. "Behold, I stand at the door knocking." In one, free will closes the door of the heart, and there is unbelief; in the other, free will lets the spirit breath "where he listeth," and supernatural light spreads itself through the understanding; and supernatural warmth gives new life to the will. There is a new creation. The soul has something new, sublime, interminable to live for, a hope before undreamed of thrills through it, and a love never felt before. In a word, the whole being is transformed. Free will does not do the work, but only refrains from hindering it. Faith still remains the gift of God, and the salvation is still the work of grace. Yet, because the gift is so abundant and grace so universal, unbelief and eternal condemnation are the work of free will. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

Hence, for one to say, "I wish I had faith" is to utter a contradiction. You can have faith if you will have it; and what you say, analyzed, means, "I wish I wished!" You are mistaken when you say you wish you had faith. You do not wish faith, but you wish the peace of mind, the quiet trust, and tranquil hope, you see in those who have faith. Had you really wanted faith you might have had it long ago.

Some persons, Catholics even, who, talking of persons having "*more*" or "*less faith*," mix up the act of believing with the sentiment it ought to produce, but from which it is totally distinct. Sentiment belongs chiefly to the sensual nature, and comes and goes, with the changes of the body, and the flow of the blood; faith is the assent of the intellect to God's teaching, and always remains the same where it exists at all.

Holy David begged God: "Pierce my flesh with thy fear"--that is, let not only my soul believe, but let my body tremble in thy presence. And this is the prayer we ought to say instead of uttering the fruitless complaint "I wish I had more faith," which means, I wish I could please myself more in trying to please God! I wish the prayers I *must* say, the fasts I *must* undergo, the public worship I *must* attend, were pleasanter and more congenial to my feelings; I wish I could follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ without going to Mount Calvary! Instead of wishing for more faith, we ought to examine whether we have not more already than we have made use of. You have enough to know that all light and help comes from God. Have you prayed occasionally, in season and out of season? You know that it is your duty to be sober, honest, temperate, meek, merciful, modest, chaste, reverent, humble; have you kept these virtues from your youth? You know the sacraments are fountains of grace. Have you frequented them, as such, eagerly, reverently, untiringly?

It is not faith that we long for and cannot get, but the works of faith that are lacking in our lives. It is not want of faith that prevents any one of you from going to Mass daily, especially during Lent, but want of good will to overcome sloth.

176 - The Natural and the Supernatural Law

You can have faith when you want it, and as much as you want of it. Only treat it as it deserves: obey it, live by it, and you will have the fruits of it also. The peace it brings is to men of good will. Have the good will to keep the faith, and it will keep you.

176.

Lecture, *The Catholic Telegraph and Telegraph*, March 22, 1877
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Lecture in St. Joseph's Cathedral

The Natural and the Supernatural Law

Since there came to be a party grown out of the Reformation, whose study is to openly assail Christianity, there has been a constant effort to make out some contradiction between reason and revelation--between the natural and the supernatural. Infidels, men who expect no immortality, have no logical reason to care about science. But infidels, in the past and present centuries, were stirred by a marvelous zeal for science, as long as they hoped to find in it something to contradict Christianity. The French encyclopediasts worked industriously on ancient historical records of Egypt and China, on the study of languages, of astronomy, and later, the German and English infidels have labored and are laboring on geology, anatomy, physiology, looking for some proof that Jesus Christ was mistaken in those things which He indorsed of the ages preceding Him, and taught to His own age, which takes in all time, from His incarnation to the day of final judgment. In their zeal to overthrow the belief of the Catholic people, they have succeeded in darkening their own understanding of both the natural and the supernatural. They do not understand now either what faith is or what reason is.

So, in order to show how idly they toil to show contradiction between what reason knows through itself and what it knows through God's revelation, we must state what both are, and see how they appear, side by side.

By human nature, we mean that union of soul and body which constitutes man. The body is an organism bearing in it the causes of its own growth, decay and death. The soul is a spiritual substance, with the power to know and choose; that is, understanding and free will. The understanding can be brought into contact with real things, either directly or indirectly. Directly, it touches truth through the senses or by its own reflection; indirectly by having truth brought to it through a teacher.

Adam was created a perfect man, and made to be in a supernatural condition by immortality of body, infused knowledge of things he had never seen or studied, absolute subordination of his body to his soul, and sanctifying grace, whereby he was not merely innocent, but positively pleasing to his Creator. Now, without these supernatural gifts, what could Adam know? That is, what can any man know from

simple reason? "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," and his first act must have been the consciousness of that life, as he felt his heart beating and the blood bounding through his veins. Then he opened his eyes on the sky above and Paradise around, and he understood their existence through his senses. Then he reasoned within himself concerning his own and their origin and meaning, and understood by that process that he and they had their beginning from One who has no beginning, and is, therefore, entitled to adoration as lord, owner and master of all. And this is as far as reason can go without a teacher. When the Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day, and told him more minutely why he was created, what was the nature of the things about him, and what he had to do with them, there was revelation, whether of truths that were far off and with no direct bearing on his destiny, or of truths for the shaping of his conduct.

Truths may be in different spheres, but they can not contradict one another. What you know of a house by seeing it can not contradict what the owner can tell you of its cost, its furniture, or other details not visible to the first glance. So what the heavens tell to reason of the glory of God, what the earth reveals of His wisdom and watchfulness, can not contradict what He teaches of His trinity and unity, of the incarnation, death and resurrection, of the Second Person, of the mission of the Apostles and the infallibility of the Church, His own personal supervision of our thoughts, words and actions, and His final adjustment of good and evil, by personally measuring out to each individual their retribution.

In like manner, the obligations that reason sees can not contradict those which God reveals. The natural and supernatural must be in perfect harmony. Reason can find out that we have duties, and can know with absolute certainty some general principles regulating those duties towards our fellow men, and towards ourselves. It can know that God is to be worshipped, both with interior and exterior worship, and can form some conjectures as to the manner of worship. The Church then comes in and teaches, by what acts God is to be worshipped, giving the precept and form of prayer and the sacrifice of the Mass. It can know that we are obliged to give every one his due, and injure none. Then the Church extends this knowledge, by explaining what are the rights of our fellows to their lives, property and reputation with minute detail. It can know in general that we are to keep our appetites under the control of reason. But the Church has to teach how and by what means this can be done, to set before us minutely what are temperance and chastity and the duty of fasting and bodily self-denial in our hourly actions. It may be set down as a general principle, therefore, that the supernatural law does not overturn the natural, but supplements it with definite details and augmented certainty.

It comes to each one of us as to one sitting alone on a height, in the midst of a vast expanse of mountain, plain, lake, sea. The lone one knows that by choosing the

right path it will reach a land of beauty, peace and rest. But among so many paths, chequering all the wide landscape, how can it tell the right one? How to tell it from day to day, and from hour to hour? It is easy for the philosophers to say: "Do right and be good," "follow Truth," "abstain and suffer," and the rest of their generalities. But to find what is the right in the manifold relations and rapid changes of life, and to find in each relation and each change the motive and the strength to do it, surpasses all that mental power ever yet achieved.

No one is free from stain, says holy Job; not even the infant of a single day upon the earth. They tried what natural reason would do for many centuries, from the deluge down to the Incarnation, and the history of the period while it is a magnificent record of the triumphs of mind over matter for useless or destructive purposes, shows constant progress towards utter ignorance of God, of all moral truth, and the lowest depravity. Plato, and Socrates, and Aristotle, were the lights of the world; but the truths they taught had to go forth to the world as their opinion, and the errors they acquiesced in had the same authority. In the brightest period of the empire, which then comprised the world, men were in the habit of scoffing at gods whose public worship they promoted, and the common people held their religious festivals by riotously abandoning themselves to the gratification of their vilest passions. Corruption had obscured all knowledge of even the Natural law. So that when our Lord through His own lips, and through the Apostles, announced its precepts with authoritative and detailed statement and explanation, it sounded on the ears of men as something strange, unheard of, and foolish. I say natural law, for this law, also, as well as the Law of Moses, Jesus Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfill.

As with dogma, so is it with morals. The church's teaching simply strengthens the law by her authority, and renders clear the applications of it by her teaching. The Ten Commandments are but explicit direction how to honor God, our neighbor and ourselves, as we are bound to, under pain of sin. The evangelical counsels point out the path to perfect liberty, peace and final happiness. The natural law guides us to justice and leads us to truth, in a general way. The supernatural adds to it the certainty of Divine Authority, and explains definitely and surely all its applications to the circumstances of life.

177.

Lecture, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, February 4, 1863

Lectures in St. Peter's Cathedral. No. 3.

Natural and Revealed Religion.

It is not an uncommon prejudice against the Church that she is very complicated, and artificial in her creed and practices, imposing many burthens on her members over

and above those prescribed by the law of nature and common sense. The present discourse will treat of that prejudice, and set forth the difference between natural and revealed religion. To do this, it will be necessary to explain in order what is meant by natural religion, what by revealed religion, that we may note the points of difference between the two.

To settle what is meant by natural religion, we must get a clear understanding of what is religion and what is nature. Religion is a Latin word, which means the act of rebinding or tying again. We are linked to God by His act that brings us forth from nothing into being. Religion would tie us again to Him by making our intellect and free will return to Him in adoration, faith and obedience. In other words, religion is a system of truths that we are to believe of our relations with God, and of precepts that we are to practice in order to make our will conform to His, causing us to go back to the Creator with our moral being, as we came forth from Him with our physical being.

When I speak of natural religion, I beg you to understand the word natural, not as sensual or spontaneous, or habitual, but as coming from our whole nature.

There are in our nature two elements--body and spirit. But spirit predominates of right, and so natural religion is the religion of the spirit or the religion which the intellect approves. It is not the unclean system of harmonies--of attraction and repulsion--which a prurient French school has dragged from the sources that of old gave rise to the abominable rites of Paganism, and which some are trying to make popular among us, but the system derived from natural knowledge of God and of ourselves.

These are briefly the points of its teaching. That there is a God one, infinitely perfect, free--the Creator of all things. That man, as the work of His hands, must do His will. That He will reward virtue and punish sin. That man is bound to give to his Creator adoration, with all his powers--that is, interior and exterior worship. That each man is bound to give to his neighbor his just rights--what he claims for himself. That he is bound by prudence, patience, fortitude and temperance to maintain the supremacy of his soul over his body.

These generalities, together with those duties that arise from society, comprise all the dictates of natural religion. To God man owes adoration and worship. To his fellow-man his rights. To himself the supremacy of mind over body.

Supernatural religion revealed by God through Moses, the Prophets, and lastly through His Son, does not reverse in anything the dictates of reason. The ten commandments revealed to Moses on Sinai enjoin adoration and obedience to God, justice to men, and the repression of anger, lust and covetous desires.

Let us illustrate this agreement of the natural and revealed law by considering the commandments in detail. The first commandment is: "I am the Lord thy God--thou shalt not have any strange gods before me. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven

image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth, thou shalt not bow down to them or serve them."

In this commandment we are directed to believe in God, to hope in God, and to love God. Reason enjoins the same: we must believe in Him, because He is infinite truth; hope in Him, because there is no limit to His goodness; and love Him, because He is infinite perfection. By this commandment we are forbidden to worship false gods or idols--and reason also cries out against giving to anything else the honor which belongs to God.

The second commandment is, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain." And does not reason also cry out against the prevailing fashion of treating the Holy name of God with more contempt than that of the commonest felon? of invoking it at every impulse of surprise or anger, and coupling it with indecent expressions and lewd jests? What good does it do a man to curse? What harm does it do his enemies? There is neither dignity nor energy nor good taste nor sense nor wit in the habit--and if it has been adopted by men holding high positions in the country, why so much the worse for the country; but they cannot make profanity decent or respectable.

The third commandment directs us to set apart days for the worship of God and observe them by resting from hard labor, and attending public worship. Reason sanctions this also. For reason teaches, that we should not become so absorbed in worldly affairs as to forget God, or neglect to render back to him a part of our time as of every other gift, and therefore enjoins that, at stated intervals, there should be a day of rest and worship. The Revolutionary French Republic, formed by theory upon an atheistic basis, was obliged to admit a stated day of rest, though it only gave to the poor every tenth day.

The fourth commandment is, "Honor thy father and thy mother." That is, it prescribes obedience and respect for lawful authority. This, too, is a dictate of reason, since without it society, whether of the family or of the state, could not exist.

The fifth and seventh commandments--thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal--are self-evident, as dictates of nature, even to the commonest understanding.

The sixth commandment is also an injunction of the natural law. Uncleanness is a subjection of the soul to the body; it weakens the powers of the mind and produces loathsome diseases in the body, and is, therefore, abominable.

The eighth forbids lying, echoing the voice of nature. Speech was given us to tell our thoughts; but when we lie we tell what are not our thoughts. The shame that a child feels at being caught in a falsehood shows how nature abhors a lie.

The ninth and tenth commandments forbid unclean and covetous thoughts. For if the outward act is wrong, so is the inward resolution. Guilt and merit are in the will, and the outward act only adds to the one or the other by the greater length of time it

proves the will to have been in the mind, and the injury and scandal done to others.

Therefore, all the ten commandments agree substantially with the injunctions of reason or of the natural law. The difference between natural and revealed religion is not in the general principles of belief or conduct. Both say, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, with thy whole soul and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." But natural religion stops short with the statement of general principles, and revealed religion goes on into the details of faith and practice. There is the same difference between them as between the definitions in any science and the science itself. Natural religion contains definitions only. Revealed religion contains the definitions with all their developments and applications.

Thus, natural reason compels us to believe in God, whatever He may say. Revelation goes on to tell us what He does say, through the twelve articles of the Creed, with all their subordinate explanations, comprising all that a Christian is bound to believe. Reason bids us hope in God. Revelation teaches how to exercise hope in prayer, and to say the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary." Reason bids us love. Revelation explains to us the commandments, whose fulfillment is love. Reason bids us worship God. Revelation shows us by what inward acts and what outward rites this worship is performed. Reason commands us to set apart some time for prayer and praise. Revelation, establishing Sundays and holidays, shows us which are the proper times to set apart.

So revelation does not contradict or supplant natural religion, but only develops and explains it, adding to it definiteness and certainty--definiteness, because it teaches the law in detail--and certainty, because practically we are always more certain of what others tell us than of what we get by reasoning.

There are only three points that I know of in which anything like a plausible attempt was ever made to show any contradiction between reason and the revealed moral law. Gibbon said the law of the Cross was contrary to reason in three respects--viz: in the forgiveness of enemies, in the neglect of worldly goods, and in fasting. Let us consider them one by one.

The first objection is that forgiveness of enemies is destructive of self-respect and is a license to the ill-disposed to trample upon the good, at pleasure. If your forgiving disposition is known in society, the argument runs, you will forthwith be subject to a thousand insults. Your rights will be disregarded, your person contemned every moment. It is against nature to turn the other cheek to the smiter. The force of the objection arises from confounding the satisfaction of personal enmity with the defense of rights. No Christian is bound to yield any, even the smallest, of his rights to an unjust aggressor. But, on the contrary, he is bound to defend them, because they are rights and not because they are his. He can maintain them all but he must do it from love of justice and not from love of self. What greater dignity can be conceived than

that of Jesus Christ silent among his persecutors? or of the martyrs fearing not him who can kill the body, but only Him who has power over both soul and body?

We forgive enemies--those who wantonly annoy us, slander us and persecute us; simply because another is their master, and it is His business, not ours, to judge them. Whatever grief they have given us is less than we have deserved at the hands of God, for we have sinned, and whatever guilt they have incurred God, to whom vengeance belongs, will punish. In the midst of injuries we are to bear ourselves meekly, but not weakly, accepting humiliation for ourselves, but never yielding to wrong, though torture and death were the penalty of resistance.

Contempt of this world's goods, says Gibbon, in the next place, begets laziness, checks industry, stifles enterprise, and destroys prosperity in society. The fact that the early Christians lived in common, gathered about their assemblies all the idle fellows of Jerusalem, and checked the enterprise of the whole city--this objection again supposes that no one can act but from self-love. It supposes that one cannot be industrious from principle, from a sense of duty to society, to his family, and all dependent on him, in other words, that charity is impossible. But charity is not impossible, since God, who commands nothing impossible, enjoins it. Again, you have yet to see the man in whom Christian contempt of the world begot laziness. Drunkenness, gluttony, love of ease, news-seeking, politics are forerunners of neglect of business--not piety. If any one neglects work under pretext of devotion, he plays the hypocrite. If there are mothers who leave their children uncombed to go to Mass, or fathers who leave their debts unpaid to say litanies, their devotion is false and hateful to God. It has been charged that religious houses of men and women are places of idleness and sloth. This may be true of religious houses where discipline is dying out, such as the Augustinian one in Wittenberg, where Luther was educated; but it is never true of any where the rule is enforced. In other words, it is never their renunciation of the world that makes them slothful, but forgetfulness of that renunciation and the growth of a worldly spirit in them.

Finally, it is pretended that the law of fasting is contrary to reason since we have a right to the bounties that nature yields us. It is true we have a right to the bounties of nature; but we must use them according to our need of them and not according to their abundance. We must eat and drink to live--not live to eat and drink. The soul must always have the supremacy over the body, and temperance is necessary to health. Now, unless one accustoms himself to check his appetites by abstinence he will not be able to observe the law of temperance. But to check one's appetites is to fast. Therefore, fasting is prescribed by reason.

Our appetites are like children. Indulgence spoils them. If we want to hold them under control so as to have any peace with them, we must repress and mortify them almost incessantly. The most pitiable object in life is the wretched hunter after good

eating and drinking. Nature cries out against him, as one who has chained a soul to the service of a beast; and even little children wonder why he does not control his desires when he knows so much harm comes of not doing it.

I do not pretend that nature prescribes the identical fasts of the Church, but only that nature prescribes fasting. Then the Church comes in and tells how to fast, and when, naming the days of Lent and Advent, the Ember Days and vigils of feasts, for our guidance in detail. Therefore, the fasts and feasts of the Church are but the carrying out in detail of the law of nature, which enjoins the subjection of matter to spirit, as prescribed by common sense.

It thus appears that Revelation imposes no obligation upon men not contained and implied in natural religion. There is nothing artificial or complicated in it. It simply explains how to fulfill what reason declares we owe to God, our neighbor and ourselves. We have no empty sacrifices, libations, purifications. The forms used by the Church are not empty, but full of grace, which is the life of the soul.

Strangers sometimes complain of the ceremonies they witness in Catholic Churches and call them meaningless, when, with better right, the ceremonies might complain of them. It is not the fault of the ceremonies that they seem meaningless, but of those who do not study their meaning. The grace they convey puts meaning and life into them all. The Spirit of God moves in the baptismal water, in the words of absolution, in the cross made by the bishop upon our foreheads; He is on the priest's lips at the tremendous altar, by the bedside of the dying, on the hands of the bishop when he anoints the forehead of the soldier of the cross and consecrates the Levite. The rites of the Church are not empty, but full of the Holy Ghost. And this consideration makes it as easy to fulfill them as it is to live, for to fulfill them is to take in spiritual food and drink, pardon for sin, strength to resist temptation, consolation, peace, life.

Truly is the yoke of Christ easy and his burthen light. How eager He is to make us happy! He promises unspeakable rewards for doing what common sense and our own interest would require of us even without reward! And light as is His burthen, He lightens it still more by grace. If men would do and suffer for Him, the hundredth part of what they do and suffer for their passions, He would save them all. They need not be pain-racked and heart-wrung with the pleasure-seeker, or faint with toil, weary with watching, torn by anxiety with the money-getter, or wild with fear, envy, jealousy with the place-hunter, but only to be patient a little while under the evils that beat upon their bodies but cannot touch their souls, and behold God, is their reward.

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Editorial, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, August 14, 1858 (1)

Jansenistic Theology.

There is no heresy of modern times so dangerous as Jansenism. The pretence of rigorism, the railing upon amusements, is a sheep's clothing which hides the wolf better than any other. The gloomy spirit of Paschal, and the stern teachings of Quesnell and St. Arnaud have left an impress on the public mind not soon to be effaced.

For this reason every Catholic writer ought to be extremely cautious, in enunciating theological views on subjects of common interest, and while fearless in the denunciation of vice, should study not to condemn it upon false principles of rigorism. A person who writes is supposed to have studied his statements, and weighed his reasons; and hence what he utters is never set down as the impulse of his zeal, but as the teaching of his Theology.--Many things may be said in private discourse, or even in familiar instructions, which, as expressions of emotion in particular circumstances, or as alluding to local facts, may not only be harmless but useful, but which reasoned and formalized, in print, may be dangerous and false doctrine.

We condemn fanaticism, in Radicals, Free-lovers, Spiritualists, and the like--is it any better in ourselves?

Sometimes, heart-sick at the sight of the havoc of souls committed around us by the sin of drunkenness, we may be tempted to denounce the use of stimulating beverages, upon any occasion, as a sin--and to some, such use being a *proximate occasion*, may actually be a sin. But to maintain, as a rule of morals, that it is never lawful for any one, in health to taste intoxicating drinks, would be uncatholic and dangerous.

Again, the amusements of youth, such as music, pic-nics, dancing, and the like, may, in certain localities, have become the occasion of disorders. If so, let him who is scandalized by the disorders, fearlessly reprehend them; but let him never content his zeal by attacking these amusements as the necessary occasions of sin. We read that St. John Chrysostom braved the anger of the Empress Eudoxia, when she appointed the hour of High Mass for the celebration of the games inaugurating her statue, not by quotations from the Fathers and theological reasons, against games in general, but by denouncing *those games*, then and there held, to the shameful interruption of Divine Worship. So ever the good pastor should decry the abuse he deplors, not attach what was its accidental occasion.

A communication appeared in our columns a few weeks ago, in which a well-meaning friend expressed his sentiments on the subject of dancing. We commend the zeal which is fired against the occasion of sin, but we deprecate the theology, which confounding the lascivious street dances, condemned by the ancient Fathers, with the modern social amusement, and, using the argument of possible distraction, in prayer,

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valid against *any* species of amusement, business, or study, would (wise beyond what is written) condemn indiscriminately what is allowed by the theologians of the Church.

179.

Editorial, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, July 27, 1861

[Useless Natural Religion.]

What insufferable twaddle the Boston advocates of Natural Religion let off! Nature commands them to adore. The bright sky--the restless ocean--the rushing rivers--the rugged mountains--the silent woods--the sweet sequestered vales--the gorgeous sunsets--the moonlit cities or fields--all inspire them with worship! Worship, indeed! What worship is there in mawkish sentimentality? What honor is there to God, or what benefit to man from such glows of sentiment, as arise merely from a good constitution, and a taste for the beautiful? Does it obtain sorrow for sin, resolution to observe the ten commandments, preparation for death and the judgment? Does it make a man act more justly, think more guardedly, live more soberly? Religious sentiments are good when used as an aid to humility, purity, charity--but are perverted into means of sin when mistaken for piety. True piety is in doing, not in feeling.