

"In the World, but not of the World"  
*Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* sermon 14  
St. John Henry Newman  
May 5, 1873

"The world passeth away, and the desire thereof: but he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever." 1 John ii. 17.

[Note] I HAVE been asked by those whose wish at such a moment is a command, to say a few words on the subject of the sorrowful, the joyful solemnity, which has this morning brought us together. A few words are all that is necessary, all that is possible;—just so many as are sufficient to unite the separate thoughts, the separate memories, the separate stirrings of affection, which are awakened in us by the presence, in our midst, of what remains on earth of the dear friend, of the great soul, whom we have lost,—sufficient to open a communication and create a sympathy between mind and mind, and to be a sort of testimony of one to another in behalf of feelings which each of us has in common with all.

Yet how am I the fit person even for as much as this? I can do no more than touch upon some of those many points which the thought of him suggests to me; and, whatever I may know of him, and say of him, how can this be taken as the measure of one whose mind had so many aspects, and who must, in consequence, have made such distinct impressions, and exercised such various claims, on the hearts of those who came near him?

It is plain, without my saying it, that there are those who knew him far better than I could know him. How can I be the interpreter of their knowledge or their feelings? How can I hope by any words of mine to do a service to those, who knew so well the depths of his rare excellence by a continuous daily intercourse with him, and by the recurring special opportunities given to them of its manifestation?

I only know what he was to me. I only know what his loss is to me. I only know that he is one of those whose departure hence has made the heavens dark to me. But I have never lived with him, or travelled with him; I have seen him from time to time; I have visited him; I have corresponded with him; I have had mutual confidences with him. Our lines of duty have lain in very different directions. I have known him as a friend knows friend in the tumult and the hurry of life. I have known him well enough to know how much more there was to know in him; and to look forward, alas! in vain, to a time when, in the evening and towards the close of life, I might know him more. I have known him enough to love him very much, and to sorrow very much, that here I shall not see him again. But then I reflect, if I, who do not know him as he might be known, suffer as I do, what must be their suffering who knew him so well?

1. I knew him first, I suppose, in 1837 or 1838, thirty-five or six years ago, a few years after he had become Fellow of Merton College. He expressed a wish to know me. How our friendship grew I cannot tell; I must soon have been intimate with him, from the

35 recollection I have of letters which passed between us; and by 1841 I had recourse to  
36 him, as a sort of natural adviser, when I was in difficulty. From that time I ever had  
37 recourse to him, when I needed advice, down to his last illness. On my first intimacy  
38 with him he had not reached the age of thirty. I was many years older; yet he had that  
39 about him, even when a young man, which invited and inspired confidence. It was  
40 difficult to resist his very presence. True, indeed, I can fancy those who saw him but  
41 once and at a distance, surprised and perplexed by that lofty fastidiousness and keen  
42 wit which were natural to him; but such a misapprehension of him would vanish  
43 forthwith when they drew near to him, and had actual trial of him; especially, as I have  
44 said, when they had to consult him, and had experience of the simplicity, seriousness,  
45 and (I can use no other word) the sweetness of his manner, as he threw himself at once  
46 into their ideas and feelings, listened patiently to them, and spoke out the clear  
47 judgment which he formed of the matters which they had put before him.

48 This is the first and the broad view I am led to take of him. He was, emphatically, a  
49 friend in need. And this same considerateness and sympathy with which he met those  
50 who asked the benefit of his opinion in matters of importance was, I believe, his  
51 characteristic in many other ways in his intercourse with those towards whom he stood  
52 in various relations. He was always prompt, clear, decided, and disinterested. He  
53 entered into their pursuits, though dissimilar to his own; he took an interest in their  
54 objects; he adapted himself to their dispositions and tastes; he brought a strong and  
55 calm good sense to bear upon their present or their future; he aided and furthered them  
56 in their doings by his cooperation. Thus he drew men around him; and when some  
57 grave question or undertaking was in agitation, and there was, as is wont, a gathering of  
58 those interested in it, then, on his making his appearance among them, all present were  
59 seen to give to him the foremost place, as if he had a claim to it by right; and he, on his  
60 part, was seen gracefully, and without effort, to accept what was conceded to him, and  
61 to take up the subject under consideration; throwing light upon it, and, as it were,  
62 locating it, pointing out what was of primary importance in it, what was to be aimed at,  
63 and what steps were to be taken in it. I am told that, in like manner, when residing on  
64 his property in France, he was there too made a centre for advice and direction on the  
65 part of his neighbours, who leant upon him and trusted him in their own concerns, as if  
66 he had been one of themselves. It was his unselfishness, as well as his practical good  
67 sense, which won upon them.

68 Such a man, when, young and ardent, with his advantages of birth and position, he  
69 entered upon the public world, as it displays itself upon its noblest and most splendid  
70 stage at Westminster, might be expected to act a great part and to rise to eminence in  
71 the profession which he had chosen. Not for certain; for the refinement of mind, which  
72 was one of his most observable traits, is in some cases fatal to a man's success in  
73 public life. There are those who cannot mix freely with their fellows, especially not with  
74 those who are below their own level in mental cultivation. They are too sensitive for a  
75 struggle with rivals, and shrink from the chances which it involves. Or they have a  
76 shyness, or reserve, or pride, or self-consciousness, which restrains them from  
77 lavishing their powers on a mixed company, and is a hindrance to their doing their best,  
78 if they try. Thus their public exhibition falls short of their private promise. Now if there

79 was a man who was the light and the delight of his own intimates, it was he of whom I  
80 am speaking; and he loved as tenderly as he was beloved;—so far then he seemed  
81 rather made for domestic life.

82 Again, there are various departments in his profession, in which the particular talents  
83 which I have been assigning to him might have had full play, and have led to authority  
84 and influence, without any need or any opportunity for those more brilliant endowments  
85 by which popular admiration and high distinction are attained. It was by the display of  
86 talents of an order distinct from clearness of mind, acuteness, and judgment, that he  
87 was carried forward at once, as an advocate, to that general recognition of his powers,  
88 which was the response that greeted his first great speech, delivered in a serious cause  
89 before an august assembly. I think I am right in saying that it was in behalf of the  
90 Anglican Chapters, threatened by the reforming spirit of the day, that he then addressed  
91 the House of Lords; and the occasion called for the exercise, not only of the talents  
92 which I have already dwelt upon, but for those which are more directly oratorical. And  
93 these were not wanting. I never heard him speak; but I believe he had, in addition to  
94 that readiness and fluency of language, or eloquence, without which oratory cannot be,  
95 those higher gifts which give to oratory its power and its persuasiveness. I can well  
96 understand, from what I knew of him in private, what these were in his instance. His  
97 mien, his manner, the expression of his countenance, his youthfulness—I do not mean  
98 his youth, but his youthfulness of mind, which he never lost to the last,—his joyous  
99 energy, his reasonings so masterly, yet so prompt, his tact in disposing of them for his  
100 purpose, the light he threw upon obscure, and the interest with which he invested dull  
101 subjects, his humour, his ready resource of mind in emergencies; gifts such as these,  
102 so rare, yet so popular, were necessary for his success, and he had them at command.  
103 On that occasion of his handselling them to which I have referred, it was the common  
104 talk of Oxford, how the most distinguished lawyer of the day, a literary man and a critic,  
105 on hearing the speech in question, pronounced his prompt verdict upon him in the  
106 words, "That young man's fortune is made." And indeed it was plain to those who were  
107 in a position to forecast the future, that there was no prize, as it is called, of public life, to  
108 which that young man might not have aspired, if only he had had the will.

109 2. This, then, is what occurs to me to say in the first place, concerning the dear friend of  
110 whom we are now taking leave. Such as I have described, were the prospects which  
111 opened upon him on his start in life. But now, secondly, by way of contrast, what came  
112 of them? He might, as time went on, almost have put out his hand and taken what he  
113 would of the honours and rewards of the world. Whether in Parliament, or in the law, or  
114 in the branches of the Executive, he had a right to consider no station, no power,  
115 absolutely beyond his reach. His contemporaries and friends, who fill, or have filled, the  
116 highest offices in the State, are, in the splendour of their several careers, the illustration  
117 of his capabilities and his promise. But, strange as it may appear at first sight, his  
118 indifference to the prizes of life was as marked as his qualifications for carrying them off.  
119 He was singularly void of ambition. To succeed in life is almost a universal passion. If it  
120 does not often show itself in the high form of ambition, this is because few men have  
121 any encouragement in themselves or in their circumstances to indulge in dreams of  
122 greatness. But that a young man of bold, large, enterprising mind, of popular talents, of

conscious power, with initial successes, with great opportunities, one who carried with him the goodwill and expectation of bystanders, and was cheered on by them to a great future, that he should be dead to his own manifest interests, that he should be unequal to the occasion, that he should be so false to his destiny, that his ethical nature should be so little in keeping with his gifts of mind, may easily be represented, not only as strange, but as a positive defect or even a fault. Why are talents given at all, it may be asked, but for use? What are great gifts but the correlatives of great work? We are not born for ourselves, but for our kind, for our neighbours, for our country: it is but selfishness, indolence, a perverse fastidiousness, an unmanliness, and no virtue or praise, to bury our talent in a napkin, and to return it to the Almighty Giver just as we received it.

This is what may be said, and it is scarcely more than a truism to say it; for undoubtedly, who will deny it? Certainly we owe very much to those who devote themselves to public life, whether in the direct service of the State or in the prosecution of great national or social undertakings. They live laborious days, of which we individually reap the benefit; nevertheless, admitting this fully, surely there are other ways of being useful to our generation still. It must be recollected, that in public life a man of elevated mind does not make his own self tell upon others simply and entirely. He is obliged to move in a groove. He must act with other men; he cannot select his objects, or pursue them by means unadulterated by the methods and practices of minds less elevated than his own. He can only do what he feels to be second-best. He proceeds on the condition of compromise; and he labours at a venture, prosecuting measures so large or so complicated that their ultimate issue is uncertain.

Nor of course can I omit here the religious aspect of this question. As Christians, we cannot forget how Scripture speaks of the world, and all that appertains to it. Human Society, indeed, is an ordinance of God, to which He gives His sanction and His authority; but from the first an enemy has been busy in its depravation. Hence it is, that while in its substance it is divine, in its circumstances, tendencies, and results it has much of evil. Never do men come together in considerable numbers, but the passion, self-will, pride, and unbelief, which may be more or less dormant in them one by one, bursts into a flame, and becomes a constituent of their union. Even when faith exists in the whole people, even when religious men combine for religious purposes, still, when they form into a body, they evidence in no long time the innate debility of human nature, and in their spirit and conduct, in their avowals and proceedings, they are in grave contrast to Christian simplicity and straightforwardness. This is what the sacred writers mean by "the world," and why they warn us against it; and their description of it applies in its degree to all collections and parties of men, high and low, national and professional, lay and ecclesiastical.

It would be hard, then, if men of great talent and of special opportunities were bound to devote themselves to an ambitious life, whether they would or not, at the hazard of being accused of loving their own ease, when their reluctance to do so may possibly arise from a refinement and unworldliness of moral character. Surely they may prefer more direct ways of serving God and man; they may aim at doing good of a nature more

166 distinctly religious; at works, safely and surely and beyond all mistake meritorious; at  
167 offices of kindness, benevolence, and considerateness, personal and particular; at  
168 labours of love and self-denying exertions, in which their left hand knows nothing that is  
169 done by their right. As to our dear friend, I have already spoken of the influence which  
170 he exercised on all around him, on friends or strangers with whom he was connected in  
171 any way. Here was a large field for his active goodness, on which he did not neglect to  
172 exert himself. He gave to others without grudging his thoughts, time, and trouble. He  
173 was their support and stay. When wealth came to him, he was free in his use of it. He  
174 was one of those rare men who do not merely give a tithe of their increase to their God;  
175 he was a fount of generosity ever flowing. It poured out on every side; in religious  
176 offerings, in presents, in donations, in works upon his estates, in care of his people, in  
177 almsdeeds. I have been told of his extraordinary care of families left in distress, of his  
178 aid in educating them and putting them out in the world, of his acts of kindness to poor  
179 converts, to single women, and to sick priests; and I can well understand the solicitous  
180 and persevering tenderness with which he followed up such benevolences towards  
181 them from what I have seen in him myself. He had a very retentive memory for their  
182 troubles and their needs. It was his largeness of mind which made him thus open-  
183 hearted. As all his plans were on a large scale, so were his private charities. And when  
184 an object was public, and required the support of many, then he led the way by a  
185 munificent contribution himself. He built one church on his property at Loch Shiel; and  
186 another at Galashiels, which he had intended to be the centre of a group of smaller  
187 ones round about; and he succeeded in actually planting one of these at Selkirk. Nor did  
188 he confine himself to money gifts: it is often more difficult to surrender what we have  
189 made our own personally, than what has never come actually into our tangible  
190 possession. He bought books freely, theological, historical, and of general literature; but  
191 his love of giving was greater than his love of collecting. He could not keep them; he  
192 gave them away again; he may be said to have given away whole libraries. Little means  
193 has any one of determining the limits of his generosity. I have heard of his giving or  
194 offering for great objects sums so surprising, that I am afraid to name them. He alone  
195 knows the full measure of his bounties, who inspired and will reward it. I do not think he  
196 knew it himself. I am led to think he did not keep a strict account of what he gave away.  
197 Certainly I know one case in which he had given to a friend many hundreds, and yet  
198 seemed to have forgotten it, and was obliged to ask him when it was that he had done  
199 so.

200 I should trust that, in what I am saying, I have not given any one the impression that he  
201 was inconsiderate and indiscriminate in giving. To have done this would have been to  
202 contradict my experience of him and my intention. As far as my opportunities of  
203 observing him extended, large as were his bounties and charities, as remarkable was  
204 the conscientious care with which he inquired into the nature and circumstances of the  
205 cases for which his aid was solicited. He felt he was but the steward of Him who had  
206 given him what he gave away.

207 He gave away as the steward of One to whom he must give account. There are at this  
208 time many philanthropic and benevolent men who think of man only, not of God, in their  
209 acts of liberality. I have already said enough to show that he was not one of these. I

210 have implied the presence in him of that sense of religion, or religiousness, which was  
211 in fact his intimate and true life. And indeed liberality such as his, so incessant and  
212 minute, so well ordered, and directed too towards religious objects, almost of itself  
213 evidences its supernatural origin. But I insist on this point, not only for its own sake, but  
214 because of its bearing upon that absence of ambition, which in a man so energetic, so  
215 influential, is a very remarkable point of character. Such apathy, so to call it, might be,  
216 though not an Epicurean selfishness, still a natural temper, the temper of a  
217 magnanimous mind, such as might be found in ancient Greece or Rome, as well as in  
218 modern times. But in truth in him it was much more than a gift of nature; it was a fruit  
219 and token of that religious sensitiveness which had been bestowed on him from above.  
220 If it was really the fact, that his mind and heart were fixed upon divine objects, this at  
221 once accounts for what was so strange, so paradoxical in him in the world's judgment,  
222 his distaste for the honours and the pageants of earth; and fixed, assuredly they were,  
223 upon the invisible and eternal. It was a lesson to all who witnessed it, in contrast with  
224 the appearance of the outward man, so keen and self-possessed amid the heat and  
225 dust of the world, to see his real inner secret self from time to time gleam forth from  
226 beneath the working-day dress in which his secular occupations enveloped him.

227 I cannot do justice by my words to the impression which in this respect he made on me.  
228 He had a tender conscience, but I mean something more than that—I mean the emotion  
229 of a heart always alive and awake at the thought of God. When a religious question  
230 came up suddenly in conversation, he had no longer the manner and the voice of a man  
231 of the world. There was a simplicity, earnestness, gravity in his look and in his words,  
232 which one could not forget. It seemed to me to speak of a loving desire to please God, a  
233 single-minded preference for His service over every service of man, a resolve to  
234 approach Him by the ways which He had appointed. It was no taking for granted that to  
235 follow one's own best opinion was all one with obeying His will; no easy persuasion that  
236 a vague, obscure sincerity in our conclusions about Him and our worship of Him was all  
237 that was required of us, whether those conclusions belonged to this school of doctrine  
238 or that. That is, he had deep within him that gift which St. Paul and St. John speak of,  
239 when they enlarge upon the characteristics of faith. It was the gift of faith, of a living,  
240 loving faith, such as "overcomes the world" by seeking "a better country, that is, a  
241 heavenly." This it was that kept him so "unspotted from the world" in the midst of worldly  
242 engagements and pursuits.

243 No wonder, then, that a man thus minded should gradually have been led on into the  
244 Catholic Church. Judging as we do from the event, we thankfully recognize in him an  
245 elect soul, for whom, in the decrees of Omnipotent Love, a seat in heaven has been  
246 prepared from all eternity,—whose name is engraven on the palms of those Hands  
247 which were graciously pierced for his salvation. Such eager, reverential thoughts of God  
248 as his, prior to his recognizing the Mother of Saints, are surely but the first tokens of a  
249 predestination which terminates in heaven. That straightforward, clear, good sense  
250 which he showed in secular matters did not fail him in religious inquiry. There are those  
251 who are practical and sensible in all things save in religion; but he was consistent; he  
252 instinctively turned from bye-ways and cross-paths, into which the inquiry might be  
253 diverted, and took a broad, intelligible view of its issues. And, after he had been brought

254 within the Fold, I do not think I can exaggerate the solicitude which he all along showed,  
255 the reasonable and prudent solicitude, to conform himself in all things to the  
256 enunciations and the decisions of Holy Church; nor, again, the undoubting conviction he  
257 had of her superhuman authority, the comfort he found in her sacraments, and the  
258 satisfaction and trust with which he betook himself to the intercession of the Blessed  
259 Virgin, to the glorious St. Michael, to St. Margaret, and all Saints.

260 3. I will make one remark more. I have spoken, first, of his high natural gifts, of his  
261 various advantages for starting in life, and of his secular prospects. Next, in contrast  
262 with this first view of him, I have insisted on his singular freedom from ambition, and  
263 have traced it to that religiousness of mind which was so specially his; to his intimate  
264 sense of the vanity of all secular distinction, and his supreme devotion to Him who alone  
265 is "Faithful and True." And now when I am brought to the third special feature of his life,  
266 as it presents itself to me, I find myself close to a sacred subject, which I cannot even  
267 touch upon without great reverence and something of fear.

268 We might have been led to think that a man already severed in spirit, resolve, and acts  
269 from the world in which he lived, would have been granted by his Lord and Saviour to  
270 go forward in his course freely, without any unusual trials, such as are necessary in the  
271 case of common men for their perseverance in the narrow way of life. But those for  
272 whom God has a love more than ordinary He watches over with no ordinary jealousy;  
273 and, if the world smiles on them, He sends them crosses and penances so much the  
274 more. He is not content that they should be by any common title His; and, because they  
275 are so dear and near to Him, He provides for them afflictions to bring them nearer still. I  
276 hope it is not presumptuous thus to speak of the inscrutable providences of God. I know  
277 that He has His own wise and special dealings with every one of us, and that what He  
278 determines for one is no rule for another. I am contemplating, and, if so be, interpreting,  
279 His loving ways and purposes only towards the very man before us.

280 Now, so it was, there was just one aspect of this lower world which he might innocently  
281 love; just one, in which life had charms for a heart as affectionate as it was religious. I  
282 mean that assemblage of objects which are included under the dear name of Home. If  
283 there was rest and solace to be found on earth, he found it there. Is it not remarkable,  
284 then, that in this, his sole earthly sanctuary, He who loved him with so infinite a love met  
285 him, visited him, not once or twice, but again and again, with a stern rod of  
286 chastisement? Stroke after stroke, blow after blow, stab after stab, was dealt against his  
287 very heart. "Great and wonderful are Thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are  
288 Thy ways, O King of ages. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord and magnify Thy name? for  
289 Thou only art holy." I may speak with more vivid knowledge of him here than in other  
290 respects, for I was one of the confidants of his extreme suffering under the succession  
291 of terrible inflictions, which left wounds never to be healed. They ended only with his life;  
292 for the complaint, which eventually mastered him, was brought into activity by his final  
293 bereavement. Nay, I must not consider even that great bereavement his final one; his  
294 call to go hence was itself the final agony of that tender, loving heart. He who had in  
295 time past been left desolate by others, was now to leave others desolate. He was to be  
296 torn away, as if before his time, from those who, to speak humanly, needed him so

297 exceedingly. He was called upon to surrender them in faith to Him who had given them.  
298 It was about two hours before his death, with this great sacrifice, as we may suppose,  
299 this solemn summons of his Supreme Lord confronting him, that he said, with a loud  
300 voice, "Thy will be done"; adding his favourite prayer, so well known to us all, "Fiat,  
301 laudetur, atque in æternum superexaltetur, sanctissima, altissima, amabilissima  
302 voluntas Dei in omnibus." They were almost his last words.

303 We too must say, after him, "Thy will be done." Let us be sure that those whom God  
304 loves He takes away, each of them, one by one, at the very time best for their eternal  
305 interests. What can we, in sober earnest, wish, save that very Will of God? Is He not  
306 wiser and more loving than we are? Could we wish him back whom we have lost? Who  
307 is there of us who loves him most but would feel the cruelty of recalling to this  
308 tumultuous life, with its spiritual perils and its dark future, a soul who is already rejoicing  
309 in the end and issue of his trial, in salvation secured, and heaven begun in him? Rather,  
310 who would not wish to have lived his life, and to have died his death? How well for him  
311 that he lived, not for man only, but for God! What are all the interests, pleasure,  
312 successes, glories of this world, when we come to die? What can irreligious virtue, what  
313 can innocent family affection do for us, when we are going before the Judge, whom to  
314 know and love is life eternal, whom not to know and not to love is eternal death?

315 O happy soul, who hast loved neither the world nor the things of the world apart from  
316 God! Happy soul, who, amid the world's toil, hast chosen the one thing needful, that  
317 better part which can never be taken away! Happy soul, who, being the counsellor and  
318 guide, the stay, the light and joy, the benefactor of so many, yet hast ever depended  
319 simply, as a little child, on the grace of thy God and the merits and strength of thy  
320 Redeemer! Happy soul, who hast so thrown thyself into the views and interests of other  
321 men, so prosecuted their ends, and associated thyself in their labours, as never to  
322 forget still that there is one Holy Catholic Roman Church, one Fold of Christ and Ark of  
323 salvation, and never to neglect her ordinances or to trifle with her word! Happy soul,  
324 who, as we believe, by thy continual almsdeeds, offerings, and bounties, hast blotted  
325 out such remains of daily recurring sin and infirmity as the sacraments have not  
326 reached! Happy soul, who, by thy assiduous preparation for death, and the long  
327 penance of sickness, weariness, and delay, has, as we trust, discharged the debt that  
328 lay against thee, and art already passing from penal purification to the light and liberty of  
329 heaven above!

330 And so farewell, but not farewell for ever, dear James Robert Hope Scott! He is gone  
331 from us, but only gone before us. It is for us to look forward, not backward. We shall  
332 meet him again, if we are worthy, in "Mount Sion, and the heavenly Jerusalem," in "the  
333 company of many thousands of angels, the Church of the first-born who are written in  
334 the heavens," with "God, the Judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and  
335 Jesus, the Mediator of the New Testament, and the blood which speaketh better things  
336 than that of Abel."

337 (Preached May 5, 1873, in the Church of the Jesuit Fathers, London, at the Funeral of  
338 James R. Hope Scott, Esq., Q.C.)



339    Note

340    The following sermon, I know well, is quite unworthy of its subject; moreover, when  
341    read, it will, I much fear, come short of the expectations both of those who heard it  
342    delivered and of those who have heard of it. Words spoken by mourner to mourners,  
343    when hearts are open and sensibilities awake, have a life in them which departs with  
344    their utterance; and, on being written down and read, are but memorials of their own  
345    tameness and impotence.

346    Those, however, who so lovingly asked me to speak, now ask me to put on paper what I  
347    said. They have the best right to decide in this matter; and, in complying with their  
348    wishes, at least I have the mournful pleasure of recording the long friendship which it  
349    was my joy and pride to have with one who was beloved and is lamented by so many.—