

1 "Christian Zeal"
2 *Parochial and Plain Sermons* vol. II sermon 31
3 St. John Henry Newman
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5 "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up." John ii. 17.

6 [Note 1] THE Apostles commemorated on this Festival direct our attention to the subject
7 of Zeal, which I propose to consider, under the guidance of our Saviour's example, as
8 suggested by the text. St. Simon is called Zelotes, which means the Zealous; a title
9 given him (as is supposed) from his belonging before his conversion to the Jewish sect
10 of Zealots, which professed extraordinary Zeal for the law. Anyhow, the appellation
11 marks him as distinguished for this particular Christian grace. St. Jude's Epistle, which
12 forms part of the service of the day, is almost wholly upon the duty of manifesting Zeal
13 for Gospel Truth, and opens with a direct exhortation to "contend earnestly for the Faith
14 once delivered to the Saints." The Collect also indirectly reminds us of the same duty,
15 for it prays that all the members of the Church may be united in spirit by the Apostles'
16 doctrine; and what are these but the words of Zeal, viz. of a love for the Truth and the
17 Church so strong as not to allow that man should divide what God hath joined together?

18 However, it will be a more simple account of Zeal, to call it the earnest desire for God's
19 honour, leading to strenuous and bold deeds in His behalf; and that in spite of all
20 obstacles. Thus when Phinehas stood up and executed judgment in Israel, he was
21 zealous for God. David also, in his punishment of the idolaters round about, and in
22 preparing for the building of the Temple, showed his Zeal, which was one of his especial
23 virtues. Elijah, when he assembled the Israelites upon Mount Carmel, and slew the
24 prophets of Baal, was "very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts." Hezekiah besides, and
25 Josiah, were led to their reformations in religious worship by an admirable Zeal; and
26 Nehemiah too, after the captivity, who with the very fire and sweetness of Gospel Love
27 set the repentant nation in order for the coming of Christ.

28 1. Now, Zeal is one of the elementary religious qualifications; that is, one of those which
29 are essential in the very notion of a religious man. A man cannot be said to be in
30 earnest in religion, till he magnifies his God and Saviour; till he so far consecrates and
31 exalts the thought of Him in his heart, as an object of praise, and adoration, and
32 rejoicing, as to be pained and grieved at dishonour shown to Him, and eager to avenge
33 Him. In a word, a religious temper is one of loyalty towards God; and we all know what
34 is meant by being loyal from the experience of civil matters. To be loyal is not merely to
35 obey; but to obey with promptitude, energy, dutifulness, disinterested devotion,
36 disregard of consequences. And such is Zeal, except that it is ever attended with that
37 reverential feeling which is due from a creature and a sinner towards his Maker, and
38 towards Him alone. It is the main principle in *all* religious service to love God above all
39 things; now, Zeal is to love Him above all men, above our dearest and most intimate
40 friends. This was the especial praise of the Levites, which gained for them the reward of
41 the Priesthood, viz. their executing judgment on the people in the sin of the golden calf.
42 "Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy Holy One, whom Thou didst prove at

43 Massah, and with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah. Who said unto his
44 father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren,
45 nor knew his own children; for they have observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant.
46 They shall teach Jacob Thy Judgments, and Israel Thy Law; they shall put incense
47 before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine Altar. Bless, Lord, his substance,
48 and accept the work of his hands; smite through the loins of them that rise against him,
49 and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." Phinehas was rewarded in like
50 manner, after executing judgment. "Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace. And
51 he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting Priesthood,
52 because he was zealous for his God." [Deut. xxxiii. 8-11. Numb. xxv. 12, 13.] Zeal is the
53 very consecration of God's Ministers to their office. Accordingly our Blessed Saviour, the
54 One Great High Priest, the Antitype of all Priests who went before Him and the Lord and
55 Strength of all who come after, began His manifestation of Himself by two acts of Zeal.
56 When twelve years old he deigned to put before us in representation the sacredness of
57 this duty, when He remained in the Temple "while His father and mother sought Him
58 sorrowing," and on their finding Him, returned answer, "Wist ye not that I must be about
59 My Father's business?" And again, at the opening of His public Ministry, He went into
60 the Temple, and "made a scourge of small cords, and drove out the sheep and oxen,
61 and overthrew the changers' tables" [Luke ii. 48, 49. John ii. 15.] that profaned it: thus
62 fulfilling the prophecy contained in the text, "The Zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me
63 up."

64 Being thus consumed by Zeal Himself, no wonder He should choose His followers from
65 among the Zealous. James and John, whom He called Boanerges, the sons of Thunder,
66 had warm hearts, when He called them, however wanting in knowledge; and felt as if an
67 insult offered to their Lord should have called down fire from Heaven. Peter cut off the
68 right ear of one of those who seized Him. Simon was of the sect of the Zealots. St.
69 Paul's case is still more remarkable. He, in his attachment to the elder Covenant of God,
70 had even fought against Christ; but he did so from earnestness, from being "zealous
71 towards God," though blindly. He "verily thought with himself, that he *ought to do* many
72 things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," and acted "in ignorance;" [Acts xxvi.
73 9. 1 Tim. i. 13.] so he was spared. With a sort of heavenly compassion his persecuted
74 Lord told him, that it was "hard for him to kick against the pricks;" and turned his
75 ignorant zeal to better account. On the same ground rests the commendation which that
76 Apostle bestows in turn upon his countrymen, while he sorrowfully condemns their
77 unpardonable obstinacy. "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel," he says, "is,
78 that they might be saved; for I bear them record, that they have a Zeal of God, but not
79 according to knowledge." [Rom. x. 1.] They were guilty, because they might have known
80 what they did not know; but so far as they were zealous, they claimed from him a
81 respectful notice, and were far better surely than those haughty scorers, the Romans,
82 who felt no concern whether there was a God or no, worshipped one idol as readily as
83 another, and spared the Apostles from contemptuous pity. Of these was Gallio, who
84 "cared for none of those things" which either Jews or Christians did. Such men are
85 abominated by our Holy Lord, who "honours them that honour Him," while "they that
86 despised Him are lightly esteemed." [1 Sam. ii. 30.] He signifies this judgment on the
87 lukewarm and disloyal, in His message to the Church of Laodicea: "I know thy works,

88 that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou
89 art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will cast thee forth out of My mouth." [Rev. iii.
90 15, 16.] Thus positive misbelief is a less odious state of mind than the temper of those
91 who are indifferent to religion, who say that one opinion is as good as the other, and
92 contemn or ridicule those who are in earnest. Surely, if this world be a scene of contest
93 between good and evil, as Scripture declares, "he that is not with Christ, is against
94 Him;" and Angels who witness what is going on, and can estimate its seriousness, may
95 well cry out, "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they
96 came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." [Judges v.
97 23.]

98 I do not deny that this view of the subject is different from that which certain principles
99 and theories now current in the world would lead us to adopt; but this surely is no
100 reason that it should not be true, unless indeed, amid the alternate successes of good
101 and evil, there be any infallible token given us to ascertain the superior illumination of
102 the present century over all those which have preceded it. In fact we have no standard
103 of Truth at all but the Bible, and to that I would appeal. "To the Law and to the
104 Testimony;" if the opinions of the day are conformable to it, let them remain in honour,
105 but if not, however popular they may be at the moment, they will surely come to nought.
106 It is the present fashion to call Zeal by the name of intolerance, and to account
107 intolerance the chief of sins; that is, any earnestness for one opinion above another
108 concerning God's nature, will, and dealings with man,—or, in other words, any
109 earnestness for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, any earnestness for Revelation
110 as such. Surely, in this sense, the Apostles were the most intolerant of men: what is it
111 but intolerance in this sense of the word to declare, that "he that hath the Son hath life,
112 and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life;" that "they that obey not the Gospel of
113 our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence
114 of the Lord;" that "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor covetous, nor
115 revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God;" that we must not even "eat"
116 with a brother who is one of such; that we may not "receive into our houses," or "bid
117 God speed" to any one who comes to us without the "doctrine of Christ"? Has not St.
118 Paul, whom many seem desirous of making an Apostle of less rigid principles than his
119 brethren, said, even about an individual, "The Lord reward him according to his works!"
120 [1 John v. 12. 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; v. 11. 2 John 10, 11. 2 Tim. iv. 14.] and
121 though we of this day have not the spiritual discernment which alone can warrant such a
122 form of words about this man or that, have we not here given us a clear evidence, that
123 there are cases in which God's glory is irreconcilable with the salvation of sinners, and
124 when, in consequence, it is not unchristian to acquiesce in His judgments upon them?
125 These words were deliberately written by St. Paul, in the closing days of his life, when
126 his mind was most calm and heavenly, his hope most assured, his reward immediately
127 in view: circumstances which render it impossible for any one who even reverences St.
128 Paul as a man of especial holiness, to explain them away, not to insist on the argument
129 from his inspiration.

130 Such is Zeal, a Christian grace to the last, while it is also an elementary virtue; equally
131 belonging to the young convert and the matured believer; displayed by Moses at the

132 first, when he slew the Egyptian, and by St. Paul in his last hours, while he was
133 reaching forth his hand for his heavenly crown.

134 2. On the other hand, Zeal is an imperfect virtue; that is, in our fallen state, it will ever be
135 attended by unchristian feelings, if it is cherished by itself. This is the case with many
136 other tempers of mind which yet are absolutely required of us. Who denies that it is a
137 duty in the returning sinner to feel abhorrence of his past offences, and a dread of God's
138 anger? yet such feelings, unless faith accompany them, lead to an unfruitful remorse, to
139 despair, to hardened pride; or again, to perverse superstitions. Not that humiliation is
140 wrong in any sense or degree, but it induces collateral weaknesses or sins, from unduly
141 exciting one side of our imperfect nature. Mercy becomes weakness, when unattended
142 by a sense of justice and firmness: the wisdom of the serpent becomes craft, unless it
143 be received into the harmlessness of the dove. And Zeal, in like manner, though an
144 essential part of a Christian temper, is but a part; and is in itself imperfect, even for the
145 very reason that it is elementary. Hence it appropriately fills so prominent a place in the
146 Jewish Dispensation, which was intended to lay the foundations, as of Christian Faith,
147 so of the Christian character. Whether we read the injunctions delivered by Moses
148 against idolatry and idolaters, or trace the actual history of God's chosen servants, such
149 as Phinehas, Samuel, Elijah, and especially David, we find that the Law was peculiarly
150 a Covenant of Zeal. On the other hand, the Gospel brings out into its full proportions,
151 that perfect temper of mind, which the Law enjoined indeed, but was deficient both in
152 enforcing and creating,—Love; that is, Love or Charity, as described by St. Paul in his
153 first Epistle to the Corinthians, which is not merely brotherly-love (a virtue ever included
154 in the notion of Zeal itself), but a general temper of gentleness, meekness, sympathy,
155 tender consideration, open-heartedness towards all men, brother or stranger, who come
156 in our way. In this sense, Zeal is of the Law, and Love of the Gospel: and Love perfects
157 Zeal, purifying and regulating it. Thus the Saints of God go on unto perfection. Moses
158 ended his life as "the meekest of men," though he began it with undisciplined Zeal,
159 which led him to a deed of violence. St. John, who would call down fire from heaven,
160 became the Apostle of Love; St. Paul, who persecuted Christ's servants, "was made all
161 things to all men;" yet neither of them lost their Zeal, though they trained it to be
162 spiritual.

163 Love, however, is not the only grace which is necessary to the perfection of Zeal; Faith
164 is another. This, at first sight, may sound strange; for what is Zeal, it may be asked, but
165 a result of Faith? who is zealous for that in which he does not trust and delight? Yet, it
166 must be kept in mind, that we have need of Faith not only that we may direct our actions
167 to a right object, but that we may perform them rightly; it guides us in choosing the
168 means, as well as the end. Now, Zeal is very apt to be self-willed; it takes upon itself to
169 serve God in its own way. This is evident from the very nature of it; for, in its ruder form,
170 it manifests itself in sudden and strong emotions at the sight of presumption or
171 irreverence, proceeding to action almost as a matter of feeling, without having time to
172 inquire which way is best. Thus, when our Lord was seized by the officers, Peter
173 forthwith "drew his sword, and struck a servant of the High Priest's, and smote off his
174 ear." [Matt. xxvi. 51.] Patience, then, and resignation to God's will, are tempers of mind
175 of which Zeal especially stands in need,—that dutiful Faith, which will take nothing for

176 granted on the mere suggestion of nature, looks up to God with the eyes of a servant
177 towards his master, and, as far as may be, ascertains His will before it acts. If this
178 heavenly corrective be wanting, Zeal, as I have said, is self-willed in its temper: while,
179 by using sanctions, and expecting results of this world, it becomes (what is commonly
180 called) political. Here, again, we see the contrast between the Jewish and the Christian
181 Dispensations. The Jewish Law being a visible system, sanctioned by temporal rewards
182 and punishments, necessarily involved the duty of a political temper on the part of those
183 who were under it. They were bound to aim at securing the triumph of Religion here;
184 realizing its promises, enjoying its successes, enforcing its precepts, with the sword.
185 This, I say, was their duty; and, as fulfilling it, among other reasons, David is called "a
186 man after God's own heart." But the Gospel teaches us to "walk by Faith, not by sight;"
187 and Faith teaches us so to be zealous, as still to forbear anticipating the next world, but
188 to wait till the Judge shall come. St. Peter drew his sword, in order (as he thought) to
189 realize at once that good work on which his heart was set, our Lord's deliverance; and,
190 on this very account, he met with that Saviour's rebuke, who presently declared to
191 Pilate, that His Kingdom was not of this world, else would His servants fight. Christian
192 Zeal, therefore, ever bears in mind that the Mystery of Iniquity is to continue on till the
193 Avenger solves it once for all; it renounces all hope of hastening His coming, all desire
194 of intruding upon His work. It has no vain imaginings about the world's real conversion
195 to Him, however men may acknowledge Him outwardly, knowing that "the world lies in
196 wickedness." It has recourse to no officious modes of propagating or strengthening His
197 truth. It does not flatter and ally itself with Samaria, in order to repress Syria. It does not
198 exalt an Idumæan as its king, though he be willing to beautify the Temple, or has
199 influence with the Emperors of the World. It plans no intrigues; it recognises no parties;
200 it relies on no arm of flesh. It looks for no essential improvements or permanent
201 reformations, in the dispensation of those precious gifts, which are ever pure in their
202 origin, ever corrupted in man's use of them. It acts according to God's will, this time or
203 that, as it comes, boldly and promptly; yet letting each act stand by itself, as a sufficient
204 service to him, not connecting them in one, or working them into system, further than He
205 commands. In a word, Christian Zeal is not political.

206 Two reflections arise from considering this last characteristic of the virtue in question;
207 and with a brief notice of these I will conclude.

208 1. First, it is too evident how grievously the Roman Schools have erred in this part of
209 Christian duty. Let their doctrines be as pure as they would represent, still they have
210 indisputably made their Church an instrument of worldly politics by a "zeal not according
211 to knowledge," and failed in this essential duty of a Christian Witness, viz. in preserving
212 the spiritual character of Christ's kingdom [Note 2]. In saying this, I would not willingly
213 deny the great debt we owe to that Church for her faithful custody of the Faith itself
214 through so many centuries; nor seem unmindful of the circumstances of other times, the
215 gradual growth of religious error, and the external dangers which appeared to place the
216 cause of Christianity itself in jeopardy, and to call for extraordinary measures of
217 defence. Much less would I speak disrespectfully of the great men, who were the agents
218 under Providence in various stages of that mysterious Dispensation, and whom,

219 however our Zeal may burn, we must in very Charity believe to be, what their works and
220 sufferings betoken, single-minded, self-denying servants of their God and Saviour.

221 2. The Roman Church then has become political; but let us of the present day beware of
222 running into the other extreme, and of supposing that, because Christ's Kingdom is not
223 based upon this world, that it is not connected with it. Surely it was established here for
224 the sake of this world, and must ever act in it, as if a part of it, though its origin is from
225 above. Like the Angels which appeared to the Patriarchs, it is a heavenly Messenger in
226 human form. In its Polity, its Public Assemblies, its Rules and Ordinances, its Censures,
227 and its Possessions, it is a visible body, and, to appearance, an institution of this world.
228 It is no faulty zeal to labour to preserve it in the form in which Christ gave it.

229 And further, it should ever be recollected, that, though the Church is not of this world,
230 yet we have assurance from God's infallible word, that there *are* in the world temporal
231 and present Dispensers of His Eternal Justice. We are expressly told, that "the powers
232 that be are ordained of God;" that they "bear not the sword in vain, but are ministers of
233 God, revengers to execute wrath upon the evil-doer," and bestow "praise" on those who
234 do well. Hence, as being gifted with a portion of God's power, they hold an office of a
235 priestly nature [Note 3], and are armed with the fearful sanction, that "they that resist
236 them, shall receive to themselves Judgment." On this ground, religious Rulers have
237 always felt it to be their duty to act as in God's place for the promulgation of the Truth;
238 and the Church, on the other hand, has seen her obligation not only to submit to them,
239 in things temporal, but zealously to co-operate with them in her own line, towards those
240 sacred objects which they have both in common. And thus has been happily fulfilled for
241 fifteen hundred years, Isaiah's prophecy, that "kings should be nursing fathers to the
242 Church, and queens her nursing mothers." Yet, clearly, there is nothing here, either of a
243 self-willed zeal, or political craft, in the conduct of the Church; inasmuch as she has but
244 submitted herself thereby to the guidance of the revealed Word.

245 May Almighty God, for His dear Son's sake, lead us safely through these dangerous
246 times; so that, while we never lay aside our Zeal for His honour, we may sanctify it by
247 Faith and Charity, neither staining our garments by wrath or violence, nor soiling them
248 with the dust of a turbulent world!

249 Notes

250 1. The Feast of St. Simon and St. Jude the Apostles.

251 2. Among the principles referred to are the following, which occur among the Dictatus
252 Hildebrandi: "Quod liceat illi [Papæ] imperatores deponere;" "Quod à fidelitate iniquorum
253 subditos potest absolvere." *Vide* Laud against Fisher, p. 181.

254 3. [*leitourgoi theou*]. Rom. xiii. 1-6.