

1 "Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth"
2 *Oxford University Sermons* sermon 5
3 St. John Henry Newman
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5

6 "Out of weakness were made strong." Heb. xi. 34.

7 THE history of the Old Testament Saints, conveyed in these few words, is paralleled or
8 surpassed in its peculiar character by the lives of those who first proclaimed the
9 Christian Dispensation. "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves," was the
10 warning given them of their position in the world, on becoming Evangelists in its behalf.
11 Their miraculous powers gained their cause a hearing, but did not protect themselves.
12 St. Paul records the fulfilment of our Lord's prophecy, as it contrasts the Apostles and
13 mankind at large, when he declares, "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we
14 suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the
15 offscouring of all things unto this day." [1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.] Nay, these words apply not
16 only to the unbelieving world; the Apostle had reason to be suspicious of his Christian
17 brethren, and even to expostulate on that score, with his own converts, his "beloved
18 sons." He counted it a great gain, such as afterwards might be dwelt upon with
19 satisfaction, that the Galatians did not despise nor reject him on account of the infirmity
20 which was in his flesh; and, in the passage already referred to, he mourns over the
21 fickleness and coldness of the Corinthians, who thought themselves wise, strong, and
22 honourable, and esteemed the Apostles as fools, weak, and despised.

23 2. Whence, then, was it, that in spite of all these impediments to their success, still they
24 succeeded? How did they gain that lodgment in the world, which they hold down to this
25 day, enabling them to perpetuate principles distasteful to the majority even of those who
26 profess to receive them? What is that hidden attribute of the Truth, and how does it act,
27 prevailing, as it does, single-handed, over the many and multiform errors, by which it is
28 simultaneously and incessantly attacked?

29 3. Here, of course, we might at once refer its success to the will and blessing of Him
30 who revealed it, and who distinctly promised that He would be present with it, and with
31 its preachers, "alway, even unto the end." And, of course, by realizing this in our minds,
32 we learn dependence upon His grace in our own endeavours to recommend the Truth,
33 and encouragement to persevere. But it is also useful to inquire into the human means
34 by which His Providence acts in the world, in order to take a practical view of events as
35 they successively come before us in the course of human affairs, and to understand our
36 duty in particulars; and, with reference to these means, it is now proposed to consider
37 the question.

38 4. Here, first of all,—
39 It is plain that we cannot rightly ascribe the influence of moral truth in the world to the
40 gift of miracles, which was entrusted to the persons who promulgated it in that last and
41 perfect form, in which we have been vouchsafed it; that gift having been withdrawn with
42 the first preaching of it. Nor, again, can it be satisfactorily maintained that the visible

43 Church, which the miracles formed, has taken their place in the course of Divine
44 Providence, as the basis, strictly speaking, on which the Truth rests; though doubtless it
45 is the appointed instrument, in even a fuller sense than the miracles before it, by which
46 that Truth is conveyed to the world: for though it is certain that a community of men,
47 who, as individuals, were but imperfectly virtuous, would, in the course of years, gain
48 the ascendancy over vice and error, however well prepared for the contest, yet no one
49 pretends that the visible Church is thus blessed; the Epistle to the Corinthians
50 sufficiently showing, that, in all ages, true Christians, though contained in it, and forming
51 its life and strength, are scattered and hidden in the multitude, and, but partially
52 recognizing each other, have no means of combining and cooperating. On the other
53 hand, if we view the Church simply as a political institution, and refer the triumph of the
54 Truth, which is committed to it, merely to its power thence resulting,— then, the
55 question recurs, first, how is it that this mixed and heterogeneous body, called the
56 Church, has, through so many centuries, on the whole, been true to the principles on
57 which it was first established; and then, how, thus preserving its principles, it has, over
58 and above this, gained on its side, in so many countries and times, the countenance
59 and support of the civil authorities. Here, it would be sufficient to consider the three first
60 centuries of its existence, and to inquire by what means, in spite of its unearthly
61 principles, it grew and strengthened in the world; and how, again, corrupt body as it was
62 then as now, still it preserved, all the while, with such remarkable fidelity those same
63 unearthly principles which had been once delivered to it.

64 5. Others there are who attempt to account for this prevalence of the Truth, in spite of its
65 enemies, by imagining, that, though at first opposed, yet it is, after a time, on mature
66 reflection, accepted by the world in general from a real understanding and conviction of
67 its excellence; that it is in its nature level to the comprehension of men, considered
68 merely as rational beings, without reference to their moral character, whether good or
69 bad; and that, in matter of fact, it is recognized and upheld by the mass of men, taken
70 as individuals, not merely approved by them, taken as a mass, in which some have
71 influence over others,—not merely submitted to with a blind, but true instinct, such as is
72 said to oppress inferior animals in the presence of man, but literally advocated from an
73 enlightened capacity for criticizing it; and, in consequence of this notion, some men go
74 so far as to advise that the cause of Truth should be frankly committed to the multitude
75 as the legitimate judges and guardians of it.

76 6. Something may occur to expose the fallacy of this notion, in the course of the
77 following remarks on what I conceive to be the real method by which the influence of
78 spiritual principles is maintained in this carnal world. But here, it is expedient at once to
79 appeal to Scripture against a theory, which, whether plausible or not, is scarcely
80 Christian. The following texts will suggest a multitude of others, as well as of Scripture
81 representations, hostile to the idea that moral truth is easily or generally discerned. "The
82 natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." [1 Cor. ii. 14.] "The light
83 shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." [John i. 5.] "Whosoever
84 hath, to him shall be given." [Matt. xiii. 12.] "Wisdom is justified by her children." [Matt.
85 xi. 19.]

86 7. On the other hand, that its real influence consists directly in some inherent moral
87 power, in virtue in some shape or other, not in any evidence or criterion level to the
88 undisciplined reason of the multitude, high or low, learned or ignorant, is implied in
89 texts, such as those referred to just now:—"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of
90 wolves; *be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*"

91 8. This being the state of the question, it is proposed to consider, whether the influence
92 of Truth in the world at large does not arise from *the personal influence*, direct and
93 indirect, of those who are commissioned to teach it.

94 9. In order to explain the sense in which this is asserted, it will be best to begin by
95 tracing the mode in which the moral character of such an organ of the Truth is formed;
96 and, in a large subject, I must beg permission to be somewhat longer (should it be
97 necessary) than the custom of this place allows.

98 10. We will suppose this Teacher of the Truth so circumstanced as One alone among
99 the sons of Adam has ever been, such a one as has never transgressed his sense of
100 duty, but from his earliest childhood upwards has been only engaged in increasing and
101 perfecting the light originally given him. In him the knowledge and power of acting rightly
102 have kept pace with the enlargement of his duties, and his inward convictions of Truth
103 with the successive temptations opening upon him from without to wander from it. Other
104 men are surprised and overset by the sudden weight of circumstances against which
105 they have not provided; or, losing step, they strain and discompose their faculties in the
106 effort, even though successful, to recover themselves; or they attempt to discriminate
107 for themselves between little and great breaches of the law of conscience, and allow
108 themselves in what they consider the former; thus falling down precipices (as I may say)
109 when they meant to descend an easy step, recoverable the next moment. Hence it is
110 that, in a short time, those who started on one line make such different progress, and
111 diverge in so many directions. Their conscience still speaks, but having been trifled with,
112 it does not tell truly; it equivocates, or is irregular. Whereas in him who is faithful to his
113 own divinely implanted nature, the faint light of Truth dawns continually brighter; the
114 shadows which at first troubled it, the unreal shapes created by its own twilight-state,
115 vanish; what was as uncertain as mere feeling, and could not be distinguished from a
116 fancy except by the commanding urgency of its voice, becomes fixed and definite, and
117 strengthening into principle, it at the same time developes into habit. As fresh and fresh
118 duties arise, or fresh and fresh faculties are brought into action, they are at once
119 absorbed into the existing inward system, and take their appropriate place in it.
120 Doubtless beings, disobedient as most of us, from our youth up, cannot comprehend
121 even the early attainments of one who thus grows in wisdom as truly as he grows in
122 stature; who has no antagonist principles unsettling each other—no errors to unlearn;
123 though something is suggested to our imagination by that passage in the history of our
124 Blessed Lord, when at twelve years old He went up with His parents to the Temple. And
125 still less able are we to understand the state of such a mind, when it had passed
126 through the temptations peculiar to youth and manhood, and had driven Satan from him
127 in very despair.

128 11. Concerning the body of opinions formed under these circumstances,—not
129 accidental and superficial, the mere reflection of what goes on in the world, but the
130 natural and almost spontaneous result of the formed and finished character within,—two
131 remarks may be offered. (1.) That every part of what may be called this moral creed will
132 be equally true and necessary; and (if, as we may reasonably suppose, the science of
133 morals extends without limit into the details of thought and conduct) numberless
134 particulars, which we are accustomed to account indifferent, may be in fact indifferent in
135 no truer sense, than in physics there is really any such agent as chance; our ignorance
136 being the sole cause of the seeming variableness on the one hand in the action of
137 nature, on the other in the standard of faith and morals. This is practically important to
138 remember, even while it is granted that no exemplar of holiness has been exhibited to
139 us, at once faultless yet minute; and again, that in all existing patterns, besides actual
140 defects, there are also the idiosyncrasies and varieties of disposition, taste, and talents,
141 nay of bodily organization, to modify the dictates of that inward light which is itself divine
142 and unerring. It is important, I say, as restraining us from judging hastily of opinions and
143 practices of good men into which we ourselves cannot enter; but which, for what we
144 know, may be as necessary parts of the Truth, though too subtle for our dull
145 perceptions, as those great and distinguishing features of it, which we, in common with
146 the majority of sincere men, admit. And particularly will it preserve us from rash
147 censures of the Primitive Church, which, in spite of the corruptions which disfigured it
148 from the first, still in its collective holiness may be considered to make as near an
149 approach to the pattern of Christ as fallen man ever will attain; being, in fact, a
150 Revelation in some sort of that Blessed Spirit in a bodily shape, who was promised to us
151 as a second Teacher of Truth after Christ's departure, and became such upon a
152 subject-matter far more diversified than that on which our Lord had revealed Himself
153 before Him. For instance, for what we know, the Episcopal principle, or the practice of
154 Infant Baptism, which is traceable to Apostolic times, though not clearly proved by the
155 Scripture records, may be as necessary in the scheme of Christian truth as the
156 doctrines of the Divine Unity, and of man's responsibility, which in the artificial system
157 are naturally placed as the basis of Religion, as being first in order of succession and
158 time. And this, be it observed, will account for the omission in Scripture of express
159 sanctions of these and similar principles and observances; provided, that is, the object
160 of the Written Word be, not to unfold a system for our intellectual contemplation, but to
161 secure the formation of a certain character.

162 12. (2.) And in the second place, it is plain, that the gifted individual whom we have
163 imagined, will of all men be least able (as such) to defend his own views, inasmuch as
164 he takes no external survey of himself. Things which are the most familiar to us, and
165 easy in practice, require the most study, and give the most trouble in explaining; as, for
166 instance, the number, combination, and succession of muscular movements by which
167 we balance ourselves in walking, or utter our separate words; and this quite
168 independently of the existence or non-existence of language suitable for describing
169 them. The longer any one has persevered in the practice of virtue, the less likely is he to
170 recollect how he began it; what were his difficulties on starting, and how surmounted; by
171 what process one truth led to another; the less likely to elicit justly the real reasons
172 latent in his mind for particular observances or opinions. He holds the whole

173 assemblage of moral notions almost as so many collateral and self-evident facts. Hence
174 it is that some of the most deeply-exercised and variously gifted Christians, when they
175 proceed to write or speak upon Religion, either fail altogether, or cannot be understood
176 except on an attentive study; and after all, perhaps, are illogical and unsystematic,
177 assuming what their readers require proved, and seeming to mistake connexion or
178 antecedence for causation, probability for evidence. And over such as these it is, that
179 the minute intellect of inferior men has its moment of triumph, men who excel in a mere
180 short-sighted perspicacity; not understanding that, even in the case of intellectual
181 excellence, it is considered the highest of gifts to possess an intuitive knowledge of the
182 beautiful in art, or the effective in action, without reasoning or investigating; that this, in
183 fact, is *genius*; and that they who have a corresponding insight into moral truth (as far
184 as they have it) have reached that especial perfection in the spiritual part of their nature,
185 which is so rarely found and so greatly prized among the intellectual endowments of the
186 soul.

187 13. Nay, may we not further venture to assert, not only that moral Truth will be least
188 skilfully defended by those, as such, who are the genuine depositories of it, but that it
189 cannot be adequately explained and defended in words at all? Its views and human
190 language are incommensurable. For, after all, what *is* language but an artificial system
191 adapted for particular purposes, which have been determined by our wants? And here,
192 even at first sight, can we imagine that it has been framed with a view to ideas so
193 refined, so foreign to the whole course of the world, as those which (as Scripture
194 expresses it) "no man can learn," but the select remnant who are "redeemed from the
195 earth," and in whose mouth "is found no guile"? [Rev. xiv. 3, 5.] Nor is it this heavenly
196 language alone which is without its intellectual counterpart. Moral character in itself,
197 whether good or bad, as exhibited in thought and conduct, surely cannot be duly
198 represented in words. We may, indeed, by an effort, reduce it in a certain degree to this
199 arbitrary medium; but in its combined dimensions it is as impossible to write and read a
200 man (so to express it), as to give literal depth to a painted tablet.

201 14. With these remarks on the nature of moral Truth, as viewed externally, let us
202 conduct our secluded Teacher, who is the embodied specimen of it, after his thirty
203 years' preparation for his office, into the noise and tumult of the world; and in order to
204 set him fairly on the course, let us suppose him recommended by some external gift,
205 whether ordinary or extraordinary, the power of miracles, the countenance of rulers, or a
206 reputation for learning, such as may secure a hearing for him from the multitude of men.
207 This must be supposed, in consequence of the very constitution of the present world.
208 Amid its incessant din, nothing will attract attention but what cries aloud and spares not.
209 It is an old proverb, that men profess a sincere respect for Virtue, and then let her
210 starve; for they have at the bottom of their hearts an evil feeling, in spite of better
211 thoughts, that to be bound to certain laws and principles is a superstition and a slavery,
212 and that freedom consists in the actual exercise of the will in evil as well as in good; and
213 they witness (what cannot be denied) that a man who throws off the yoke of strict
214 conscientiousness, greatly increases his producible talent for the time, and his
215 immediate power of attaining his ends. At best they will but admire the religious man,
216 and treat him with deference; but in his absence they are compelled (as they say) to

217 confess that a being so amiable and gentle is not suited to play his part in the scene of
218 life; that he is too good for this world; that he is framed for a more primitive and purer
219 age, and born out of due time. [*Makarisantes humon to apeirokakon*], says the scoffing
220 politician in the History, [*ou zeloumen to aphron*];—would not the great majority of men,
221 high and low, thus speak of St. John the Apostle, were he now living?

222 15. Therefore, we must invest our Teacher with a certain gift of power, that he may be
223 feared. But even then, how hopeless does this task seem to be at first sight! how
224 improbable that he should be able to proceed one step farther than his external
225 recommendation carries him forward! so that it is a marvel how the Truth had ever been
226 spread and maintained among men. For, recollect, it is not a mere set of opinions that
227 he has to promulgate, which may lodge on the surface of the mind; but he is to be an
228 instrument in changing (as Scripture speaks) the heart, and modelling all men after one
229 exemplar; making them like himself, or rather like One above himself, who is the
230 beginning of a new creation. Having (as has been said) no sufficient eloquence—nay,
231 not language at his command—what instruments can he be said to possess? Thus he
232 is, from the nature of the case, thrown upon his personal resources, be they greater or
233 less; for it is plain that he cannot commit his charge to others as his representatives,
234 and be translated (as it were), and circulated through the world, till he has made others
235 like himself.

236 16. Turn to the history of Truth, and these anticipations are fulfilled. Some hearers of it
237 had their conscience stirred for a while, and many were affected by the awful simplicity
238 of the Great Teacher; but the proud and sensual were irritated into opposition; the
239 philosophic considered His doctrines strange and chimerical; the multitude followed for
240 a time in senseless wonder, and then suddenly abandoned an apparently falling cause.
241 For in truth what was the task of an Apostle, but to raise the dead? and what trifling
242 would it appear, even to the most benevolent and candid men of the world, when such a
243 one persisted to chafe and stimulate the limbs of the inanimate corpse, as if his own life
244 could be communicated to it, and motion would continue one moment after the external
245 effort was withdrawn; in the poet's words, [*thrasos akousion andrasi thneskousi*
246 *komizon*]. Truly such a one must expect, at best, to be accounted but a babbler, or one
247 deranged by his "much learning"—a visionary and an enthusiast,— [*kart'*
248 *apomousos estha gegrammenos*], fit for the wilderness or the temple; a jest for the
249 Areopagus, and but a gladiatorial show at Ephesus, [*epithanaios*], an actor in an
250 exhibition which would finish in his own death.

251 17. Yet (blessed be God!) the power of Truth actually did, by some means or other,
252 overcome these vast obstacles to its propagation; and what those means were, we shall
253 best understand by contemplating it, as it now shows itself when established and
254 generally professed; an ordinary sanction having taken the place of miracles, and
255 infidelity being the assailant instead of the assailed party.

256 18. It will not require many words to make it evident how impetuous and (for the time)
257 how triumphant an attack the rebellious Reason will conduct against the long-

258 established, over-secure, and but silently-working system of which Truth is the vital
259 principle.

260 19. (1.) First, every part of the Truth is novel to its opponent; and seen detached from
261 the whole, becomes an objection. It is only necessary for Reason [Note 1] to ask many
262 questions; and, while the other party is investigating the real answer to each in detail, to
263 claim the victory, which spectators will not be slow to award, fancying (as is the manner
264 of men) that clear and ready speech is the test of Truth. And it can choose its questions,
265 selecting what appears most objectionable in the tenets and practices of the received
266 system; and it will (in all probability), even unintentionally, fall upon the most difficult
267 parts; what is on the surface being at once most conspicuous, and also farthest
268 removed from the centre on which it depends. On the other hand, its objections will be
269 complete in themselves from their very minuteness. Thus, for instance, men attack
270 ceremonies and discipline of the Church, appealing to common sense, as they call it;
271 which really means, appealing to some proposition which, though true in its own
272 province, is nothing to the purpose in theology; or appealing to the logical accuracy of
273 the argument, when every thing turns on the real meaning of the terms employed, which
274 can only be understood by the religious mind.

275 20. (2.) Next, men who investigate in this merely intellectual way, without sufficient basis
276 and guidance in their personal virtue, are bound by no fears or delicacy. Not only from
277 dulness, but by preference, they select ground for the contest, which a reverent Faith
278 wishes to keep sacred; and, while the latter is looking to its stepping, lest it commit
279 sacrilege, they have the unembarrassed use of their eyes for the combat, and
280 overcome, by skill and agility, one stronger than themselves.

281 21. (3.) Further, the warfare between Error and Truth is necessarily advantageous to the
282 former, from its very nature, as being conducted by set speech or treatise; and this, not
283 only for a reason already assigned, the deficiency of Truth in the power of eloquence,
284 and even of words, but moreover from the very neatness and definiteness of method
285 required in a written or spoken argument. Truth is vast and far-stretching, viewed as a
286 system; and, viewed in its separate doctrines, it depends on the combination of a
287 number of various, delicate, and scattered evidences; hence it can scarcely be exhibited
288 in a given number of sentences. If this be attempted, its advocate, unable to exhibit
289 more than a fragment of the whole, must round off its rugged extremities, and unite its
290 straggling lines, by much the same process by which an historical narrative is converted
291 into a tale. This, indeed, is the very *art* of composition, which, accordingly, is only with
292 extreme trouble preserved clear of exaggeration and artifice; and who does not see that
293 all this is favourable to the cause of error,—to that party which has not faith enough to
294 be patient of doubt, and has just talent enough to consider perspicuity the chief
295 excellence of a writer? To illustrate this, we may contrast the works of Bishop Butler
296 with those of that popular infidel writer at the end of the last century, who professed to
297 be the harbinger of an "Age of Reason."

298 22. (4.) Moreover, this great, though dangerous faculty which evil employs as its
299 instrument in its warfare against the Truth, may simulate all kinds of virtue, and thus

300 become the rival of the true saints of God, whom it is opposing. It may draw fine
301 pictures of virtue, or trace out the course of sacred feelings or of heavenly meditations.
302 Nothing is so easy as to be religious on paper; and thus the arms of Truth are turned, as
303 far as may be found necessary, against itself.

304 23. (5.) It must be further observed, that the exhibitions of Reason, being complete in
305 themselves, and having nothing of a personal nature, are capable almost of an
306 omnipresence by an indefinite multiplication and circulation, through the medium of
307 composition: here, even the orator has greatly the advantage over the religious man;
308 words may be heard by thousands at once,—a good deed will be witnessed and
309 estimated at most by but a few.

310 24. (6.) To put an end to these remarks on the advantages accruing to Error in its
311 struggle with Truth;—the exhibitions of the Reason, being in their operation separable
312 from the person furnishing them, possess little or no responsibility. To be anonymous is
313 almost their characteristic, and with it all the evils attendant on the unchecked
314 opportunity for injustice and falsehood.

315 25. Such, then, are the difficulties which beset the propagation of the Truth: its want of
316 instruments, as an assailant of the world's opinions; the keenness and vigour of the
317 weapons producible against it, when itself in turn is to be attacked. How, then, after all,
318 has it maintained its ground among men, and subjected to its dominion unwilling minds,
319 some even bound to the external profession of obedience, others at least in a sullen
320 neutrality, and the inaction of despair?

321 26. I answer, that it has been upheld in the world not as a system, not by books, not by
322 argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such men as have
323 already been described, who are at once the teachers and the patterns of it; and, with
324 some suggestions in behalf of this statement, I shall conclude.

325 27. (1.) Here, first, is to be taken into account the natural beauty and majesty of virtue,
326 which is more or less felt by all but the most abandoned. I do not say virtue in the
327 abstract,—virtue in a book. Men persuade themselves, with little difficulty, to scoff at
328 principles, to ridicule books, to make sport of the names of good men; but they cannot
329 bear their presence: it is holiness embodied in personal form, which they cannot steadily
330 confront and bear down: so that the silent conduct of a conscientious man secures for
331 him from beholders a feeling different in kind from any which is created by the mere
332 versatile and garrulous Reason.

333 28. (2.) Next, consider the extreme rarity, in any great perfection and purity, of simple-
334 minded, honest devotion to God; and another instrument of influence is discovered for
335 the cause of Truth. Men naturally prize what is novel and scarce; and, considering the
336 low views of the multitude on points of social and religious duty, their ignorance of those
337 precepts of generosity, self-denial, and high-minded patience, which religion enforces,
338 nay, their scepticism (whether known to themselves or not) of the existence in the world
339 of severe holiness and truth, no wonder they are amazed when accident gives them a

340 sight of these excellences in another, as though they beheld a miracle; and they watch it
341 with a mixture of curiosity and awe.

342 29. (3.) Besides, the conduct of a religious man is quite above them. They cannot
343 imitate him, if they try. It may be easy for the educated among them to make speeches,
344 or to write books; but high moral excellence is the attribute of a school to which they are
345 almost strangers, having scarcely learned, and that painfully, the first elements of the
346 heavenly science. One little deed, done against natural inclination for God's sake,
347 though in itself of a conceding or passive character, to brook an insult, to face a danger,
348 or to resign an advantage, has in it a power outbalancing all the dust and chaff of mere
349 profession; the profession whether of enlightened benevolence and candour, or, on the
350 other hand, of high religious faith and of fervent zeal.

351 30. (4.) And men feel, moreover, that the object of their contemplation is beyond their
352 reach—not open to the common temptations which influence men, and grounded on a
353 foundation which they cannot explain. And nothing is more effectual, first in irritating,
354 then in humbling the pride of men, than the sight of a superior altogether independent of
355 themselves.

356 31. (5.) The consistency of virtue is another gift, which gradually checks the rudeness of
357 the world, and tames it into obedience to itself. The changes of human affairs, which
358 first excited and interested, at length disgust the mind, which then begins to look out for
359 something on which it can rely, for peace and rest; and what can then be found
360 immutable and sure, but God's word and promises, illustrated and conveyed to the
361 inquirer in the person of His faithful servants? Every day shows us how much depends
362 on firmness for obtaining influence in practical matters; and what are all kinds of
363 firmness, as exhibited in the world, but likenesses and offshoots of that true stability of
364 heart which is stayed in the grace and in the contemplation of Almighty God?

365 32. (6.) Such especially will be the thoughts of those countless multitudes, who, in the
366 course of their trial, are from time to time weighed down by affliction, or distressed by
367 bodily pain. This will be in their case, the strong hour of Truth, which, though unheard
368 and unseen by men as a body, approaches each one of that body in his own turn,
369 though at a different time. Then it is that the powers of the world, its counsels, and its
370 efforts (vigorous as they seemed to be in the race), lose ground, and slow-paced Truth
371 overtakes it; and thus it comes to pass, that, while viewed in its outward course it seems
372 ever hastening onwards to open infidelity and sin, there are ten thousand secret
373 obstacles, graciously sent from God, cumbering its chariot-wheels, so that they drive
374 heavily, and saving it from utter ruin.

375 33. Even with these few considerations before us, we shall find it difficult to estimate the
376 moral power which a single individual, trained to practise what he teaches, may acquire
377 in his own circle, in the course of years. While the Scriptures are thrown upon the world,
378 as if the common property of any who choose to appropriate them, he is, in fact, the
379 legitimate interpreter of them, and none other; the Inspired Word being but a dead letter
380 (ordinarily considered), except as transmitted from one mind to another. While he is

381 unknown to the world, yet, within the range of those who see him, he will become the
382 object of feelings different in kind from those which mere intellectual excellence excites.
383 The men commonly held in popular estimation are greatest at a distance; they become
384 small as they are approached; but the attraction, exerted by unconscious holiness, is of
385 an urgent and irresistible nature; it persuades the weak, the timid, the wavering, and the
386 inquiring; it draws forth the affection and loyalty of all who are in a measure like-minded;
387 and over the thoughtless or perverse multitude it exercises a sovereign compulsory
388 sway, bidding them fear and keep silence, on the ground of its own right divine to rule
389 them,—its hereditary claim on their obedience, though they understand not the
390 principles or counsels of that spirit, which is "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the
391 flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

392 34. And if such be the personal influence excited by the Teacher of Truth over the
393 mixed crowd of men whom he encounters, what (think we) will be his power over that
394 select number, just referred to, who have already, in a measure, disciplined their hearts
395 after the law of holiness, and feel themselves, as it were, individually addressed by the
396 invitation of his example? These are they whom our Lord especially calls His "elect,"
397 and came to "gather together in one," for they are worthy. And these, too, are they who
398 are ordained in God's Providence to be the salt of the earth,—to continue, in their turn,
399 the succession of His witnesses, that heirs may never be wanting to the royal line
400 though death sweeps away each successive generation of them to their rest and their
401 reward. These, perhaps, by chance fell in with their destined father in the Truth, not at
402 once discerning his real greatness. At first, perhaps, they thought his teaching fanciful,
403 and parts of his conduct extravagant or weak. Years might pass away before such
404 prejudices were entirely removed from their minds; but by degrees they would discern
405 more and more the traces of unearthly majesty about him; they would witness, from
406 time to time, his trial under the various events of life, and would still find, whether they
407 looked above or below, that he rose higher, and was based deeper, than they could
408 ascertain by measurement. Then, at length, with astonishment and fear, they would
409 become aware that Christ's presence was before them; and, in the words of Scripture,
410 would glorify God in His servant [Gal. i. 24.]; and all this while they themselves would be
411 changing into that glorious Image which they gazed upon, and be in training to succeed
412 him in its propagation.

413 35. Will it be said, This is a fancy, which no experience confirms? First, no irreligious
414 man can know any thing concerning the hidden saints. Next, no one, religious or not,
415 can detect them without attentive study of them. But, after all, say they are few, such
416 high Christians; and what follows? They are enough to carry on God's noiseless work.
417 The Apostles were such men; others might be named, in their several generations, as
418 successors to their holiness. These communicate their light to a number of lesser
419 luminaries, by whom, in its turn, it is distributed through the world; the first sources of
420 illumination being all the while unseen, even by the majority of sincere Christians,—
421 unseen as is that Supreme Author of Light and Truth, from whom all good primarily
422 proceeds. A few highly-endowed men will rescue the world for centuries to come.
423 Before now even one man [Note 2] has impressed an image on the Church, which,
424 through God's mercy, shall not be effaced while time lasts. Such men, like the Prophet,

425 are placed upon their watch-tower, and light their beacons on the heights. Each
426 receives and transmits the sacred flame, trimming it in rivalry of his predecessor, and
427 fully purposed to send it on as bright as it has reached him; and thus the self-same fire,
428 once kindled on Moriah, though seeming at intervals to fail, has at length reached us in
429 safety, and will in like manner, as we trust, be carried forward even to the end.

430 36. To conclude. Such views of the nature and history of Divine Truth are calculated to
431 make us contented and resigned in our generation, whatever be the peculiar character
432 or the power of the errors of our own times. For Christ never will reign visibly upon
433 earth; but in each age, as it comes, we shall read of tumult and heresy, and hear the
434 complaint of good men marvelling at what they conceive to be the especial wickedness
435 of their own times.

436 37. Moreover, such considerations lead us to be satisfied with the humblest and most
437 obscure lot; by showing us, not only that we may be the instruments of much good in it,
438 but that (strictly speaking) we could scarcely in any situation be direct instruments of
439 good to any besides those who personally know us, who ever must form a small circle;
440 and as to the indirect good we may do in a more exalted station (which is by no means
441 to be lightly esteemed), still we are not absolutely precluded from it in a lower place in
442 the Church. Nay, it has happened before now, that comparatively retired posts have
443 been filled by those who have exerted the most extensive influences over the destinies
444 of Religion in the times following them; as in the arts and pursuits of this world, the great
445 benefactors of mankind are frequently unknown.

446 38. Let all those, then, who acknowledge the voice of God speaking within them, and
447 urging them heaven-ward, wait patiently for the End, exercising themselves, and
448 diligently working, with a view to that day when the books shall be opened, and all the
449 disorder of human affairs reviewed and set right; when "the last shall be first, and the
450 first last;" when "all things that offend, and they which do iniquity," shall be gathered out
451 and removed; when "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun," and Faith shall see her
452 God; when "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they
453 that turn many to righteousness as the stars, for ever and ever."

454 (Preached on Sunday afternoon, January 22, 1832, in his turn as Select Preacher.)

455 Notes

456 1. [Here, as in the foregoing Discourse, by Reason is meant the reasoning of secular
457 minds, (1) *explicit*, (2) *à posteriori*, and (3) based on *secular assumptions*. Vide
458 Preface.]

459 2. Athanasius.