

159

**The
Individuality
Of the Soul**



JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

159

THE INDIVIDUALITY
OF THE SOUL

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The cover sketch of John Henry Newman as a young man is by Al Franco.

*"The spirit shall return unto God,
who gave it." —Eccles. 12:7.*

HERE we are told that upon death the spirit of man returns to God. The sacred writer is not speaking of good men only, or of God's chosen people, but of men generally. In the case of all men, the soul, when severed from the body, returns to God. God gave it: He made it, He sent it into the body, and He upholds it there; He upholds it in distinct existence wherever it is. It animates the body while life lasts; it returns again, it relapses into the unseen state upon death. Let us steadily contemplate this truth, which at first sight we may fancy we altogether enter into. The point to be considered is this, that every soul of man which is or has been on

earth, has a separate existence; and that, in eternity, not in time merely,—in the unseen world, not merely in this,—not only during its mortal life, but ever from the hour of its creation, whether joined to a body of flesh or not.

Nothing is more difficult than to realize that every man has a distinct soul, that every one of all the millions who live or have lived, is as whole and independent a being in himself as if there were no one else in the whole world but he. To explain what I mean: do you think that a commander of an army realizes it when he sends a body of men on some dangerous service? I am not speaking as if he were wrong in so sending them; I only ask in matter of fact, does he, think you, commonly understand that each of those poor men has a soul, a soul as dear to himself, as precious in its nature, as his own? Or does he not rather look on the body of men collectively, as one mass, as parts of a whole, as but the wheels or springs of some great machine, to which he assigns the individuality, not to each soul that goes to make it up?

We classify and generalize

This instance will show what I mean, and how open we all lie to the remark, that we do not understand the doctrine of

the distinct individuality of the human soul. We class men in masses, as we might connect the stones of a building. Consider our common way of regarding history, politics, commerce, and the like, and you will own that I speak truly. We generalize, and lay down laws, and then contemplate these creations of our own minds, and act upon and towards them, as if they were the real things, dropping what are more truly such. Take another instance: when we talk of national greatness, what does it mean? Why, it really means that a certain distinct definite number of immortal individual beings happen for a few years to be in circumstances to act together and one upon another, in such a way as to be able to act upon the world at large, to gain an ascendancy over the world, to gain power and wealth and to look like one, and to be talked of and to be looked up to as one.

They seem for a short time to be some one thing: and we, from our habit of living by sight, regard them as one, and drop the notion of their being anything else. And when this one dies and that one dies, we forget that it is the passage of separate immortal beings into an unseen state, that the whole which appears is but appearance, and that the component

parts are the realities. No, we think nothing of this; but though fresh and fresh men die, and fresh and fresh men are born, so that the whole is ever shifting, yet we forget all that drop away, and are insensible to all that are added; and we still think that this whole which we call the nation, is one and the same, and that the individuals who come and go, exist only in it and for it, and are but as the grains of a heap or the leaves of a tree.

Or again, survey some populous town: crowds are pouring through the streets; some on foot, some in carriages; while the shops are full, and the houses too, could we see into them. Every part of it is full of life. Hence we gain a general idea of splendor, magnificence, opulence and energy. But what is the truth? why, that every being in that great concourse is his own center, and all things about him are but shades, but a "vain shadow," in which he "walketh and disquieteth himself in vain." He has his own hopes and fears, desires, judgments, and aims; he is everything to himself, and no one else is really anything. No one outside of him can really touch him, can touch his soul, his immortality; he must live with himself for ever. He has a depth within him unfathomable, an infinite abyss of exis-

tence; and the scene in which he bears part for the moment is but like a gleam of sunshine upon its surface.

Again: when we read history we meet with accounts of great slaughters and massacres, great pestilences, famines, conflagrations, and so on; and here again we are accustomed in an especial way to regard collections of people as if individual units. We cannot understand that a multitude is a collection of immortal souls.

Not only had, but has

I say immortal souls: each of those multitudes, not only *had* while he was upon earth, but *has* a soul, which did in its own time but return to God who gave it, and not perish, and which now lives unto Him. All those millions upon millions of human beings who ever trod the earth and saw the sun successively, are at this very moment in existence all together. This, I think, you will grant we do not duly realize. All those Canaanites, whom the children of Israel slew, every one of them is somewhere in the universe, now at this moment, where God has assigned him a place. We read, "They utterly destroyed all that was in" Jericho, "young and old." Again, as to Ai: "So it was that all that fell that day, both of men and

women, were twelve thousand." Again, "Joshua took Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, Debir, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein" (Josh. ch.6, 8, 10). Every one of those souls still lives. They had their separate thoughts and feelings when on earth, they have them now. They had their likings and pursuits; they gained what they thought good and enjoyed it; and they still somewhere or other live, and what they then did in the flesh surely has its influence upon their present destiny. They live, reserved for a day which is to come, when all nations shall stand before God.

But why should I speak of the devoted nations of Canaan, when Scripture speaks of a wider, more comprehensive judgment, and in one place appears to hint at the present state of awful waiting in which they are who were involved in it? What an overwhelming judgment was the Flood! All human beings on the earth but eight were cut off by it. That old world of souls still lives, though its material tabernacle was drowned. Scripture, I say, signifies this; obscurely indeed, yet still, as it appears, certainly. St. Peter speaks of "the spirits in prison," that is, *then* in

prison, who had been "disobedient," "when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah" (1 Pet 3:20). Those many, many souls, who were violently expelled from their bodies by the waters of the deluge, were alive two thousand years afterwards, when St. Peter wrote. Surely they are alive still.

All still live

And so of all the other multitudes we anywhere read of. — All the Jews who perished in the siege of Jerusalem still live; Sennacherib's army still lives; Sennacherib himself still lives; all the persecutors of the Church that ever were, are still alive. The kings of Babylon are still alive; they are still, as they are described by the prophet, weak indeed now, and in "hell beneath," but having an account to give, and waiting for the day of summons. All who have ever gained a name in the world, all the mighty men of war that ever were, all the great statesmen, all the crafty counsellors, all the scheming aspirants, all the reckless adventurers, all the covetous traders, all the proud voluptuaries, are still in being, though helpless and unprofitable. Balaam, Saul, Joab, Ahithophel, good and bad, wise and ignorant, rich and poor,

each has his separate place, each dwells by himself in that sphere of light or darkness, which he has provided for himself here. What a view this sheds upon history! We are accustomed to read it as a tale or a fiction, and we forget that it concerns immortal beings, who cannot be swept away, who are what they were, however this earth may change.

And so again all the names we see written on monuments in churches or churchyards, all the writers whose names and works we see in libraries, all the workmen who raised the great buildings, far and near, which are the wonder of the world, they are all in God's remembrance, they all live.

It is the same with those whom we ourselves have seen, who now are departed. I do not now speak of those whom we have known and loved. These we cannot forget; we cannot rid our memory of them: but I speak of all whom we have *ever* seen; it is also true that they live. Where we know not, but live they do. We may recollect when children, perhaps, once seeing a certain person; and it is almost like a dream to us now that we did. It seems like an accident which goes and is all over, like some creature of the moment, which has no existence beyond

it. The rain falls, and the wind blows; and showers and storms have no existence beyond the time when we felt them; they are nothing in themselves. But if we have but once seen any child of Adam, we have seen an immortal soul. It has not passed away as a breeze or sunshine but it lives; it lives at this moment in one of those many places, whether of bliss or misery, in which all souls are reserved until the end.

Or again, let us call to mind those whom we knew a little better, though not intimately: — all who died suddenly or before their time, all whom we have seen in high health and spirits, all whom we have seen in circumstances which in any way brought out their characters, and gave them some place in our memories. They are gone from our sight, but they all live still, each with his own thoughts; they are waiting for the judgement.

I think we shall see that these thoughts concerning others are not familiar to us; yet no one can say they are not just. And think too that the thoughts concerning others, which *are* familiar to us, are not those which become believers in the Gospel; whereas these which I have been tracing do become us, as tending to make us think less of this world, with its hopes

and fears, its plans, successes, and enjoyments.

Two spiritual states

Moreover, every one of all the souls which have ever been on earth is, as I have already implied, in one of two spiritual states, so distinct from one another, that the one is the subject of God's favor, and the other under His wrath; the one on the way to eternal happiness, the other to eternal misery. This is true of the dead, and is true of the living also. All are tending one way or the other; there is no middle or neutral state for any one; though as far as the sight of the external world goes, all men seem to be in a middle state common to one and all. Yet, much as men look the same, and impossible as it is for us to say where each man stands in God's sight, there are two, and but two classes of men, and these have characters and destinies as far apart in their tendencies as light and darkness: this is the case even of those who are in the body, and it is much more true of those who have passed into the unseen state.

No thought of course is more overpowering than that every one who lives or has lived is destined for endless bliss

or torment. It is far too vast for us to realize. But what especially increases the mind's confusion when it attempts to do so, is just this very thing which I have been mentioning, that there are but these two states, that every individual among us is either in one or the other,—that the states in which we individually are placed are so unspeakably contrary to each other, while we look so like each other. It is certainly quite beyond our understandings, that all we should now be living together as relatives, friends, associates, neighbors; that we should be familiar or intimate with each other, that there should be among us a general intercourse, circulation of thought, interchange of good offices, the action of mind upon mind, and will upon will, and conduct upon conduct, and yet after all that there should be a bottomless gulf between us, running among us invisibly, and cutting us off into two parties;—not indeed a gulf impassable here, God be praised!—not impassable till we pass into the next world, still really existing so that every person we meet is in God's unerring eye either on the one side or the other, and, did He please to take him hence at once, would find himself either in paradise or in the place of torment.

Our Lord observes this concerning the Day of Judgment, "Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

A solemn thought

What makes this thought still more solemn, is that we have reason to suppose that souls on the wrong side of the line are far more numerous than those on the right. It is wrong to speculate; but it is safe to be alarmed. This much we know, that Christ says expressly, "Many are called few are chosen;" "broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat;" whereas "narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be who find it."

If then it is difficult, as I have said it is, to realize that all who ever lived still live, it is as difficult at least to believe that they are in a state either of eternal rest or eternal woe; that all whom we have known and who are gone, are and that we who still live, were we now to die, should then at once be either in the one state or the other. Nay, I will say more: when we think seriously on the subject, it is almost impossible to comprehend, I do not say

that a great number, but that any person whom we see before us, however unsatisfactory appearances may be, is really under God's displeasure, and in a state of reprobation. So hard is it to live by faith!

People feel it to be a difficulty to have to admit certain other doctrines of the Church, which are more or less contrary to sight. For instance, they say as an argument against regeneration in Baptism, "Is it possible that all who have been baptized can have been born again, considering what lives they lead?" They make the evidence of sight tell against a doctrine which demands their faith. Yet, after all, is there anything more startling, more difficult to believe, than that any one person whom we see, however sinful his life, is at present under God's eternal wrath, and would incur it if he were to die at once, and will incur it unless he repents? This is what we cannot bring ourselves to believe. All we commonly allow is, that certain persons are what we call "in *danger* of hell." Now, if by using this cautious phrase we mean merely to express that irreligious men may repent before death, or that men may seem to be irreligious to us who are not so, and therefore that it is safer to speak of men being in danger of

God's wrath than actually under it; so far is well. But we are in error if we mean, as is often the case, to deny thereby that irreligious men, as such, whether man can ascertain them or not, are at this very time not only in danger, but actually under the power of God's wrath. Healthy men in a sickly country may be said to be in danger of sickness; soldiers in a battle are in danger of wounds; but irreligious men not only hazard, but do lie under God's eternal curse; and when we see an irreligious man, we see one who is under it, only we speak guardedly, both as hoping that he may repent, and as feeling that we may be mistaken. But whether or not men may be what they seem, or whether or not they are to change, certain it is that every one who dies, passes at once into one or other of two states; and if he dies unsanctified and unreconciled to God, into a state of eternal misery.

Inconceivable?

How little the world at large realizes this, is shown by the conduct of surviving friends after a loss. Let a person who is taken away have been ever so notorious a sinner, ever so confirmed a drunkard, ever so neglectful of Christian ordinances, and though they have no reason

for supposing anything hopeful was going on in his mind, yet they will generally be found to believe that he has gone to heaven; they will confidently talk of his being at peace, of his pains being at an end, of his happy release, and the like. They enlarge on these subjects; whereas their duty lies in keeping silence, waiting in trembling hope, and being resigned. Now, why is it they speak and think in this manner? Apparently because they cannot conceive it possible that he or that they should be lost. Even the worst men have qualities which endear them to those who come near them. They have human affections in some shape or other. Even the witch of Endor showed a sympathy and kindness towards her guest which move us. Human feelings cannot exist in hell, and we cannot bring ourselves to think that they are subjects of hell who have them. And for this reason men cannot admit the bare possibility of another being lost; they reject the idea, and therefore, when a man dies, they conclude, as the only alternative, that he must be in Abraham's bosom; and they boldly say so, and they catch at some half sentence which he said during his illness, when he was calmer or weaker, or at the ease with which he died, in confirmation

of their belief.

And if it is difficult to believe that there are any persons among us at this moment in a state of spiritual death, how shall we understand, what perchance is the case, that there are many such, perhaps multitudes? How shall we persuade ourselves of the great truth that, in spite of outward appearances, human society, as we find it, is but a part of an invisible world, and is really divided into but two companies, the sons of God and the children of the wicked one; that some souls are ministered unto by angels, others led captive by devils; that some are "fellow-citizens of the saints," and of the invisible "household of God," and others companions of those His enemies in times past, who now are waiting in prison for the judgment.

If we really understood!

How blessed would it be if we really understood this! What a change it would produce in our thoughts, unless we were utterly reprobate, to understand what and where we are,—accountable beings on their trial, with God for their friend and the devil for their enemy, and advanced a certain way on their road either to heaven or to hell. No truths indeed, ever so awful, ever so fully brought home

to the mind, will change it, if the love of God and of holiness be not there; but none among us, as we may humbly trust, is in this reprobate state. One wishes to think that no one has so done despite to the Spirit of grace, and so sinned against the Blood of the Covenant, as to have nothing of his regenerate nature left to him; no one among us, but, if he shut his eyes to the external world, and opened them to the world within him, contemplated his real state and prospects, and called to mind his past life, would be brought to repentance and amendment.

Endeavor then, my brethren, to realize that you have souls, and pray God to enable you to do so. Endeavor to disengage your thoughts and opinions from the things that are seen; look at things as God looks at them, and judge of them as He judges. Pass a very few years, and you will actually experience what as yet you are called on to believe. There will be no need of the effort of mind to which I invite you when you have passed into the unseen state. There will be no need of shutting your eyes to this world when this world has vanished from you, and you have nothing before you but the throne of God, and the slow but continual movements about it in preparation

of the judgment. In that interval, when you are in that vast receptacle of disembodied souls, what will be your thoughts about the world which you have left! How poor will then seem to you its highest aims, how faint its keenest pleasures, compared with the eternal aims, the infinite pleasures, of which you will at length feel your souls to be capable!

O my brethren, let this thought be upon you day by day, especially when you are tempted to sin. Avoid sin as a serpent; it looks and promises well; it bites afterwards. It is dreadful in memory, dreadful even on earth; but in that awful period, when the fever of life is over, and you are waiting in silence for the judgment, with nothing to distract your thoughts, who can say how dreadful may be the memory of sins done in the body? Then the very apprehension of their punishment, when Christ shall suddenly visit, will doubtless outweigh a thousandfold the gratification, such as it was, which you felt in committing them; and if so, what will be the proportion between it and that punishment, if after all it be actually inflicted? Let us lay to heart our Saviour's own most merciful words, "Be not afraid," He says, "of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that

they can do. But I will forewarn you, whom ye shall fear. Fear Him, which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell. Yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."