

icles and Sermons :: On the Interior Operations of God to Bring Man to the True End of His Creation - Fe

On the Interior Operations of God to Bring Man to the True End of His Creation - Fenelon - posted by BrokenOne (), on

IN the beginning God attacked us in externals; little by little he withdrew such of his creatures as we loved too much, and contrary to his law. But this outward work, though essential in laying the foundation of the building, goes but a little way towards the completion of the whole edifice. The interior operation, although invisible, is beyond comparison, greater, more difficult, and more wonderful!

There comes a time, when God, having completely stripped us, having mortified the flesh as to the creatures to which it clung, commences an interior work for the purpose of forcing from us our hold upon Self. External objects are now no longer the subjects of his spoliations: he would tear from us the I, which is the centre of our self-love. It was only for the sake of this I that we loved all the rest; and He now pursues it relentlessly and without cessation. To deprive a man of his clothing, would be harsh treatment enough; but that is nothing in comparison with the discipline which should strip off his skin and muscles, and reduce him to a skeleton of bones. Trim up the branches of a tree, and far from killing it, you even add to its vigor, and it shoots out again on every side; but attack the trunk, wither the root, and it fades, languishes and dies. It is the good will of God towards us, thus to make us die to self.

As to the external mortification of the senses, He causes us to accomplish it by certain courageous efforts against ourselves. The more the senses are destroyed by the courage of the soul, the more highly does the soul estimate its own virtue, and live by its own labor. But in process of time, God reserves for his own hand the work of attacking the soul in its depths, and depriving it finally of the last vestige of the life of Self. It is no longer the strength of the soul that is then employed against the things without, but its weakness that is turned against itself. It looks at self; it is shocked at what it sees: it remains faithful, but it no longer beholds its own fidelity. Every defect in its previous history rises up to view, and often new faults, of which it had never before even suspected the existence. It no longer finds those supports of fervor and courage which formerly nourished it. It faints; like Jesus, it is heavy even unto death. All is taken away but the will to retain nothing, and to let God work without reservation.

It has not even the consolation of perceiving that it has such a will. It is no longer a perceptible, designed will, but simple, without reflex acts, and so much the more hidden, as it is deeper and more intimate in the soul. In such a state, God sees to everything that is necessary to detach the soul from self. He strips it little by little, removing one after another all the investments in which it was wrapped.

The last operations, though not always the greatest, are, nevertheless, the most severe. Though the outside garments may be more costly than those within, yet the removal of the latter is more painful than that of the former. During the first, we are consoled by reflecting upon what is left us; during the last, nought remains but bitterness, nakedness, and confusion.

I shall perhaps be asked, in what these deprivations consist; but I cannot say. They are as various as the characters of men. Each man suffers according to his necessity, and the designs of God. How is it possible to know what will be taken off from us, when we do not know what we have on? We cling to an infinity of things which we should never suspect; we only feel that they are a part of us when they are snatched away, as I am only conscious that I have hairs when they are pulled from my head. God develops to us, little by little, what is within us, of which we are, until then, entirely ignorant, and we are astonished at discovering in our very virtues, defects of which we should never have believed ourselves capable. It is like a grotto which appears perfectly dry, but in which the water suddenly spouts out from every point, even from those that were least suspected.

These spoliations are not commonly such as could have been anticipated. That which we expect, finds us prepared, and is scarce proper to hasten the death of self. God surprises us in the most unlooked-for quarters. They are nothings, but nothings which desolate us and crucify self-love. Great and striking virtues are no longer appropriate; they would nourish pride, and communicate a certain degree of strength and interior assurance contrary to the design of God, which is, to make us lose ground. Then it is a simple, single way; everything is commonplace. Others see nothing great, and the person himself discovers within, only what seems natural, weak, and feeble; but he would rather a hundred times, fast all his life on bread and water, and practice the greatest austerities, than suffer what is going on within him. Not because he enjoys a certain taste of fervor in austerities; not at all, that delight is gone; but he finds in the pliability which God requires in an infinity of little things, more of self-abandonment and death than there would be in great sacrifices.

Nevertheless, God never leaves the soul until He has rendered it supple and pliable, by twisting it all manner of ways. At one time the person must speak frankly; at another be still; he must be praised, then blamed, then forgotten, and then examined anew; he must be low, he must be high, he must suffer condemnation without uttering a word in self-defense, and again he must speak well of himself. He must be willing to find himself weak, restless, and irresolute in the merest trifles; manifesting the waywardness of a little child; shocking his friends by his coldness; becoming jealous and suspicious without reason; even relating his most foolish jealousies to those in regard to whom he feels them; speaking with patience and labor to persons, contrary to their desire and his own, and without fruit; appearing artificial and faithless; in short, to find himself arid, languishing, weary of God, dissipated in mind, and so far separated from every gracious thought as to be tempted to despair. Such are examples of some of the spoliations which now desolate myself; but there is an infinity of others which God apportions to each one according to his own wise purposes.

Let no one tell me that these are only empty imaginations. Can we doubt that God acts immediately in the soul? that He so acts as to make it die to self? that, after having subdued the grosser passions, He attacks all the subtle resources of self-love within, especially in those souls who have generously and without reserve delivered themselves up to the operations of his grace? The more He would purify them, the more He exercises them interiorly. The world has neither eyes to see nor ears to hear these trials; but the world is blind; its wisdom is dead; it cannot coexist with the Spirit of truth. "The things of God," says the Apostle, "knoweth no man but the Spirit of God;" "the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God." (1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.)

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Re: On the Interior Operations of God to Bring Man to the True End of His Creation - - posted by BrokenOne (), on: 200

We are not, at first, accustomed to this interior supervision, which thus tends to raze us to the foundation. We are willing to be silent and recollected; to suffer all things; to be at the disposal of Providence, like a man passively trusting himself to the current of a river; but we dare not yet risk listening to the interior voice, calling us to the sacrifices which God is preparing. We are like the child Samuel, who did not yet know the Lord; when the Lord called, he thought it was Eli, but he was told that he had been dreaming, and that no one spoke to him. Just so, we are uncertain whether it may not be some imagination which would carry us too far. Often the high-priest Eli, that is, our spiritual advisers, tell us that we have been dreaming, and bid us lie down again. But God does not leave us, and continues to wake us, until we lend an ear to what He has to say.

If it were a matter of visions, apparitions, revelations, extraordinary illuminations, miracles, things contrary to true teaching, we should be right in not being detained by them. But when God has led us to a certain point of abandonment, and we subsequently have an interior conviction that He still desires us to give up certain innocent things, the tendency of all which is only to make us more simple and more profoundly dead to self, can it be an illusion to yield to such drawings? Probably no one follows them without good counsel. The repugnance which our wisdom and self-love manifest to them, is a sufficient evidence that they are of grace; for we see that we are only hindered from following them by selfish considerations. The more we fear to do these things, the more we have need to do them; for it is a fear which arises only from delicacy, want of pliability and attachment either to our pleasures or our views. We must die to all the sentiments of the natural life. Thus every pretext for retreat is cut off by the conviction in the depths of the soul, that the sacrifices required will assist in causing us to die.

Ease and promptness in yielding to these movements, are the means by which souls make the greatest advances. Those who are ingenuous enough never to hesitate, soon make incredible progress. Others argue, and never fail to find a sufficient reason for not following the interior monitor. They are willing and not willing; they want to wait for certainties; they search about for advisers, who will bid them not do what they are afraid of doing; they stop at every step, and look back; then languish in irresolution, and insensibly estrange the Spirit of God. At first they grieve Him by their hesitation; then they irritate Him by formal resistance, and finally quench his operations by repeated opposition.

While they thus resist, they find pretexts both to conceal and justify the resistance; but they insensibly grow dry; they lose their simplicity, and, make what effort they may to deceive themselves, they are not at peace; there is always at the bottom of the conscience, a feeling of reproach that they have been wanting toward God. But as God becomes more distant, because they are departing from Him, the soul becomes hardened by degrees. It is no longer peaceful; but it no longer seeks true peace; on the contrary, it wanders farther and farther from it, by seeking it where it is not; like a dislocated

bone, a continual source of pain, and out of its natural position, yet, it manifests no tendency to resume its place, but, on the contrary, binds itself fast in its false relations.

Ah! how much to be pitied is that soul which is just beginning to reject the secret invitations of God, when he demands that it shall die to all! At first, it is but an atom; but the atom becomes a mountain, and soon forms a sort of chaos between it and God. We play deaf when God demands a lowly simplicity; we are afraid to listen; we should be glad enough to be able to convince ourselves that we had not heard; we say so, but are not persuaded. We get into a tumult; we doubt all our past experience; and the graces which had served the most effectually to make us humble and simple before God, begin to look like illusions. We seek without, for spiritual advisers who may calm the trouble within; we readily find them, for there are so many, gifted even with much knowledge and piety, who have yet but little experience.

In this condition, the more we strive to recover, the sicker we get. We are like the wounded deer, bearing in his side the fatal arrow; the more he struggles through the woods to be delivered of his enemy, the more deeply he buries it in his body. Alas! "Who hath hardened himself against Him and hath prospered." (Job ix. 4.) Can God, who is Himself the true Peace, leave that heart peaceful which opposes itself to his designs? Such a person is like one with an unknown disorder. Physicians employ their art in vain to give him any solace. You behold him sad, depressed, languishing; no food, no remedy can avail to do him good; he dies day by day. Can we wonder that, wandering from the true way, we should ceaselessly continue to stray farther and farther from the right course?

But, you will say, the commencement of these things is a small matter; true, but the end is deplorable. In the sacrifice which we made when we devoted ourselves wholly to God, we reserved nothing and felt happy in so doing, while we were looking at things with a general view and at a distance; but when God takes us at our word and accepts our offer in detail, we are made aware of a thousand repugnances, the existence of which we had not so much as suspected before. Our courage fails; frivolous excuses are suggested to flatter our feeble and tempted souls; then we hesitate and doubt whether it is our duty to obey; we do only the half of what God requires of us, and we mix with the divine influence a something of self, trying still to secure some nutriment for that corrupt interior which wills not to die. A jealous God retires: the soul begins to shut its eyes, that it may not see that it has no longer the courage to act, and God leaves it to its weakness and corruption, because it will be so left. But think of the magnitude of its error!

The more we have received of God, the more ought we to render. We have received prevenient love and singular grace: we have received the gift of pure and unselfish love, which so many pious souls have never tasted; God has spared nothing to possess us wholly; He has become the interior Bridegroom; He has taken pains to do everything for his bride—but He is infinitely jealous. Do not wonder at the exacting nature of his jealousy! What is its object? Is it talents, illuminations, the regular practice of external virtues? Not at all; He is easy and condescending in such matters. Love is only jealous about love; the whole of his scrutiny falls upon the state of the will. He cannot share the heart of the spouse with any other; still less can He tolerate the excuses by which she would convince herself that her heart is justly divided; this it is that lights the devouring fires of his jealousy. As long, O spouse! as pure and disinterested love shall guide thee, so long the Bridegroom will bear with inexhaustible patience all thy wrong doing through weakness or inadvertence, without prejudice to the purity of thy love; but from the moment that thou shalt refuse anything that God asks, and begin to deceive thyself in the refusal, from that moment He will regard thee as a faithless spouse, and one seeking to conceal her infidelity!

How many souls, after having made great sacrifices, fall into these ways! False wisdom is the source of the whole difficulty; it is not so much through defect of courage as through excess of reason, that we are arrested at this point. It is true that when God has called souls to this state of absolute sacrifice, he treats them in accordance with the gifts He has lavished upon them; He is insatiable for deaths, losses, renunciation; He is jealous of his own gifts even, because the excellence of the blessings secretly breeds within us a sort of self-confidence. All must be destroyed, every vestige must perish! We have abandoned everything—and He comes now to take everything, leaving us absolutely nothing. If there be the smallest thing to which we cling, however good it may appear, there He comes sword in hand, and cuts into the remotest corner of the soul. If we are still fearful in any recess, to that spot He comes, for He always attacks us in our weakest points. He pushes hard, without giving us time to breathe. Do you wonder? Can we be dead while we yet breathe? We desire that God would give us the death-stroke; but we long to die without pain; we would die to our own will by the power of the will itself; we want to lose all and still hold all. Ah! what agony, what distress, when God has brought us to the end of our strength! We faint like a patient under a painful surgical operation. But the comparison is nought, for the object of the surgeon is to give us life—that of God to make us die.

Poor souls! weak in spirit! how these last blows overwhelm you! The very apprehension of them makes you tremble and fall back! How few are there who make out to cross the frightful desert! Scarcely shall two or three behold the promised land!

and! Woe to those from whom God had reason to expect everything, and who do not accept the grace! Woe to him who resists the interior guidance! strange sin, that against the Holy Spirit! Unpardonable either in this world or in the next, what is it but resistance to the divine monitor within? He who resists the Spirit, striving for his conversion shall be punished in this world by affliction, and in the next by the pains of hell. Happy is he who never hesitates; who fears only that he follows with too little readiness; who would rather do too much against self than too little! Blessed is he who, when asked for a sample, boldly presents his entire stock, and suffers God to cut from the whole cloth! Happy he who, esteeming himself as nothing, puts God to no necessity of sparing him! Thrice happy he whom all this does not affright!

It is thought that this state is a painful one; it is a mistake; here is peace and liberty; here the heart, detached from everything, is immeasurably enlarged, so as to become illimitable; nothing cramps it; and in accordance with the promise, it becomes, in a certain sense, one with God himself.

Thou only O my God! canst give the peace which is then enjoyed! The less timid the soul is in the sacrifice of itself, the greater liberty does it acquire! At length, when it no longer hesitates to lose all and forget self, it possesses all. It is true that it is not a conscious possession, so that the soul addresses itself as happy, for that would be to return to self after having quitted it forever; but it is an image of the condition of the blessed, who will be always ravished by the contemplation of God, without having a moment, during the whole of eternity, to think of themselves and their felicity. They are so satisfied in these transports, that they will be eternally rejoicing, without once saying to themselves that they are happy.

Thou grantest to those souls who never resist thee, O bridegroom of souls! even in this life, a foretaste of this felicity. They will all things and nothing. As it is things created which hem up the heart, these souls, being restrained by no attachment to the creature, and no reflections of self, enter as it were into thine immensity! Nothing stops them; they become continually more and more lost; but though their capacity should increase to an infinite extent, Thou wouldst fill it; they are always satisfied. They do not say that they are happy, but feel that they are so; they do not possess happiness, but their happiness possesses them. Let any one ask them at any moment, Do you will to suffer what you suffer? Would you have what you have not? They will answer without hesitation and without reflection, I will to suffer what I suffer, and to want that which I have not; I will everything which God wills; I will nothing else.

Such, my God, is true and pure worship in spirit and in truth. Thou seekest such to worship Thee, but scarce findest them! There are few but seek self in thy gifts, instead of seeking Thee alone in the cross and in spoliation. Most seek to guide Thee instead of being guided by Thee. They give themselves up to Thee, that they may become great, but withdraw when they are required to become little. They say they are attached to nothing, and are overwhelmed by the smallest losses. They desire to possess Thee, but are not willing to lose self, that they may be possessed by Thee. This is not loving Thee; it is desiring to be loved by Thee. O God, the creature knows not to what end Thou hast made him; teach him, and write in the depths of his soul, that the clay must suffer itself to be shaped at the will of the potter!