

Several Manners of the Divine Presence.

The presence of God is understood by us in several manners, and to several purposes.

1. God is present by his essence; which, because it is infinite, cannot be contained within the limits of any place; and, because he is of an essential purity and spiritual nature, he cannot be undervalued by being supposed present in the places of unnatural uncleanness; because as the sun, reflecting upon the mud of strands and shores, is unpolluted in its beams, so is God not dishonoured when we suppose him in every of his creatures, and in every part of every one of them; and is still as unmixed with any unhandsome adherence as is the soul in the bowels of the body.

2. God is everywhere present by his power. He rolls the orbs of heaven with his hands; he fixes the earth with his foot; he guides all the creatures with his eye, and refreshes them with his influence: he makes the powers of hell to shake with his terrors, and binds the devils with his word, and throws them out with his command, and sends the angels on embassies with his decrees: he hardens the joints of infants, and confirms the bones, when they are fashioned beneath secretly in the earth. he it is that assists at the numerous productions of fishes; and there is not one hollowness in the bottom of the sea, but he shows himself to be Lord of it by sustaining there the creatures that come to dwell in it: and in the wilderness, the bittern and the stork, the dragon and the satyr, the unicorn and the elk, live upon his provisions, and revere his power, and feel the force of his almightiness.

3. God is more specially present, in some places, but the several and more special manifestations of himself to extraordinary purposes. First, by glory. Thus, his seat is in heaven, because there he sits encircled with all the outward demonstrations of his glory, which he is pleased to show to all the inhabitants of those his inward and secret courts. And thus they that 'die in the Lord, may be properly said to be 'gone to God;' with whom although they were before, yet now they enter into his courts, into the secret of his tabernacle, into the retinue and splendour of his glory. That is called walking with God, but this is dwelling or being with him. 'I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ;' so said St. Paul. But this manner of Divine Presence is reserved for the elect people of God, and for their portion in their country.

4. God is, by grace and benediction, specially present in holy places, and in the solemn assemblies of his servants. If holy people meet in grots and dens of the earth when persecution or a public necessity disturbs the public order, circumstance, and convenience, God fails not to come thither to them; but God is also, by the same or a greater reason, present there where they meet ordinarily by order and public authority; there God is present ordinarily, that is, at every such meeting. God will go out of his way to meet his saints when themselves are forced out of their way of order by a sad necessity; but else, God's usual way is to be present in those places where his servants are appointed ordinarily to meet. But his presence there signifies nothing but a readiness to hear their prayers, to bless their persons, to accept their offices, and to like even the circumstance of orderly and public meeting. For thither the prayers of consecration, the public authority separating it, and God's love of order, and the reasonable customs of religion, have in ordinary, and in a certain degree, fixed this manner of his presence, and he loves to have it so.

5. God is especially present in the hearts of his people by his Holy Spirit; and indeed the hearts of holy men are temples in the truth of things, and, in type and shadow, they are heaven itself. For God reigns in the hearts of his servants; there is his kingdom. The power of grace hath subdued all his

enemies: there is his power. They serve him night and day, and give him thanks and praise; that is his glory. This is the religion and worship of God in the temple. The temple itself is the heart of man; Christ is the high-priest, who from thence sends up the incense of prayers, and joins them to his own intercession, and presents all together to his Father; and the Holy Ghost, by his dwelling there, hath also consecrated it into a temple; and God dwells in our hearts by faith and Christ by his Spirit, and the Spirit by his purities: so that we are also cabinets of the mysterious Trinity; and what is this short of heaven itself, but as infancy is short of manhood, and letters of words? The same state of life it is, but not the same age. It is heaven in a looking-glass, dark, but yet true, representing the beauties of the soul, and the graces of God, and the images of his eternal glory, by the reality of a special presence.

6. God is especially present in the consciences of all persons, good and bad, by way of testimony and judgment; that is, he is there a remembrance to call our actions to mind, a witness to bring them to judgment, and a judge to acquit or to condemn. And although this manner of presence is, in this life, after the manner of this life, that is imperfect, and we forget many actions of our lives; yet the greatest changes of our state of grace or sin, our most considerable actions, are always present, like capital letters to an aged and dim eye; and, at the day of judgment, God shall draw aside the cloud, and manifest this manner of his presence more notoriously, and make it appear that he was an observer of our very thoughts, and that he only laid those things by which, because we covered with dust and negligence, were not then discerned. But when we are risen from our dust and imperfection they all appear plain and legible.

Now the consideration of this great truth is of a very universal use in the whole course of the life of a Christian. All the consequents and effects of it are universal. He that remembers that God stands a witness and a judge, beholding every secrecy, besides his impiety, must have put on impudence, if he be not much restrained in his temptation to sin. "For the greatest part of sin is taken away, if a man have a witness of his conversation: and he is a great despiser of God who sends a boy away when he is going to commit fornication, and yet will dare to do it, though he knows God is present, and cannot be sent off; as if the eye of a little boy were more awful than the all-seeing eye of God. He is to be feared in public; he is to be feared in private: if you go forth, he spies you; if you go in, he sees you: when you light the candle, he observes you; when you put it out, then also God marks you. Be sure, that while you are in his sight, you behave yourself as becomes so holy a presence." But if you will sin, retire yourself wisely, and go where God cannot see, for nowhere else can you be safe. And certainly, if men would always actually consider, and really esteem this truth, that God is the great eye of the world, always watching over our actions, and an ever-open ear to hear all our words, and an unwearied arm ever lifted up to crush a sinner into ruin, it would be the readiest way in the world to make sin to cease from amongst the children of men, and for men to approach to the blessed estate of the saints in heaven, who cannot sin, for they always walk in the presence and behold the face of God. This instrument is to be reduced to practice, according to the following rules.