

REASONS FOR OPPOSING RITUALISM

Church Association Tract 055

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SHOULD we oppose Ritualism or let it alone? Is it our duty to sit still and allow Ritualists to do what they please? Or is it our duty to resist the progress of Ritualism by every means in our power? These are questions which seem to puzzle many Churchmen in the present day. They are questions to which I propose to supply an answer.

I submit, then, to the consideration of my fellow Churchmen that the life of the Church of England, and nothing less, is at stake. We have no choice, if we wish to keep the Church alive, we must contend earnestly for the truth. If we draw back, and refuse strife and contention for Christ's truth, there will soon be nothing for us but submission and disgrace. Some men may cry, "Peace, peace : oh, sacrifice anything for peace!" but there can be no real peace while our Church tolerates and fosters Popery. Is ecclesiastical peace so sweet, that it is worth purchasing at the expense of truth? Is a quiet life so precious, that in order to secure it we will tolerate transubstantiation and Auricular Confession? God forbid that we should say so! What others think I know not. For my own part my mind is made up. I have come to one decided conclusion. I say, Give me a really Protestant and Evangelical Church of England, or no Church of England at all. When the Reformed Church of England renounces her Protestant principles, and goes back to Popery, her glory will have departed. She will be an offence to God, and not a resting-place for any true Christian.

The ignorance of many Churchmen about the true nature and mischievous tendency of Ritualism is very great indeed. It is an ignorance so deplorably deep that it is like a judicial blindness. Some think that the whole Ritualistic controversy is a mere difference of opinion about matters of taste—about dresses, and ornaments, and gestures, and postures, and flowers, and banners—in fact, about things which are utter trifles. Others think that it is only a new form of the old dispute between High Churchmen and Low Churchmen, and that both parties are equally wrong and equally right, and all the same at the bottom. Others think that zealous and earnest people cannot be wrong, whatever they teach or do: and that as Ritualists are zealous and earnest, they ought to be let alone. Many are utterly unable to see differences, like persons afflicted with colour-blindness, who cannot distinguish red from blue. They cannot understand why all clergymen are not to be regarded as equally good and equally right, whatever they may think or do. The whole result is that Ritualism goes on and prospers, whilst honest Churchmen who come forward to oppose it are denounced and disliked as agitators, firebrands, and "troublers of Israel."

Nothing, unhappily, is so hard as to persuade men to inquire, examine, think, or read about any religious subject. If Churchmen would only examine for themselves the subject of Ritualism, I cannot believe they would ever be so apathetic as many seem to be about it. They would soon find that full-blown Ritualism is nothing less than an organised attempt to un-Protestantise the Church of England, and to re-introduce among us the corrupt doctrines of the Church of Rome. They would find that the evils against which the friends of the Church Association contend are not mere matters of taste, but deadly spiritual diseases, which would completely destroy the Church of England if once allowed to prevail. They would find that full-blown Ritualism is a deliberate effort to bring Popish principles and practices into our pale, and that what the friends of the Church Association are defending are the old doctrines, the old truths, and the old paths of our martyred Reformers. They would find, in short, that it is most unfair and unreasonable to call the Church Association a turbulent, mischievous and persecuting institution, and that for all it has done and is doing there is good cause.

In order to supply information, I think it may be useful to put down in order ten of the main points in Ritualism to which the attention of Churchmen ought to be specially directed. They are extracted from a very useful publication sent out by the Church Association, entitled, *Church Association Tract No. IV*. I am far from saying that all Ritualists hold all the positions set forth in these points. Some hold some of them, and some hold others. No doubt there are degrees in departure from the faith, and there are Ritualists and Ritualists! All I mean to say is, that when I speak of Ritualism as a dangerous system which ought to be opposed, I mean a system in which the following views are more or less supported and maintained :-

1. Most Ritualists pervert the communion table into an altar, and the Lord's Supper into a sacrifice and encourage the idea of a real material presence of Christ's body and blood, under the forms of the consecrated bread and wine. Our Church on the contrary never calls the Lord's table an altar in any part of the Prayer Book—declares that the sacrifice of the Mass is “a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit”—that transubstantiation over-throweth the natural body and blood of Christ are in heaven and not here—and that any adoration of the sacramental bread and wine is “idolatry to be abhorred of all faithful Christians.” (Art. XXVIII., XXXI., Communion Service Rubric.)
2. Many Ritualists *encourage and enjoin habitual Auricular Confession to a priest, and seek to restore judicial absolution by a priest, and the Romish Sacrament of Penance*. Our Church says, “It is most evident and plain that this Auricular Confession hath not the warrant of God's Word.” (Second part of Homily on Repentance.)
3. Many Ritualists *deny the sole authority of God's written Word. They add to it the so-called voice of the Church, or Catholic antiquity, or primitive teaching, or the traditions of the Dark Ages*. Our Church declares that “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation,” (Art. VI.); and that “while each Church has the right and the power to decree ceremonies (Art. XX.), it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written;” and “whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” (Art. VI.)
4. Many Ritualists *revile Protestantism. They vilify the Reformation and scoff at the Reformers, such as Cranmer, Latimer, and Jewel*. Yet these are the very men to whom we owe our English Bible and Prayer Book, our Articles, our freedom from Popish tyranny and superstition, our Protestant liberties, and the existence of a pure and reformed branch of Christ's Church in the realm!
5. Many Ritualists *declare that the doctrine of Rome and England is the same, and pray for union with the corrupt Church of Rome*.
6. Some Ritualists *hold, with the Church of Rome, that there are seven sacraments*. Our Twenty-fifth Article declares that there are only two sacraments ordained of Christ in the Gospel—Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
7. Some Ritualists pray for the souls of the dead, declare their belief in purgatory, give an extravagant honour to the Virgin Mary and the Saints, and invoke their intercession. Our Church says of such prayers that they are vain things fondly invented, grounded on no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.” (Art. XXII.)
8. Some Ritualists *introduce the practice of incensing persons and things, substituting wafers for bread at the Communion Service, multiplying lights and candles round the Lord's table as if it was an altar, and clothing ministers in sacerdotal vestments borrowed from the corrupt Church of Rome*.

9 Some Ritualists *propose to abandon, and labour for the abolition of, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*. Yet the declaration prefixed to those Articles declares that they “contain the true doctrine of the Church of England agreeable to God's Word.”

10 Some Ritualists recommend *the reservation of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*. Our Twenty-eight Article says: ‘The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.’”

Now, I ask plain Churchmen to read these ten points carefully, and consider them well. If they wish to see the points proved in detail by documentary evidence they have only got to buy the tract from which they are extracted, and they will find proofs in abundance. But if Churchmen can read these statements and yet say that Ritualism ought not to be opposed, and is not a direct return to Popery, I can only say that they are very unsatisfactory members of the Church of England!

For my own part I maintain that Ritualism ought to be steadily opposed for the following reasons:—

1. Because it has no real authority in God's Word, and is not to be found anywhere in the New Testament.
2. Because it dishonours the One Sacrifice and priestly office of Christ, obscures the faith of the Gospel, and practically puts human mediators between Christ and the soul.
3. Because it is not to be found by any plain man in the Church's Articles and Prayer Book, and in many points is flatly contrary to their express teaching.
4. Because it tends to bring the laity into subjection to the clergy, and especially to enslave the consciences of women.
5. Because it leads direct to that Popery which was cast out of the Church three hundred years ago by our Protestant Reformers.

Reader, what is your duty about Ritualism? Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding.

Are you a *true Christian*? Then I call on you to oppose Ritualism in every lawful way, both in defence of Jesus Christ's honour, and from respect for God's Word.

Are you a true *Churchman*? Then I call on you to oppose Ritualism in every lawful way, as a pernicious modern innovation, contrary to the letter and spirit of Church formularies, and most injurious to the Church of England.

Are you a *true Englishman*? Then I call on you to oppose Ritualism in every lawful way, as helping to bring back that Popery which made England cringe to a foreign potentate—kept back the Bible from our people—deluged our land with monkery, superstition, ignorance, and immorality—burned our Protestant Reformers—and ruined millions of souls.

Reader, think on these things and act. Do not be ashamed of supporting the Church Association. Oppose Ritualism in every lawful way! Think on these things and pray. Use that prayer which King Edward VI. prayed three hours before his death: “O my Lord God, defend this realm from papistry, and maintain Thy true religion!”