

THE ERRORS OF RITUALISM HAVE THEIR SOURCE IN THE UNREGENERATE HUMAN HEART

Church Association Tract 42

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In examining any religious system, the question is—*first*, whether it is *altogether* of God, or *altogether* of the Devil; and if it be mixed—that is partly of the one and partly of the other—then *secondly*, to ascertain what in it is of the truth of God, and what in it is of the Devil's lie.

Now the Bible is *God's* truth *altogether*: and we may well say of Atheism, Infidelity, Heathenism, and some other systems, that they are *altogether* of the *wicked one*. But it has best answered the Devil's purpose to *mingle together*, as far as he could, truth and error, that is, God's truth and his lie; for he knows,

1. That a very little error spoils a good deal of truth:—
2. That under the guise of, or in connection with, a little truth, he gets an immense deal of error received and adopted:—
3. That he thus gets the human heart satisfied to remain as it is, under the delusion that it possesses religion enough to save it:—

4. That it is a matter of perfect indifference what the delusion is; though the more he can clothe the skeleton, or the putrid carcass of a dead soul, with the flesh that seems to the victim religious, the more secure he is of his prey: and of course he will suit the delusion as much as possible to the taste and fancies of the victim.

Ritualism and Popery are perhaps his master pieces in this way; for, in these, with much that is true he has mixed up the most positive contradictions to the Word of God, and has linked with a portion of true Christianity the most palpable and fatal absurdities: and he works these in spite of knowledge, education, civilization, refinement, and common sense. He finds he can make the greatest fools of those whom the world and themselves reckon to be the most sensible, learned, acute, and well-informed; for he well knows the secret, that the carnal mind is *enmity* against God; and that, without grace, all the talents of men, however vast, and their natural excellencies however surpassing, only make them the more easy victims of his fearful delusions, and the fitter tools for working upon others to draw them into the same fatal net of destruction, in which they have themselves become entangled. Names will at once occur to you illustrating all this; but I forbear to adduce personal instances.

I have put Ritualism and Popery together; and we should not go far wrong if we were to say they are the same thing: but, at the same time, there is a serious difference. The moment a man becomes a Papist—and from the first, if he is born such—he is shut out as much as possible from all truth, and fortified in every way against it. The children of Romanists from their infancy are *educated* in Popery, and are taught so to deal practically with Protestantism and Protestants, as to expose them in the least possible degree to the probability of conversion. Many such therefore grow up in entire ignorance of the truth. But the Ritualists are living in the very blaze of God's truth.

They have in our Prayer Book, Articles, and Homilies, the pure gospel of the grace of God: they are bound to read the pure word of God in all the services of our Church; and yet they persist in shutting their eyes against the light; and even, as we have heard of wreckers, remove or intercept or confuse the beacon lamp of truth, so that instead of its being a guide to save, it becomes a decoy to inevitable destruction. Which are the worse of the two classes, in many—I do not say in all—cases, I leave you to determine.

But to come a little closer to our immediate subject:—"The errors of Ritualism have their source in the unregenerate human heart."

1. The first error I would here name is what our Church states in these words: "The sacrifices of Masses, in the which it is commonly said, that the Priest doth offer Christ for the quick and dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, are blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits."

This may be reckoned the fundamental error of the whole system, consisting of two parts, first, that transubstantiation is effected by the priest;—*i.e.* the change of the substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ; the second, that there is the consequent offering of Christ for sin by the priest, being the *continuation* or *repetition* (for the distinction of these terms, lately attempted to be established in a criticism on the Bishop of Ripon is absurd and dishonest, and the latter after all is the truer of the two) of that one offering once for all of Himself on the Cross, by which He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Now mark carefully what we have to say in reference to this; for I doubt whether the full error of this is discerned by many; and I do not remember to have seen it put as forcibly as it has struck me in carefully considering it.

The very essence, value, and power of the sacrifice of Christ was in His SUFFERING for sin:—and *this* word constantly occurs in reference to Christ. Luke xxiv. 46, "Thus it behoved Christ to *suffer*." Acts xvii. 3, "Christ must needs have *suffered*." 1 Peter ii. 21, "Christ also *suffered* for us." 1 Peter iii. 18, Christ also hath *once suffered* for sins." And, remember, He bare our sins, and was made sin for us, not in a *formal* manner merely, but in that deep agony of soul which drew from Him the never to be forgotten cry—"My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" and the completion of the sacrifice was in the blood-shedding, for the blood is the life; and thus he laid down His life for us, sealing the atonement by His death.

Now, do you see the force of what I am saying? I deny that there is any sacrifice of Christ *without suffering*. It was the sacrifice of Himself in and by *suffering*, and that not the mere bodily suffering of crucifixion, but the deep unutterable agony of His soul as the sinbearer—all the agony of hell, which we had deserved, meeting in and upon that holy and spotless One, in that tremendously fearful season of the darkness of His soul and of the universe—it was *this* which made His blood-shedding and death a sacrifice,—an atonement and propitiation for sin.

But how can there be any *continuation* or *repetition* of the SUFFERING? And yet if there is the slightest force or truth in what the Ritualists tell us, that the *sacrifice* is in any sense going on still, then I affirm—and I defy contradiction, that the *suffering* and the *wrath-bearing* must be going on still. But certainly this is not the fact. Look at this a little farther. The infinite singularity and uniqueness—if I may use the term—of the offering up of Jesus as the Lamb of God consisted in this that, owing to His infinite glory as Jehovah, by His infinite suffering not only was it an offering made *once for all*, but it became impossible that it could be any thing else, or need any thing to supplement it. But suppose that there was a repetition or continuation of that sacrifice, that is, suppose that the Ritualist's idea is true, *then* every time the priest, or any priest, offers Christ for the quick and dead, Christ SUFFERS, AND BEARS THE VERITABLE WRATH OF GOD, as He bare it on the Cross in its ineffable agony. You cannot have sacrifice without suffering; and if the suffering does not continue, neither can the sacrifice. On the other hand, in the Protestant—that is,

the Scriptural—view, the Lord's people, in partaking of the bread and wine, fulfill by faith the Saviour's parting command, "Do this in *remembrance* of Me:" and it is impossible it can be anything but a *remembrance*; because the *wrathbearing* and the *suffering* with the bloodshedding and death cannot be repeated; and all the transubstantiation in the world, however by a fiction it may repeat the latter, cannot approach a hair's breadth to the repeating of the former. But it is necessary I should just add here, that *what that remembrance may be to us*, through the Holy Ghost, who brings all things to our remembrance, is quite another matter. Though there is no repetition or continuation of the sacrifice, yet while we "do this in *remembrance*" of Him, we do,—if really and truly His,—in the words of our Article, "rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, and the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ, and the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ." We do offer a sacrifice; but it is "the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." The mere presentation of the symbols to God is nothing; there is no preciousness, no meaning, no congruity in such a thing, when He has His living Son—"a Lamb as it had been slain"—with Him at His right hand in His glory. These symbols are *for us*; and such presentation to God, as is made by the Ritualist, can only be an infinite insult and abomination, shewing the utter carnality and the fatal delusion of the heart that can offer them. Here we have, then, one clear illustration and proof of the statement embodied in our subject; this error has its source in the unregenerate human heart; and the point we have been handling is the very pith of ritualism. Its Eastward Position and its Vestments are inseparably bound up with what we have been bringing before you. *They presume there is a sacrifice*; but we have proved this to be impossible unless Christ still suffers!

We proceed now to bring forward a few other illustrations of our subject, not unconnected with what we have already said. The characteristic of most of the Ritualistic errors, is *utter ignorance* of spiritual truth: at which, however, we are not surprised, when we recall those words of the apostle, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

We find, for instance, an utter ignorance of the *real character of God*. What is Ritualistic Service but another kind of heathenism, about which God expostulates so severely with His ancient People! Mark, in Isaiah xlv. 9-20, not a refined and subtil argument, but a strong and pointed appeal to their common sense, concluding with those remarkable words—"None considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread on the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh and eaten it; and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?" Is not all this thoroughly applicable (*mutatis mutandis*) to those who worship the wafer? And is not the explanation of it precisely the same in the case of the Papist and of the idolator,— "He feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Away with the mawkish apologies and excuses often made, by those who ought to know better, for Ritualistic idolatry; and let it be visited with the reprobation, freely expressed, of good Christian common sense. "Bring no more," saith God, in the same Prophet, "vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; your new moons and appointed feasts my soul hateth;" and if He could speak thus, when these things had their place in the divinely appointed ceremonial, what would He not say, now that all these things are superseded in His Word (which, remember, gives us the true and earliest history of Christianity and the Church) by simple spiritual service, and two ordinances, which we call, Sacraments, in perfect correspondence with such service? Throughout the New Testament we have no ritual. How utterly do Ritualists ignore Christ's weighty and decisive words—"God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him, *must* worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Again, there is utter ignorance of the *real nature of sin*. Even the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin; how much less the mummeries: and attitudes, and processions, and elevations, and prostrations, which must occupy all thought, and make the service oscillate between a wearisome performance and an amusing entertainment!

How would the soul, if truly regenerate, instead of going back to beggarly elements, leap for joy at finding itself freed, as in our Scriptural Protestant service, from all such bondage of externals, and privileged to walk in the blessed liberty of simple worship and loving spiritual fellowship! How can a heart have ever truly ached for sin, or a soul felt itself hopelessly lost, that can play with sin in this way, and make a pastime of ordinances, in which, to a living faith, pardon is to be sealed and grace is to be imparted!

Again, what ignorance is manifested, in this fearful system, of all atonement, first, in its suffering; and, secondly, in its sufficiency. As we have already seen—how entirely the pretended offering of Christ, by the Romish or the Ritualistic priest, ignores the essential feature of suffering! And what can the wrath of God be, if it can be thus mitigated and appeased at the will of a priest and subject to his performance?

We can scarcely forbear to notice on this occasion the fearful abominations of the Confessional. How can any, that possess the blessedness of the pure in heart, who now live near to God, and shall see Him for ever, and are ever looking to the grace of Christ, and the strength and comfort of the indwelling Spirit to overcome and mortify their hated corruptions, not dread, with infinite recoil, for themselves and others, such certain and inevitable pollution. What are we not *bound to think* of those, and of their system, who encourage intercourse, reeking with filthiness, and setting up a moral mortification in all the faculties of thought and feeling! The arrogating, too, to man in this, as well as in other things, the prerogative which belongs only to God, is another unmistakable feature of the unregenerate heart.

Again, the lowering down spiritual communion with God, so as to be dependent on the mere contact of matter with our bodies, in the eating of the bread, and the drinking of the wine, cannot be conceived as co-existing with divine grace. How singularly has the Word of God met by anticipation these grossest notions of the carnal mind! “Not that which entereth into the mouth defileth the man,” was Christ’s own statement, when discussing meats and His appeal to the common sense and universal conviction of His hearers; and we should justly demand, that it should have been most unequivocally revealed—before we could be warranted in believing it—that anything entering in by the mouth into a man could cleanse or sanctify or save him, any more than that it could defile him.

A total want of sympathy with the universal experiences of the Apostles, as evidenced in their Epistles, and of all their faithful followers ever since, is another marked feature in the adherents of ritualism; and, I may add also, their consequent denial of the *experience*, in a real child of God, of the work of the Holy Ghost, and fellowship with Jesus. This is no matter of surprise; for wherever *externals* can occupy and satisfy the Ritualist as they do, he cannot have felt those deeper needs and heartlongings, which find their satisfying in nothing less than Jesus Himself, and in the fellowship of that Spirit, who takes of the things of Christ, and showeth them to us.

And it is only in entire keeping with all this deadness to and denial of spiritual life, that with such persons there is little or no separation between things sacred, and things most trifling and worldly. Both are confounded together in the experience and practice of the Ritualist. The holy and the worldly are both viewed by him from the standing point of the *flesh*; and therefore he finds no difficulty in combining the one with the other; while the true children of God, those that are heartily and soundly evangelical, must and do come out and are separate, not touching the unclean thing; and are thus as much disliked and hated, with but few exceptions, as were our Lord and His Disciples by the Scribes and Pharisees. It was Christ’s object to purchase unto Himself a Church, “an holy priesthood, to offer up *spiritual* sacrifices, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus;” and what Christ has given to His Church by the Holy Ghost comprises *all spiritual blessings*, for which they may look and ask without limit; but our condition is one of *fallen flesh*; and He has accordingly given us what that flesh needs, but no more—namely, two simple, significant, and instructive

ordinances, which we call sacraments; and nothing beyond. It was *fallen* flesh that was to be dealt with; and therefore, in His loving dealings with us, there must be fixed boundaries and due restrictions, so as to help the spirit without encumbering it. In the resurrection body, all will be different. Whatever may be the perfection and adornments of that outer world, the perfected spirit will never swerve from its perfect love, perfect worship, perfect service; and the resurrection body, fashioned like to the body of Christ's glory, will ever be its helpmeet, and never its burden. Here, in the present condition, in those who are truly *converted* to God, all His *spiritual* provisions are welcomed and realised, and the true life is felt to be the *spiritual* life; and the *outward* things are taken in moderation and used within limits, even in connection with religion itself, as in the case of the sacraments. In the *unconverted*, *outward* things are understood, enjoyed, and appropriated, as natural and suitable and sufficient; and they constantly invade the province of religion; while *spiritual* things are either *rejected* by the *infidel*, or *carnalised* by the *papist* and *ritualist*, who know no other use for them.

I make two remarks in conclusion:—

1. In speaking of Ritualists, it should be remembered, that all do not go to the same length; and if we have to deal with them *personally*, we must be careful to seek grace to act and speak wisely according to circumstances. "On some have compassion, making a difference."

2. Of what moment it is, that those who really are the Lord's own children, born of the Spirit, and savingly united to Christ, should walk worthy, come out and be separate, and possess real spiritual affections; that they may not put a stumbling-block in the way of Ritualists and others; but be able to exercise a holy influence, through the power of their spirit and conduct, to bring them, if it be the Lord's will, to Christ, and thus to save their souls.