

**MIND YOUR RUBRICS:  
SEASONABLE THOUGHTS UPON  
THE RUBRICS AND OTHER  
IMPORTANT POINTS, FOR THE  
CONSIDERATION OF CHURCHMEN**

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Mind Your Rubrics: Seasonable Thoughts Upon The Rubrics And Other Important Points, For  
The Consideration Of Churchmen by James Bardsley

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SEASONABLE THOUGHTS  
UPON THE  
RUBRICS AND OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS,  
FOR THE  
CONSIDERATION OF CHURCHMEN.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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WHILST it is the inalienable birthright of every human being to think for himself—and he can no more denude himself of this prerogative of his nature, than he can deprive himself of his own immortality—yet it is as true of thought as of property, that it has its duties as well as its rights. A man is just as responsible for his mental convictions, as he is for his moral actions. It has become very common with some to repeat the familiar saying of a well-known poet,—

“He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

This, in the highest sense, is true: but it is equally true that a man's life cannot be really right whose opinions are wrong. As the fingers of the clock will not always point to the right hour, unless the internal mechanism be correct; so, unless a man's opinions are sound, his conduct will not be really what God's Word requires. It is the cordial and heartfelt reception of the truth which both sanctifies and saves. If God has chosen us to salvation as an end, it is through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, as the means.

But there is another important truth apt to be overlooked from the same mental condition of the age in which we live: *i. e.*, there is a *public* judgment of the Church, as well as a *private* judgment of the individual. I do not mean a public judgment of the Church in such

a sense as entirely to supersede the private judgment of the individual: God forbid. But it is as much the duty of a Church to define and deliver its decisions upon great cardinal points, as it is that of the individual to exercise his private judgment upon them.

The decisions of the Church may be wrong, and the opinions of the individual may be right. What has been may be. It was once said of that mighty theologian Athanasius, "*Athanasius contra mundum*;" yet Athanasius was right, and the world was wrong. Still, at the same time, the fact that an opinion has been publicly adopted and established by the Church generally, is so far in favour of its truth. What a Church has to do, is calmly and solemnly to declare its decisions upon subjects deemed necessary and important, and then to make the Word of God accessible to its members, and impose it upon them as a solemn obligation to try these decisions by the only infallible standard of truth. This is what the Church of England has plainly and conspicuously done. While she teaches in her sixth Article, "that Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation," yet she asserts that "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." She declares in her eighth Article, "that the three Creeds ought thoroughly to be received and believed," not because they are covered with the hoar of antiquity, but because "they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." She teaches in her Article xx., "that while the Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith; yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another." It is upon this very ground that she summarily rejects the Romish dogmas of purga-



tory, the worshipping of images, the invocation of saints, and transubstantiation, as "fond things vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God." Now these and other decisions of the Church, skilfully and frequently wielded by her clergy, must tend to throw up a mound in the minds of the people both against the inroads of Romanism and Rationalism. It is a well-known plan and practice of Romish controversialists to represent the individual interpretation of Scripture by Protestants as their rule of Faith, and then having set up this man of straw, vigorously to knock it down. It is needless to say that no intelligent Protestant ever says that his private interpretation of Scripture is the rule of Faith. The rule is one thing, the interpretation of the rule is another. A person with a right rule may give a false measure, but this is not the fault of the rule, but of him who uses it. Some men by the light of the sun commit deeds of darkness, but the sun still remains the same beneficent agent of creation. And so, though some men wrest and pervert Scripture to their own hurt, it still remains the same unchangeable rule of Faith to the Church, and the only standard of final appeal.

The same remarks apply with respect to the Prayer-book, though of course in a lower degree. They stand upon totally different ground. There is all the difference between ceremonies invented by the wisdom of man, and ordinances instituted by the authority of Christ,—between the richest human compositions, and the revealed truths of Holy Scripture. As amid all the agitations of the atmosphere the sun continues to shine, so amid all the fluctuations of human opinion the Word of God remains the same, unchangeable as the light of heaven. Ceremonies rest upon human authority, and may vary; and the slightest acquaintance with Church history will teach us that from the earliest ages they have been as various as the

countries in which Christians have resided, and the forms of government under which they have lived. There is nothing upon which the utterances of our Church have been more distinct than this, and which admits of less honest difference among its members. "It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one and utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. . . . Every particular or National Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying." (Art. xxxiv.) With this Article agrees the language of the Preface on Ceremonies, which though not instituted by the authority of Christ, it says of them—

"Although the keeping or omitting of a Ceremony, in itself considered, is but a small thing; yet the wilful and contemptuous transgression and breaking of a common order and discipline is no small offence before God. 'Let all things be done among you,' saith St. Paul, 'in a seemly and due order;' the appointment of the which order pertaineth not to private men: therefore no man ought to take in hand, nor presume to appoint or alter any public or common Order in Christ's Church, except he be lawfully called and authorized thereunto."

Considerations like these would, I think, rectify many of those irregularities which evidently prevail amongst us, and prevent many of those rapid changes of thought and feeling, which unhappily show themselves in our midst. It must be apparent to every person of age and thought, that many of those clergymen who at present are disturbing the order and breaking the unity of the Church by the introduction of Rites and Ceremonies, which they do not pretend are to be found in the Prayer-book, were a short time since at the opposite swing of the pendulum in this matter. So stringent were they a few years ago that if a

brother clergyman departed from the letter of a rubric from peculiar circumstances, even though he maintained its spirit, he was denounced by them in the severest language, and hardly regarded as a churchman at all. Now these rubrical innovations and irregularities, unhappily so patent amongst us, and so destructive of the peace and prosperity of the Church, can only be prevented and rectified, not by one man setting up his private judgment against another man as to what is expedient to be done or what left undone, but by candid and impartial appeal to the rubrics themselves. This is what I propose to do briefly in the following pages. Not that I intend to examine and amplify all the rubrics, this would swell my tract into a volume, and defeat my design. But my aim shall be as time and space permit, to discuss some of those rubrics which involve the gravest consequences, and affect most nearly the administration of public worship. Should I express myself plainly and strongly, this will not, I may venture to say, arise from a disregard of the views of others, but from my own personal convictions. With reverence I hope I may say, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken."