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A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO

THE RIGHT HON. AND RIGHT REV.

THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

ON THE LATE

“PURCHAS JUDGMENT.”

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM GRESLEY,

VICAR OF ALL SAINTS', BOYNE HILL.

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A LETTER,

ETC.

MY LORD BISHOP,

I hope your Lordship will pardon my boldness in addressing you. I should not have ventured on such a step, but that I have been specially requested to do so, perhaps because I am a surviving member of the old Church party of thirty or forty years back, and have not followed altogether in the steps of the more modern Ritualists, though admiring their great zeal and energy.

The special point on which I desire to address your Lordship is the decision of the Court of Final Appeal in respect to the position of the Celebrant at the Holy Eucharist. If anything is more likely than another to cause a disruption or large secession from the English Church, or to cause many attached members to waver in their allegiance, and cast in their lot with those who desire disestablishment and consequent disendowment, it would be the carrying into effect the decree of the Court on this point. Such is the state of feeling, I am persuaded many men would give up all their worldly position, or even submit to martyrdom, rather than alter a practice, which as they believe in-

volves a sacred truth. And this is not only the feeling of many of the Clergy, but of a large body of sincere and earnest laymen also.

It will be said, perhaps, If the Judgment is according to law we cannot help it. Those who will not submit must take the consequence.

Allow me then very briefly to advert to the merits of the question. Your Lordship will, I think, agree with me, that all our great English Divines, or a large number of the chief among them, regard the Holy Eucharist as *a Feast upon a Sacrifice*, not a Sacrifice in the sense of continual slaying the Holy Victim, but in the sense of continually presenting to the FATHER the Victim once slain for the sins of the world.

To give one instance out of very many: Bishop Taylor, in his *Holy Living*, says at the time of the Oblation: "We sinners, Thy unworthy servants, in remembrance of Thy life-giving Passion, Thy Cross and Thy pains, Thy death and Thy burial, . . . do humbly present unto Thee the present Sacrifice of remembrance and thanksgiving." Similar expressions may be found in many other of our old divines. The notion was, that as the great Sacrifice of the Cross was typified and prefigured by the sacrifices of the Mosaic law, so it was commemorated and applied to the souls of men by the Holy Eucharist, which they scruple not to call a Sacrifice.

But in so great a mystery how can it be expected that all men should understand alike? The mind of man is not capable of grasping its infinite greatness. In effect some men, as we know, especially dwell on the Feast or Communion, some more on the Sacrifice. These different views naturally superinduce some difference of ritual. Those who feel strongly the neces-

sity of setting forth the idea of Sacrifice, prefer to stand at the centre of the altar, in the act of consecrating, as a recognized symbol of the doctrine. Those who principally dwell upon the Communion celebrate at the side or end. There is another class of persons who while recognizing equally the Feast and the Sacrifice, yet believe that the doctrine of the Sacrifice had been unduly obscured of late, and celebrate at the centre of the altar, in order to bring back to its right place the too much neglected doctrine.

What I desire respectfully to present before your Lordship is this,—that our Church in her formularies *purposely* allows both these opinions and both these forms of ritual. Let me quote the rubric before the Prayer of Consecration: “When the Priest, standing before the Table, hath so ordered the Bread and Wine, that he may with the more readiness and decency break the Bread before the people, and take the Cup into his hands, he shall say the Prayer of Consecration.” Here the Priest is directed to stand *before* the Table. To require him to stand at the north end would be more inconvenient, as well as contrary to general usage. Observe also particularly, that it is not said that he shall return to the north side. Some of the Clergy having arranged the necessary things return to the north end for the Consecration, but some do not. Now why should the Court restrict the liberty which has been so long allowed? Why should they impose a rule which the Church does not impose? for it is evident that no precise rule is given. Is it not almost certain that the framers of the rubric have purposely left it open? There were the same parties in the Church then as now. It was surely meant to include them both.

This view, I think, is corroborated by an expression which we find in the prayer after the Communion. We beseech our Heavenly FATHER "graciously to receive our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." To this one party would attach precisely the same meaning as "the Eucharistic Sacrifice;" but others would maintain that it meant no more than that praise and thanksgiving were offered. I do not express any opinion as to which party is right. In fact, I believe that both are right and both are wrong; both hold a true doctrine, but both have a tendency to exclude an equally true one. But what I ask your Lordship to consider is, whether this almost necessary defect in the apprehension of so mysterious a subject was not purposely provided for by the compilers of our formularies, and whether it was not their deliberate intention to include both within the Church. In the case of Mr. Voysey, recently decided, it was very prominently set forth by the Court that when passages in Holy Scripture, or in the formularies of the Church, are doubtful, it would not be just to enforce one alternative to the exclusion of the other. Does not the decision in the Purchas case seem to go directly against this principle, and peremptorily to decide a point which has notoriously been taken differently by different parties?

I observe that in the recent judgment it is said, "Their Lordships *incline to think* that the rubric was purposely framed so as not to direct or insist on a change of position in the minister which *might be* needless." But surely when their Lordships express so much doubt and hesitation, it is but just that the defendant should have the benefit of the doubt, and that a number of earnest and zealous men should not

be compelled to adopt a practice which they conscientiously disapprove, when the whole question is so difficult of decision.

There is another part of the recent judgment which will cause very great uneasiness,—in fact, will displease and annoy all parties equally,—nay, it will cause worse than annoyance. It will give a colour of ridicule to the whole affair. While the Ritualists are debarred from wearing their favourite vestments, the Low Church party will have to wear the surplice which they so much dislike in the pulpit, and what will be still more annoying to many cathedral dignitaries, the long disused copes. Already the secular press turns the matter into ridicule. Would it not be well to devise some means to prevent all this scandal and irreverence?

If I am rightly informed, the action of the Court as it stands at present is simply in the form of advice to the Queen to pronounce judgment. Whether judgment has been pronounced, I am not aware. Probably Her Majesty consults on the matter with her constitutional advisers before pronouncing. In so very grave a case, pregnant with so much danger, would it not be competent for your Lordship, in conjunction with other Bishops, to address the Queen and request her to pause before she ratifies the judgment? If, unfortunately, it should already be completed, the only remedy seems to be that which many persons have long hoped for, namely, the action of Convocation and Parliament, by which these matters may be well considered, and settled on a satisfactory basis, as in the last settlement of 1662, the points in question being first debated and passed in Convocation, and then confirmed by Act of Parliament, and the rubrics

of the Prayer Book be revised by competent and undeniable authority, which all would be ready to accept.

If the matter rests as it is, and the recent judgment is insisted on, a greater blow will be struck at the unity and permanence of the Church, than any which recent days have witnessed. It would be well for the authorities both in Church and State to consider whether they may not be making the same sort of fatal blunder which has caused so much loss to the Church, by the expulsion of the Wesleyans from her communion. Surely it would be the wiser course to endeavour to conciliate and retain a body of earnest and devoted men, rather than outrage their feelings and drive them from us.

I have the honour to be

Your Lordship's faithful servant,
WILLIAM GRESLEY.





