

“THE CHANCEL SHALL REMAIN AS THEY HAVE DONE IN TIMES PAST.”

Church Association Tract 192

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These familiar words first entered the Prayer Book in 1552, near the close of the reign of Edward VI., when nearly all the fittings and furniture of the chancels had been changed from what they had been “in times past.” The altars, images, crucifixes, had all been swept away, and instead of them texts of Scripture (“as a stay to their heresies,” as Bonner¹ complained) were painted on the chancel walls. Nobody dreamed at that time of perpetuating the old mediaeval fittings and furniture. Yet the chancels themselves were to “remain,” and an order was newly inserted into the Prayer Book to ensure their remaining. An explanation of all this may be found in the history of the period.

But first of all let us observe that the wording was not quite the same then as now. The rubric of 1552 ran thus:—

The Morning and Evening Prayer shall be used in such place of the Church, Chapel, or Chancel, and the Minister shall so turn him, as the people may best hear. And if there be any controversy therein, the matter shall be referred to the ordinary, and he or his deputy shall appoint the place, and the chancels shall remain, as they have done in times past.

Here it will be noticed that the bit about “chancels” was a mere dependent clause occurring in a general direction as to

“The order where Morning and Evening Prayer shall be used and said.” Accordingly the rubric was printed with that heading, not on a separate page as now, but as a prelude to “The order for Morning Prayer.” There was no reference then to “the accustomed place,” as in our present rubric; and for the very obvious reason that “the accustomed place,” of pre-reformation times would not have enabled the people to “best hear.”

While the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI. was “in consultation” a powerful party, headed by Bucer and Bishop Hooper, advocated the abolition of chancels altogether. Bucer went so far as to call it “antichristian” to say service in the choir.²

Bishop Hooper, preaching at Court, on March 5th, 1550,³ urged: “This I would wish, that the magistrates should put both the preacher, minister, and the people in one place, and shut up the partition called the chancel, that separateth the congregation of Christ one from the other.” The avarice of the courtiers who stripped lead from the roofs, and quarried the walls for building materials, under a pretended zeal for “Reformation,” added urgency to this question in 1552; yet Cranmer and his colleagues not only resisted the powerful pressure brought to bear upon them, but inserted a fresh rubric that the chancels should “REMAIN, as they have done in times past.” “Done” what? Why, “remained.” Neither in 1552 nor in 1559 was it deemed desirable to retain the furniture of the mediaeval chancels; on the contrary, the fixed altars were supplanted by movable tables; the crucifix, with its attendant lights and images, was banished; and the Ten Commandments were put up on the east wall of the “church or chancel” over the holy table; the piscinae, &c., were rendered useless. Thus though the chancels “remained,” their furniture was radically changed, and that, too, under the authority and inspection of the Ordinaries and Royal visitors⁴ at the very date of the first issue of the rubric under consideration. The comma which then followed the word “remain” made its meaning perfectly clear and obvious, and the blunders which have ensued upon its accidental omission are an instructive illustration of the value of “tradition.”

The so-called “Ritualists,” who affect a superior knowledge of the Prayer Book, quote the rubric as though the emphatic word were “as,” and as though the “Ultra-Protestant” *Second Prayer Book* of 1552 (which they declare to have been spoiled by the predominating influence of Martin Bucer and “foreign” reformers), had deliberately enacted for the first time that no change should be made in the paraphernalia and housings which constituted the distinctive “properties” used on the parochial stage for the “display of the Romish Mass!” “See!” they say, “the chancels shall remain AS they have done in times past.”

True, the decision arrived at in 1552 by Cranmer and his colleagues was “The chancels shall remain.” The use which they made of the chancel was to furnish a smaller meeting place into which the communicants might “draw near” so as to have hearty vocal congregational worship, notwithstanding their diminished numbers after the withdrawal of non-communicants. For this purpose, seats for the communicants were placed by the churchwardens within the chancel; and non-communicants were shut out⁵ by screens and curtains so long as the Popish practice of “hearing Mass” lingered in the memories of the older generation.

The first step in Reform had been to abolish all side altars and all “low masses,” and for this purpose the service was at first confined to “the chancel” and to the “high altar” within the chancel.

So early as September 22nd, 1547, the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury were enjoined “that henceforth all masses by note shall be sung within the choir at such times as heretofore they have been used to be sung in other places of the church.”⁶ Within a fortnight after the First Prayer Book came into use, the Privy Council directed an order to Bp. Bonner to suppress all celebrations “used in private chapels, and other remote places, and not in the chancel, contrary to the king’s majesty’s proceedings,” and that “the holy blessed communion, according to the Act of Parliament, be ministered at the high altar of the church, and in no other places of the same”; even private communions being “executed at the Chancel.”⁷

According to the First Prayer Book each person present at the Communion time, was to go up into the Chancel and there drop his individual “oblation” into the poor men’s box, which by the Royal Injunction of 1547, had been placed “near unto the High Altar.”⁸ The Rubric of 1549 directed.

“Then so many as shall be partakers of the Holy Communion shall tarry still in the quire, or in some convenient place nigh the quire, the men on the one side and the women on the other side. All other (that mind not to receive the said Holy Communion) shall depart out of the quire, except the ministers and clerks.”

At that time the choir screen was a high erection with lofty doors, and in cathedrals often consisted of a stone wall which effectually screened the communicants from observation.

Ridley in his first visitation of the diocese of London, in May, 1550, directed the churchwardens—

“To erect and set up the Lord’s board after the form of an honest table decently covered in such place of the *quire* or *chancel* as shall be thought most meet by their discretion and agreement, so that the ministers with the communicants may have their places separated from the rest of the people, and to take down all other by-altars or tables.”⁹

In the same Visitation he asked “whether any tarrieth in the quire after the offertory, other than those that do communicate except clerks and ministers?”¹⁰

The *Greyfriars’ Chronicle* (p. 69) tells us—

‘Item, the XXIV. day of the same month after, was the grates beside the high altar at Powle’s closed up, that the people should not look in at the time of the Communion time, and the vail hanged up. And

the XXVIII. day after was Easter even, and then was the Table removed, and set beneath at the vail north and south.”

Wriothesley's Chronicle also mentions (p. 47) how Ridley, in March, 1551 —

“After the creed, caused the vaile to be drawn that no person should see but those that received, and he closed the iron gates of the quire on the north and south side that non might remain in the quire.”

Thus we learn that the object aimed at in directing the chancels to “remain” was to put a stop to solitary celebrations, and to exclude non-communicant attendants from “hearing mass.”

In the reign of Elizabeth, Parliament re-enacted the rubric of Edward’s second book as printed above. Unluckily, however, no manuscript or printed copy of the second Book of Edward was attached to the statute-roll of Elizabeth (as erroneously stated by Sir R. Phillimore, and by Bp. Forbes), and not one of the many printed books issued during the reign of Elizabeth (not even those of her first year) corresponded to the terms or answered the requirements of the statute. Indeed, no two issues of Elizabethan Prayer Books even agreed with one another!

With her lofty notions of the prerogative of the “Supreme Governour” of the Church, Elizabeth took upon herself to alter the text enacted by Parliament, and among other illegal changes she substituted the following version:—

<i>Statutory rubric of 1559.</i>	<i>Elizabeth's fraud-rubric.</i>
The morning and Evening Prayer shall be used in such places of the Church, Chappel, or Chancel, and the Minister shall so turn him as the people may best hear. And if there be any controversie therein, the matter shall be referred to the Ordinary, and he or his deputy shall appoint the place, and the Chancels shall remain, as they have done in times past.	The morning and Evening Prayer shall be used in the accustomed place of the Church, Chappel, or Chancel, except it shall be otherwise determined by the Ordinary of the Place: and the Chancels shall remain, as they have done in times past.

We can but conjecture as to the motives which led to this tampering with the text of the Prayer Book. The Queen, doubtless, desired to make the inevitable changes as little startling to the bulk of the nation as possible, and as power was reserved to the Ordinary to set aside her direction in this respect, the policy may have been as wise as it certainly was unscrupulous. The omission of all reference to the Ordinary’s “deputy,” doubtless, originated in a desire to restrict all discretionary power to a few well-known individuals selected by, and responsible to, the (then) executive government; while the slight change of punctuation (by substituting a colon for a comma) tended to give an independent importance to the concluding words, although the retention of the comma after “remain” still preserved the original sense.¹¹

During Elizabeth’s reign, the chancels continued to be used for the special accommodation of the communicants. Thus in 1565 the Chapter of Canterbury certified to Archbishop Parker that “None are suffered to tarry within the chancel but the communicants.”¹² In 1591 the Archdeacon of Essex ordered a certain William Peacock to make public amends “when the whole company of communicants be gathered together in the quire, and before the Communion be administered.”¹³ In 1627 the churchwardens of Thoydon Garnon were presented in the Archdeacon’s Court for having “their chancel unseated.”¹⁴ Special seats for communicants are mentioned in contrast with the “common seats” by Archdeacon King, 1599, and later by Archdeacons Davenant, White, Sharp,

and by Bishops Thornborough, Bridges, Montagu, Juxon, and Cosin.¹⁵ These seats still remain at Wimborne Minster, in Dorsetshire. In the Ridsdale case, the Dean of the Arches (Lord Penzance) held that the rubric as to the communicants being “conveniently placed” related to “a part of the church near the Lord’s Table,” and he adopted those words from a Judgment given in the Metropolitan Court of the Archbishop of Armagh, in 1852.

A clear proof that the Ritualistic gloss on this rubric had not been so much as imagined, is the fact that the Puritans never adduce it as one of their grievances. For example, in 1606 was published the *Survey of the Book of Common Prayer*,¹⁶ where the objection raised was merely “whether this *maintaining* of chancels be not scandalous to many?” At the Hampton Court Conference no allusion was made to this rubric; and at the Savoy the complaint was merely as to the interpolation into the *printed* books of “the accustomed place” without any legal authority. The objectors said:—

“We desire that the words of the first rubric may be expressed as in the book established by authority of Parliament, 5 & 6 Ed. VI. thus:—“*The Morning and Evening Prayer shall be used in such place of the church, chapel, or chancel, and the Minister shall so turn him, as the people may best hear, and if there be any controversy therein, the matter shall be referred to the Ordinary.*”

Not one word as to the chancels remaining “as” they had done. The bishops were in no mood to make concessions, but rejoined haughtily enough, “We think it fit that the rubric stand as it is, and all be left to the discretion of the ordinary,”¹⁷ i.e. to *themselves*. Accordingly no further attention seems to have been bestowed on this point during the revision, since no amendment of this particular rubric was proposed either in Committee or in Convocation.¹⁸

But, so far as we can trace the opinions of the Rulers of the Church, the Ritualistic interpretation of the rubric had not as yet dawned upon the mind of anybody.

Queen Elizabeth in 1561 had issued an Order “for the comely keeping . . . especially of the upper part called the chancels.”¹⁹

This “further Order” was enforced by Archbishop Parker, who asks “whether the rood-loft be pulled down according to the order prescribed, and the partition between the church and chancel be kept.” Similar inquiries are made by Archbishop Grindal, Bishops Aylmer, Sandys, and other Elizabethan ordinaries.²⁰

And this very Order of Elizabeth was referred to in a side-note by Juxon, in 1640, as explaining the rubric, when he asked, “Do the chancels remain as they have done in times past, *that is to say*, in the convenient situation of the seats, and in the ascent or steps unto the place appointed anciently for the standing of the holy table?” These articles of Juxon’s were formally adopted by the Convocation of 1640 in their 9th canon; and his inquiry (*including the reference to Elizabeth’s Order of 1561*) is repeated verbatim in 1662 by Archdeacon Pory, the author of the *Prayer for the High Court of Parliament*.²¹

Now, as Juxon was Archbishop of Canterbury, and Pory a leading reviser of the Prayer Book in 1661, we have authoritative contemporary proof of the meaning of the “chancels remaining,” on July 30th, 1561, when an order was made by the Consistory Court of St Albans upon the churchwardens of Busshey, “that before the first day of September next *the rood loft be taken down*, and that the stalls in the quire, the communion table and the burdes of the churchyard be made and emended.”

Bp. Wren, the chairman of the Revision Committee of 1661, in his Notes published by Bp. Jacobson, says of the rubric in question:—

“Set down when this Order was made. But who can tell now which place, when this Order was made, was the accustomed place? Also, who knows how the chancels were in those times past, so many having been demolished, and many disused? But what is now fit to be ordered therein, and to preserve those that are still in use, it would be set down in express words, without those uncertainties which breed nothing but debate and scorn.”

He then comments on the Ornaments Rubric (p. 55) and, on the fourth rubric before the Communion which specifies the place of the table “at the communion time,” he remarks (p. 74):

“Many churches have new no chancels. And in the most that have, though the desk for reading the prayers doth stand in the body of the Church, yet they use to go into the Chancel to receive the Communion. Let it therefore be expressly here set down what is intended, still keeping the use of the chancels, where it may well be done.”

In his answer to the articles of impeachment, Wren said²² of this rubric *the chancels shall remain*, “meaning thereby (as the Defendant supposeth) that the chancels should not be demolished or defaced, but should be preserved for the use of the parish.”

Bp. Cosin, also a prominent reviser, has a similar note:

“*And the chancels shall remain as they have done in times past.* That is, distinguished from the body of the church by a frame of open-work, and furnished with rows of chairs or stools on either side; and if there were formerly any steps up to the place where the altar or table stood, that they should be suffered to continue so still, and not be taken down and laid level with the ground, as lately they have been by violence and disorder contrary to law and custom.”²³

But when, at a later time, Cosin came to embody the “considerations” which he thought needed attention at the forthcoming revision, he passed over this rubric in silence.²⁴

From such comments it is clear that the idea of “retaining” the mediaeval fittings and furniture which had long disappeared from the chancels had not occurred to anyone. Neither in Committee, nor in Convocation was any amendment of the Elizabethan printed “rubric” proposed. But, from inadvertence, the (statutory) comma after the word “remain” was overlooked, owing to its having been dropped by the printers out of that folio copy of 1636 which was employed in Convocation for the purposes of the revision. The punctuation was taken over from this printed copy, save in one curious particular. In the MS. “annexed” to the Act of Uniformity, a full stop has been substituted for the printed colon of 1636, and the word “And” was made to commence with a capital letter so as to form, *for the first time*, an independent sentence. Hence, it might be argued by some intrepid Ritualist that in 1661 the emphasis was intentionally transferred to the word “as,” and no longer rested as heretofore upon the word “remain.” If so, we arrive at this grotesque result that the condition of the chancels during the twenty years of the Great Rebellion, which Wren and Cosin so manifestly deplored, was enacted in 1662 as the statutory model for future imitation! *Credat Judæus.*

The existing law as to chancels was laid down by Sir John Nichol in *Rich v. Bushnell*²⁵ as follows:—“Though the freehold of the chancel may be in the rector, lay or spiritual, as by a sort of legal fiction, the freehold of the church is in the incumbent; and though the burden of repairing the chancel may rest on such rector, yet the *use* of it belongs to the parishioners for the decent and convenient celebration of the holy communion and the solemnization of marriage.” This doctrine was adopted by C. J. Cockburn, in *Griffin v. Dighton*,²⁶ confirmed on appeal.

In 1731 was republished John Johnson’s *Clergyman’s Vade Mecum*, which went through many editions and was long the standard work of parson’s law, in which it is observed (l.-179): “Generally there are in every chancel pews fastened to the freehold for the use of the people when they communicate.” It is to these pews or benches that reference was intended by the rubric

introduced in 1661, that the communicants should be “conveniently placed” during the interval after the close of the ante-communion service, and before the commencement of what used to be called “the second service.” Where a chancel is sufficiently spacious to accommodate all the intending communicants this, no doubt, is the most rubrical way of providing for the administration. But when, as at Easter or other “great feasts of receivings,”²⁷ the numbers are too large to be accommodated in the chancel, the rubric provides for the bringing down of the table, so that (to use the words of the 82nd canon) “the communicants may more conveniently and in more number communicate with the said minister.” The moving of the table was not only contemplated by the rubrics, but by the Injunctions of Elizabeth (of even date with her Prayer Book, in 1559) the “Interpretations” of the bishops in 1561, the Royal Advertisements of 1566, and the Canons of 1604. As the Privy Council stated in *Liddell v. Westerton*,

“The communion of the Lord’s Supper was to be held at a table as distinguished from an altar, a table in the ordinary meaning of that term; that as by the rubric the bread used was to be ‘the ordinary bread eaten at table with other meats,’ so the table was to be of the character of those employed on such occasions; that *it was not only to be movable, but was from time to time to be moved.*”²⁸

Two other points may be noticed. There is no ground for saying that the chancel is for the use of singers, any more than is the organ gallery; singers have no legal right to be seated except at the discretion of the churchwardens. And the requirements of all the rubrics would be completely fulfilled even though no single communicant approached the rails. Rails did not exist in pre-reformation times, being an invention of Abp. Laud’s. Yet even Laud consented to waive his preference for kneeling at the rails, if the communicants would but kneel in the chancel.²⁹ And Bp. Montagu, a still “higher” churchman than Laud, published in a synod held on October 8th, 1639, at Ipswich, the following direction:—“That the communicants being entered, should be disposed of orderly in their several ranks, leaving sufficient room for the priest or minister to go between them; by whom they were to be communicated one rank after another, till they had all of them received.”³⁰

May not this direction furnish the best interpretation of the words “in order” which appeared *for the first time* in the rubric of 1661, relating to the delivery of the communion?

A custom referred to by several Ordinaries in their Visitation articles (ex. gr., Juxon, Bostock, White, and ³¹Pory) was that the first rank of communicants “drew near” to the table at the words “draw near” in the Exhortation, addressed exclusively to “them that come to receive.” This custom still lingers in many churches, and when combined with the other plan of arranging “the communicants’ seats” so that the officiating clergy may pass noiselessly from rank to rank,³² it enables the whole congregation to take part audibly in such portions of the service as belong to the people, such as the general confession, the Lord’s prayer, and the *Gloria in excelsis*. Those who kneel at the rails need not quit their position, but will serve as leaders to the rest in making the prescribed responses, and in this way, without any change of position on the part of any save the officiants, a much more congregational rendering of the service is attained. The duty of “conveniently placing” the communicants belongs, of course, to the churchwardens; for the words “having placed *themselves*” were expressly altered³³ to avoid any individual eccentricities or possible confusion. On these lines the whole of the rubrics receive a consistent interpretation, which is conducive to the seemly and orderly administration of the “Supper of the Lord and the Holy Communion.”

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Endnotes:

- 1) Cardwell, *Doc. Ann.* No. xxxiv.

- 2) "Ut enim chorus sit tam procul sejunctus a reliquo templo, et in eo tantum sacra represententur, quae tamen ad omnem pertinent populum, clerumque, hoc Antichristianum est . . . Ex formis antiquissimorum templorum atque scriptis S. Patrum satis cognoscitur, fuisse stationem cleri apud veteres in mediis templis, quae fere rotunda erant; ex eoque loco sic sacra divina populis esse exhibita ut exaudiri planè possent quae recitabantur, et intelligi ab omnibus, qui essent praesentes." (*Scripta Anglicana*, ed. 1577, p. 457.)
- 3) This was the day after Bp. Heath had been committed to the Fleet for refusing assent to the new Ordinal of 1550, immediately after which the revision of the Prayer Book was taken in hand. (Dasent's *Acts of the Privy Council*, II.-379, Hooper's Works, I.-492.)
- 4) The vouchers for these statements will be found detailed in "The Crucifix at St. Paul's," and "Queen Elizabeth's Crucifix." Price One Penny each. (J. F. Shaw & Co.)
- 5) For detailed proof see Tract 87 on "Hearing Mass."
- 6) Gasquet's *Ed. VI. and the Book of C. P.*, p. 56.
- 7) Cardwell, *Doc. Ann.*, No. xvi.
- 8) *Doc. Ann.*, I.-18.
- 9) *Doc. Ann.*, I.-83.
- 10) Foxe, *Act and Mon.*, vi.-784.
- 11) I have shown elsewhere that not one of the Elizabethan prelates recognised Elizabeth's fraud rubrics. They constantly quote the *ipsissima verba* of the suppressed but nevertheless legal and binding rubric of Edward's Second Prayer Book, which had been enacted by the 3rd section of 1 Eliz., c. 2. See *The Historical Grounds of the Lambeth Judgment examined*, fifth edition, p. 22.
- 12) Strype's *Parker*, i.-365.
- 13) Hale's *Precedents*, Criminal Cases, p. 206.
- 14) Hale's *Precedents*, Church Rates, p. 55.
- 15) Appendix to Second Report of Ritual Commission, pp. 434-602.
- 16) British Museum, 3406, b. 37, pp. 40, 72.
- 17) Cardwell, *Conf.*, pp. 314, 351.
- 18) Parker, *Hist. Revis.*, p. 128.
- 19) Cardwell, *Doc. Ann.*, No. Iv. It is printed in full in Miller's *Eccl. Law*.
- 20) *Rit. Rep. App.*, pp. 403-5, 417-38, 407-4, 418-4, 425-31, &c., &c.
- 21) *Rit. Rep. App.*, pp. 589-3, 625-3.
- 22) *Parentalia*, p. 74.
- 23) Works, V.-228.
- 24) *Ibid.*, p. 507.
- 25) 4 Haggard, 164.

- 26) 33 L. J., Q.B., 181.
- 27) "That the table be removed out of the choir into the body of the church, before the chancel door; where either the choir seemeth to be too little, or at great feasts of receivings. And at the end of the communion to be set up again, according to the Injunctions." (*Interpretations and further considerations of the Injunctions* drafted by the bishops in 1561. Of this draft two copies exist, one at C. C. C. Cambridge, the other in the Petyt MSS. in the Inner Temple Library. They are printed by Cardwell and Strype, but do not appear to have ever been completed or published. Lord Selborne thinks they were "suggestions for future legislation," and they probably served as a basis for the Royal Advertisements of 1566.)
- 28) Brooke, p. 71.
- 29) Perry's *History of the Church of England*, I-513, n.
- 30) Heylin's *Cyprianus Anglicus*, p. 366. The Order itself is in the Lambeth MSS., No. 643, p. 631. Mr Perry misquotes it as authorising "standing"!
- 31) Appendix to Second Report of Rit. Com., pp. 593-629.
- 32) "Sweet awful hour! *the only sound*
One gentle footstep gliding round,
Offering by turns on Jesus' part
The cross to every hand and heart.
- 33) See the erasure in MS. Annexed Prayer Book, p. 240.