

# THE COUNTER-REFORMATION AND HOW TO MEET IT

## Church Association Tract 26

PAPER READ BY THE REV. A. BARING-GOULD

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At the Church Association Conference, held at Wolverhampton, on the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1873, on the following subject:—

*“How may a correct knowledge of the doctrines of our Reformed Church be extended with faithfulness and soundness of judgment, so that spiritual life may be further developed in Congregations, and the people guarded against the manifold errors which now assail the Truth.”*

In this question it is evidently intended that our minds should in the first place be directed to “the manifold errors which now assail the Truth;” and these errors being ascertained and admitted, the remedy proposed is the extension of a “correct knowledge of the doctrines of our Reformed Church.” This extension of knowledge, however, is to be made under a most important condition, viz., that “spiritual life may be further developed in our congregations.”

The preliminary inquiry would therefore naturally be, What are “the manifold errors which now assail the Truth?” Upon this point, however, it is but too evident that little need be said. When things have come to that pass that our two Archbishops can deliberately record the humiliating confession that “there can be no doubt that the danger we apprehend of a considerable minority both of clergy and laity amongst us desiring to subvert the principles of the Reformation is *real*,” we have little cause to spend our time in saying another word to prove it. It is upon the remedy rather than the disease that our attention should be especially fixed. Suffice it, then, to say on this point that a regular organized conspiracy to unprotestantize our Church has been discovered by her loyal members, acknowledged to exist by our ecclesiastical rulers, and scarcely denied by the conspirators themselves. Not content with introducing a gorgeous ceremonial into our churches in imitation of Rome, they have now set up what is practically the Romish mass, and withal “sacramental confession” and “priestly absolution” as necessary to its right reception. “It is therefore,” says Bishop Ellicott, “no use disguising the fact. What is, or rather has been, called the ritualistic movement has now passed into a distinctly counter-Reformation movement, and will, whenever sufficiently sustained by numbers and perfected in organization, reveal its ultimate aims with clearness and decision.”

Not, however, that I would for a moment forget that there are “manifold errors which assail the Truth,” and which come from a totally different quarter. Infidelity in its various grades and phases, has, it may be feared, by a natural reaction, become terribly prevalent in the country. It is, indeed, deplorable to think that as the result of this Romeward movement, Rationalism is making at least as many converts as Ritualism, and, for the most part, converts of a far more educated class. If, then, I do not dwell on this form of error, it is not because I do not recognize its existence, or acknowledge its power for mischief, but because the reference to “the doctrines of our Reformed Church” which is made in the question before us leads me to suppose that I am expected to suggest the remedy for error which comes in a totally different direction.

Having, then, said this much in regard to “the errors which now assail the Truth,” we pursue the inquiry as to the *remedy*, so far at least as regards the guarding our congregations against their adoption. And that question is, as we have seen, practically this:—“What course of teaching can we adopt, with the best prospect, under God, of establishing our people in the faith, fortifying them against the errors specified, and making them enlightened and spiritually minded Churchmen?”

And to this I shall reply by offering three suggestions, only premising that though my contribution towards the solution of this painfully important question will necessarily be taken for what it is

worth, and no more; yet I earnestly trust you will be assured that it is not offered without a deep sense of the grave responsibility I incur, nor without very earnest prayer for that guidance from above which can alone enable me to speak—to use the words employed in our question—“with faithfulness and soundness of judgment.”

I. Let me say then, in the first place, that I think we shall all agree that our first and great want in the present crisis is a *real revival of spiritual religion in our midst*. And to secure this there is indeed but one only means to be employed with any hope of success—the plain and faithful preaching of Christ, accompanied with well sustained prayer for the Holy Ghost to apply that word of Truth. It would, indeed, be to the last degree disastrous, if we allowed any teaching whatever to interfere with the plain and practical preaching of the Gospel. Never was it more necessary than now to unfold clearly and repeatedly the great truths connected with the Fall, and the Redemption of mankind through the atoning Sacrifice and finished Righteousness of Christ. It has “pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.”

And if I were to specify any one truth which I conceive needs special prominence in our teaching in these days, I should certainly name *the renewal of the heart by the Holy Ghost*. The doctrine of the new birth is one which I fear is practically suppressed in too many of our churches. People are allowed quietly to take it for granted that they are “born again,” and the congregation is regarded and addressed as though its members were all alike—real Christians.

But this delusion, however pleasing to them, and however painful to us to disturb, must be dissipated at all cost. We must plainly show, by the decisive testimony of God’s word, that there is a mighty difference amongst the members of our congregations—that some are born again, and some are not—that there are the converted and the unconverted—the children of light and grace, and the servants of sin and Satan.

I would plead, therefore, for a revival of the good old Protestant and Scriptural teaching of our Fathers in Christ:—“Ye must be born again.” I humbly venture to suggest that what we want is not only more teaching on the Person and work of the Holy Ghost, but also a closer application of the enquiry to the consciences of our people:—“Have *you* experienced this new Birth?”

We often express amazement at members of our congregations being drawn under the blighting influence of Ritualism; but if their religion is only a *profession*, and not a *reality*, what cause is there for such astonishment? If persons don’t know the genuine coin of the Realm, how should we be surprised, if they readily accept the counterfeit?

What then we most want, I am persuaded, is a real revival of spiritual religion in our Church. And here we must be reminded that such a revival can only originate with God—that the vital energy which we so much need to inspire both Pastors and people can only be the result of the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

And is not such an outpouring of the Spirit to be obtained by Prayer? Is it not promised? And would not “spiritual life be further developed in our congregations,” if we could only bring them to their knees in “the present distress” and implore its fulfilment?

I believe, therefore, that no more effectual remedy for the distracted and disorganized state of our Church can be found than a *combination for prayer for the interposition of God and for the display of His Power*. With a revived Ministry and a revived Church, the clouds which at present hang so heavily over would be rolled back, and we should speedily see the salvation of God. Oh! I will never believe that He who, at the time of the glorious Reformation, gave such courage, not only to strong men but also to feeble women, to submit to the most cruel torture and death rather than compromise the Truth, will now refuse His grace to our people, if we ask it, and enable them to stand firm to those Reformation principles thus dearly purchased. Our ecclesiastical rulers too,

baptized anew with the Holy Ghost, will, at last, realize their responsibility and go boldly to the front and do their duty. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

II. Let us follow this up with clear and systematic explanation of the services of our Church, showing that our *Prayer Book is Scriptural and Evangelical from cover to cover*.

Our Church refers her children to the authority of God's Word, "so 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." Art. vi.

If, therefore, we wish our people to be intelligent Churchmen, it is clear that, according to our Church's teaching, we must bring all our authorized formularies—especially that *one* around which the controversy now rages, the office of the Holy Communion—to the test of Scripture.

Let us candidly enquire, for instance, in their presence, whether we can discover, in the service I have named, the slightest support of the Ritualistic theory. Is the word "Altar" found in it? And if not, why was it excluded? Is there the slightest trace to be seen in the service of a "Propitiatory Sacrifice," or of a "Sacrificing Priest" to present it before God? Who knows anything from *the Prayer Book* of a "Real Objective Presence under the form of bread and wine" in the Lord's Supper? Nay, compare our present office with that which preceded it, and ask is not the evidence conclusive that the last Revisers took every conceivable pains to stamp out of our Prayer Book this very heresy of the Sacrifice of the Mass? Words were expunged and introduced; prayers were divided and transposed; expressions were altered and revised, and all in a Protestant direction.

This is indeed ground which has been so repeatedly gone over, that it is quite unnecessary to illustrate any further the truth of what I say; but what I would ask is this:—Can it be possible for such an enquiry as this to be pursued in detail by our people, holding the Bible in one hand and the Prayer Book in the other, without their being convinced that the teaching of our Church is both Scriptural and Protestant? With their minds thus enlightened, will they not be compelled to relegate this Ritualistic system to its own proper place? Will they not then number it, unhesitatingly, amongst certain well known dogmas which centuries ago were stigmatized by our Church as "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits?"

And the benefit of such teaching would, I think, be twofold:—

*First. It would arm our people against the allurements of this counter-Reformation movement.* It is not, you may depend, by the mere denunciation of this heresy, however vehement and strong, that they will be deterred from exposing themselves to the evil influences of Ritualism, and so swelling the tide of defection from Protestant principles. *You must enlighten their minds and show them why it is wrong.* You must explain the real issue that is at stake. You must let men understand what "the Sacrifice of the Mass" really means, and what it involves. You must show them that "the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood" localized in the consecrated elements of bread and wine, however mystified by unintelligible explanations, is in fact, as our Rubric justly points out, *a denial of the proper humanity of Christ.* Above all, you must show them that in every church in the land where the Lord's Supper is taught to be a *Sacrifice* and not a *Sacrament*, there *the truth of Christ's finished work upon the Cross is virtually renounced.* Let the people thus see, I say, that this system is as dishonouring to God as it is subversive of the Gospel: let them only clearly understand that it was for refusing to teach this very doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice that our Reformers were bound to the stake and burnt, considering it to be a virtual denial of the sufficiency of Christ's Atonement, and then I should expect that, under God, the plague would be stayed. Gaudy dresses, floral decorations, brilliant lights, fragrant incense, enchanting music and bannered processions may be all very dramatic and alluring to the natural heart; but to a serious and enlightened mind its attractive power would be broken directly it was discovered what it all symbolized. It would at once

be regarded as a *forbidden gratification* directly it was seen that it could only be obtained at the expense of countenancing a service which was insulting to the Saviour by reason of the pretension to repeat His Sacrifice, and so casting a reflection upon the all-sufficiency of His finished work on Calvary.

*Second.* But the benefit of such teaching as I have named would not only be to arm our people against the allurements of Ritualism; *it would equally fortify them against being frightened by it, and so tempted to secede.* Secede! when the more carefully our formularies and services are examined, whether by lawyer or divine, the more certain we become that the teaching of our Church is in harmony with Scripture—the more confirmed we are that we ourselves are right in the interpretation we have always put on them. “We are,” says a venerable Dean, when referring to the Bennett Judgment, “in distinct, unequivocal, verbal accord with these decisions of the highest Court of Appeal, and therefore we most legitimately feel ourselves *confirmed* by this judgment as the loyal and dutiful sons of the Church of England, cordially receiving what she receives as to Presence, denying what she denies as to Sacrifice, and excluding what she excludes as to Adoration.”

And is this, let us ask, the time to talk about secession? When the ship is being scuttled, and is in danger of sinking, in God’s name let us make every effort to stop the leak; but to talk of deserting the good old ship because mutineers have been discovered on board; to think of leaving her in the hour of her peril, and that just at a time when her true Protestant colours are flying at her masthead more conspicuous than ever, would be, to my mind at least, an act too unjustifiable and wrong even to be named, except to be reprobated by every true and loyal Churchman.

And here I hope I shall be pardoned if, before passing on to my final suggestion I venture to express my deep regret that any of our valued Brethren should press, at this critical period in the history of our Church, for a revision of our Prayer Book. This, it is sometimes said, is the only effectual remedy for the evils in our Church which we all alike deplore. I, for one, believe this to be an *entire mistake*.

We need not adopt the untenable position that our Prayer Book is a perfect book, and that no expression in it could have been more cautiously and wisely worded. Such an idea, in any human composition is, of course, simply absurd. It may also be fully admitted that there are some phrases in it which might for *convenience* sake—not, as far I am concerned, for *conscience* sake—be with advantage altered; but to press for such a revision *at this particular time* would be in point of fact to give up the whole controversy and to admit ourselves to be in the wrong. To say that the Prayer Book must needs be altered to get rid of Romanizing teachers; is to concede the point at issue, and to allow that after all they have got the teaching of our Church on their side, which is the very point I *entirely deny*.

Besides, supposing a revision were now to be attempted, are we sure that we should have it all our own way? And if not, is it not quite easy to conceive that our position in the Church of England, with a revised Prayer Book, might then become—what, thank God, it is not now—untenable!

But enough. “I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say!”

III. And here, in the third place, let me say that I think it behoves us to be, very earnest with our flocks in warning them *against giving the slightest encouragement to this movement either by their influence or example.* The best way to put out a fire is to remove all fuel that may feed it to the greatest possible distance, so that the conflagration may die out from sheer exhaustion.

It appears to me, therefore, to be a grievous mistake on the part of sound churchmen to countenance these ritualistic services by their own presence or that of their families. And yet what do we see every day? There is to my mind no more deplorable feature in this movement, than the

thoughtless and even reckless way in which Protestant parents are constantly seen acting in this matter. You will hear them condemning the whole system in the most unmeasured terms one day; and then, the next, as though they were under some strange infatuation, you will see them indulging their own or their children's curiosity by placing themselves or those children under its immediate influence.

And what is the almost certain consequence? The deadly poison, introduced into the child's spiritual system, by the parent's own heedlessness and folly, works its way in that system. Slowly, perhaps, but surely, it becomes developed; a taste for a gorgeous ceremonial is imbibed; outward badges are adopted and worn; the sacramental bread is received into the palm of the hand; postures and prostrations succeed; and so the plague spreads, until at last the parent stands aghast at the discovery that his child has for months been clandestinely closeted with some Anglican Priest, catechised on all the secrets of the family, and, what is worse, questioned on sin which can only with safety be breathed into the ear of God.

In the training of the young we have, indeed, every inducement to be diligent. Peculiarly susceptible to the attractions of a sensuous service; confiding and inexperienced, their danger is immense; and *so in proportion should be our efforts to keep them right*. And if, considering the ground on which I stand,<sup>1</sup> I might for a moment be allowed to refer to my own long experience with the young, I should be disposed to say that no toil, no pains, no labour in Bible, Confirmation, and Sacramental classes with the young will ever be regretted. Let them only be thoroughly grounded in the knowledge of Divine Truth, and then, under the blessing of God, they will be fortified for life against the assaults of Priest-craft. They will love their Bibles because they have discovered therein "the hid treasure." They will love their Church, because they have ascertained that her teaching is true, and her services are spiritual and scriptural and Protestant. And then with their minds thus enlightened, and their hearts sanctified, you will stand on vantage ground in your effort to preserve them from being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." You will address them with confidence and say:—"Now you know the truth, 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.' Be not entangled in this miserable Romanizing delusion. Have nothing to do with it. Christ has far nobler employment for your talents than dressing up churches, and turning our spiritual services into musical entertainments. He who crosses the waters of the Niagara, justly thinks it wisest to give the thundering cataract below a wide berth. He will run no risk of being caught by the current, and carried down to destruction. Let the peril which we see they incur who begin by imitating the ceremonial of Rome, induce you to shew the same salutary caution:—"Touch not—taste not—handle not.""

And if it is our wisdom to warn our people to abstain from giving the slightest encouragement by word or deed to this Romanizing movement, how much more should we, as Evangelical Clergymen, be careful *lest by any indiscretion on our part, we encourage it ourselves*.

I am quite aware that I am now treading on tender ground; and yet, I feel I should not be true to my convictions if I did not extend my word of caution to the clerical, as well as to the lay members of this Association. And what I would, with all deference, ask them is this:—If a clergyman, at this particular crisis, introduces changes into his services—except, of course, on direct authority—how can he be surprised if some members of his congregation, whose tendencies are in a Romanizing direction, clamour for more; and then, is not the result inevitable; if *he* wont give them more, they will pass over to others who will?

The question is now not unfrequently asked—How far would it be wise for us to raise our ritual to meet the prejudices of some who are in favour of a more ornate service. My own impression is that this would be only to *give an increased impetus to the Romanizing movement, and do incalculable mischief*. Better far, as it seems to me, to stand fast where we are; only with scrupulous care let us give no just ground for complaint that ours is a cold, and dull, and slovenly service. "Let all things be done decently and in order!" We want more attraction in our churches, do you say? Granted; we

do. Then here is an attractive power that will magnetize the hearts of our people, and draw them to Him who will satisfy the yearnings of the most earnest soul. Let us meet all the allurements of Ritualism by a fuller, freer, bolder preaching of the Gospel. Our desire is natural and right; we want more attraction in our churches, more success in our ministry; and here, believe me, is the secret of both. "I," says the Saviour, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

And now, one word in conclusion. Happy it is, dear friends, that whatever be the skill and subtlety with which the great enemy of God and man succeeds in sowing tares among the wheat, for the Church of Christ we have nothing to fear. Whatever may be the future of our beloved Church, as an Establishment, the Lord's people within her are safe. They shall be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

And who can tell but that this resuscitated Popery, after all, will be overruled for the further development of "Spiritual Life in our Congregations?" May we not hope that it will lead God's children to examine more closely the ground on which they stand, and so induce them to cling to the Truth with a yet firmer grasp? May we not hope, in particular, that the troublous times in which we live may lead men to search more carefully the page of Prophecy; and so, reading the signs of the times, be quickened in "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ?" And would not the effect of this on the minds of our people be salutary and good? The spread of Popery and infidelity—the increasing antagonism between light and darkness, would not stagger them. They will look for nothing else. The final development of Antichrist is only what is to be expected. "The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith;" "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived;" "and then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming." And what if we see these signs fulfilling before our eyes? What if the impression gains ground on the minds of our people that Satan is even now marshalling his host at least for the great—the final apostacy? Will not *this*, think you, have a tendency to develop "Spiritual Life in our Congregations?" Will they not then give heed, as they never did before, to our Lord's solemn words of warning:—"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man!"

Take, however, the most sober view you please of the and ecclesiastical signs of the times, both at home and abroad, and the delightful conclusion we arrive at is, I think, certain and safe:—"Our redemption draweth nigh." Soon the machinery of this worn-out dispensation will stop, and the Lord will come and set all things right. In the mean season, our duty is clear. Let us be firm, patient, prayerful, and united.

"Come, my people," says God, "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." The last struggle, if it be sharp, will be short. "He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." Already the rumbling of His chariot wheels may be heard in the distance by the listening ear of His loving bride. The last warning cry to a slumbering Church, it would seem, may even now be recognized above the din of strife:—"Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him!"

Endnotes:

- 1) The Author was Incumbent of a large Parish in Wolverhampton for three and twenty years where this Address was delivered.