

THE EASTWARD POSITION

Church Association Tract 136

BY THE REV. CANON J. C. RYLE

Vicar of Stradbroke

The harm of the "Eastward position" consists in this, that it is the outward and visible sign of an unscriptural, mischievous, and soul-injuring doctrine. That doctrine is nothing less than this, that the Lord's Supper is a proper sacrifice,—that the officiating clergyman is a sacrificing priest,—that the communion table is an altar,—and that in the act of consecration some mysterious change takes place in the bread and wine. All this, and nothing less than this, lies at the bottom of the "Eastward position." It is, to speak plainly, a step toward the Romish sacrifices of the mass, which the 31st article of the Church of England declares to be blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits." It is in reality an action which pours contempt on the finished sacrifice of Christ.

There are hundreds of English clergymen it may be feared, who are using the Eastward Position as the symbol of a doctrine which they want to maintain and spread, but which ought to be resisted by all faithful Churchmen. The following extracts supply abundant proof that there is ground for saying this. They speak for themselves.

Extracts from a Ritualistic Catechism, "*The Ritual Reason Why.*"—

345. *Why is the Priest to say it (the Prayer of Consecration) "standing before the" Altar? Because this is the position of a Sacrificing Priest.*

340. *What is the prayer which the priest says kneeling at the midst of the Altar?*

It is a humble acknowledgment of his own unworthiness to execute the ministry which he is about to perform, and of that of the communicants to join with him in the Sacrifice by feasting on the Sacred Victim who is now about to be offered.—

Ritual Reason Why, p.136.

"Dr. Pusey says:—The standing before the Altar, means the primitive doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and the bowing after the Sarum use at the Consecration means Eucharistic adoration."—*Church Review*, June, 1874.

All Englishmen who desire the peace and prosperity of the Reformed Church of England have now a plain duty before them in the present day. They ought to resist any attempt to sanction the "Eastward position" in the worship of the Established Church, by whomsoever it may be made, and from whatever quarter it may proceed. They ought to know that a strong effort is likely to be made in Convocation to obtain a report to Parliament (under the recent letter of business for the revision of rubrics) recommending that the Prayer-book rubrics should be so altered as to permit the "Eastward position" being used. To prevent such a Report being made, and to resist its adoption by Parliament, if it is made, should be the aim and endeavour of every faithful Protestant Churchman.

Once for all, let the following points be impressed on our minds.

1. The "Eastward position" is utterly without warrant of Scripture. The four accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, written by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. Paul, do not say one word to favour it. Any plain, impartial, unprejudiced man, reading the simple narrative of the New Testament for the first time, would say unhesitatingly that whatever our blessed Lord did, when he broke the bread and gave the cup, was done before, under the eyes, and in full view of,

the whole congregation of the Apostles. Why are clergymen to appear to make a mystery where our Lord made none?

2. The “Eastward position” is utterly without warrant of the Prayer-book, fairly and reasonably interpreted. The Communion office nowhere calls the Lord’s Supper a sacrifice, and nowhere calls the Lord’s Table an altar. The rubric which regulates and directs the minister’s position, in the act of consecrating the bread and wine, distinctly says that he should “break the bread and take the cup into his hand *before the people*.” If “before the people” can be twisted into meaning “with his back to the people,” there really is no meaning in words! The rubric, moreover, on this point, is the more remarkable, because it first directs the minister to “stand before the table,” and “order the bread and wine,” so that he may afterwards do what he does “with readiness and decency.” But, *after* he has ordered or put in proper position, the elements, he is to perform the act of consecration “before the people,”—that is, standing in such a position that all can see what he does.

3. Last, but not least, the “Eastward position” is a direct step towards Popery. Whether its friends and advocates like to admit this or not, it is a simple matter of fact. It is a retrograde movement towards the unscriptural and superstitious system of religion which our martyred reformers resisted to the death. It is a departure from the Protestant principles on which the Church of England was established three centuries ago, and which have been her strength, her glory, and her beauty. If we value an open Bible, a free gospel, and a deliverance from priestcraft, let us resolve never to consent to the sanction of the “Eastward position” in the Church of England, and let us use every lawful means to prevent it.

For fuller information see Church Association Tract, No. XXX.