

**A STRICTER ADHERENCE TO THE RUBRIC,  
IN THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE  
CHURCH: A SERMON,  
PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF  
ST. MARY, NOTTINGHAM, ON THE  
EVENING OF NOV. 13, 1842**

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A stricter adherence to the rubric, in the public worship of the Church: a sermon, preached in the Parish Church of St. Mary, Nottingham, on the evening of Nov. 13, 1842 by George Wilkins

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**GEORGE WILKINS**

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BY

ARCHDEACON WILKINSON,

THE VICAR.

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S E R M O N,

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1 Cor. xiv. 40.

“ Let all things be done decently and in order.”

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In matters of domestic or of civil life, confusion and embarrassment necessarily ensue, where no regard is paid to this valuable admonition of maintaining decency and order. And if such be requisite for the conduct and comfort of life, in all concerns of a temporary kind, how much more necessary and essential are they to matters of a higher and more momentous nature? When decency and order are not observed in every part of the worship of God, no spiritual benefit can be derived from it, for such cannot be acceptable to that great Being to whom it is offered. It is a wise precaution, that in seeking the best method in which a paramount duty is to be performed, especial care be taken that the duty itself be not impaired or weakened by over-attention to form,—that the shadow be not too strong for the relief of the substance; yet is it of consequence that the one should be so blended into the other as to pro-

duce perfect harmony in the whole: but in reference to the soul-important service to be rendered to Almighty God, it is impossible that too much pains can be devoted even to the slightest particular connected with it. In the tabernacle in the wilderness, as well as in the temple of God at Jerusalem, "the snuffers were of pure gold<sup>1</sup>."

When the pious Reformers of our branch of the Catholic Church purified our religion from the dross and impurities of popish superstition and error, they prescribed a due method and order of public worship to be observed in the congregations of the people. For it is the privilege and prerogative of every Christian nation to prescribe such forms, rites, and ceremonies for its public worship as may be deemed, by the government of that nation, best suited to the genius and character of the people, provided, that nothing be decreed contrary to the written word of God.

For the preservation of this decency and order in the service of Almighty God, and with an especial view to uniformity in the mode, manner, and substance of that service, the Reformers compiled a Form of Common Prayer, which being afterwards approved of by the Convocation, and sanctioned by the three Estates of the Realm, became the prescribed and established worship of the land. To this

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxvii. 23 ; 1 Kings vii. 50 ; 2 Chron. iv. 22.

Form are annexed directions how, when, and in what manner the prayers are to be offered up in every episcopally consecrated Church in the Empire. These directions are called "Rubrics," from the circumstance of their being originally printed in red ink, in contradistinction to the prayers, which were printed in a different colour and character.

As the teaching of our blessed Lord and His Apostles enjoined unity of spirit in the bond of peace; and as in the Gospel dispensation there is "one body, and one spirit, and we are all called in one hope of our calling;—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all<sup>2</sup>;" so, to our wise Reformers it seemed good for the preservation of that unity, that the people in this Christian land, and in its Christian dependencies, should worship God, as it were, with one mouth and one voice, through the medium of one Common Form of Prayer. And that the danger of using rash, improper, or unsuitable language, when addressing the Almighty in prayer, might not be incurred, every prescribed prayer was composed in strict unison with the spirit and meaning of Holy Scripture, and every word, phrase, and sentence, was employed such as was most becoming in man to offer, and best adapted, as far as human means could be used, to the Majesty of the Most High to accept.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. iv. 4.



For, as if to guard against all public extemporaneous effusions, Solomon had directed, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few<sup>a</sup>;" and it will be found, upon examination, that the words of the framers of our Liturgy are few indeed, only sufficient to connect the sentiments and spirit of the Holy Scriptures in the adaptation of them to a precatory form. The Books of Moses present us with many prescribed forms of prayer; we there read the blessing of the Jewish priests,—the blessing at the removal or resting of the Ark,—the hymn which the children of Israel sang *together* unto the Lord; which they could not have thus done had not the hymn been already known. In the expiation of a certain murder, the elders of the city which were next to the slain were expressly commanded to say a *form* of prayer precomposed by God Himself. Again we read the form of confession and prayer of the person offering the first fruits, or the giver of yearly tithes; these were all prescribed and appointed for general use amongst the Jews. Look at the Psalms of David, a book purposely composed for the service of the temple.—Does it not abound in forms of prayers, or of thanksgiving, or of penitential confession?

<sup>a</sup> Eccl. v. 2.

But the Sectarists who indulge in what they call the liberty of a self-prompted worship, unrestrained and unfettered by preconcerted forms, (a practice adapted to persons accustomed to *feel* rather than to *think*,) conceive all this to have been allowed to the Jews in condescension to their weakness, and suited to their peculiar system, and that now, in these days, it would savour of their "beggarly elements" to place restraint upon the outpourings of the spirit of Christians<sup>4</sup>. But, let us ask, how came it to pass, when Christianity was introduced to supersede the ceremonial, but not the moral law of the Jews, that John the Baptist gave a form of prayer to his disciples, as the Jewish doctors and teachers before him had given to theirs? And why was it, that our Saviour, so far from censuring his example, followed it, and also gave His followers a form to help their devotions? Would He have repeated and recom-

<sup>4</sup> It is said, "that prescribed forms of prayer are a stinting of the Spirit, by people whose heads have been filled with harangues and discourses concerning the gift and spirit of prayer, which they have been told consists not only in pious and holy affections, but also in a variety and volubility of words and expressions; and consequently, a set form of prayer and the spirit of prayer are inconsistent; which is in effect to say, that a man cannot make use of any of the penitential psalms, nor any other form of prayer and praise in the divine Book of Psalms; no, nor rehearse even the Lord's prayer itself, with the spirit of prayer; which, to affirm, is the height of madness."—Bp. Bull on the Common Prayer.

mended that form *twice*,—at different times and upon different occasions—had He not desired to have established beyond all doubt and contradiction the utility and expediency of such a mode ?

The Christian Church adopted this practice from the earliest times, and has preserved it to the present day, opposed by none in this country but by Sectarians, who, in their use of unpremeditated prayer (as far as it is unpremeditated), degenerate into rhapsodies of absurdity and enthusiasm in their extemporaneous effusions. Independent of the consideration how rarely it happens that, with an uncommon and powerful readiness of thought and expression, any one is able to make an unpremeditated address to an earthly sovereign in a manner suitable to a subject to deliver, and a monarch to receive ; how is it possible that all the people in the congregation assembled, high and low, instructed or ignorant, should be able to join, or concur, or assent to the petition of the prayer offered, before they know what it is that is to be asked ? for if they have to consider the necessity and propriety of it, before they can acquiesce or give their consent to the object of supplication,—and if this is to be done as each sentence or sentiment is delivered,—this very process of consideration, of reflection and assent, while it keeps the mind and judgment perpetually on the stretch, and carries it away, perchance, by the mere force of human eloquence,