

**ARE THEY ORDINANCES?
SOME THOUGHTS ON BAPTISM
AND THE SUPPER; IN RELATION
TO THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649316755

Are They Ordinances? Some Thoughts on Baptism and the Supper; in Relation to the Society of Friends by Richard H. Thomas

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Cover @ 2017

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RICHARD H. THOMAS

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ARE THEY ORDINANCES?

SOME THOUGHTS

ON

BAPTISM AND THE SUPPER,

IN RELATION TO THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

Suggested by an "Address on the Ordinances," by
David B. Updegraff.

BY RICHARD H. THOMAS,

"The Interchange,"

BALTIMORE, MD.

1885.

Price 10 cents. Twelve copies for one dollar. Ad-
dress JOHN R. CARV, 7 Bank Lane, Baltimore, Md.

C8348.600.20

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INTRODUCTORY.

The following pages are written not in spirit of controversy, but in the interest of truth. The more I think upon the subject the more does the importance of it impress itself upon me. The question is not simply whether a small religious body shall retire from the position it has held for two centuries on the ordinances (so called), its scope is much larger. Shall the clearest and strongest testimony to Christianity, as it is when freed from outward ordinances, be lost to the Church at large? While we acknowledge with sorrow that this testimony has often been weakened by our members resting in the denial of the outward and failing to press on to a clear experience of the inward realities, which, in the mind of many, the outward represent, we still maintain that the very existence of a body of Christians able to bear scrutiny both on questions of doc-

trine, and of practice, who have entirely disused outward ordinances, has been a testimony of the strongest kind to non-sacramentarian Christianity. The testimony increases in importance in proportion to the religious experience and activity of those who profess it. Those who acknowledge us as brothers in the work and service of the Lord Jesus, necessarily place water baptism and the "bread and wine" among the non-essentials, though they may continue strongly to advocate them. We believe that this alone has done a great deal, though its influence may have been to a certain extent unconscious, in enabling Christians of certain other evangelical bodies to maintain their clear position against the sacramental explanation of the so-called ordinances.

The *necessary* differences of doctrine as to the meaning and mode of performance of these ceremonies is dwelt upon later, and shown to arise from the absence of specific directions concerning them in the New Testament, and the bearing of this upon the question of their institution is discussed. We would here point out that their practice has a continual tendency to confuse the minds of Christians as to the meaning of

many passages in the New Testament, which they refer to the outward rather than the inward. The result is a lowering of the standard of Christian experience in the case of persons so perplexed. This uncertainty would be entirely done away could they see that the outward was transitory, and of no permanent obligation. The more we look into the matter and consider the free spirit of Christianity, how it is intended for every race and country, how its membership is not told from the books of any outward organization, but that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him, the more clearly do we see that but one inward thing is needful—a heart right in the sight of God, through Jesus Christ, and one outward thing—the manifestation of the inward condition by outward righteousness. How few soever there may be who hold this, surely it is broader and more all-embracing than the teaching of this *plus* certain ceremonies that have *intrinsically* no meaning whatever, and can bear, and have received the most opposite explanations. The work of the Lord is not only hindered by fruitless discussions as to their meaning and performance, but the spread of the Gospel is hindered by

them. It is acknowledged that many in India would come out as Christians did not water baptism stand in the way, for, if they are baptized, they will lose caste, which they will not lose from being Christians. Now it is true, a man ought to be willing lose all for Christ, but should he be called upon to lose all for a ceremony? In other places the natives confound this rite, and thinking it similar to the ceremonies in honor of their gods, put a wrong meaning on it.

David B. Updegraff, in his recent "Address on the Ordinances", whose publication is the immediate cause of this little book, for which, by the way, I only am responsible, speaks strongly of the importance of the unity of the church at large in order to meet the tide of infidelity. His concern is better than his remedy, for how can we help the cause of Christ by adopting a lower standard. Rather live up to the present one. The Society of Friends occupies a peculiar position, not because of their perversity, but because they have adopted the position of the Early Church in its essential spirit which, it seems to them, has been generally departed from. This is clearly so in regard to their doctrines on Peace, Oaths, and the Christian Ministry, in that they maintain that

this is to be exercised only under the immediate guidance of the Lord, and that it is the prerogative of the Great Head of the Church to call on whom He pleases in the congregation to speak in His name. In regard to the so-called ordinances, we believe they are in harmony with the principles of the early church. Types and symbols cease to be imposed when the reality appears, though they may linger awhile. To have them continued in a religion essentially spiritual, is to perpetually menace its spirituality—however much certain individuals or bodies understand them in their true light as symbols.

We acknowledge that neither theoretical nor practical objections have any force when urged against the employment of things God has commanded, but, when we are speaking of customs, however venerable, or however backed by high authority, then they have force, and should be considered. I have accordingly in the following pages endeavored to confine myself to the consideration of the true meaning of those passages which are often taken to prove that they were ordained, confining myself largely, though by no means exclusively, to the points touched on in D. B. U.'s book. Although an exhaustive sur-