

**SINCERITY AND  
SUBSCRIPTION: A PLEA  
FOR TOLERATION IN  
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649323807

Sincerity and Subscription: A Plea for Toleration in the Church of England by H. Hensley Henson

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Cover @ 2017

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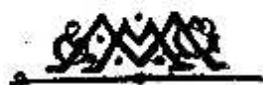
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**H. HENSLEY HENSON**

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## SINCERITY AND SUBSCRIPTION



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*A Plea for Toleration in  
the Church of England*

BY  
*Herbert*  
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London  
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
NEW YORK : THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
1903

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## PREFATORY NOTE

### I.

RECENT events have again directed public attention to the formal conditions under which the clergy of the Church of England hold office and fulfil their ministry. For quite intelligible reasons there has sprung up among us a habit of speech with respect to the Prayer-book, which implies serious mental confusion, and may induce very unfortunate results. Moderate men, whether clergy or laity, readily declare themselves to be prepared to stand by the Prayer-book, to desire no departure from its system, to be resolved to maintain and, as far as in them lies, to enforce its observance. It is scarcely excessive to say that the formula of episcopal policy is "The Prayer-book, the whole Prayer-book, and nothing but the Prayer-book," and the simplest layman thinks he can see the



soundness of that formula when he recalls the statutory declaration exacted from every Ordained man, not merely at his Ordination, but on every appointment to office. That declaration, as prescribed in the XXXVIth Canon, is the following :—

“I assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to the Book of Common Prayer, and of the Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons: I believe the doctrine of the Church of England, as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the Word of God; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use the form in the said book prescribed, and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority.”

Now this seems explicit enough: but it is sufficiently well known that so far as the least important part of the declaration is concerned, that which pledges the clergyman to use the form in the Prayer-book in his public ministrations, the greatest difficulties have been discovered. Puritans in the 17th century, and

Ritualists in the 20th, from quite different premisses have reached the same conclusion of disobedience, and those Anglicans, who are not Puritans, and would resent the appellation of Ritualists, appear to have agreed upon an explanatory clause, which, without authority of law but in deference to the coercion of necessity, they will append to the statutory declaration. It runs as follows :—

“We affirm our sense of the sacred obligation imposed by the declaration made by the clergy under Canon XXXVI. not to alter the services in the Prayer-book by unsanctioned omissions, or by any additions which hinder the service or which suggest its insufficiency ; nor to introduce other services or prayers without the authority of the Bishop.”<sup>1</sup>

The legal declaration prohibits changes ; the new clause defines the mode of making changes. It is a curious method of confessing a “sacred obligation,” but its justification lies in the fact

<sup>1</sup> See *Times*, Wednesday, May 27th, 1903.

that changes must be made. The system of the Elizabethan Prayer-book was even in James I.'s reign partially obsolete in the judgment of so wise and cautious a man as Lord Bacon ; and it is the same Elizabethan Prayer-book, as re-issued at the Restoration, which we still insist upon. Of course Time has silently abrogated some rubrics and modified others ; and an honest clergyman, endowed with an average measure of common sense, and really anxious to do his spiritual work, has no real practical difficulty in the rubrics of the Prayer-book. Bishop Thirlwall's declaration in 1848 is certainly justified by the general experience :—

“Whatever complaints may be heard among ourselves, and whatever reproaches may be cast against us by our adversaries, with regard to the imperfections of our ecclesiastical system, and the bondage, as it has sometimes been termed, of the Church, none can honestly allege that he meets with any impediments arising from this cause, which seriously limit the field of his usefulness, or restrain him from