

# Kings and Priests

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## Kings and Priests

*“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9: 24-28)*

The subject on which I am to speak this afternoon might appear altogether opposed to that of Rationalism, which we had last week; but the opposition is only in appearance. No doubt in the minds and intention of many it is a real antagonism; and far be it from me to doubt that, as godly men have been tinged with somewhat of Rationalism, so on the other hand probably even more have suffered from Ritualism. There can be no question to any upright mind, adequately acquainted with both the word of God and the facts growing out of the present state of thought among the children of God in the world, that there are, carried away in these contrary directions, persons who have a true living knowledge of God through the Lord Jesus. But this proves nothing whatever as to the character of either system in itself. It shows that the children of God themselves have, in the bare fact that they are His children, nothing to preserve them from the snares of the adversary; that, even though they have been born again, in consequence of allowing human thought and feeling they may be swayed in either direction.

### ***Rationalism and Ritualism Distinguished***

But further, underneath the seeming opposition of the two systems, there is a link, and consequently often no small sympathy, and will, I have no doubt, afford the enemy of souls power in his own time to blend them together in a union for which neither might be prepared at the present moment. The reason of this lies in the very simple fact, that as *Rationalism is a deification of human powers*, in which man presumes by his own mind to judge the word of God, and is therefore the infidelity of the intellect when either carried out to its results or judged in its principle; so on the other hand *Ritualism is the infidelity of the imagination*, very often with piety underneath it, with a love for the Saviour that may preserve from the full consequences of the system, but in itself always savouring of and tending to idolatry.

Now the power of deliverance, as well as that which makes manifest its real character, is what we may most profitably dwell upon at this time. It is no pleasure to dissect that which is evil. The momentous thing is to supply God's remedy; and as I endeavoured to bear this in mind in speaking of Rationalism, so I shall for the most part restrict myself at this time to that which may, by God's grace, preserve souls from religious infidelity, giving them divine grounds to judge and reject Ritualism in all its fruits as well as its roots.

### ***Gospel Truth Preserves from Rationalism and Ritualism***

Thanks be to God, the remedy is not far off; it is nigh us in our mouth and in our heart. The truth of the gospel is the best guard, not against Rationalism alone, but also against Ritualism. It is impossible for a soul that really understands the gospel — I do not mean one that is merely born again, but one that intelligently knows by grace the word of truth, the gospel of salvation — to be dragged

into either. There may be persons drawn away for a time into anything; but it is impossible for a person who understands the gospel simply, and who carries its truth really before his soul, and, above all, who has Christ Himself as the object revealed to his heart in love by that gospel, to be left under the snare of either, if indeed to be drawn aside into it at all. I shall show therefore that, if Christians hold fast what God has given them in the Lord Jesus, and also in that mighty work which Christ has accomplished, and which God now reveals by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, Who makes it known to us more particularly in the New Testament, there is a divine preservative which no power of the enemy can break through.

You will have noticed that in the verses just read we have the Spirit of God showing us the relation of the truth and facts of Christianity to what was really a ritual system — the only ritual that God ever acknowledged. In Israel there was a system of religious shadows, furnished by God Himself. Undoubtedly therefore, if this were all the revelation of God, we ought every one of us to be ritualists. For the believer there can be no question either that God set it up, or that God maintained it by His authority until it had done its work. It was by no means the primitive system, for God took care that promise should be before law and those shadows which in the law were systematized, commonly called the Levitical economy.

### ***Christ Jesus Gives Us the Truth***

But the truth of the gospel shows that the Lord Jesus came into the world to give us the truth, which Rationalism, far from having found, confesses that it has not, because it is only in quest of truth — does not profess to know, and even doubts the possibility of knowing. Not only has Christ brought us in Himself the truth for the simplest soul that receives Him, and not only is He in Himself the very same Christ for the simplest as for those who are most spiritual, but, besides that, He has wrought a work, the consequences of which are infinite and absolutely exclusive of Ritualism and of the ground it assumes.

God has not left us to gather what these consequences are; He has revealed them. He states distinctly some of them in the verses already read. He tells us there that Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands. These holy places belonged to the ritual system of Israel, and they are divinely declared to be “figures of the true.”

Ritualism therefore does not give us the truth any more than Rationalism; it gives us shadows, while Rationalism only leaves men in darkness. It gives us figures of the true, but nothing more. It gives us not the very image, but at best types. Rationalism is a negative and deadly system, gives nothing, and would destroy all. The ritual system according to God did, in an emblematical way and to a certain extent, present the truth which Christ was about to bring in — not the whole of the truth, far from it, nor even any part of it in its fulness.

It is impossible for any one, for any thing, to be an adequate representation of Christ. We must have Christ Himself in order to have the truth. But we are told in this chapter that Christ “obtained eternal redemption.” This He did being lifted up from the earth as a sacrifice. We are told further that He has entered “into heaven itself.” Thus, if everything in Him is a reality, there is none in the condition of the creature as it is, except indeed the sorrowful reality of sin; but, properly speaking, we cannot call sin a reality, except for judgment. It is the alienation of man's heart from God, self-will, lust, passion, pride, vanity — yea, it is all a lie against the nature that God made. Being a departure from God Himself to the view of the creature it has, save in its guilt and misery, no right to be called a reality. There was once reality, when God made the heavens and earth, and placed man in the Paradise

of delight, when man and all that God surrounded him with was very good but that reality faded when man sinned; and from that day till God displaced the world of sin by Jesus Christ our Lord, it is not according to God, but a vain show in the flesh, though in part with shadows of good things to come.

But there is no reality according to God here below; it has become but a wilderness, where there is no way except to faith. Christ came down to it. He is the reality, and He has done a real work for God and man, as we are taught in this very Epistle (and in all the rest, speaking now in a general way). This it is which, received into the heart by faith, brings the sinner out of what he was — out of the lie in which fallen nature lives, or rather is dead — brings him into the truth and the grace of God which are the fruits of love according to His will. God leads the believer into consciousness of relationship with Himself, and thus, while walking through this world, prepares the soul to await another reality, to await heavenly glory, where Christ Himself is gone before, to await too (though not for Himself) this earth to be made worthy of the God Who created it, to be worthy of Him Who has reconciled all things unto Himself by Jesus Christ (Col. 1: 20).

### ***Christ Takes the Place of the Figures of Moses***

Now the apostle has his soul filled with these truths, and brings them before those to whom he was writing. They also particularly needed it; for they had been accustomed to a ritual system. It was more important for them than for any others to know whether Christianity was a prolongation of that with which they had been familiar among the Jews, or whether it was an altogether new system — not without a certain preparation of the way for it, not without promises going before, and shadows as we have seen, but in itself wholly new — in contrast with ritualistic Judaism. And this contrast is precisely what the apostle here lets us know: “Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

Consequently, we now have all according to God; as there is but one Christ, so but one sacrifice, and, speaking now of what is needful for God and for the deliverance of man from his ruin, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Consequently, it is shown there is no necessity that “He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others.” Continual repetition was part of the ritual system; and Christianity stands in contrast with it. He has offered Himself once and for ever. Were it necessary to offer Himself repeatedly, He must also often suffer. The two things cannot be separated: for then must He, we read, “often have suffered since the foundation of the world” (Heb. 9: 26). The idea of a fresh offering of Christ to God without His fresh suffering is not merely a mistake, but is in direct antagonism to His word and to the foundation of Christianity.

“But now once,” it is said, “in the end of the world” — speaking of the world as the theatre of God's dealings, not as the mere physical system but the consummation of the various ages that have been running their course, by which man was put to the proof, and, among other tests, very specially by the ritual system — “But now once” in the end of all the experimental ways with man, “in the end of the ages hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

### ***Christ Brought God In and Put Sin Out***

Thus we find in the Lord Jesus and in His death two grand truths: (1) He came to bring God into the world; (2) He came to put sin out of the world. Rationalism is plainly and certainly ignorant of both; if Ritualism own the first, it assuredly ignores, and in effect denies, the second — *i.e.*, God's

putting away sin by redemption. Far from controverting the incarnation, Ritualism makes much of it for its own ends; but it is very sure that the principle is inconsistent with redemption, save in figure. It is impossible for Ritualism to live in presence of the fundamental truth of the gospel, that Christ suffered to “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Has He done it or not? Has He failed to do what He came for? Has He indeed, or only once even in figure, “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself?”

That there was accomplished on the cross the sacrifice of Christ Himself not even the ritualists deny; nor does one believe that they mean to deny that He put away sin by His death. We are not now discussing what men would say, but judging what their system means. We are searching what Ritualism really is, as judged by the living word of God. I affirm then that, during God's maintenance of a ritual system for special and worthy purposes, there was no such thing as a sacrifice that would put away sin before God. There were sacrifices; but the very opposite was their character and their result, as we are told in Heb. 10: 1-3. They brought sin to remembrance. They kept the fact of man's defilement constantly before the eyes of the Jew. It was well that it should be so, being to him a most wholesome lesson as far as it went. It was of God's mercy, and in itself right and good that man should be made to feel his sin till it was put away; and it was not, could not be, then put away. But if I believe the truth of the gospel, sin is put away by Christ's death. Granted that it is, so much the worse for him that does not believe in Christ. The truth and the blessedness of the fact remain for faith; but assuredly it is so much the more terrible for him who substitutes something else for Christ — so much the more fatal, not to the rationalist only, but also to the ritualist.

We must not be deceived by sounds nor by appearances. We are responsible for the truth now, because the truth is revealed. And, let it be observed, that now all is out between God and man without a veil. There was a veil, but it is rent. Mark the time and fact well: when Jesus died, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom. Has this no significance? Everything has that God reveals; but surely no facts more so than those of the cross. Up to that time man was not in the Divine presence. But God had come down to man. He was here on earth in the person of the Lord Jesus. He that had seen Him, the Son, had seen the Father.

But there was more than this manifestation in the death of Christ. In a certain sense He brought God nigh to the sinner during His life; in His death He brings the believer to God. Do you believe this? If you really receive and act on it, you are not a ritualist. If you believe that you are brought nigh to God, I ask according to what measure? Use your own weapon, you who love Jesus and know Him; have recourse to your own standard. Never give Christ up; never lose sight of Him as the Truth; never fail to bring Him in, whatever the difficulty, whatever the question. Your vantage-ground is that you have Christ, and that you know it. Therefore do you seek humbly, holily, but believingly, to apply the Christ Whom you have received from God and Whom the Holy Ghost has made known to your soul by the word of God.

### ***Brought Nigh through Christ's Death Not Incarnation***

Now you are brought nigh to God, not according to the measure of a Jew, nor even of a Jewish priest, nay, nor even of the Jewish High Priest. You will not say therefore that my doctrine lowers the privileges of a Christian. I am persuaded that there is too often a painful deficiency in the way in which these evil steps of retrogression to Judaism are apt to be met. Mere protest against them is cold and powerless, that is, by the negative process of showing their fallacy here and there. This kind of opposition will never stand in the day either of dark trial or of alluring promise. The heart of man wants something solid; and God would make it sure too. God, according to His own grace, has revealed His

own truth, His own power, His own wisdom in Christ the Lord; not merely so, but also in Christ's redemption. And this unique fact is the standing witness and effect of it; *the veil is rent*.

### ***Ritualism Denies the Rent Veil***

It is not merely therefore, that God has come down to me, but that He has consecrated for me a way to Himself — a new and living way through the veil (Heb. 10: 19-22). Ritualism denies this; it renews and again insists on the veil. Who gave it such authority? Not God Who tore it down in answer to Christ's cross. What warrants the renewal? It is treason against His word. It is in effect a plain, flagrant, inexcusable denial of the revealed effect of the death of Christ. Let it be again said that I accuse no man among their ranks of an intention to nullify the gospel; but it is impossible for an intelligent Christian not to arraign the system, no matter by whom it may be held — be it by one that you hope to be Christian, be it by one that you are as sure as you can be that he is a Christian. Grant all this, which I do with all my heart: yet a Christian's holding such an error does not make the error less serious, and cannot consecrate what is contrary to Christ.

I maintain then, that Ritualism is a return from Christianity to figure, and that its doctrine and its practice ignore the nearness to God into which the gospel brings the believer by Christ's work. Is not this true according to the plain word of God which you have before you in Heb. 9 and 10? This truth you know I am not wresting; for your consciences cannot evade its force. I appeal to you in the presence of God Whose word you have before you. You might doubt if one were stringing together a cluster of passages which might dazzle or perplex; but I purposely dwell now on a single luminous portion of Holy Writ. One is enough, if there were no others.

But I hope to show briefly that throughout the New Testament since the accomplishment of redemption, the same truth is taught in different forms. It is impossible that the truth of God should be inconsistent with itself. All the scriptures which treat of Christianity are admirably harmonious, their testimony is uniform, and all demonstrate that Ritualism, though not a rejection of Christ's person, is distinctly a virtual denial of the efficacy of Christ's work as now declared in the gospel of God.

### ***A Special Earthly Priesthood Revived***

Thus Ritualism has for one of its pillars the assumption that God has still an earthly priesthood. The assertion of a holy caste of ministrants on earth, who draw near to God for the Christian, thoroughly sets aside the gospel of Christ. Remember that it is no question of Christian ministry. I yield to no man in firmness of conviction that ministry is a divine and permanent institution of Christianity. The truth is that Christian ministry and earthly priesthood are antagonistic, instead of being the same thing. For ministry, Christian ministry, is the service by a divine gift, which brings the truth of God to bear on the soul of man. It is a service toward the unconverted, to bring them to God by the gospel, and toward the converted, to instruct them more fully in the truth of the gospel and of the whole counsel of God in Scripture generally.

But earthly priesthood is quite another thing; and so far from its being part of the institutions of the gospel, the attempt to set it up is beyond just doubts the sin of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16). For it is the presumption of a man, who might be a Levite or a leader of the people, to supplant the authority of Moses, and to stand in the place of Aaron, the apostle and the high priest of the Jewish system. It is really a blow struck at Christ's priesthood, as it was against Aaron chiefly that the rebellion of Korah was directed.

The Epistle of Jude (verse 11) will show you that this is no mere fanciful application of a type, which has no bearing on the perils of Christians. Indeed I should scorn to take advantage of those who are but ill versed in the types of Scripture. I dare not use what I did not believe on the fullest examination of Scripture to be the truth, but this, though it is enough for me, will not do for you. I beg you therefore to compare with Numbers and Hebrews what we are told by Jude. We learn there (verse 11) that not merely the way of Cain and the error of Balaam apply now, but also that men are to perish in the gainsaying of Korah. What is this but, since Christianity was revealed, the setting up of men to an earthly priesthood so as to infringe the glory of the Lord Jesus? According to Hebrews He is the true and only Priest in the sense of one that stands between God and our souls.

### ***The Present Christian Priesthood***

No doubt there is, in another sense, a priesthood under Christianity; but this only furnishes a further instance that Ritualism is irreconcilable with the Christian's place, as it is a fresh proof of what I have already endeavoured to show, that the power of Christianity is lost where its positiveness is forgotten and men reduce it to a negation of this or that error. There are those who constantly desire to maintain the truth by saying that there are no priests now. I should reverse the matter, and say, that what the New Testament declares is that all Christians are priests, that is, all who are brought nigh to God. Not that all are ministers of the word; those that minister are the few for the good of the many — of all. No Christian, because he is a Christian, is a minister of the word. Ministry depends not on a man's being a Christian, but on the question whether he has received a distinct power or gift as it is called in Scripture — the gift of the grace of the Lord Jesus, in which he is bound to serve Him whether in the gospel or in the church. Consequently, if we look at Christians, they differ in point of gift. Some are not called to serve the Lord in that way at all; and even those who are called to serve have gifts differing, as the apostle says in Rom. 12: 6-8.

When we come to the Christian priesthood, there is one common position for all Christians; and why? Because we are brought nigh to God. The truth of the gospel supposes, not an earthly institution, but that Christians are priests, and that this is the only real priesthood which God now owns, save Christ's on high. Even our Lord Jesus Christ was not a priest upon the earth, and when here He exercised no such functions. This is the direct statement of Scripture. The same Epistle to the Hebrews (chapter 8: 4) affirms it: so false in every way is the ritualistic system as applied to Christianity. Even He Who is the foundation-stone of all blessing for man, the life and righteousness and glory of the Christian under the gospel — even He was not a priest as long as He lived on the earth. Lifted up from the earth, He became a sacrifice; ascended to heaven, He entered the sanctuary which the Lord pitched, and not man, and was there, according to the work of God, the great High Priest. And who are the priests? If the Lord Jesus fills the type of Aaron, and incomparably more, if Aaron was but a feeble shadow of what Christ is as high priest, who are the sons of Aaron? They are those whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren: "Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me." Who are the children? Christians. He Who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, as the same inspired writer tells us in the second chapter of the same Epistle (Heb. 2: 11, 13).

Consequently we see how the doctrine of the types exactly agrees with the plain statements of the gospel. For if He suffered once, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God, He has brought us so perfectly that there can be — there is — no priest between us and God save Himself. And the Lord Jesus, so far from keeping us from God, is the very One Who by His death brings us to God, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

Again, this is the present position of the Christian, not merely the future one. When we go to heaven, we shall not cease to be priests. When the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ over the earth comes, we shall not cease to be priests; on the contrary, instead of it being as now a position for faith to enjoy and realize, we shall be displayed as kings and priests; we shall reign with Christ. But the gospel, the truth of the gospel, as revealed in the Epistles, shows that every Christian is in the place of priest now, not in a merely figurative but in a most real way, for there is always a reality according to the gospel. Christianity gives the reality of the truth and grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This may help to show the immense importance of the theme before you. Moreover, it shows how unbelieving is Ritualism, though in appearance more respectable than Rationalism, not so bold perhaps, certainly more reverent in its postures — if not in its impostures. It may salute with a kiss, it may bow down to Jesus, it may give Him ample honour in word; but judged by Scripture, by the ever-living word of God, its heart is far from Him. Yea, it is no more true worship of the Lord Jesus than when Israel of old, wrought on by Satan's power, dared to liken a calf of gold to Jehovah; for unquestionably the Ritualism of Christendom does not even adhere to the figures of the true. By no means would it be justified if it did restrict itself to ancient shadows of “good things to come”: I have already shown that, even if it did, it were not Christian. For Scripture affirms that it is idolatrous for Gentile Christians to consecrate to Christian uses the ritual elements given to the Jews (Gal. 4: 9).

### ***The So-called Christian Fathers***

In point of fact, however, Ritualism goes much farther; and it is a striking fact, too, not known by everybody, that, in spite of its boasted reference to the old writers that are commonly called the “fathers,” it has developed enormously since these days. Take, for instance, its strange millinery with colours more suitable to harlequins or the most fantastic of stageplayers, in which men indulge who call themselves Christ's servants — I beg pardon, Christian priests: do the “fathers” sustain them here? By no means. Not that the “fathers” will ever be to me a standard either of practice or of orthodoxy. I know them too well to admit such a dream for an instant. It may suit such as have never compared them with the word of God; for I own that it is possible to study them deeply, and to be completely stupefied by them. Indeed, there are few greater wonders to my mind than to see men of sweet affections, and of superior ability and attainment, who yet seem given over to minds void of discernment when they cite the “fathers.” Why they could and do write far better themselves, whenever they follow the word of God; nevertheless they bow down to them, just as a Romanist does before the wafer he worships as his God, or before the virgin whom he trusts to intercede for his soul.

Not less painfully one sees good men whose consciences and minds seem holden, when they are in presence of the musty remains of these ancient writers. But even they never contemplated what has come to pass in our own day; for it is remarkable that they brand as no better than good-for-nothing people those who scarcely went so far as to indulge in gorgeous vestments. Clement of Alexandria, if I recollect aright, treats such symptoms even in the germ as utterly disreputable. The truth seems to be, that the dresses that have long become ecclesiastical were originally merely the dresses of the people of that day. There were vast changes brought in when the barbarians overran and overthrew the Roman empire; and that which used to be merely the civil dress of a Roman became, by an extraordinary turn, the ecclesiastical dress of a so-called “Christian priest.” They had a particular dress for fast days, and another dress for feasts or ordinary days. This is pretty much, I believe, the origin of that which has long been metamorphosed so strangely, but at the same time so singularly abandoned by some pretenders to ecclesiastical antiquity in our own day. But enough of this.

## ***The “Fathers” and the Scriptures***

I go back still to the solemn fact already referred to — the connecting-link between Rationalism and Ritualism, and the more so because the connection is apt to be unsuspected.

I remember an incident which may illustrate this a little. A friend of mine who was once travelling to Oxford did not identify for a moment an old university chief who was sitting by him. Many years had elapsed since their separation, nor am I aware that there was any particular acquaintance even in earlier days. They were no longer young, and now they are both gone. The question put to his fellow-passenger by my friend was this: “Pray, sir, can you tell me how the Rationalists are getting on at Oxford?” It was an awkward question to one who was a principal leader of Rationalism; for he was, at any rate in physical science, the most distinguished of the seven who since then attained unenviable notoriety by the “Essays and Reviews.” He was silent for a moment; but I suppose he saw that the questioner's face did not indicate one who would be disposed to insult another by an unbecoming enquiry — a question which I am persuaded he would not have put if he had recognized Mr - .

(The “Essays and Reviews,” by six clergymen and one layman of the Church of England, were published in 1860, and were condemned by the bishops in Convocation, 1864.)

After a pause the professor answered, “As fast, sir, as the Tractarians will let them.” “What do you mean?” said my friend. “This,” said the other — and it puts the case pithily enough, and is no bad confirmation of what I have been insisting on already — “The Tractarians say that the fathers are as good as the Scriptures. The Rationalists answer that the Scriptures are no better than the fathers.”

The reply brings the case clearly to an issue, and shows us that under wholly different surfaces — intellectual audacity on the one hand, which dares to speak against the word of God, and on the other hand the outward piety or at any rate the genuflexion of Ritualism — there is really the same root of infidelity at bottom. There is the supplanting of the plain truth of the inspired word. Both get rid of it, depriving, the soul of that which is the only means of a living link between God and man. It does not matter what the means or forms may be, whether the negative process of Rationalism, or the more positive claim of Ritualism: if man comes in — whether it be with his rites or his reasoning — so as to exclude God's word, or step between its authority and the soul of man, it comes to pretty much the same result in the end.

It remains to show further, as to this, the general teaching of the New Testament. I have confined myself to a particular passage; but, as before, instead of exposing in Ritualism what is crude, painful, and evidently evil, I am willing to take it as it presents and loves to present itself-to take it in its best shape from its ablest defenders. It is always fair, if not obligatory, to do so. The more we have to blame another, the more should we let him put in the best appearance, and have the highest credit that your conscience can admit of. Always set out an adversary in the most favourable light you can; you have no business to be an adversary if your cause will not bear this. Why should you lower another? Why harbour an exaggerated or uncharitable thought? It is no unkindness nor want of humility, but on the contrary real love — love for God and for His children — to state with all plainness that divine truth which is ruined by Ritualism, ignorant of His nature and of its own opposition to God.

## ***Ritualism is Built on Incarnation Only***

As to the doctrine of Ritualism then I am not now about to say a word of excesses in form and

practice, and I refuse to dwell on what might be called the abuses of the light-minded people that adopt it. I will not bear hard on the giddy young men and women, or on their guiltier seniors. We must turn to look at the gravest and wisest among those that are its leaders. Now, as asserted by those that are most competent, in its fairest light, this is the essential principle of Ritualism: it does not disbelieve in Jesus as a divine person; far from denying that the Son of God was a man in the world, it takes its stand on the grand truth of the incarnation — a truth I hold to be most precious and essential to Christianity. Incarnation means not only God in the world, but a divine person Who has taken manhood into His person. It is the union of God and man in the same person. Ritualism is an imaginative system, built on the truth of incarnation. It maintains that when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was in this world He brought down all needed blessing — power, goodness, love, truth — to bear upon the souls and bodies of men. It holds that the only way for a man to receive the blessing is by coming in contact with His humanity. But then He died on the cross, and is gone. Ritualism always passes lightly over the grave of Christ, rarely dwelling on it, except as a weapon for dealing with the affections, or as a display of divine love. This the falsest systems may do, as Socinianism itself. So the Jesuits were always famous preachers of the cross thus far, with warm appeals to fear or feeling.

Ritualism cannot be said to go beyond this, even taking into account those that might be real believers. For I wish to set it in the light in which they would wish it put themselves. They hold then that, when our Lord Jesus departed from this world, the church was that divine system in which the benefits of Christ's incarnation were to be perpetuated for man on the earth; that consequently the church has made this good by her officials or the clergy. We all know that Ritualism is a common belief at the present day, although of course it had its springs before. They hold that by certain persons, in an uninterrupted line from the apostles, who were the personal companions of the Lord Jesus incarnate here below, the benefits of His incarnation are kept up in a given channel, and assured by outward signs or seals, which are the adequate means of conveying the blessings of incarnation to such as submit to them. This is the system. They hold accordingly that any one who disputes this must be a Rationalist, and that this is the difference between an orthodox man and an unorthodox.

### ***Christ's Atoning Death Slighted***

But in fact it is the Ritualists themselves who, without any intention to be unorthodox, are really quite opposed to the truth of the gospel according to God's word, their system being incompatible with what God has revealed. For, it will be observed, their principle on its own showing slights sin, sets aside its judgment, and ignores redemption. On its own theory it is a simple continuation of what was found when the Lord Jesus had *not* suffered on the cross. The Son was as truly incarnate before He died as after. His sacrifice, His death, His resurrection, are altogether distinct from incarnation, though impossible without it. It is granted freely and cordially that incarnation gave us not only the person of the Son of God, but also the condition of humanity in which He could accomplish redemption. As long as He remained simply divine, there could be no link with man; but when He did become a man, no doubt there according to the blessed will and ways of God was the state of the person Who was to die in atonement. When He was merely incarnate, it was not yet done.

Observe too the consistency of the system, so far as regards its idea of an earthly priesthood, and of sacramental ordinances as the only means of salvation — for this is the doctrine. When our Lord Jesus Christ was here below, when He, the Son, became incarnate, before His death and resurrection, He carefully acknowledged priesthood according to the law — a priesthood vested in Aaron and his sons, which in no way belonged to Himself. And as He respected the Jewish priesthood, so He maintained all the shadows of the law. In other words He threw His own divine weight into the support

of the ritual system till the cross closed it. The time was not yet come for God's grace and glory to displace it. It would have been contrary to God's mind to have overthrown it then, and the Lord Jesus, in word and deed as in person, was the expression of God and of His ways. Consequently, as long as the Lord was on the earth, we see His adhesion to the temple, feasts, sacrifices, everything. Nay, in the case of His own person we know it was so from the first, as we find in Luke 2. The Lord observed the times and seasons, and owned fully that earthly system of ritual which God had brought in by Moses.

### ***The Rending of the Veil***

But the moment He died on the cross, the whole system in principle disappeared before God. It was dead. The death of Christ sentenced to death the ritual system; it did infinitely more, but it did that. Then, as we have seen, the veil was rent; and it was not man, nor an accident; it was God Who rent it. How could Ritualism subsist with a rent veil? How could it abide for those who had received the Lord Jesus and were by His blood entitled to go straight into the presence of God?

And what a wonderful witness of this truth appears in the converted robber who died by the Lord's side! "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." What more unequivocal proof could be that it was not a bare theory, but, on the contrary, it was, as all the truth is, most practical! In fact, it was for the souls of men and the glory of God, for present wants and eternal blessedness. Accordingly, therefore, that converted robber proclaims the falsehood of the ritualistic system.

### ***Dr. Newman and the Converted Robber***

(Dr. J. H. Newman was leader of the Oxford Ritualistic Movement, afterwards joined the Church of Rome (1845), and became Cardinal (1879-90).)

I am aware that the ritualists would answer otherwise, and I remember how it was used by one not behind the chief of them — a man no longer, it is true, in the Protestant ranks of Ritualism, but in Rome, the natural home and necessary end of it all. It was in a sermon intended to act upon his old companions; and something like this was his comment: "Without church or sacrament, without priest, without confession, at once through faith the dying thief received the Saviour and went to heaven." Many would say, "What admirable doctrine!" Others would add, "How extremes meet! Think of Dr. Newman preaching the doctrine of Plymouth," the free and full grace of God in the gospel! But not so; it is evil, root and branch: let me tell you why. What he taught is, that the strength of the faith of the converted robber was so great and precious in God's sight, that He, in consequence of the necessary lack of the church and sacramental channels, was pleased to honour the faith of the man so much as to give him this great indulgence. Now I affirm that this is a denial of the Gospel: no man who understood it could teach thus. It is vital error, really leaving out Christ and His work, and making all of what was in the man.

But God forbid that anyone here should go away with the thought that I am pronouncing on the author of this discourse: I would only compare his doctrine with the truth of the gospel; and I do reject that which opposes the gospel, without a word about his own personal condition, of which I know nothing. It is better not to speak of what we do not know; but, as a servant of the Lord Jesus, I do speak of that which He has taught or preached, and I say that it is untrue that God saw such a meritorious value (for this is the doctrine) in the faith of the thief under those circumstances that it counterbalanced the want of church, priest, and sacrament. All such thoughts are simply religious imagination without the smallest warrant from the word of God. They are not the mind nor the language of faith.

No! what the converted robber does in reality show is the value of Christ and His blood, the present, immediate, everlasting efficacy for a most guilty but now repentant soul of that which Jesus wrought for sinners on the cross. There sin was judged; there was God's grace shown to the very uttermost. There was a soul that in the face of every obstacle received it with simplicity; but not a thought of anything in himself that could be an offering to God, not a trace of presenting, as it were, his faith, and God accepting this as of such signal value in His sight, that He could and would dispense with what in strictness ought to have been for souls in order to salvation. Not so. The robber had what ought to have been; he had what alone can suffice for a sinner with God. Not that I deny for a moment the place of the church; for I must tell you that I am a churchman — a high churchman if you will — and that, viewing the church whether as the body of Christ or as the house of God, I have the strongest convictions of what is true and obligatory on the Christian in respect of it.

### ***Every Christian a Churchman***

Do not suppose any play on the word church; for indeed I hold it to be the place of every Christian man to be in the truest and fullest sense a churchman. It is not enough for a man to be a Christian without being a churchman; nor is it the same thing. Nor do I admire the Augustinian subterfuge of an invisible church. I mean no offence to my dissenting friends who are present, but I am thoroughly convinced that they are wrong, and that most evangelicals are little if at all better. That is to say, I have been for many years satisfied that societies, or voluntary companies, are a practical denial of the church of God. Therefore, as far as the principle is concerned, however far apart in application, I shall go quite as far as Dr. Newman or Dr. Pusey, although I abhor the embrace of Babylon, which has seduced the one, if not the other. I do not regard the woman that sits on the seven hills as the church of God, but, on the contrary, as a spurious counterfeit, as the chief and central spring of all the dark and turbid streams of Ritualism; for she sits also by “many waters.”

But I maintain, that, before the question of the church comes, a man is put to the test thoroughly by the truth in Christ; and this is of vital moment in every conceivable way. It is not the church first, and then Christ; but Christ first, the church being merely the complement, though of all importance. And sure I am that if a man holds simply but intelligently withal to Christ, he will be little disposed either to Romanism or to Dissent. He will be content with the church of God, as He puts it in His word, and makes it good in fact, spite of all the external ruin; and this is what I mean by being a churchman. I repeat that I do not mean merely in an invisible way, which is wholly unscriptural. Before the church began, there was invisibility for the saints, save individually: the very object of the church here was a visible witness, though it will only be perfect in glory, and it has failed like all else. At the same time, I maintain that there is the reality of the church of God on the earth, as “ruined man” supposes a man, though in ever so wretched a state.

Now, what makes plain the importance of this is, that the truth of the gospel deals with the soul, with man as a sinner altogether guilty, but it also shows God's dealing with its evil in His own grace, yet putting it away righteously; that is, in the maintenance of His own character. It is here that Ritualism is so offensive and utterly hostile to the truth of God. If you substitute the incarnation for the atonement, for redemption, you set aside the judgment of sin; you make the atonement a mere accident — something at the very best which comes in as a sort of make-weight of the incarnation; you thus ignore its only proper place. Whereas the truth of the gospel is founded on a Christ, not incarnate only, but Who has died both to put away the “old man” with all its evil and to begin a new creation — Who has entered into a new and most real place, not the ruined scene of sin and fallen man. For He Who was God as well as man, Who was not in a fallen condition, but as man was “the Holy Thing” (Luke 1: 35),

went down under all the consequences of the fall on the cross, and there achieved the perfect victory. Now the Holy Spirit is sent down from heaven to proclaim the present immediate results of that victory to every soul that believes. This is the gospel.

### ***Romans and Righteousness***

In the foregoing statements I have referred to the facts of the Gospels; but if we take up Romans, it is the same thing. There it is not incarnation only, but Christ that died, and Christ that arose; and the Christian acquires a corresponding place. Consequently it is not the vagueness of Ritualism any more than the darkness of Rationalism — cold, comfortless both of them indeed; but what is really presented is that God has fairly and fully brought out all the evil, in order to put it away. Christ “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Consequently now it is not mercy only. I grant you the coming of Christ to the earth was most rich mercy; but there is more than mercy now. The death of Christ has laid the foundation of righteousness. It is not only that He was the Righteous One; He was this in everything here below; but now the wonderful thing is, as the gospel shows, that there is righteousness to justify the believer, yea, the ungodly. It shows that God is righteous now on behalf of him who has received Jesus, regarding him without a spot or stain in His sight. On that day the converted robber was fitted for heaven, and thus is every soul made meet that believes the gospel. By a suffering Christ (1 Peter 3: 18) we are brought to God, brought in grace and power by faith. We know Him thus, having in the gospel learned His love in our greatest need.

But then it is not merely this. We are also brought into a new relationship. There are many who believe in Christ, and are quite sure that God has forgiven them their sins. I would to God that every Christian, be he Dissenter, or Anglican, or whatever — I would to God that every person who has received the name of Jesus stood “full of the remission of sins,” as Luther calls it. He said the church was full of remission of sins. I would to God that every individual were really so, that he had the simple, full, happy, constant sense of being forgiven.

I do not mean by this that a man is to be without grief and shame if he has slipped aside and dishonoured the Lord. By such a plenary forgiveness I do not mean that if a man falls into evil he is to make light of it because it is all forgiven. Who teaches such doctrine? But I do hold that what God has given him by the gospel is not lost by his folly; and because he is forgiven in the sight of God, he is called upon to humble himself and confess to the Lord; he can go to God about it because he has a great High Priest. It is here that the high priesthood of Christ comes in. It is not even going to Christ, still less to a man upon the earth, but going by Christ to God; and the reason is that God in the Gospel has now proved His perfect grace and salvation by giving all freely to my soul. Consequently, as it is against God that I have sinned, I use that Saviour, and am entitled to use Him, as my High Priest — to go to God and acknowledge my sin — to have it fairly and fully out before God, with the certainty that His grace will restore my soul, and it does.

But this supposes that the believer is in a settled relationship. He is in the relationship of a child of God; and more than this, he is a member of the body of Christ. But it may be well to warn you of the great mistake of supposing that membership of the body of Christ is simply a question of faith. There must be besides faith something more; and the sum of it is, that on the ground of your faith you receive the Holy Ghost, baptizing you into the one body (Acts 1: 5, 11; 1 Cor. 12: 13).

Thus it may be seen that the position of a Christian is a living relationship both individually and corporately. You will understand therefore why I spoke of the difficulty of conceiving an intelligent Christian that is not also a firm churchman in the true sense of the word. In short, he is not merely an

individual. This he is, and he is first of all an individual brought to God; but then he shares in the infinite blessing of being a member of Christ's body, and this now on the earth. This I mean by being a churchman. Such was the church as it was known in early days: why should it be otherwise now? Why should anything else suffice now? What do we value? Is it what comes from God, or what is of man? This is the question.

### ***Christian Privileges Surrendered***

Hence, through all the Epistles, beginning with Romans, we find the great truth that the Christian's place is by Christ's death and resurrection, not merely by His incarnation. Thus are maintained two principles — first, God glorified by the Lord Jesus as to everything that could harm us; next, the believer justified from sin, as well as from his sins. When incarnation is put instead of the gospel, it brings you back where the work ought to be done; you are waiting for what you have not. This is the state in which Ritualism leaves you; consequently you must needs go and take advantage of religious ordinances. What are they? Promises. It would be presumptuous, according to Ritualism, for a man to know that his sins are forgiven; it would be presumptuous for one to say that he is a child of God; it would be presumptuous to take the place of certainly being a member of the body of Christ, except in the vague sense that every man of the world is who behaves decently and goes to church. Now in Scripture all is real, and not only so, but is made known; it is communicated in power to our souls, because all our action has to be founded on a known relationship. Why, you ought to know this yourselves.

Systematic doubting has a ruinous effect. No wonder that, where incarnation takes in effect the place of Christ's redemption, there are doubts unremoved. Ritualism takes away what Christianity has revealed as come, as it also sets up a veil which leaves man outside of God's presence. As long as there was a veil, God dwelt in the thick darkness, and man was on the other, the wrong, side; whereas the essence of Christianity is that God has both come down to me and brought me to Him while I am in this world. No doubt it is a matter of faith, but this does not make it to be any the less a reality. Indeed, the facts of faith have a substance in them far beyond the facts of sense. They are both real, but the facts of sense may disappear, while the facts of faith never will. You are brought into an eternal reality when put in contact with the world of faith; but you are brought in now.

This is Christianity. You do not wait till you get to heaven to be heavenly. This is part of the new relationship. Again, you are dead with Christ, not merely dying. The ritualist is trying to die. He is endeavouring, poor man! to put to death that old man that won't die. There is always a killing, but it is never killed; and no wonder. The fact is that there is no power but God's that can deal with it; and it is God Who has done it in the cross of Christ. The believer, the Christian who understands the gospel, starts with this precious truth.

### ***Ritualism and Baptism***

And this shows the place in which the institutions of Christianity come. I hope there is nobody here that makes light of baptism or the Lord's supper; but I dare say there are a great many here who but little understand their true import. Now I am not going into debatable points, but I will state the certain truth of God. It is notorious that baptism is used by the ritualist as a means of getting life. That is what he means when he talks about "baptismal regeneration": he means that a person is brought into life by that act duly administered by one who is in the apostolic succession. I am not maligning or exaggerating in any way. They would say so themselves in stronger terms, if possible. Yet mark how

the whole system perishes before the divine word.

In the first place, according to Scripture, baptism is never the sign of life-giving but of death-giving. It is the sign of having part with Christ in His death. It is never presented in Scripture as a means of quickening. Those who say so are altogether wrong in the very principles of Christianity. Death is what we want; and not merely life. There was always life-giving in the sense of quickening. Do you suppose that before the Lord Jesus came into the world there were not persons quickened? This was before anything was heard of baptism. To be sure: who can doubt it? Do you suppose that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not receive quickening from the Son of God as much as you and I? But they were not baptized for all that; and I am not going to give up my baptism, nor what Scripture tells me baptism means. I am not going to listen to people who tell me it is either the means of new birth or only the sign of it. I hold it to be the outward sign of a most blessed truth peculiar to Christianity; and the truth is this — not quickening (which is not peculiar to Christianity, but common to all saints from the beginning) but that I am dead with Christ, which never could be said till Christ died. Consequently the Christian starts with this as the grand truth on which he is called to act, not by trying to die like a monk or a nun, endeavouring to kill the “old man,” but by believing and acting on his faith that God has slain it, that we are crucified with Christ and nevertheless live, that the “old man” is dealt with by divine judgment on the cross of Christ, and that I, receiving Christ, have all that blessing now.

Assuredly our blessed Lord did not die for Himself. Scripture has no thought of it, but the contrary. There was no “old man” in Christ: the man that says so is a heretic. The truth of the gospel is that He Who had no sin dies for us who had nothing else, and the consequence of His mighty work is that we are not only quickened, but delivered from sin by His bearing its judgment. He did not leave the “old man” as before. That was the condition of the Old Testament saints. It was not gone for them; to us it is. I do not mean by this that we are perfect in the sense that there is no such thing as the flesh in us; but what Scripture shows is that I am entitled by the death of Christ to treat my “old man” as already judged. I am entitled to take all the comfort, as completely as if it were actually gone for ever. It is gone in the sight of God as truly as it will be when Christ comes. At His coming we shall have all the results manifestly; but now I have them to my faith, and am called to act according to such a place in the sight of God.

It is instructive to see that Ritualism, like every other human system, denies this, while after all it is one of its great boasts to give a fuller than ordinary value to baptism. You will invariably find that the people who boast of their soundness about baptism are, as I believe, wrong about baptism. The best course is never to boast of anything but Christ. You are always right there; but the moment you begin to boast of this doctrine or of that, I would not give much for your doctrine after all. But when content to have only Christ to boast of, He will be with you, and will make your doctrine to be good and sound, not by your magnifying your own possession of it, but by your holding simply to Christ. We have got all the truth in Him, and may the Spirit of God make us increasingly true to Him!

But there is more than this. I said that first of all Ritualism is false in its theory of baptism — in the very meaning of it; but, further, even as a system it is most inconsistent, because the principle is that these blessings of the incarnation are only through the appointed channel or the well-known ordinances; but every thoroughgoing ritualist would acknowledge at once that Christian baptism is valid even if administered by a woman, and of course by a man. Thus they hold that every Christian is competent to baptize in emergency; that is to say, it is valid. No doubt they do not think it orderly, but still they acknowledge it to be real. The Romanist does so. That is the doctrine of Catholicism, no matter what its form may be. Dissenters and most Evangelicals do not allow this, strange to say; but all Catholics so called, east, west, north, south, agree in it. Now, if this be the case, if baptism be the

means of getting life, there is the most fundamental blessing of Christianity, according to Ritualism received entirely apart from the apostolic succession duly administered in the appointed way. Thus, even in its foundation, it cannot stand; for, as usual, God takes care that a thing which is false shall be inconsistent. It is a mark set up as it were by the roadside to warn people that there is danger here, and that the truth is elsewhere. The tale does not even hang together. The witnesses do not agree.

### ***Ritualism and the Lord's Supper***

Take the other ordinance, the Lord's Supper, and the same result appears. What does the Lord's Supper set out? The incarnation? Not at all. The Lord's Supper shows that He Who became incarnate died. But this ever-recurring institution of Christianity is not individual like baptism, which is strictly so, and properly speaking is outside the church. Properly speaking it belongs to me as a Christian. Were there no such thing as the corporate system of the church, I should be, and ought to be, baptized as a Christian; but the Lord's Supper has no place except in the church. No person therefore is at liberty to take the Lord's Supper by himself.

The Lord's Supper is not according to Christ's intention or its own meaning unless on the ground of the church of God; nor ought one to partake of that bread or that cup except on the divine foundations of the church of God according to His word. We are not at liberty to give up or to alter; we may not bring in our own thoughts or modifications under any pretence whatever. This has nothing to do with the question of the church being in a state of confusion. I grant it; but there is the more reason why we should hold to the truth of God if we know it — to the unbending word that God has given. Be as gracious as you will to those who do not understand it; but let your carefulness be for the Lord's glory by your own holding fast the truth. Make allowance for others. Grace would do it; but hold you fast under all circumstances to what you know to be the will of the Lord Jesus.

Now, in the Lord's Supper, supposing that the mass of God's children anywhere had gone off, some here, some there, and there were only two or three that joined in taking the Lord's Supper according to Christ's institution, what is the meaning of it? Is it not so far a witness of the one body of Christ? It would be very presumptuous for two or three persons to say. "We are the body of Christ"; but it would be no less presumptuous for them to take the Lord's Supper on any other ground than that of Christ's body. If they are not thus, it is an unauthorized human act; on the other hand, they must hold fast to His name as members of His body, and simply partake of that bread in His name. This is its meaning. It is the remembrance of Himself; but it is the showing forth of His death, not of His incarnation.

Here again see how utterly false the ritualistic system is. In short, it is a wilful, deliberate, systematic going back to what existed before the death of Christ; it is the annulling of what God has introduced now, and what the Holy Spirit is holding to. The incarnation was a step towards the great end; the end was the judgment of sin, and the establishment of righteousness through the death of Christ, but displayed in Him risen from the dead.

### ***Ritualism and the Risen Christ***

This brings me to another point. My relationship is with Jesus risen. Undoubtedly He came down and took part of flesh and blood; but why? "That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death" (Heb. 2: 14). It was not merely to continue the benefits of what He did when He was living. He did indeed attract when He was alive, but substantially the disciples that followed the Lord

Jesus in His life were on the same ground as the Old Testament saints They saw and heard more; but it was simply this — that their eyes saw, and their ears listened to, the One for Whom the Old Testament saints had been waiting; but when His death and resurrection took place, and the Holy Spirit was given, the whole was changed, and Christianity came in; and the going back to what was before the death and resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit tends to apostasy from Christianity, although real Christians may be entangled by the snare.

This is surely serious if true. Let me just direct you very briefly to a few Scriptures. Take 1 Corinthians 6: 17: “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” It is not a question of joining Him in flesh when He was here below. No doubt He took flesh and blood: but this is not the link of union. “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” Again, who can deny that the expressed doctrine of 2 Corinthians 5: 15 is that “He died and rose again, that we should not live unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again”? Then Paul says, “Though we have known Christ after the flesh” (that is, when He was incarnate, and when the ritualistic system was still in force) — “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.” Now that Christ is dead and risen, and the Christian brought into association with Him at the right hand of God, the surpassing glory of the new position completely eclipses any connection that was formed when He was here below. As long as Christ was here, there could not be union. There might be that which looked onward to this high privilege, but it could not yet be given righteously. Now it is, and we are brought into it, and hence the connection of the Holy Spirit with it. It is not merely by faith, but by the Holy Spirit, which is a very important truth indeed to bear in mind. Our link with Christ, I repeat, is by nothing less than the presence of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, acting in us individually and also as the body of Christ.

I have referred to Galatians 2: 20: “I am crucified with Christ” (not incarnate, simply), “nevertheless I live.” Take again Ephesians 1: 20-22, and you will find that Christ only became the Head of the church after He died, rose, and went to heaven. The doctrine of Ephesians first presents Christ when He died, and then He is seen raised up, and now seated at the right hand of God; and only so does He become the Head of the body.

Now, we belong to that body, or we are nothing. If we are now in living association with Christ by the Holy Spirit, we are of Christ's body, exalted at the right hand of God; and that body had no existence till the Head was there. So in Colossians 1: 18 it is said, “Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” Christ is then the beginning. When He was here below, He was not the beginning; He alone was going to be, as risen. He alone was to be the Head of the church, but this required the putting away of sin. How could the Lord Jesus be united to us while our sins were not blotted out? and how could the Holy Spirit dwell in us when sin was not judged? We see therefore how all the truth hangs together. Sin is gone, righteousness established, union is formed by the Holy Ghost with Christ risen and glorified at the right hand of God.

This is, I believe, the truth of Christianity. The gospel touches on the mystery that was hidden from ages and from generations. Need it be said that this is what we are called to testify? Not the church only or chiefly, but above all Christ Whom God has given Head over all things to the church. It is the body to which we belong; the Christ of Whom we are members.

May the Lord grant then that holding fast the truth, we may bear witness to it! It is the best answer of all to Ritualism.