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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

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ART. III.—THE EASTWARD POSITION

OPPOSED TO THE GENERAL USAGE OF THREE HUNDRED YEARS,
AND AT VARIANCE WITH THE RUBRIC OF 1662, WHICH
DIRECTS THE MINISTER TO BREAK THE BREAD BEFORE
THE PEOPLE.

THIS question has been recently brought again into prominence by the action of Dr. Stubbs, the new Bishop of Chester, who, against the wish and practice of the Dean of Chester, has adopted the Eastward position in the cathedral whilst reading the Prayer of Consecration.

The question is asked, Has not the Bishop of Chester the same right to adopt the *Eastward position* in Chester Cathedral, though in opposition to the practice of the Dean, as another Bishop has to adopt the *North-side* position in a cathedral where the Dean uses the *Eastward* position? Whilst it must be admitted that since the Ridsdale Judgment gave, on certain conditions, legal sanction to the Eastward position, the Bishop of Chester, so long as he is careful to observe the specified conditions, is acting within his legal rights; yet a little reflection will show that there is a wide difference between the two cases.

The Eastward position, says the Bishop of St. Andrews, since 1662, has been unknown in any one of our cathedrals. "It is certain," he says,¹ "that before the Reformation the Eastward position was the invariable use *in them all*; and it is no less certain that since the Reformation the use of the North-end position has been in them *equally universal*; and it is so still, except that, of late years, in *three or four cathedrals*, the Eastward position has been partially introduced." He states, in the following words, the reason for the change:

At the Reformation, the Mass, with its doctrine of Sacrifice and Adoration, was given up, and Holy Communion introduced. *Nothing else will account for the universal disuse of the position formerly used.* The change, therefore, was made on principle.

Can it therefore be maintained that one Bishop has the same right to *restore* a practice of doctrinal significance, unknown for two, if not for three hundred years, as another Bishop has for declining to comply with a modern innovation—an innovation which is associated with a doctrine that was discarded at the time the practice was changed? Moreover, the tribunal which gave *conditional* sanction to the Eastward position, at

¹ Letter to Mr. Beresford Hope.

the same time declared that the North-side position "is not only lawful, but is that which would, under ordinary circumstances, enable the minister, with the greatest certainty and convenience, to fulfil the requirements of all the rubrics."

There are, then, clearly marked and important differences between the case of a Bishop who, against the known wish of the Dean, restores a practice which three hundred years ago was discarded by the whole Church of England, because of its association with a doctrine which our Church at that time deliberately rejected, and that of another Bishop who adheres to the usage of three hundred years in a cathedral where that usage has been but recently set aside. Not only is there a marked difference in the two cases, but it is difficult to conceive how anyone can allege that there is any real similarity between them. Bishop Stubbs, by conforming, in deference to the wish of the Dean, to the usage of Chester Cathedral, would not thereby deny the doctrine which is supposed to be symbolized by the Eastward position; but the Bishop who adopts it gives countenance to a doctrine which the Church of England rejected at the time she abandoned the Eastward position. The one act is *negative*, whilst the other is *positive*; the one does not necessarily involve the denial of a doctrine, but the other is avowedly used to symbolize a doctrine; the one is likely to frustrate the chief design of the rubric, viz., to enable the minister "with the more readiness and decency to break the bread before the people," etc., whilst the other, as already stated on the authority of the Judicial Committee of Privy Council, enables him "with the greatest certainty and convenience, to fulfil the requirements of all the rubrics."

It will no doubt be said in reply to these statements, that they are founded on assumptions which should not be made without strong and clear evidence.

Is it, then, a fact that the Eastward position was abandoned at the Reformation, and that the North-side position was, for three hundred years, recognised by men of all parties in the Church as the one required by the Prayer Book? Is it equally clear that at the time the Eastward position was superseded by the North-side position, the doctrine of the Mass was expunged from our *formularies*, and that, with the restoration of the Eastward position in our own times, there has been re-introduced a doctrine in *some* of our churches hardly distinguishable from the Romish doctrine of the Mass?

It will be found interesting and instructive to consider this question in the light of history. We ask, therefore:

(1) Was the Eastward position abandoned at the Reformation in consequence of changes made in the rubrics of our Prayer Book?

(2) Was the rubric introduced in 1552, which precedes the Prayer of Consecration, intended to authorize the Eastward position while reading that prayer?

I. In the Prayer Book of 1549, the words, "The priest standing humbly *afre the midst of the Altar*, shall say the Lord's Prayer, with this Collect," were superseded in 1552 by the following rubric :

The Table having at the Communion-time a fair white linen cloth upon it, shall stand in the body of the church, or in the chancel, where Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer be appointed to be said. And the priest, standing at the *North side of the table*, shall say the Lord's Prayer, with the Collect following.

Here no one can fail to observe that "*the Altar*" has given place to "*the Table*," and "*the priest standing humbly afre the midst of the altar*," has given place to his "*standing at the north side of the table*." From 1552, when this important change was made, up to within the last few years, except during the short reign of Queen Mary, the recognised position of the minister when reading the Communion Service, including the Prayer of Consecration, has been on the North side of the table. Bishop Wordsworth of St. Andrews, who has made this subject his special study, offers the following remarks on the alteration made in the rubric in 1552 :

I consider, as my brother—the present Bishop of Lincoln—does, that the Purchas Judgment, which, if I remember right, forbids *in toto* the Eastward position, is simply the true one, notwithstanding the bold assertion of Canon Gregory and others to the contrary. And among other reasons for thinking so, the following appears to me unanswerable : I assume the practice of our twenty-four English cathedrals as giving us the surest rule, because the practice, being not of an individual but of a corporation, is least liable to change. Now it is certain that *before* the Reformation the Eastward position was the invariable use in them all : and it is no less certain that *since* the Reformation the use of the North-end position has been in them equally universal, and is so still, except that of late years in three or four cathedrals the Eastward position has been partially introduced. How did that universal change come about ? Because the doctrine was changed. At the Reformation, the Mass, with its doctrine of Sacrifice and Adoration, was given up, and Holy Communion introduced. Nothing else will account for the universal change of the position formerly used. The change was therefore made on principle.—(Letter from Bishop Wordsworth of St. Andrews, to Mr. Beresford Hope, June 4, 1874.)

There are but few names, if any, of higher authority in the Church of England than the name of Bishop Jewel ; and certainly no one know better than he did what change of practice followed the change made in the rubric of 1552. If the Eastward position was known in our Church in Jewel's day, it is unaccountable that, when speaking of the various superstitions of the Mass, he should ask, "What Father or Doctor taught us that Christ's body is in a hundred thousand places at once ?

that the priest should hold the bread over his head, *and turn his back to the people?*"

Among the charges brought against Archbishop Laud in 1640, by the Scottish Commissioners, was that through the Scottish Liturgy, for which he was held to be mainly responsible, the minister was allowed, "without warrant of the Book of England," to go "from the north end of the table," and "stand during the time of Consecration with his hinder parts to the people." To this charge the Archbishop replied: "Truly, this charge is, as it seems, no great matter. And yet here again they are offended that this is done without warrant of the Book of England. How comes this Book of England to be so much in their esteem, that nothing must be done without warrant from it?" In the charge it is distinctly affirmed, and in the Archbishop's answer it is clearly implied, that for the minister to leave the North of the table, and read the prayer of Consecration with his back to the people, was without warrant of the English Book of Common Prayer. This is further confirmed by the fact named by Dr. Wordsworth, Bishop of St. Andrews, in his letter to Mr. Beresford Hope: "My brother (the Bishop of Lincoln) notices the engraving which Laud's bitter enemy, William Prynne, published in 1644, of the arrangements of the Archbishop's chapel, where the cushion for the celebrant is placed at the North end of the table."

That this was the recognised practice according to the Prayer Book, from the change of the rubric in 1552, previous to its last revision in 1662, we have the most conclusive evidence in Hanson L'Estrange's "Alliance of Divine Offices," first published in 1659:

As for the priest standing at the north side of the table, this seemeth to avoid the fashion of the priest's standing with his face towards the east, as is the popish practice. So the MS. collections of a learned man.—("Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology," p. 245.)

Now if we look at the change made in the rubric in 1552; if we weigh the words of Bishop Jewel written some years afterwards; if we consider the charge brought against Archbishop Laud, and his reply to that charge; and if we further notice the statement of L'Estrange, written in 1659, that the Church of England had directed the priest to stand on the North of the table, to avoid the popish practice; can there be any room for doubt as to the teaching and practice of the Church of England between 1552 to 1662?

II. "Standing before the table." Many will admit that the minister's *normal* position during the Communion Service is on the North side of the table, but they plead that during the Prayer of Consecration he is to stand before the table; and in

support of their contention they adduce the rubric which precedes that prayer. The rubric runs thus: "When the priest, standing before the table, hath so ordered the bread and wine, that he may with the more readiness and decency break the bread before the people, and take the cup into his hands, he shall say the Prayer of Consecration, as followeth." Are the words "*standing before the table*" to be associated with the direction "*he shall say the Prayer of Consecration*," or with the words "*hath so ordered the bread and wine*"? When we find Mr. Beresford Hope, Mr. Morton Shaw, Canon Malcolm MacColl, Canon Gregory, Bishop Jenner and others, supporting the first construction of the rubric, and when we see the late Professor Blunt, the late Canon Selwyn, Canon Swainson, Dean Howson, Bishop Wordsworth, and a host of authorities supporting the second, it seems obvious that, if we have regard to the grammatical construction only, the rubric is susceptible of both interpretations. If the rubric had said that the minister, while "*standing before the table*," "*shall say the Prayer of Consecration*," the Eastward position would be clearly established. But by the other construction of the rubric, the minister is instructed to stand before the table while ordering the bread and wine; and having done this, he is afterwards so to stand as to enable him "*with the more readiness and decency to break the bread before the people*" while saying the Prayer of Consecration. Now which of the two interpretations enables the minister to do what the rubric requires? If he interposes his body between the people and the elements, *how can he possibly "break the bread before the people"?* But if, having ordered the bread and wine while standing before the table, he then returns to his normal position, viz., the North side, as directed by the fourth rubric in the Communion Service, he can there break the bread before the people while saying the Prayer of Consecration. This interpretation gives consistency to the whole rubric, and is in harmony with all but the universal practice and explanations given by Church authorities for nearly two hundred years.

Let us notice the circumstances under which this rubric was framed. It was inserted in the Prayer Book at the last revision in 1662. The late Canon Selwyn, in his letter to the Dean of York, drew attention to the following points, which have an important bearing upon this rubric. At the Savoy Conference (May, 1661), the Presbyterian divines proposed (as part of their Reformed Liturgy), "Then let the minister take the bread and break it in sight of the people;" and again they complained in their exceptions to various parts of the Liturgy. "that the manner of consecration of the elements is not here explicit and distinct enough, and the minister's breaking of

bread is not so much as mentioned." Later in the year the Prayer Book was revised, and the rubric under discussion was added, together with the marginal rubrics to the Consecration Prayer; among which are the following: "And here to break the bread;" "And here to lay his hand upon all the bread;" "And here to lay his hand upon every vessel," etc. Having cited these and some other particulars, Canon Selwyn asks:

Is it not, then, very clear that this rubric was intended to prepare for the solemn commemorative act of breaking the bread, and blessing the cup, that it might be done with the more readiness and decency before the people?

And does not "before the people" mean the same as "in the sight of the people," as proposed by the Presbyterian divines? The Judicial Committee of Privy Council declare this as their opinion.

In a letter which appeared in the *Standard* on the first of October, the subjoined passage was quoted from the Bishop of St. Andrews in support of Dean Howson's statement, that not a single Bishop of Chester had adopted the Eastward position since 1662. Bishop Jenner, in a letter to the *Standard* of October 4th, remarked that he could not see how Dean Howson could prove the correctness of this statement. The Bishop of St. Andrews having been led to inquire into the practice of our cathedrals, wrote thus in 1876:

We may feel perfectly sure that in no one cathedral was the rubric so understood or so acted on from 1662 downwards, *i.e.*, from the time it first appeared in the Prayer Book—*i.e.*, within the last thirty years. This I say in consequence of inquiries which circumstances induced me to make in regard to the Ritual practice of every English cathedral a few years ago.—("Three Conclusive Proofs," Rivington.)

This testimony is all the stronger coming from one who for ten years had more or less previously adopted the Eastward position; but, as the result of careful investigation, had been convinced that the meaning and intention of the rubric have been reflected in the practice of our cathedrals.

Bishop Jenner says he does not see that this proves anything. It certainly proves something; viz., that the investigations of a learned Bishop made him "perfectly sure that in no one cathedral" was the Eastward position adopted from 1662 to within the last forty years. But Bishop Jenner asks for "documentary evidence as regards the practice of Bishops, Deans, and Canons since 1662. One would like to know, *e.g.*, whether Bishop Pearson was a North-ender."

It must be admitted that a separate record has not been kept of the practice of each Bishop, Dean, and Canon in Chester Cathedral since 1662. It is, however, known what was the practice of Bishops Blomfield, Sumner, Graham, and Jacobson; for whatever be the reason why Archbishop Sumner

adopted the Eastward position at Canterbury on the occasion referred to by Bishop Jenner, it is a well-known fact that both at Chistor and Canterbury his habitual practice was to read the Prayer of Consecration while standing on the North side of the table. No wonder Bishop Jenner made a note in his diary when, from some unexplained cause, an Evangelical Bishop assumed the Eastward position in his own cathedral, at a time when this "position was not customarily adopted by the Cathedral clergy"! Archbishop Sumner's act on this occasion will strike people as the more surprising when it is remembered that only a few years before Bishop Blomfield had required the British chaplain at Madeira to "*discontinue*" the practice of standing with his back to the congregation during a part of the Communion Service." That an Evangelical Bishop should adopt what had been abolished as "the popish fashion," when a "High-Church" Bishop required one of his clergy to discontinue it, is truly surprising.

But Bishop Jenner "would like to know whether Bishop Pearson was a North-ender." Dr. Pearson became Bishop of Chester in 1672, and died in 1686. In 1674, two years after Bishop Pearson's consecration, a book was published, entitled "A Course of Catechizing, etc." Its contents were "gathered" from Gauden, Andrews, Hall, Taylor, Prideaux, Morton, Hammond, Pearson, etc. In this book we find the following question and answer :

Q. Why doth the priest stand on the North side of the table ?
A. To avoid the Popish superstition of standing towards the East.

These are the words of a book the teaching of which is "gathered" from Pearson, Andrews, Taylor, Heylin, and other divines. The question raised does not relate to any matter of difference among Churchmen, but solely as one between English Churchmen and Roman Catholics. It assumes, as a matter beyond controversy, that the Church of England had settled that her ministers should be "North-enders" in order "to avoid popish superstition." We have thus clear evidence that at the beginning of Dr. Pearson's episcopate the North side was the "celebrant's position." We have equally clear evidence that this was the minister's recognised position at the close of Bishop Pearson's life. L'Estrange published his book, to which reference has already been made, in 1659, from which it is evident that the North-side position was the only recognised one from 1552 to 1662. Previous to his death, in 1705, his book was reprinted in 1690 and 1699; but his statement, quoted from a learned man, about the minister's position remained the same as before, viz., "as for the priest's standing at the North side of the table, this seemeth to avoid the fashion

of the priest's standing with his face towards the East, as is the popish fashion." The very essence of both these quotations consists in their assuming that the English Church had deliberately adopted the North-side position in opposition to the usage of the Church of Rome. Until some one can produce a note from the diary of a contemporary of Bishop Pearson, that this distinguished prelate adopted what so advanced a Churchman as L'Estrange called in those days "The popish fashion," I think we may fairly conclude from the above evidence, which covers the whole period of Dr. Pearson's episcopate, that his lordship "was a North-ender."

We have seen what was the interpretation placed upon the rubrics relating to the minister's position up to the end of the seventeenth century. The testimony is equally explicit in regard to the early part of the eighteenth century, as passages from Nicholls and Wheatly will abundantly prove.

Dr. Nicholls's "Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer, with notes on all the rubrics," was first published in 1710. Having furnished a history of all the changes made in the rubrics from 1552, up to the insertion of this in 1661, which have a bearing upon the minister's position at the table, he proceeds to interpret this rubric. "The Papists," he says,

thought it the best way to screen their pretended miracle from the people's eyes by the intervention of the priest's body. But our Church enjoins the direct contrary, and that for a direct contrary reason. He is to stand before the table, indeed, just so long as he is ordering the bread and wine; but after that he is to go to some place where he is to break the bread before the people, which must be the North side of the table.

Wheatly, who wrote about the same time, gives a similar interpretation, and assigns the same reasons. He says:

It is asked whether the priest is to say the Prayer of Consecration standing before the table, or at the North end of it. I answer at the North end of it. . . . In the Romish Church, indeed, they always stand BEFORE the altar during the time of Consecration, in order to prevent the people from being eye-witnesses of their operations in working their pretended miracle. . . . But our Church, that pretends no such miracle, enjoins, we see, the direct contrary to this, by ordering the priest so to order the bread and wine, that he may with the more readiness and decency break the bread, and take the cup into his hands before the people.

It will be seen by those who examine these passages from the works of two eminent "High-Church" Liturgical authorities, that the North-side position had been deliberately adopted by our Church in opposition to the Romish practice. The words are too plain to call for comment.

The secession from our Church of the Non-jurors indirectly supplies additional evidence, if needed, as to the accepted meaning of the rubric in the early part of the eighteenth century. Most of their leading men held high sacramental views,

yet we find the following direction touching the minister's position :

Note, that wherever in this Office the priest is directed to turn to the altar, or to stand or kneel before it, or with his face towards it, it is always meant that he should stand or kneel on the North side thereof.

It may be said that it does not necessarily follow that this direction was founded on the accepted meaning of our Communion rubrics. A letter of Dr. Brett, who is declared by Canon Malcolm MacColl to have compiled the Non-jurors' Liturgy, makes it quite clear that it was intended in this particular to continue the recognised practice of the Church of England. Dr. Brett says: "In the first place, I desire that the priest may *still* be directed to stand at the North side of the table, and not at the place which we at this time call 'before the table,' that is the West side, with his back to the people." Dean Howson, in the supplement to his admirable, and, as seems to me, unanswerable book, "Before the Table," says: "I must ask attention to the word '*still*' in this passage;" for, from the use of this word, "it is evident that this was at that time the prescribed and customary position in the Church of England."

Coming down a few years later still, we have the testimony of Archdeacon Yardley, who, even in our day, would be called a very High Churchman. In his book, first published in 1728, on some of the offices, under the head, "The Rational Communicant," he writes thus :

He (the minister) doth not stand before the altar as the Romish priests do; nor like them pronounce the words with a low voice, to countenance their pretended miracle of transubstantiation. . . . But the priest in the Church of England says the prayer with an *audible* voice . . . and stands so as he may with the more readiness and decency break the bread before the people, and take the cup into his hands.—(Ed. 1763.)

Now there can be no doubt what these writers upon the Prayer Book, or its rubrics—and they were among the first after the last revision—understood the words to mean; and from the days in which they lived they must have had opportunities of learning what was the mind and intention of the framers of the rubric, as well as of the practice at the time. Let the interpretation by Nicholls, Wheatly, Brett, and Yardley be considered in connection with the time and circumstances under which the rubric was inserted, as shown by Canon Selwyn, and I think its meaning cannot remain a matter of doubt.

Archdeacon Sharp, son of Archbishop Sharp, published his views on some of the rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer, etc., in 1753. He discusses the position of the holy table; and in regard to that of the minister, he tells his readers that the

rubric which says, "the priest shall stand at the North side of the table, when he performs any part of the Communion Service," is one of "those rubrics which expressly and positively require the minister to observe this or that particular in his ministration;" and neglect of it, he says, cannot be excused by the Bishop.—(Sharp on "The Rubrics," p. 55, ed. 1834.)

To the above authorities relating to the interpretation of the rubrics, and to the practice which prevailed in our Church from 1662 to 1753, let due weight be given. Further, there is the testimony of three eminent men, who had the means of knowing what usage prevailed during the first half of this century. I refer to Bishop Mant, Bishop Blomfield, and Professor Blunt.

The Bishop of St. Andrews (Dr. Charles Wordsworth) gives a brief sketch of Bishop Mant's life. With a view to show that he had "a long and varied and extensive experience in the ministry of our Church," he mentions that he was elected Fellow of Oriel, 1798; became Vicar of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, London, in 1815; was consecrated, in 1820, Bishop of Killaloe, and translated to Down and Connor in 1823. Bishop Mant's work on the Book of Common Prayer is avowedly a compilation "from approved writers of the Church of England." Now who are the *approved* writers quoted to set forth the meaning and intention of the two rubrics bearing on our subject? They are Wheatly and L'Estrange, as given above. It would seem that Bishop Mant, "a man of extensive learning and of sound judgment," of "a long and varied and extensive experience," had not so much as become acquainted with any "*approved writers of the Church of England*," who taught that the rubrics sanctioned the Eastward position.¹

But few men, if any, have devoted more time to the study of this and kindred subjects than the late Professor Blunt.

¹ How little in our Church the practice of consecrating with the face to the East prevailed until very recently may be gathered from the following statement. Mr. Lowe, British Chaplain at Madeira, in 1846, was accused by the Treasurer and two of the Trustees of the Protestant Episcopal Chapel, on behalf of twenty-nine of the permanent residents, of having introduced certain changes into the services of their church. Nine charges were brought against him, the first being that of "*Praying with his back to the people.*" These complaints were made to Bishop Blomfield, by whom Mr. Lowe had been licensed. The Bishop, in reference to this particular charge, said in reply: "Mr. Lowe has discontinued, *in compliance with my direction*, the practice of standing with his back to the congregation during a part of the Communion Service." In reference to four of the grounds of complaint, the Bishop approved of the changes Mr. Lowe had made, *because they were in accordance with the rubrics.* This only makes it the more abundantly clear, from the Bishop's statement, that he considered the Eastward position *was not* in accordance with the rubrics.

When Proctor published his work on the Book of Common Prayer, he dedicated it to Professor Blunt as a "*volume intended to promote the studies over which he especially presides.*" It is not probably too much to say that the late Professor Blunt is acknowledged to have been one of the most learned High Church authorities of this generation: so we may suitably close our list of testimonies to the meaning and intention of the rubric preceding the Prayer of Consecration, by citing his clear and distinct explanation:

This rubric, again, has ministered cause of debate. "The priest standing before the table," you will take notice, is a different phrase from "standing at the North side of the table," and implies a different thing: viz., that he shall stand in front of the table, with his back to the people, till he has "ordered" the elements, and prepared them for the rite, interposing his person between the congregation and the table till whatsoever is merely mechanical in the act shall have been completed, the Church not wishing to make that meaner part of the service a spectacle. This done, he returns to the North side, and breaks the bread, and takes the cup "before the people," i.e., in their sight, the Church not wishing to make the manner of Consecration, as the Romish priest does, a mystery. Thus the former position was merely taken up in order to the subsequent act, that the priest "may with more readiness and decency break the bread." So that they mistake this rubric altogether, I apprehend, and violate both its letter and spirit, who consecrate the elements with their backs to the people, after the manner of the Church of Rome.—(Blunt's "Duties of the Parish Priest," p. 334.)

It would be a great injustice to many loyal Churchmen who have adopted the Eastward position, to say that they have done so for the purpose of symbolizing doctrine; and it would be a still greater injustice to suggest that they have any sympathy with the Romish doctrine of the Mass; yet it is a simple matter of fact that nearly all the authorities which have been cited, from Bishop Jewel to the late Professor Blunt, declare that the Eastward position is associated with the Romish doctrine of the Mass, and was on this account discarded by the Church of England at the Reformation. And it is also an undoubted fact that some of those who have taken an active part in promoting the so-called "Catholic Revival" have adopted and recommended the Eastward position for the express purpose of symbolizing doctrine. They have thus unhappily raised the issue whether we are to have the Holy Communion or the Sacrifice of the Mass; a Scriptural Ministry or a Sacrificing Priesthood. Surely, then, loyal Churchmen cannot but regard the question of the Eastward position as one of great importance.

JOSEPH BARDSLEY.

