

The Ornaments' Rubric

Often to be found on the page preceding Morning Prayer is a small paragraph of some fifty-five words which is often referred to as the Ornaments' Rubric. It says:

And here is to be noted, that such Ornaments of the Church, and of the Ministers thereof, at all Times of their Ministration, shall be retained, and be in use, as they were in this Church of England, by the Authority of Parliament, in the Second Year of the Reign of King Edward the Sixth.

Now, the second year of Edward's reign ended on the 27th of January, 1549; the first of Cranmer's Prayer Books didn't come into use until Whitsunday of that year, which occurred on the 9th of June. The requirements of the Ornaments' Rubric were demanded in the Elizabethan Prayer Book of 1559 and the Savoy Conference Book of James I (1604). The rubric is an extract from the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity, but it has been argued that the text of the rubric breaks off in the middle of a sentence. The Act continued with the words:

... until other order shall be therein taken by the Queen's Majesty with the advice of her commissioners appointed and authorized under the great Seal of England for ecclesiastical causes, or of the metropolitan of this realm.

In the Church of England, up to Whitsunday 1549, the Sarum Rite would have been celebrated in Latin and the clergy would have worn albs, maniples, stoles, chasubles, dalmatics, tunicles, copes and mitres. These would have used candles, crosses, crucifixes, banners, thuribles, etc. Church furnishings, such as altar frontals, pulpit falls, funeral palls, etc, would have been of the highest quality.

While Thomas Cranmer's Holy Communion Rite did not come into effect until Whitsunday, the Act of Parliament that authorised the use of the Book was approved by parliament on 21st January. It has been claimed that this Act legalises the vestments of the Sarum Rite which were actually in use in the second year, but, by contrast, some authorities accepted that the Act referred to the vestments ordered in the first Edwardine Prayer Book.

In April 1559 Bishop Edwin Sandys (1519–1588), successively of Worcester, London and York, gave his interpretation of the Ornaments' Rubric. In this he declared that, while the wearing of vestments was not illegal, clergy were not forced to use them. They were to be retained in churches until the Queen gave further instructions. Later that year the Queen issued an Injunction which required churchwardens to deliver to her officers an inventory of: 'vestments, copes or other ornaments, plate, books and especially of grails, couchers, legends, processions, hymnals, manuals, portuals and such like, appertaining to their respective churches'. In 1566 Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504–1575) gave instruction that Anglican

clergy should wear cassocks and surplices, and copes in cathedrals and collegiate churches. Canon Law, promulgated in 1604, made Parker's instructions legally binding and with minor adjustment these statutes have remained in law until the twentieth century.

From the time of the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century the legal interpretation of the Ornaments' Rubric has been challenged. The new breed of Anglo-Catholics, as 'High Church' men came to be called, argued for a reintroduction of traditional Eucharistic vestments. By contrast the Evangelical wing of the Church insisted on the wearing of choir habit for all public worship but did allow the use of copes in Cathedrals and collegiate churches. With alterations to Canon Law in 1969 the wearing of vestments became legally allowable.

One important authority in this debate was the Reverend (later Reverend Canon Doctor) Percy Dearmer (1867–1936). In 1899 he published *The Parson's Handbook*. In general agreement with those who advocated a return to the ritual and ceremonial of the pre-Reformation Church, Dearmer argued cogently for a resumption of the English Usage, not the post-Tridentine Roman Catholic liturgy. His intention was to establish sound Anglo-Catholic liturgical practices in the native English tradition, practices which were also in full accord with the rites of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the canons and rubrics that governed its use. He hoped thereby to save the Church from attack by Evangelical fundamentalists who intensely objected to such practices. One example of Dearmer's advocacy of the English tradition was his insistence that the use of a row of six candlesticks above the altar is pure Romanism. He argued that an altar with two candlesticks is more dignified and more beautiful.

A strong adherence to the letter of the law would, in Dearmer's opinion, make the Church safe from attacks by those who led demonstrations, interrupted divine worship and battled in the courts for a suppression of ritualism and sacerdotalism. While concerned in general with ritual and ceremonial *The Parson's Handbook* strongly advocated a return of art and beauty into worship.

Percy Dearmer made it clear that all Anglican clergy were subservient to the Parliamentary legislation expressed in the Ornaments' Rubric and were in breach of its requirements if they did not continue to conduct divine worship as Church of England clergy had done in the days of King Henry; that is, as before the influences of Cranmer and other Protestant reformers began to take effect.

In our modern times there is much greater flexibility in corporate worship and the disruptive activities in Dearmer's times of the likes of the anti-ritualist and polemicist John

Kensit (1853–1602) are thankfully over. However, there are still occasions when clamorous and vocal opponents of Anglo-Catholic ritual foregather, often at shrines such as Our Lady of Walsingham, especially when high officials in the Church, such as members of the Episcopate, take an active part.

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Biographical note:

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