

*FORM AND ORDER IN PUBLIC WORSHIP.*

Amongst a large proportion of my fellow Christians, the ritual or ceremonial part of divine worship is thought to be a matter of perfect indifference. For since the true religion is acknowledged to be a spiritual life in the soul granted to the humble disciple of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, through Faith, they have concluded that its outward form has received no corresponding care from the Almighty. God looks on the heart. And if that be right, the external expression of devotion is left free to all the varieties of human taste and feeling.

This, in the judgment of many, seems to be a very satisfactory conclusion. Yet I cannot assent to it, for several reasons. First, because it stands in opposition to the wisdom of the supreme Lawgiver, when He saw fit to dictate the ritual of the Church established for His own chosen people. Secondly, because it contradicts the analogy of all His other works, where we see that while the life is one thing and the form is another, *both* are ordained by the Word of God. The *life* of religion is indeed a spiritual principal, but there is no reason why the Lord should be indifferent to its *form*.

The soul is spiritual, and yet the Creator has united it to a body, and that body is the work of His Almighty hand. Every thing which His wondrous power has called into existence has its *form* and *order*. And shall we believe that His most precious work—that Church which is expressly called His body—should have no established form and order? Is it not certain that He has provid-

ed for the form not only of the human frame, but of every animal, bird, fish, reptile, and insect,—nay, of every tree and plant and flower? And is it possible that He cares nothing for the form in which His own worship is conducted? To my mind, an hypothesis like this is so far from being unreasonable, that it rather wears the aspect of absurdity.

And there is yet a third reason which should have a conclusive influence on such a question, viz., that the current notion of indifference to religious form and order is in direct conflict with the *love of form and order* implanted by the Deity Himself in every form and mortal bosom. For what else occupies the toils and stimulates the ambition of mankind but the activity of this very principle? If men were content with having life, careless about its order and its form, what would become of the whole business of every community? The poorest labourer has life in his hovel, as truly as the merchant prince in his palace. He eats, he drinks, he sleeps, and has a shelter from the elements. But he sees that his wealthy neighbour has all these things in better *form and order*, and he uses his energies to rise higher in the scale, or at least to qualify his children for the race which they may run, perhaps successfully, until they gain this coveted prize; the whole of which resolves itself, not into life, for that they have already, and probably with more health and vigour than the sons of opulence enjoy, but in the *form and order* of that life which must determine their place in the estimation of society.

To treat this matter of form and