

# The Influence of John Mason Neale and the Theology of Symbolism

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**T**HE INFLUENCE of the Tractarian teaching is often the sole theological basis for studies in Ritualism, but it is also necessary to analyze the literary contribution and influence of one who might be properly considered the finest theologian of nineteenth century Ritualism. Many factors conditioned the High Church Party to implement ritualistic practices, but in evaluating the writings that show the earliest signs of ritual development, one man stands at the forefront: John Mason Neale.

Ironically, he was quite independent of the Tractarians. His writings are the most developed apologetic for Ritualism, his work giving expression to its meaning far beyond the scope of any Tractarian.

In his historical outline of the rise of Ritualism, Archbishop Davidson somehow ignored the personal influence and theological strength of Neale on symbolism and ritual.<sup>1</sup> In a determined effort to understand the rise of Ritualism, the Commission thought to begin with the writings of 'rubricans'<sup>2</sup> while ignoring the theology of symbolism identified with John Mason Neale. The historical approach of the Ecclesiastical Commission aimed at gaining insight into the handling of legal difficulties arising in the Church of England. It is natural therefore that they saw the starting point to be a technical point of interest, i.e. rubrics, in their search for the earliest ritual developments. Unfortunately, the omission of symbolism's theological importance impoverished the earliest studies of Ritualism in the nineteenth century.

Recent scholarship has begun to place proper credit at the hand of John Mason Neale, recognizing the contribution he made to the Ritualist Movement. Kenneth Hylson-Smith, in his work *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, acknowledges that "it was Cambridge rather than Oxford, and more especially John Mason Neale, who first treated ceremonial seriously, 'as an indispensable and important part of worship, instead of something to be apologized for and left to the weaker brethren.'"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From his testimony before the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline, (1904), which was appointed in response to the problems arising from the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874. A report was issued two years later, and Archbishop Davidson's testimony is in the minutes of evidence.

<sup>2</sup>A description of those who sought to re-introduce the Eucharistic vestments based upon the Ornaments Rubric.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 213.

Neale's independence of the Tractarians was not out of disapproval of the teaching, though he admittedly was frustrated with the doctrines that lacked outward expression. In writing to Benjamin Webb, 1844, Neale remarks:

I hope and trust you are not going to Oxonianize. It is clear to me that the Tract writers missed one great principle, namely that of Aesthetics, and it is unworthy of them to blind themselves to it.<sup>4</sup>

Attempting to go beyond the Tractarians did not mean that his thoughts differed greatly from theirs. It is evident that Neale's attempt to relate the physical to the unseen world of spirit as a means of communicating the grace of God was one of the foremost doctrines of Pusey and the Oxford Movement.<sup>5</sup>

The importance and energy of Neale's work became most evident with the Cambridge Camden Society, founded in 1839 by Neale, E.J. Boyce, and Benjamin Webb. It was named after William Camden, the antiquary, who died in 1623. The object of the Society was 'to perpetuate and render accessible whatever is valuable, but at present little known, amongst the materials for the civil, ecclesiastical or literary history of the United Kingdom.'<sup>6</sup> Beginning in 1841, the Society published a magazine called *The Ecclesiologist*. In 1846 the Cambridge Camden Society changed their name to the Ecclesiological Society, and its determined aim was now concerned with 'the science of symbolism; the principle of church arrangements; church music and all the decorative arts, which can be in subservient to religion.'<sup>7</sup>

In the formative stages of the Ecclesiological Society, Neale had interest in the question of Eucharistic Vestments and purposed that his work would lead to a re-introduction of the vestment in Church of England services. In the preface to the *Hierurgia Anglicana*, a product of the Ecclesiological Society, we get a glimpse of Neale's ambitions for the Society; "In reference to the Eucharistic Vestments in particular, we are surprised that the ecclesiological movement of the last ten years has accomplished little or nothing towards their restoration."<sup>8</sup> This reference to the vestments and the desire for their restoration complements the idea running through Neale's other early writings.<sup>9</sup>

It was during his years as a Cambridge University student that John Mason Neale made an initial study of church architecture. The result of this study led Neale to the principles that remain the most comprehensive analysis of what the theology of symbolism is. In 1843, John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb translated and included

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<sup>4</sup>A.G. Lough, *John Mason Neale. Priest Extraordinary*, (Devon: A.G. Lough, 1975), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup>cf. Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 100.

<sup>6</sup>A.G. Lough, *John Mason Neale. Priest Extraordinary*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 213.

<sup>8</sup>Ecclesiological Society, *Hierurgia Anglicana*, (London: Rivington, 1848), p. ix.

<sup>9</sup>As early as 1843, Neale remarked 'I am sure that when once churches are built or restored to be equal to those of olden times,...the poverty of our present vestments will become intolerable.' *Hierologus*, p. 71. He also wrote to Benjamin Webb in 1846, "The great use of the cope is, it strikes me, to accustom our people to coloured vestments; once do that and do it on such irrefragable Anglican grounds as we have, and the Chasuble follows without difficulty." *Letters*, p. 94.

an introductory essay on *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments*, by Bishop Durandus. The introductory essay unveils a clear apologetic for Ritualism and symbolism in Divine worship. The purpose of the translation in 1843, a remarkably early date in the chronology of ritual advances, is stated thus:

The interest which has lately been displayed, as on all subjects connected with Ecclesiology, so more especially on the symbolical bearing of Church Architecture, has led us to imagine, that a translation of the most valuable work on symbolism which the Middle Ages can furnish, might not, at the present time, be unacceptable to Churchmen...We have considered it necessary to prefix an Essay on that subject; in which we have endeavoured to prove that Catholick Architecture must necessarily be symbolical.<sup>10</sup>

James White, author of *The Cambridge Movement*, writes that the Introductory Essay is of great significance because it is “the first statement of many ideas which came to be the dogmas of ecclesiology.”<sup>11</sup>

In this essay, a standard for proper church architecture is described, but the principle for symbolism in all areas of worship is developed. The importance of symbolic design and godly inspiration in architecture was not to be underestimated. The time best reflecting all of the standards Neale identifies for perfection in church architecture and its accompanying symbolism was the Medieval period. The Gothic architecture Neale identified as the paragon of Christian symbolism was to be viewed as much more than an aesthetically pleasing example. For Neale, it was nothing short of the Divine illustration of catholic teaching. Through the surpassing beauty of Gothic architecture God was vividly displaying a liturgical and theological principle.<sup>12</sup> The unrivaled symbolic beauty of the Medieval Church was providentially intended as a timeless principle illustrating how sacramental signs and instruments convey the grace of God.

The higher principle behind symbolism Neale described as *Sacramentality*.<sup>13</sup> Symbolism and ritual were established according to the providence of God for the purpose of elevating ordinary objects or human actions beyond their common use and thereby enabling them to serve a higher purpose. The Old Testament idea of consecration, an action which takes the profane and elevates it to a new and higher design, is closely tied to Neale’s definition of Sacramentality. “Symbolism is thus the true sign of the cross, hallowing the unholy, and making safe the dangerous.”<sup>14</sup>

In the introductory essay to the translation of Durandus, Neale outlines the principle arguments for the use of symbols and ritual in Divine Worship. The first argument given

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<sup>10</sup>John Mason Neale, Benjamin Webb, translators, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments by William Durandus. A Translation by John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb, with an Introductory Essay*. (Leeds: T.W. Green, 1843), p. vii.

<sup>11</sup>James White, *The Cambridge Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 70.

<sup>12</sup>Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 101.

<sup>13</sup>Defined by Neale as ‘by the outward and visible form, is signified something inward and spiritual: that the material fabric symbolizes, embodies, figures, represents, expresses, answers to, some abstract meaning.’

<sup>14</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*. p. xliv.

by Neale employs an *a priori* method of establishing the early Church as a reliable guide in the use of symbolism. Neale asserts:

Indeed, almost every great doctrine had been symbolized at a very early period of Christianity. The resurrection was set forth in the Phoenix, rising immortal from its ashes: the meritorious Passion of our Saviour, by the Pelican, feeding its young with its own blood: the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, by grapes and wheat ears, or again by the blood flowing from the heart and feet of the Wounded Lamb into a chalice beneath.<sup>16</sup>

It was not only the early Church that taught symbolism; the earliest heretics also establish the antiquity of Christian symbolism:

That fearful heresy, Gnosticism, which arose from an over-symbolizing, shews, nevertheless, how deeply the principle, with due limits, belonged to the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Neale becomes the first to espouse a Scriptural apologetic for the use of symbols in the nineteenth-century ritual controversy:

Again, types and emblems without number were seen in the language of the Psalmist, occurring so continuously in the Services of the Church. 'His faithfulness shall be thy buckler' gives rise to a fine allegory of S. Bernard's drawn from the triangular shape of the buckler used at the time when that Father wrote; even as we shall see it in the effigies of early knights. It protects the upper body completely: the feet are less completely shielded. And so, remarks the Saint, does God's providence guard His people from spiritual dangers, imaged by those weapons which attack the upper, or more vital part of the body: but from temporal adversities He hath neither promised, nor will give so complete protection.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the *a priori* argument, Neale makes an argument from analogy. He describes how God revealed Himself through the Divinely ordained Old Testament ritual, such as the tabernacle, the temple rites, the sacrificial observances, and the Passover. The Old Testament model was viewed as exemplary for worship at all times. Neale would argue that it is improbable that the same eternal God who commanded ritual observances by the Jews would suddenly find it sinful to employ physical objects to convey spiritual truth and grace. A divine imperative given to the Church of old establishes a timeless and eternal principle that could be followed by Anglicans in the nineteenth century.

Now Catholicity, which teaches men constantly to live above their senses, to mortify their passions, and to deny themselves...must constantly lead me by the seen to look on the unseen...But now, the Church, not content with

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<sup>15</sup>J. M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>16</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. xxxvii.

<sup>17</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. xxxix.

<sup>18</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. xlv.

warning us that we are in an enemy's country, boldly seizes on the enemy's goods, converting them to Her own use.<sup>19</sup>

For Neale, the Holy Sacraments of the Church are proof, in the highest degree, of the principle of symbolism and ritual. The Sacraments are in reality not only signs of things unseen, but channels and instruments of God's grace. The necessity for Ritualism in Christian worship finds a convincing attestation in the institution of the Sacraments ordained by the Son of God.

Neale's final argument would best be labeled as philosophical. Here the ritual apologist takes a chance by using a Platonic type of language to all of creation as "symbolical of some mental process, of which it is indeed only the development: that we may see in everything outward and visible some inward and spiritual meaning."<sup>20</sup> The mystery of what is called 'Sacramentality' requires the use of speculative language in order to convey something of the meaning. Neale's philosophical approach, though easy to criticize, does find some Scriptural warrant as it is an orthodox tenet of the Faith that man is created as both a physical and a spiritual being. This two-fold nature of man finds a natural capacity for that inner fulfillment that comes from God, who is indeed Spirit. Man as a physical creature also has a need to be in vital touch with the world around him. All of creation is living and breathing and man must communicate with his environment.

If it be granted that there is this mutual connexion between the abstract and its material exhibition in every case, it will be readily admitted that a principle of Sacramentality must be especially a condition of all religious acts. If we were merely spirits, without bodies or any necessary connexion with matter, it would be possible perhaps for us to worship the Great Spirit in an abstract way by a sort of volition of devotion; but not being so, our souls cannot engage in adoration without the company of their material home. Hence every effort of devotion is attended by some bodily act. Whether we lift our eyes to heaven, or kneel in prayer, we shew forth this necessity of our being: our body has sinned, has been redeemed, will be punished or glorified, no less than the soul: it must therefore worship with the soul...It has been felt not only right but necessary, in all ages and places to accompany the inward feeling of devotion with some outward manifestation of it.<sup>21</sup>

This natural response of man to involve his entire being in worship explains why symbolism is used by even those who oppose it the most. Whether a Church arranges an ornate sanctuary centered around a beautifully vested altar, or strips the building of every gorgeous ornament available for decoration, a principle of symbolism has been effected. The obvious meaning exemplified in the most barren church teaches much about how the faith is understood by those worshippers. Neale accordingly points out that "the symbolisms which Protestantism introduced were few and easily understood. The

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<sup>19</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. xlix.

<sup>20</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. li.

<sup>21</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. liii.

removal, and material of the altar, the change of vestments, the gradual introduction of close pews, the innovation of a reading up, were all figurative enough.”<sup>22</sup>

Having outlined the principle arguments for symbolism and ritual, Neale established a *sine qua non* for Sacramentality. It is not as simple as taking the profane and employing it for holy use. If God would condescend to communicate something of His nature through the outward and physical things of creation, the inward devotion of the artist or craftsman handling the material is prerequisite for the consecration of the object to become properly a medium for Sacramentality. “Simple knowledge,” says Neale, “will no more enable a man to build up God’s material, than His spiritual [knowledge],[will enable him to build up] temples.” The clearest example is the Divine ordination of certain artists and craftsmen chosen to build the Old Testament Tabernacle. It is all-important that the Spirit of God should enable those who are called to work with their hands in the Service of God for Holy Worship. Neale believed that there was a glaring distinction between the Churches built between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries (under the controlling hand of God) and the churches built in modern times. The distinction was evident in the Sacramentality of Gothic Churches while the modern churches lacked such manifold grace from God.<sup>24</sup> The church’s failure to employ inspired servants brought on the dark night of nineteenth-century church architecture. There was a definite corollary between the spiritual health of the church and the outworking of it. Neale would condemn the modern period because

In truth, architecture has become too much a profession: it is made the means of gaining a livelihood, and is viewed as a path to honourable distinction, instead of being the study of the devout ecclesiastick, who matures his noble conceptions with the advantage of that profound meditation only attainable in the contemplative life; who, without thought of recompense or fame, has no end, and emblematical of the faith which is to be maintained within its walls.<sup>25</sup>

Although the introductory essay of *Durandus* is primarily concerned with the subject of architecture, it is a definitive answer for the overall purpose of Ritualism in the nineteenth century. There is clearly found in this early ritual work “the outworking of liturgical and theological principle.”<sup>26</sup> From the early fifties to the end of the century many voices would join his chorus in proclaiming the sacramental principle of all church ornamentation. James White correctly states that this translation and essay “materially changed the course of ecclesiology.”<sup>27</sup>

The *Durandus* project was a crucial task undertaken by John Mason Neale because in it he would aim to establish a continuity for the Church of England with the ancient

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<sup>22</sup>J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. cxxvi.

<sup>23</sup>J. M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. xx

<sup>24</sup>The authority which Neale reveals for choosing the Medieval period of architecture is his view of a development and gradual expansion of God’s truth. The perfection of the Edwardian period becomes the period of ‘full ripeness of Christian art’ where all the conditions of ‘beauty, detail, general effect, of truthfulness, and of reality are so fully answered.’ *Durandus*, p. xxx

<sup>25</sup> J.M. Neale, *Durandus*, p. xxi

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, p. 101

<sup>27</sup> James White, *The Cambridge Movement*, p. 69

Church. His work on Durandus had an object in view, one greater than merely laying out principles for church architecture. At the time of the translation of Durandus, Neale remarked that if the Churches would be restored to the example of the Gothic style, the church would soon estimate “the poverty of our present vestments as intolerable.”<sup>28</sup>

The possibility of renewal through the knowledge of the primitive Church would be the assurance that Neale relied upon in his many efforts to awaken the Church of England to its rich past and wonderful heritage. His biographer, Eleanor Towle, wrote that “at any crisis he instinctively turned to it [the ancient rites, unchangeable laws and doctrine] as the authority to be consulted in an important element in the situation...taking his stand upon the broad basis of antiquity, he was comparatively little disturbed by the controversies of the day.”<sup>29</sup>

The day of the ritualistic controversies was rapidly approaching the Church of England and it was being driven primarily by dedicated slum parish priests who were testing the limits of ornamentation in the church. *The Ecclesiologist* raised a challenge in 1851 that would set into motion the wheels of the ecclesiastical courts for the rest of the century:

We must confess then to a longing to hear of some real appeal being made to the Ecclesiastical Courts...We are bound to maintain our rights as Clergymen, to that decency and beauty of public worship which our Church prescribes. We have always taken our stand on the rubrics, and we must not abandon them. At any rate, let us try whether we have not the law and the right on our side...We are so confident in our cause, so sure, that we, and we only, fully and fairly act up to, and (as a rule) do not go beyond, the requirements of our Church—that we are anxious to put these matters to the proof...Of one thing at least we are certain, that we are honest in our present belief, that in all we have done we have been faithful to the law and spirit of our Church...Let this issue be tried.<sup>30</sup>

The confident Ritualist challenged the taciturn Evangelicals to a theological battle. The principle for which they fought, Ritualism would test the strength of authority in the Anglican Communion. Continuity with ancient practices and the authority associated with such practices was expressed implicitly, if not explicitly, in the majority of Neale’s ritual controversy literature. Neale proclaimed, “a Church severed from the rest of Christendom, however true a life it may have, however its present situation may have been allotted to it in the course of God’s providence, can neither speak with authority, nor hope to produce the fruits, of one more happily circumstanced.”<sup>31</sup> For Neale, the divided Church may no longer place itself in the position of judge and party in its own cause. An outside law must be applied that could safeguard the church from taking a path into error through self-imposed revision or reforms. “There must be a higher tribunal somewhere;

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<sup>28</sup> James White, *The Cambridge Movement*, p. 210

<sup>29</sup> Eleanor Towle, *John Mason Neale; a Memoir*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), pp. 61-62

<sup>30</sup> *The Ecclesiologist* no. LXXXIII., 1851

<sup>31</sup> John Mason Neale, *Lectures on Church Difficulties*, (London: T.W. Hayes, 1852), pp. 201-202

that unless Canterbury claims to be the mother and mistress of all Churches, she must be content under the pain of schism, whenever that tribunal shall speak, to obey it.”<sup>32</sup>

Neale’s apologetic argued that ancient practice, universal approval, and rightful heritage from the primitive church is necessary for appeal in any controversy. This was an argument that sounded strangely familiar to those who identified with the *Reformed* character of the Church of England. After all, by definition something *reformed* must have had a prior existence, and the purpose of reformation is to take that which is original and restore it to its most pure state. Whenever the Church begins to view itself as being without blemish and without any need to reform itself by a greater standard than the one currently in fashion, history has shown that truth will rise up against all that is contrary to the will of God for the spiritual well-being of the Body of Christ. The permanent value of the Reformation was not a new point of origin for the church, it was a purifying movement seeking to rediscover the lost heritage of the primitive church. The nineteenth-century Ritualist clergy would find some manner of justification for their reforms as they followed in the footsteps of the sixteenth-century Reformers. Evangelicals would hardly make such an association between Cranmer and Neale, but the principle motivating both of these men was clearly a felt need for ecclesiastical reformation; looking to the past for the path ahead. For the Church of England to maintain any justification for its existence apart from Rome, it must remain faithful to the principle of reform. Every church that is a product of the Reformation ideals must remember the motto ‘*semper reformata*’, to ever be reforming. Reformation begins by recognizing the Church’s primitive foundation and standing anew upon it against all opposition.

Ritualists assured themselves, though few others, of their continuity with the primitive Church and acted accordingly. Ritualism would first be tested on Prayer Book meaning and practice. The Ritualists were persuaded that they had *the* proper understanding of Anglican liturgical and ceremonial tradition, and they trusted in the law to vindicate their position.

Those who had revived the ornaments of the church, and some years later, the ornaments of the minister, argued for their use on the authority of the Prayer Book Ornaments Rubric, which reads:

And here it is to be noted that the Minister at the time of the Communion and at all other times in his ministration shall use such ornaments in the church as were in use and retained by authority of Parliament in the second year of the reign of King Edward VI.

Neale argued that his interpretation of an historic understanding of the Ornaments Rubric upheld the principle of continuity in the Church of England, in its liturgy and practice, with the primitive Church. For Neale, such an argument would demonstrate that the purpose of the Rubric was to restore and maintain the dignity of worship that had been practiced always in the Church of Christ. Therefore, the members of the Ecclesiastical Society published the *Hierurgia Anglicana* in 1848.

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<sup>32</sup> John Mason Neale, *Lectures on Church Difficulties*, pp. 203-204

Neale felt that the spirit of the day, even among High Churchmen, was a lost faith in the splendor that the Church of Christ deserves. The Church of England was “wrapping herself up in a gloomy aloofness from men’s interests and proceedings”<sup>33</sup> and the spirit that plagued the High Church party of the eighteenth century manifested itself in “dead formalism, stiffness, and dull reverence.”<sup>34</sup> The best explanation for the general disobedience to the Ornaments Rubric was that there was a lack of vitality and a lost sense of dignity in the present day Anglican conception of the Church.

Much of late has been said and written about this rubric, to the effect that English Churchmen cannot much longer consent to its violation: why have none of our clergy and churchwardens determined at all risks, to fulfill their official obligations in this behalf? Do they excuse themselves by pleading that our Holy Mother is ‘unworthy’ of her beautiful garments? Be it remembered that this plea was first suggested by some who from dwelling too much upon, and it may be, exaggerating, the blemishes of the Church of their baptism, proceeded ere long to renounce her for the obedience of—may it not be said without uncharitableness?—a less pure Communion.<sup>35</sup>

The question of obedience to the Ornaments Rubric was a test of one’s convictions about the laws governing worship in the Church of England. It became an important point for early Ritualists to proclaim to their opponents that it was in fact they, the Ritualists, who were loyal sons of the Church of England. “Disobedience to the Church’s written enactments by addition and excess is, in our apprehension, as wrong as a refusal to act up to its requisitions,”<sup>36</sup> said the Ritualists. That they would be attacked for their obedience to the Ornaments Rubric was the absurdity that they could not comprehend.<sup>37</sup>

The challenge had been issued. The theological writings on symbolism had been published and distributed. Arguments for legitimate Prayer Book authorized ritual did not seem to be heeded. Neale felt that the conspiracy of turning a blind eye to the obvious truth was directly attributable to the Bishops. What other excuse could be given for such ignorance? What excuse could be made on technical grounds from the Prayer Book? The Ecclesiological Society held nothing back of their opinion regarding the role of the Bishops. The frustration and anger of the Ritualists towards the Bishops was expressed in their writings:

The great conflict between the Puritan element in our Church and the externals of religion, that is, Ecclesiology, which has so long been imminent is still delayed...It is remarkable enough that it is the external, rather than the internal, part of Church Worship that is now the main object of attack. We do not hear of priests being threatened or denounced or worried about doctrine, but about ritual...The Bishop does not know the rubric; or reads it as it is

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<sup>33</sup> John Mason Neale, *Lectures on Church Difficulties*, p. 197

<sup>34</sup> John Mason Neale, *Lectures on Church Difficulties*, pp. 196-197

<sup>35</sup> The Ecclesiological Society, *Hierurgia Anglicana*, (London: Rivington, 1848), p. x

<sup>36</sup> The Ecclesiological Society, *Hierurgia Anglicana*, p. iv

<sup>37</sup> “in vain does he prove that he has merely acted up to his own solemn vows in obeying the rubrics, that he has the right and the truth on his side.” *The Ecclesiologist*, no. LXXXIII April, 1851

fashionable to read the Baptismal Office, by the rule of contrary: or, which is commonest of all, he claims to be superior to the rubric. Amid the cheers of dissenters, who view his lawful authority as anti-Christian, and the approbation of the semi-dissenting Churchmen, who deny as heartily as he would himself disclaim any special grace in his office as Bishop in the Church of God, he proceeds to make an assumption, such as the wildest ambition of the most arbitrary Pope never dreamed of, viz., that he is above Church law; that he is absolutely independent, as well of his brethren as of that system with all its traditions and legislation and written constitutions, which it is in reality his one duty to administer.<sup>38</sup>

Neale began wearing a chasuble in 1850. The earliest nineteenth-century Anglican theologian of symbolism was a priest and above all regarded his theology as supremely practical:

It is granted that in themselves those ‘ornaments of the church and its ministers thereof,’ which it is now wished to re-introduce—copes, tapers, jeweled plate, roodcreens, deep chancels, sedilia, and the like,—can conduce nothing to holiness, and in so far as they do not, cannot please God. But, in their effects, they may, with His blessing, do both. Those poor, to whom the Gospel is preached, are much influenced by these outward and visible signs...We do not assert that the re-introduction of copes will give a man faith or penitence, or put him into that frame of mind in which he may be a receiver of the Holy Eucharist; but we do assert that it will teach him that those who order its use, and those who minister in it, consider that Mystery as something apart from, and higher than, the other offices of the Church.<sup>39</sup>

John Mason Neale’s literary achievements stand out as the earliest of Ritualist material and perhaps the most instructive reading for past and present Ritualists.

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<sup>38</sup> The Ecclesiologist, no.LXXXIII, April, 1851

<sup>39</sup> The Ecclesiological Society, *Hierurgia Anglicana*, , p. xi. quoted from J.M Neale, *Hierologus*, pp. ix-xiii