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TOPIC OF A LETTER

A COPIE OF A LETTER

ELIZABETHAN BOOKSELLER
WAUKESHA, ILLINOIS
MADE IN U.S.A.

A " 20
COPIE
OF
A LETTER

Written by a Friend, to one who
would be owned for Minister of that Parish
from whom he vvith-holds all Ordi-
nances but preaching.

*It may also serve to vindicate the said Parish from ma-
ny unjust clamours.*



LONDON,
Printed for William Ley at Pauls Chain neer Doctors
Commons. 1657.

COOPER
OF
ALBANY

Yours truly,
A. J. B. T. R. R.



LONDON
Printed by J. B. T. R. R.

A Copy of a Letter, &c.

SIR,



T your fir st coming hither I conceiv'd good hopes of settlement to your own and others content; but now I see no likelihood thereof, but that the breach grows wider and wider, which I am sorry for; and the rather, for that I fear the cause proceeds chiefly from your self, partly in neglecting that discreet advice; given by Mr. *Carrol* and others, Not to be over-tedious whereby you would tire your peoples patience: Exceptions also have been taken at some expressions in your Sermons out of *Acts* 4. 12. *That the mercy of God cannot save any without a crucified Christ.* Its granted, That God hath ordained and appointed the way and means of salvation to be by faith in Jesus Christ; but I hope you wil also grant this proceeded from the free Grace and rich mercy of God the Father: Its our Saviours own words, *No man can come unto me except the Father draw him.* God the Father saves by and through the Son, and all for his mercy. I no sooner think of salvation by Christ, but the saving mercy of God the Father first presents it self as the original and first moving cause: you might (as I conceive) more properly have said, There is no salvation without mercy; as Christ crucified is the meritorious cause; so the love of God the Father must be acknowledged the onely moving cause of mans salvation. For *God so loved the world, that he gave his onely begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* I wish you had explained your self in that saying.

Joh. 3. 16.

1 Joh. 4 9.

Moreover this you lately prest once and again, *That if we deal falsly with God, he will deal falsly with us.* I do not know that in any sense whatsoever it can be affirmed of God that

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1 Sam. 2. 30.

he deals falsely with any man. *Them that despise him he will despise*; and *Prov. 1. 25, 26.* it is said, *He will laugh at the destruction of such as despise his counsel, and that he will forsake them that forsake him, &c.* and all this most justly. Let God be true, and every man a liar.

I understand your designe is to have a gathered Church, and not to administer the Sacraments to any other; a business of great moment; I wish you well advised before you attempt it; how can you in reason demand Tithes, and payment of Subscriptions, and yet refuse to perform the work of the Ministry? You often complain of others for slighting of Ordinances, and at the same time deny the administration of them; you will not deny them to be of Christs institution, of great use and comfort to believers.

But peradventure you will say, This Parish affords few such; it were to be wished their number were more; but however their number is unknown to you; besides (as I conceive) being a member of a visible Church, makes a man capable to be partaker of all the Ordinances of Jesus Christ.

If you will grant that which few will deny, That a particular visible Church is a company among men embracing and professing the Truth of Doctrine, *v z.* Salvation by Christ, and using the Sacraments according to Christs institution, amongst whom such as are neither grossly ignorant in Doctrine, nor scandalous in their lives, ought in the judgment of charity to be well reputed, and admitted until they discover themselves otherwise; for it's possible amongst this company who consent in the Doctrine they profess there may be some dead and unregenerate members, and so may your members also when gathered. *Math. 7. 21.* hither pertain the Parables of the Seed, the Tares, and likewise the Net gathering both good and bad fish.

Indeed the invisible Church is a company of those who are elected unto eternal life, in whom a new life is begun here by the Holy Ghost, and is perfected in the life to come. This is called the Church of the Saints, the Sheep of Christ, *Joh. 10. 28. 2. Tim. 2. 9, &c.* This Church so long as it sojourneth

on



on earth, alwaies lies hid in the visible. And its called invisible, not that the men therein are invisible, but because their faith and truth of Grace is invisible, being only known unto God and themselves in the judgement of certainty, but to others only, in the judgement of charity.

These things being duely considered, how can you answer it to God and his People, to withhold from them such sacred Ordinances professing to have taken upon you the care of souls in this place, and not as a bare Lecturer?

It is not expected nor desired you should admit of all promiscuously, as I said before, such as through ignorance cannot discern the Lords body, nor such as be prophane and scandalous in their lives, whiles they remain such; but as Paul charged Timothy, so its desired of you, them, *To prove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering, and Doctrine, &c.* ^{2 Tim. 4: 2, 5.} Whilest you continue at this distance,

there is no hope of good; if you would give the Parishioners a meeting, that upon conference there might be (if possible) a right understanding; and if you be not wanting, I am confident they will not be wanting unto you; I heartily wish the Apostles charge may be all our practice, *1 Tim. 6. 11. To follow after righteousness, Faith, Love, Patience, & Meeknes.*

I tremble to think of the dangerous effects of division, schism and factions in a Parish. Schism simply and nakedly is a breaking off from the communion of the Church in matters of Worship and Religion, upon such grounds as have no weight in the Word of God to allow them; as namely, when the same faith or doctrine in substantials is held; and there is accordance and agreement in them; yet through passions and private ends and fancies, there is offence taken at lesse matters of fact or order, and so the Divorce is made for such faults in the yoke-fellow as are far short of adultery; as if the Members of any of the seven Churches should have separated because of some drosse in those Golden Candlesticks. The *Donatists* separated upon that principle, That there was no true Church where good and bad were mixt, and that the chaff in the floor made the wheat unclean; or that the communion of the godly was blasted and polluted.

ted by the mixture of ungodly ones amongst them. This was an open Schism, both in breaking off from the Churches of Christ upon that reason, and in assuming Liberty to erect new churches only, which he called the true Churches of Christ.

1 Cor. XI. 18,
19.

Sometime Schism introduces Heresie; when men are run out upon peevishness of Spirit, or some unwarrantable grounds, they commonly run on into error of opinion and doctrine, being caught like a loose and wandring sheep severed from the Flock by the wolves which lie in wait for such. Sometimes the Schism follows upon the error of opinion drunk in, and so a departure from the truth is attended with departure from the society and communion of the Church. *Jude* having described Hereticks, saith v. 19. *These are they that separate themselves, Mark (saith Augustine) in the natural Body how if a member be cut off, the soul presently leaveth it, and it becomes a dead piece of flesh; so it is in the Mystical Body of Christ; those who sever themselves by schism and faction from the body and their fellow-members, deprive themselves of the influence of the holy Spirit.* Peruse the Records of the Church, and you shal find for the most part, that faction hath bred heresie, when discontented Churchmen of eminent parts grew singular, with-drew and sided against the Orthodox, Gods Spirit left them, and they became Authors of damnable Heresies.

This was *Novatus* his case, after he made a faction against *Cyprian*; *Donatus* after he made a faction against *Melchisedech*; *Arius* after he made a schism against *Eustacius*; and do we not see it daily in many of our Separatists, &c. who no sooner with-draw and leave our publike Assemblies, but the Spirit of God leaveth them, and they fall to several different absurdities? so that if Liberty of conscience should obtain a toleration (which God forbid,) its feared (in short time) it may be said of England as it is written of Poland, * That if any man have lost his religion, he shal be sure to find it there, or els he may give it gone for ever.

* *D. Eeds* Serm. difference between good & verend Doctor, * *The fatal misery* (saith he) of these later days

*Relation of religion in the west parts of the world. Sect. 43.

*D. Eeds Serm. difference between good & verend Doctor, * *The fatal misery* (saith he) of these later days

dayes hath made nothing good, but in *them*; nothing true, but in opinion; Religion is in a manner lost in the questions of Religion.

And to instance one more, that learned Knight Sir *Walker Rawleigh* * much lamented that superfine and wanton age of Liberty (as he terms it in his days) by those of the Familists, Anabaptists, and other Sectaries, and further saith, *that time would soon bring to pass (if it were not resisted) that God would be turned out of Churches into Barns, and from thence again out into the Fields and Mountains, and under Hedges, and the Offices of the Ministry (robbed of all respect and maintenance) be as contemptible as these places; all Order, Discipline and Church-Government left to newness of pinion and mens fancies; yea and soon after as many Religions would spring up as there be Parish Churches in England; every contentious and ignorant person clothing his fancy with the Spirit of God, and his imagination with the gift of Revelation, insomuch as when the truth which is but one, shall appear to the simple multitude no less various then contrary to it self, the faith of men will soon after die away by degrees, and all Religion be held in scorn and contempt.*

*History of the world upon Israels march, Num. 10.

Indeed there is no age of the Church free, only these last days are most likely to have most of these dregs; Are not these errors which are so rife amongst us, either by infecting persons of place and quality grown into that boldness, or by spreading far and wide, risen to that strength, that they do face, if not seem able to put into danger of routing our Common faith, Publike Worship, Authorised Ministry, and long expected and promised Reformation.

1 Tim. 4. 1.
Jude 17. 18.
1 Jo. 2. 18.

Obi. But perhaps you will say, Many of these who are charged with Schism and Heresy, are holy men.

I answer, That a holy man cannot easily be a Heretick, nor are all the errors of holy men to be called Heresies, though they may be hey and stubble upon the foundation: Again, I cannot be so ignorant as not to know the most sanctified and zealous men, are men, and subject to carnal and corrupt affections, and may be so far swayed by them in their judgments, as not to be able to discern without prejudice

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dice and partiality, Truth from Error; good men may continue in some error in Judgement, and consequently in a sinful practice arising thence, and live and dye in it, and that unrepented of, otherwise then as in the lump of their unknown sins. It is not honesty or sincerity that can priviledg men from either erring or sinning It hath been observed of old that some heads of heresie have been well reputed for strictness and unblameableness of life; we learn out of *Austine*, That *Pelagius* had a very good testimony; and Scripture tells us, They come in Sheeps cloathing, and speak lyes in hypocrisie; we must not measure or judge of Faith by the person, but of the person by the Faith. That Horse (as one saies) of superstition and Idolatry, upon the back of which the Devil hath in former times made war against the Church, is slain under him, and now he is mounted upon a fresh horse of another colour, called Liberty of Opinion, falsely called Liberty of Conscience; let's not be ignorant of his devices.

I wish that both Ministers and People may be more studious to try the Spirits whether they are of God, 1 Joh. 4. 1. To contend for the faith once delivered, Jude 3. To beware lest we be carried away with the error of lawless men, 2. Pet. 3. 17. To turn away from such as creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, 2 Tim. 3. 5. 6. To avoid foolish questions, which are unprofitable and vain, Tit. 3. 9. To hold faith and a good conscience, 1 Tim. 1. 19. To continue in the things that we have learned, and be assured of out of the word of God, 2 Tim. 3. 14. Even these Truths so well owned and practised in the good old Puritan daies, in whose times there was a people of as powerful godliness as any in the world; practical Divinity was improved to a great height of cleanness and sweetness; but of late a miserable declination from the life and power of godnesse is come t pass; our practical, our inward & close wayes of walking with God in faith and love are sublimed unto fancies, & vapour out into fumes of strange Opinions, and which is worst of all; we take this dropie to be growth, and conceive our selves to be more spiritual and refined, because more airy and notional. The Commandments, Confession of Faith, and the Lords Prayer lie a rusting, nay by some held a sin to use them. The Lord discover unto us from whence we are fallen, and incline our hearts more to truth & holines. Sir, I remain your affectionate Friend,

R.C.

ANd forasmuch as it was also delivered with all privacie (not any one living soul else privy to any word there) it was expected to have begot as private and friendly a conference betwixt us; but it was no sooner received, but by him imparted to divers of his own party; & I being told that many Copies thereof were taken, and not hearing from him never since (it being above two months ago) although he had several opportunities to have acknowledged the receipt thereof; so that now for prevention of misreports and mistakes in written Copies (contrary to my first thoughts) I have been constrained to expose it to a more publike view.

R. C.

