

Letter to Thomas Harding on his Apostasy

Lady Jane Grey

Anglican · Reformation · Letter

STROMATA 11

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INTRODUCTION

A letter written by Jane Grey in prison, to her former chaplain Thomas Harding, after he professed himself a Roman Catholic on the ascension of Queen Mary.

So oft as I call to mind (dear friend and chosen Brother) the dreadful and fearful sayings of God, that he which layeth hold upon the plough and looketh back again, is not meet for the kingdom of heaven; and on the other side to remember the comfortable words of our Saviour Christ, to all those that forsaking themselves do follow him, I cannot but marvel at thee and lament thy case; that thou, which sometimes wert the lively member of Christ, but now the deformed imp of the devil; sometimes the beautiful temple of God, but now the stinking and filthy kennel of Satan; sometimes the unspotted spouse of thy Saviour, but now the unshamefast paramour of Antichrist; sometimes my faithful brother, but now a stranger and apostate; yea sometimes my stout christian soldier, but now a cowardly runaway. So oft as I consider the threatenings and promises of the Divine Justice to all those which faithfully love him, I cannot but speak to thee, yea, rather cry out and exclaim against thee, thou seed of Satan, and not of Juda, whom the devil hath deceived, the world hath beguiled, and desire of life hath subverted, and made of a christian an infidel.

Wherefore hast thou taken upon thee the Testament of the Lord in thy mouth? Wherefore hast thou hitherto yielded thy body to the fire, and to the bloody hands of cruel tyrants? Wherefore hast thou instructed others to be strong in Christ, when thou thyself dost now so horribly abuse the testament and law of the Lord; when thou thyself, preachest (as it were not to steal) yet most abominably stealest, not from men but from God, and as a most heinous sacrilegious robber, robbest Christ thy redeemer of his right in his members, thy body and thy soul; when thou thyself dost rather choose to live miserably (with shame) in this world, than to die gloriously and reign in honour with Christ, to the end of all eternity, in whom even in death there is life beyond wish, beyond all expression; and when, I say, thou thyself art most weak, thou oughtest to show thyself most strong, for the strength of a fort is known before the assault, but thou yieldest (like a faint captain) thy hold before any battery be brought against thee.

Oh wretched and unhappy man what art thou but dust and ashes, and wilt thou resist thy maker, that formed and fashioned thee: wilt thou now forsake him that called thee from custom-gathering among

the Romish Antichristians, to be an ambassador and messenger of his eternal word; he that first framed thee, and since thy creation and birth preserved thee, nourished thee, and kept thee, yea, and inspired thee with the spirit of knowledge (I cannot, I would I could say of grace) shall he not possess thee, darest thou deliver up thy self to another, being not thine own but his? How canst thou, having knowledge, or how darest thou neglect the law of the Lord, and follow the vain traditions of men? And whereas thou hast been a public professor of his name, become now a defacer of his glory. I will not refuse the true God, and worship the invention of man, the golden calf, the whore of Babylon, the Romish religion, the abominable idol, the most wicked mass: wilt thou torment again, rent and tear the most precious body of our Saviour Christ with thy bodily and fleshly teeth without the breaking whereof upon the cross, our sins and transgressions, could else no way be redeemed? Wilt thou take upon thee to offer up any sacrifice unto God for our sins, considering that Christ offered up himself (as St. Paul saith) upon the Cross, a lively sacrifice once for all.

Can neither the punishment of the Israelites (which for their idolatry so oft they received) move thee; neither the terrible threatenings of the ancient prophets stir thee, nor the crosses of God's own mouth fear thee to honour any other God than him? wilt thou so regard him that spared not his dear and only son for thee, so diminishing, yea, utterly extinguishing his glory, that thou wilt attribute the praise and honour to idols, which have mouths and speak not, eyes and see not, ears and yet hear not, which shall perish with them that made them: what saith the prophet Baruck, where he reciteth the epistle of Jeremiah, written to the captive Jews? Did he not forewarn them that in Babylon they should see gods of gold, silver, wood, and stone, borne upon men's shoulders to cause a fear upon the heathen? But be not you afraid of them (saith Jeremiah) nor do as others do: but when you see others worship them, say you in your hearts, it is thou (O Lord) that oughtest only to be worshipped: for as touching the timber of those gods the carpenter framed them and polished them, yea guilded they be and laid over with silver and vain things and cannot speak: he sheweth moreover, the abuse of their deckings how the priests took off their ornaments, and apparelled there women therewithal: how one holdeth a sceptre, another a sword in his hand, and yet can they judge in no matter, nor defend themselves, much less any other, from either hatred or murder, nor yet from knawing worms, dust, filth, or any other evil thing; these and such like words speaketh Jeremiah unto them, whereby he proveth them but vain things, and no gods, and at last he concludeth thus; confounded he those that worship them. They were warned by Jeremiah, and thou as Jeremiah hast warned others, and art warned thyself by many Scriptures in many places.

God, saith he, is a jealous God, which will have all honour, glory, and worship given to him only. And Christ saith in the fourth of Luke, to satan which tempted him, even to the same satan, the same Belzebub, the same devil which hath prevailed against thee: it is written (saith he) thou shalt honour the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

These and such like do prohibit thee, and all Christians to worship any other God than he which was before all worlds, and laid the foundations both of heaven and earth, and wilt thou honour a detestable idol invented by the Popes of Rome, and the uncharitable college of politic Cardinals?

Christ offered up himself once for all, and wilt thou offer him up again daily at thy pleasure ? But thou wilt say thou doest it for a good intent: Oh sink of sin! Oh child of perdition! Canst thou dream of any good intent therein, when thy conscience beareth thee witness of the wrath of God promised against thee? How did Saul, who for that he disobeyed the word of God for a good intent, was thrown from his wordly and temporal kingdom: shalt thou then which dost so deface God's honour and rob him of his right, inherit the eternal heavenly kingdom? Wilt thou for a good intent pluck Christ out of heaven, and make his death void, and deface the triumph of his cross, offering him up daily? Wilt thou either for fear of death, or hope of life, deny and refuse thy God, who enriched thy poverty, healed thy infirmity, and yielded to this victory if thou wouldst have kept it? Dost thou not consider that the thread of life hangeth upon him that made thee, who can (as his will is) either twine it hard to last the longer, or untwine it again to break the sooner? Dost thou not remember the saying of David, a notable king, which teacheth thee, a miserable wretch, in his 104th Psalm, where he saith, "When thou takest away thy spirit, O Lord, from men, they die, and are turned again to their dust, but when thou lettest thy breath go forth, they shall be made, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth."

Remember the saying of Christ in his Gospel, whosoever seeketh to save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose it for my sake shall find it; and in another place, whosoever loveth father or mother above me, is not meet for me, for he that will be my disciple, must forsake father and mother, and himself, and take up his cross and follow me: what cross? The cross of infamy and shame, of misery and poverty, of affliction and persecution, for his name sake. Let the oft falling of those heavenly showers pierce thy stony heart; let the two-edged sword of God's holy word hew asunder the knit-together sinews of worldly respects, even to the very marrow and life-blood of thy carnal heart, that thou mayst once again forsake thyself to embrace Christ, and like as good subjects will not refuse to hazard all in the defence of their earthly and temporal governors, so fly not like a white livered milk-sop from the standard, whereby thy chief Captain, Christ, hath placed thee in a noble array of this life; viriliter ago confortetur cor tuum et sustine dominum, fight manfully, come life, come death, the quarrel is God's, and undoubtedly the victory is ours.

But thou wilt say, I will not break unity; what? Not the unity of satan and his members, not the unity of darkness, the agreement of antichrist and his adherents? Nay, then thou deceives thyself with fond imaginations of such an unity as is amongst the enemies of Christ: were not the false prophets in an unity? Were not Joseph's brethren, Jacob's sons, in an unity? Were not the heathen as the Amelechites, the Peresites and Jebusites in an unity? I keep no order but look rather to my matter: were not the Scribes and Pharisees in an unity? Doth not King David testify, *conveniunt iu unum adversus Dominum*, yea, thieves and murderers, conspirators and traitors have their unity.

Mark my dear friend (yea friend if thou beest not God's enemy,) there is no unity but when Christ knitteth the knot amongst such as be his, yea, be you well assured that where his truth is resident, there it is verified, that he saith, *Non veni mittere pacem in terram sed gladium*, that is, Christ came to set one against another; the son against the father, the daughter against the mother: deceive not thyself therefore with the glistening and glorious name of unity, for antichrist hath his unity, yet not in deed, but in name, for the agreement of evil men is not an unity, but a conspiracy.

Thou hast heard some threatenings, some curses, and some admonishments of the Scriptures, to those who love themselves above Christ.

Thou hast heard also the sharp and biting words to those which deny him for love of life, saith he not, that he which denieth me before men, I will deny him before my father which is in heaven: and to the same effect writeth St. Paul in the 6th to the Hebrews, saying, it is impossible that they which have been once lightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift of grace, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have relished of the pure word of God, if they fall and slide away, it is impossible that they should be renewed again by repentance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making him as it were a mockingstock, or gaude of their fancies. And again, (saith he) if we shall willingly sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there is no oblation left for sin, but the terrible expectation of judgement and fire which shall devour the adversaries. Thus St. Paul writeth, and thus thou readest, and dost thou not quake and tremble? Well, if these terrible and thundering alarums cannot stir thee to arise and cleave unto Christ, and forsake the world, yet let the sweet consolations and promises of the Scriptures: let the examples of Christ and his Apostles, both Martyrs and Confessors, encourage thee to take faster hold by Christ. Hearken what he saith again in his holy Gospel; blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you for my sake, rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the Prophets before you.

Hear what Esau saith: fear not the curse of men, be not afraid of their blasphemies and railings, for worms and moths shall eat them up like cloth and wool, but my righteousness shall endure for ever, and my saving health from generation to generation: what art thou then (saith he) that fearest a mortal man, the child of a man, which fadeth away as doth the flower, and forgettest the Lord that made thee, that spread out the heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth so sure, that they cannot be removed: I am the Lord thy God, which maketh the sea to rage, and to be still, who is the Lord of hosts; I shall put my word in thy mouth, and defend thee with the turning of a hand. And our Saviour Christ saith to his disciples, they shall accuse you, and bring you before the princes and rulers for my name sake, and some of you they shall persecute and kill: but fear you not (saith he) neither care you not what you shall say, for it is my spirit that speaketh in you, the hand of the highest shall defend you, for the hairs of your heads are numbered, and none of them shall perish. I have laid up treasure for you (saith he) where no thief can steal, nor moth corrupt, and happy are you if you endure to the end. Fear not them (saith Christ) which have power over the body only, but fear him that hath power both over the body and the soul; the world loveth her own, and if you were of the world the world would love you, but you are mine, and therefore the world doth hate you.

Let these, and such like consolations out of the Scriptures strengthen you to God-ward; let not the examples of holy men and women go out of your mind, as that of Daniel, and the rest of the prophets; of the three children of Eleazarus, that constant father; the Machabees' children, that of Peter, Paul, Stephen, and other Apostles and holy Martyrs, in the beginning and infancy of the Church; as of good Simeon, Archbishop of Seloma, and Zetrophone, with infinite others, under Saporess the king of the Persians and Indians, who condemned all torments devised by the tyrants for their Saviour's sake. Return, return again for honour and mercy's sake into the way of Christ Jesus, and as becometh a faithful soldier, put on that armour which St. Paul teacheth to be most necessary for a Christian man, and above all things take to you the shield of faith.

And be you most devoutly provoked by Christ's own example, to withstand the devil, to forsake the world, and to become a true and faithful member of his mystical body, who spared not his own flesh for our sins. Throw down thyself with the fear of his threatened vengeance for this so great and heinous offence of apostacy, and comfort yourself on the other part with the mercy, blood, and promises of him that is ready to turn to you whensoever you turn to him: disdain not to come again with the lost son, seeing you have so wandered with him: be not ashamed to turn again with him from the swill of strangers, to the delicacies of the most benign and loving father, acknowledging that you have sinned against heaven and earth; against heaven by staining his glorious name, and causing his most sincere and pure word to be evil spoken of through you; against earth by offending your so many weak brethren to whom you have been a stumbling block through your sudden sliding.

Be not ashamed to come again with Mary, and to weep bitterly with Peter, not only with shedding of tears out of your bodily eyes, but also pouring out the streams of your heart, to wash away, out of the sight of God, the filth and mire of your offensive fall; be not ashamed to say with the publican, Lord be merciful unto me a sinner: remember the horrible history of Julian of old, and the lamentable case of Francis Spira of late, whose remembrance me thinketh should be yet so green to your memory, that being a thing of our time, you should fear the like inconvenience, seeing that you are fallen into the like

offence. Last of all, let the lively remembrance of the last day be always before your eyes, remembering the terror that such shall be in at that time, with the runagates and fugitives from Christ, which setting more by the world than by heaven, more by their life, than by him that gave them their life, more by the vanity of a painful breath, than the perfect assurance of eternal salvation, did shrink; yea, did clean fall away from him that never forsook them. And contrariwise, the inestimable joys prepared for them which feared no peril, nor dreading death, have manfully fought, and victoriously triumphed over all power of darkness; over hell, death, and damnation, through their most redoubted captain Jesus Christ our Saviour, who even now stretcheth out his arms to receive you, ready to fall upon your neck, and kiss you: and last of all, to feast you with the dainties and delicates of his own most precious blood, which undoubtedly, if it might stand with his determinate purpose, he would not let to shed again, rather than you should be lost; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and glory everlastingly.

Amen.

Yours, if you be Christ's,

Jane Grey.

Postscript.

Be constant, be constant, fear not for pain, Christ hath deliver'd thee, and heav'n is thy gain.

J. G.

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These texts are drawn from *Memoirs and Remains of Lady Jane Grey*, a compilation of her letters, prayers, disputations, and scaffold writings. The Internet Archive copy used here is available at <https://archive.org/details/memoirsremainsof00grey>. The compilation was first published in the nineteenth century; the letters to Bullinger were originally in Latin and appear here in English translation (translator unattributed in this edition). The translations are themselves pre-1900 and are public domain. Original spelling has been lightly modernised in places by the nineteenth-century editors; the texts are otherwise presented as found. No independent transcription has been made against manuscript sources.

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