

To the Pious and Devout Reader

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Anglican · Post-Reformation · Letter

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INTRODUCTION

Composed during the Interregnum, when the Church of England lay dismantled and its bishops dispossessed, this preface frames Taylor's pastoral program for a people he regarded as exiles in their own land. Writing as one of the deprived clergy, he casts the Puritan ascendancy as a Babylonian captivity and sets himself the task of teaching a generation born under it how to worship as their fathers had. The piece stands among the founding documents of the Caroline Divine sensibility that would shape Anglican identity for centuries after the Restoration. Expect polemic of a particular temper — grieved rather than shrill, with Taylor's characteristic gravity already settling into the long cadences for which Holy Living and Holy Dying would be remembered.

In this sad declension of Religion, the Seers who are appointed to be the Watchmen of the Church, cannot but observe that the Supplanters and Underminers are gone out, and are digging down the Foundations: and having destroy'd all publick Forms of Ecclesiastical Government, discountenanc'd an excellent Liturgie, taken off the hinges of Unity, disgrac'd the Articles of Religion, polluted publick Assemblies, taken away all cognisance of Schism, by mingling all Sects, and giving countenance to that, against which all Power ought to stand upon their guard. There is now nothing left, but that we take care that men be Christians: For concerning the Ornament and Advantages of Religion, we cannot make that provision we desire; Incertis de salute, de gloriâ minimâ certandum: For since they who have seen Jerusalem in prosperity, and have forgotten the order of the Morning and Evening Sacrifice, and the beauty of the Temple, will be tempted to neglect so excellent a ministration, & their assembling themselves together for peace, and holy Offices, and be content with any thing that is brought to them, though it be but the husks and acorns of Prodigals and Swine, so they may enjoy their Lands and their Money with it; we must now take care that the young men who were born in the Captivity, may be taught how to worship the God of Israel after the manner of their fore-fathers, till it shall please God that Religion shall return into the Land, and dwell safely and grow prosperously.

But never did the excellency of Episcopall Government appeare so demonstratively and conspicuously as now: Under their conduct and order we had a Church so united, so orderly, so govern'd, a Religion so settled, Articles so true, sufficient, and confess'd, Canons so prudent and so obey'd, Devotions so regular and constant, Sacraments so adorn'd and ministred, Churches so beauteous and religious, Cir-

cumstances of Religion so grave and prudent, so useful and apt for edification, that the enemies of our Church, who serve the Pope in all things, and Jesus Christ in some, who dare transgress an Institution and Ordinance of Christ, but dare not break a Canon of the Pope, did despair of prevailing against Us and Truth, and knew no hopes but by setting their faces against us to destroy this Government, and then they knew they should triumph without any enemy: So Balaam the son of Bosor was sent for, to curse the people of the Lord, in hope that the son of Zippor might prevail against them that had long prospered under the conduct of Moses and Aaron.

But now in stead of this excellency of Condition and Constitution of Religion, the people are fallen under the harrows and saws of impertinent and ignorant Preachers, who think all Religion is a Sermon, and all Sermons ought to be libels against Truth and old Governours, and expound Chapters that the meaning may never be understood, and pray, that they may be thought able to talk, but not to hold their peace, they casting not to obtain any thing but Wealth and Victory, Power and Plunder; and the people have reap'd the fruits apt to grow upon such Crabstocks: they grow idle and false, hypocrites and careless, they deny themselves nothing that is pleasant, they despise Religion, forget Government; and some never think of Heaven; and they that do, think to go thither in such paths which all the ages of the Church did give men warning of, lest they should that way go to the Devil.

But when men have try'd all that they can, it is to be suppos'd they will return to the excellency and advantages of the Christian Religion, as it is taught by the Church of England; for by destroying it, no end can be serv'd but of Sin and Folly, Faction, and Death eternal. For besides that, no Church that is enemy to this, does worship God in that truth of Propositions, in that unblameable and pious Liturgie, and in preaching the necessities of holy life, so much as the Church of England does; besides this (I say) it cannot be persecuted by any Governour that understands his own interest, unless he be first abus'd by false Preachers, and then prefers his secret opinion before his publick Advantage. For no Church in the World is so great a friend to Loyalty and Obedience, as she, and her Sisters of the same perswasion. They that hate Bishops have destroy'd Monarchy, and they that would erect an Ecclesiastical Monarchy, must consequently subject the Temporal to it. And both one and the other would be Supreme in Consciences; and they that govern there, with an opinion that in all things they ought to be attended to, will let their Prince govern others, so long as he will be rul'd by them: And certainly, for a Prince to persecute the Protestant Religion, is as if a Physician should endeavour to destroy all Medicaments, and Fathers kill their Sons, and the Master of Ceremonies destroy all Formalities and Courtships; and as if the Pope should root out all the Ecclesiastick State. Nothing so combines with Government, if it be of Gods appointment, as the Religion of the Church of England, because nothing does more adhere to the Word of God, and disregard the crafty advantages of the world. If any man shall not decline to try his Title by the Word of God, it is certain there is not in the world a better guard for it, then the true Protestant Religion, as it is taught in our Church. But let things be as it please God; it is certain, that in that day when Truth gets her Victory, in that day we shall prevail against all Gods enemies and ours, not in the purchases and perquisites of the world, but in the rewards and returns of Holiness and Patience, and Faith and Charity; for by these we worship God, and against this interest we cannot serve any thing else.

In the mean time we must by all means secure the foundation, and take care that Religion may be convey'd in all its material parts, the same as it was, but by new and permitted instruments. For let us secure that our young men be good Christians, it is easie to make them good Protestants, unless they be abus'd with prejudice, and suck venome with their milk; they cannot leave our Communion, till they have reason to reprove our Doctrine.

There is therefore in the following pages a Compendium of what we are to Believe, what to Do, and what to Desire; It is indeed very little, but it is enough to begin with, and will serve all persons so long as they need milk, and not strong meat. And he that hath given the following Assistances to thee, desires to be even a door-keeper in Gods House, and to be a servant of the meanest of Gods servants, and thinks it a worthy imployment to teach the most ignorant, and make them to know Christ, though but in the first rudiments of a holy Institution. This onely he affirms, That there is more solid comfort and material support to a Christian spirit in one Article of Faith, in one period of the Lords Prayer, in one holy Lesson, then in all the disputes of impertinent people, who take more pains to prove there is a Purgatory, then to perswade men to avoid Hell: And that a plain Catechism can more instruct a soul, then the whole dayes prate which some daily spit forth, to bid men get Christ, and persecute his Servants.

Christian Religion is admirable for its wisdom, for its simplicity; and he that presents the following papers to thee, designs to teach thee as the Church was taught in the early dayes of the Apostles. To believe the Christian Faith, and to understand it; to represent plain Rules of Good Life; to describe easie Formes of Prayer; to bring into your Assemblies Hymnes of Glorification and Thanksgiving, and Psalms of Prayer. By these easie paths they lead Christs little ones into the Fold of their great Bishop; and if by this any service be done to God, any ministry to the Soul of a Childe or an ignorant Woman, it is hoped that God will accept it: and it is reward enough, if by my Ministry GOD will bring it to passe, that any Soul shall be instructed, and brought into that state of good things, that it shall rejoyce for ever.

But do thou pray for him that desires this to thee, and endeavours it.

Source: The Golden Grove, Jeremy Taylor. London: Printed by J.F. for R. Royston at the Angel in Ivie-lane, 1655. Text sourced from Project Canterbury (anglicanhistory.org).

Transcribed from the 1655 first edition by Project Canterbury (Anglican History Project, anglicanhistory.org). Taylor composed The Golden Grove during his years of enforced exile in Wales under the Interregnum, when Anglican worship had been suppressed and he was living under the protection of Richard Vaughan, Earl of Carbery, at the estate from which the book takes its name. The text is in the public domain; Taylor died in 1667. No translator is involved; this is Taylor's own English.

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