The English Catholics' Letter to James I (1603)

Transcript

British Library, Additional MS 44848, ff. 111v–114r

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The Catholiques of Englands Letter to Kinge James at his first enterance into England for approbation and toleration of their religion

Most puissant prince and Orient Monarch Such are the rare p[er]fecc[i]ons and admirable guises of wisdome prudence valor and Justice wherewith the bountifull hands of Gods divine Ma[jes]tie hath endued yo[u]r Ma[jes]tie as in the depth of yo[u]r provident Judgement wee doubt not but you can foresee what Concerneth both the Temporall and Spirituall gouerment of all yo[u]r kingdomes and domynions notwithstanding yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ie]s most afflicted subjects and devoted servants the Catholiks of England partly to preuent sinister Informac[i]ons which happily may possesse yo[u]r sacred {daies} before our answer bee heard partly almost as men ouerwhelmed with persecuc[i]ons for our Consciences

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The Catholiks of England to – K. J:
wee are enforced to haue speedy recourse and hope of present redresse from your highnes and to present those humble lynes unto your royall person; to plead for vs some Commiserac[i]on and favour. /. alas what allegiance or dutye can any temporall prince desire or expect at his vassalls hands which wee are not adressed to p[er]forme how many noblemen and worthy gent. most zealous in the Catholike religion haue endured some losse of lands and livenigs some exile, others Imprisonm[en]t some the effusion of blood and life for the adwancem[en]t of yo[u]r blessed mothers right unto the scepter of Albion nay whose finger did euer ake but Catholiks for yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ie]s present title and dominions . how many fledd to yo[u]r Co[u]rt as offering themselues as hostages for yo[u]r frends to liue and dye in yo[u]r {gratious} quarrel if euer aduersary had oposed himself against the equity of yo[u]r Cause if this they attempted with their princes disgrace to obtayne yo[u]r Ma[jes]t[ie]s grace what will they doe nay what will they not doe to liue without disgrace in yo[u]r graces favor the mayne of this realme if wee respect religion (setting petty sects aside) consisteth uppon fower parts , Protestants who haue {Domynedred} ouer all the former Queens dayes Puritanes who haue crept upp apace amongst them Atheists and pollitians who were bredd uppon their broyles and {Conteasion} in matters of Faith and Catholiks who as they are {opposite} to alle, soe are they detested of all because error was euer an enemy to truthe hardly all or any two of the first three can bee suppressed, theirfore wee beseech yo[u]r ma[jes]tie to yeeld us as much favor as others of Contrary Religion (to that which shall bee publikely

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The Catholiks to King James
professed in England) shall obtayne at yo[u]r hands for if our fault bee Ake lesse or none at all in equity our punishment ought to bee Ake lesse or none at all; the gates Arches and {Pyramides} of France p[ro]clamed their present king pater patriae et pacis restitutor (that is the father of his Countrey and restorer of his peace) because that Kingdome beeing well neere torne in peeces with Ciuill warres and made a prey to forraigne Foes was by his provident

~~wis~~ wisdom and valour acquitted in it selfe and hostile strangers expelled and the which hee principally effected {th[a]t} by condiscending to tollerate them of an adverse religion to that which was openly p[ro]fessed {(questiuneles)} dread soveraigne the kingdome of England through the cruell persecutions of Catholiks hath been almost odious to all Christian nations trade and traffique is exceedingly decayed warrs and blood hath seldome ceased Subsedyes and Taxes neuer so many discontented {myndds} Innumerable all which yo[u]r princely Ma[jes]t[ie]s Conveyance to yo[u]r humble suppliants the afflicted Catholiks will easely addresse at this [*Left margin:* 1 Kings 12. 17.] yo[u]r highness first ingresse, Si loqueris ad nos verba levia erunt tibi servi cunctis Diebus (that is you speake comfortable words unto them or if you hearken unto them in this thinge they will be servants unto you all their dayes) saith the sage Councellors of Salomon to Ruaboam for {in largem[en]t} after affliction resembleth a pleasant gale after a vehement tempest and a benefit? in distress doublet the value there of how gratefull will it bee

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The Catholiks of England to K. J.
to all princes abroad and {hu[nora]ble} to yo[u]r Ma[jes]t[i]e to understand how Queene Elizabeths severity is changed into yo[u]r royall Clemency and that the lenyty of a man reedified with the {()sin} formed anger of a woman destroyed {that} the lyon Rampant is passant whereas the passant had been Rampant how acceptable shall yo[u]r subjects bee to all Catholike Countryes who are now almost abhorred of all when they shall {perre}and yo[u]r highnes {repayreth} not pikes or {p[ro]vis[i]ons} for the p[ro]fessors of their faith but permitteth them Temples and altars for the use of their religion then shall wee see with our eyes and touch with our Fingers that happy benedicc[i]on of Esah: 14.7. In this land that swords are turned into mattocks and ^{or} plowes and Lances into scythes. and all nations admiring us will say hi sunt semen cui benedixit dominus. (that is these are the seed which the lord hath blessed) wee request noe more favor at yo[u]r graces hands then that wee may securely beleeue and p[ro]fesse that Catholike religion which yo[u]r happy predecessors p[ro]fessed from Donaldus the first, the first Converted unto yo[u]r late blessed mother Martyred A religion venerable for antiquity. maiesticall for Amplitude, constant for Continuance irreprehensible for doctrine indureing to all kinds of virtue and piety diswading from all sin and wickednes, a religion belooued by all primitive pastors established by all Eccumenicall councells v upholden by antient Doctors maintained by the first and best Christian Emperors, recorded almost alone in all eccle[siasti]call historyes sealed in the blood

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The catholiques
of millions of martyrs adorned with the virtues of soe many confessors beautified with the purity of thousand of virgins So conformable unto natural sence and reason and finaly soe agreeable with the sacred text of gods word and the gospell, the free vse of this religion wee request if not in publike churches yet at the least in priuate houses if not with aprobac[i]on yet with tollerac[i]on without molestac[i]on assureing yo[u]r grace that howsoeuer some p[ro]testants and puritants incited by morall honesty of life or innated instinct of nature or for feare of some trmporall punishm[en]t pretend obedience unto yo[u]r highnes lawes yet certainely the onely Catholiks for Conscience sake obserue them for they defending that princes {precepts} and {stattuts} oblige noe subjects under the penalty of sinn will haue little care in {Conscienc} to transgress them which principally are tormented with the guilte of

sin but Catholiks Confessing merritt in obeying ~~and~~ in merritt in transgressing canot but in soule bee greevously tortured for the least prevarication thereof wherefore most mercifull soveraigne wee yo[u]r longe afflicted subjects prostrate out~~r~~ selues and p[ro]test before the ma[jes]tie of god and all his holey Angells as loyall obedience and Imaculate ~~obedience~~ allegiance unto yo[u]r grace as euer did faithfull subjects in England or Scotland unto yo[u]r highnes p[ro]genitors and intend as sincerely with our goods and liues to serue you as euer did the loyallest Isaralites king David or the truest legions the Romane Emperors and thus expecting yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ie]s Customary favor and gratious bounty wee rest yo[u]r devoted suppliants to him

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whose hands doe manage the harts of kings and with reciprocate mercy will acquit the mercifull yo[u]r sacred ma[jes]t[ie]s most devoted servants the

Catholiques of England

Other manuscript witnesses

- All Souls College, MS 155, ff. 54–56v
- British Library, Harley MS 3791, ff. 120x–121x
- British Library, Harley MS 4761, ff. 10r–13r
- British Library, Sloane MS 1775, ff. 57r–58v
- British Library, Stowe MS 180, ff. 3x–4x
- Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cinq-Cents de Colbert ms 466, ff. 259r–260v
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 781, ff. 89–91
- Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 82, ff. 160v–163v
- Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 9276, item 6, ff18
- Gonville & Caius College, MS 73/40, f. 168r
- The National Archives, SP 14/1, /56
- The National Archives, SP 14/1, /56

Seventeenth-century print exemplars

- *Scrinia Sacra* (1654) [Wing S2110], pp. 82–84

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