

THE
ACTS AND MONUMENTS
JOHN FOXE.

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The Author's Preface

(John Foxe)

To the True and Faithful Congregation of Christ's Universal Church, with all and the singular Members of it, wherever congregated or dispersed throughout the Realm of England, a Protestation or Petition of the Author, wishing to them abundance of all peace and tranquility, with the speedy coming of Christ the Spouse, to make an end of all mortal misery.

SOLOMON, the peaceable prince of Israel, as we read in the first Book of Kings, after he had finished the building of the Lord's Temple (which took seven years), made his petition to the Lord for all who would pray in the temple, or turn their face toward it; and his request was granted. The Lord answered him, as we read in 1Kng 9.3. "I have heard your prayer and have hallowed this house," etc.; although the infinite Majesty of God is not to be confined within any material walls, yet it so pleased his goodness to respect this prayer of the king, that he not only promised to hear those who prayed there, but also filled it with his own glory. For we read, "The priests could not stand to minister, because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord," 1Kng 8.11.

After my seven years' labor about this Ecclesiastical History, upon a similar trust in God's gracious goodness, if I, a sinful wretch, might either be so bold as to ask, or so happy as to speed, I would most humbly crave Almighty God to bestow his blessing upon it. I am not comparing my work with the building of that temple; yet I am following the zeal of the builder. Just as the prayers of those who prayed in the outward temple were heard, may all true disposed minds, who resort to reading this history, receive some spiritual fruit for their souls. For it contains the acts of God's holy martyrs, and the monuments of His church. By the example of their life, faith, and doctrine, and through the operation of His grace, may it be to the advancement of His glory, and the profit of His church, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

But as it happened in that temple of Solomon, all who came there did not come to pray, but many came to prate — some to gaze and hear news, some to talk and walk, some to buy and sell, some to carp and find fault, and some also at last to destroy and pull it down, as they did indeed. For what in this world is so strong, that it will not be impugned? What is so perfect, that it will not be abused? What is so true, that will not be contradicted? or so circumspectly done, that wranglers will not find fault with it? Even so, in writing this history, I expect that among many well-disposed readers, some wasp's nest or other will be stirred up to buzz about my ears, so dangerous a thing it is now-a-days, to write or do any good. But either we must offend the godly by flattering a man, or else we must procure the hatred of the wicked by speaking the truth. I had sufficient trial in my former edition, of such stinging wasps and

buzzing drones. If they had found in my book any just cause to find fault, or upon any true zeal for truth they had proceeded against the untruths of my history, *and had brought just proofs for the same*, I could right well abide it. For God forbid that any faults, wherever they are, should not be detected and accused. And therefore, accusers in a commonwealth, to my mind, are of no small service.

But then such accusers must beware not to act like the dog Cicero speaks of in his oration, which being set in the capitol to frighten away thieves by night, let the thieves alone, and barked at true men walking in the day. To bay and bark where true faults are, is not amiss. But to carp where there is no cause; to spy straws in others, and leap over their own blocks; to swallow camels and to strain at gnats; to oppress truth with lies, and to set up lies for truth; to blaspheme the dear martyrs of Christ, and to canonize as saints those whom Scripture would scarcely allow for good subjects — *that* is intolerable. Such barking curs, if they were well served, would be made to stoop awhile. But I do not intend at this time to wrestle much with these brawling spirits.

Therefore, to leave them a while till further leisure serves me to attend to them, I thought in the interim season, by way of protestation or petition, to write to you this much, both in general and particular — the true members and faithful congregation of Christ's church, wherever congregated together or dispersed through the whole realm of England. For what all these adversaries seek, is to do what they can to withdraw readers from this History, by discrediting it with slanders and sinister surmises. Therefore, in few words, this will be to warn and desire all well-minded lovers and partakers of Christ's gospel, that you not allow yourselves to be deceived with the boastings and hyperbolic speeches of those slandering tongues, whatever they have, or will hereafter, exclaim against it. But impartially deferring your judgment till the truth is tried, first *peruse* and then *refuse* — measuring the alleged untruths of this history, not by scoring up the hundreds and thousands of lies which they give out, but wisely weighing the purpose of their doings according to how you find them, and so judge the matter.

I allure no one to read my books; let every man do as he pleases. If anyone thinks his labor is too much in reading this history, his choice is free either to read *this* or any other work. But if the fruit of it recompences the reader's trouble, then I wish no man be so light-eared as to be carried away by any sinister clamor of its adversaries, who many times deprave good doings, not for the faults they find, but only finding faults because they would deprave. As for me and my history, my purpose was to profit all and to displease none. So if skill is wanting in any part, my purpose has yet been simple, and the cause no less urgent, which moved me to take this enterprise in hand.

For *first*, it grieved me that this part of history had been so long unsupplied in my country church of England, and to see the simple flock of Christ, especially the unlearned sort, so miserably deluded. And all this was for ignorance of history, not knowing the course of times, and the true descent of the church.

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Again, considering the multitude of chronicles and history-writers, both in and out of England, of whom most have been either monks or clients to the See of Rome,¹ it grieved me to behold how partially they handled their stories. I cannot but commend their diligent labor in committing many things to writing that are not unfruitful to be known, nor unpleasant to be read. Yet I lamented to see that the principal points which chiefly concerned the state of Christ's church, and which were most necessary to be known by all Christian people, were either altogether omitted in their monuments, or else, if any mention of them were inserted, all things were drawn to the honor specially of the church of Rome, or else to the favor of their own sect of religion. Hearing and reading no other church mentioned or magnified in their writings, except that church which flourished in this world in riches and riot, the unlearned were thereby led to think that no other church stood in all the earth except the church of Rome.

In the number of this sort of writers, besides our monks of England (for almost every monastery had its chronicler) I might also recite both Italian and other authors, such as Platina, Sabellicus, Nauclerus, Martin, Antony, Vincent, Onuphrius, Laziard, George Lilius, Polydore Virgil, with many more. They take it upon themselves to intermeddle with matters of the church. Even though they express some part of the truth in matters concerning the bishops and See of Rome, yet in suppressing another part, they play with us, as Ananias and Sapphira did with their money; ^{Act 5.1-10} or as the Greek painter Apelles did: painting the one half of Venus coming out of the sea, he left the other half imperfect. So these writers, while they show us one half of the bishop of Rome, they leave the other half of him imperfect and utterly untold. For they paint him, on the one part, glittering in wealth and glory, showing —

what succession the popes had from the chair of St. Peter; when they first began, and how long they sat; what churches and what famous buildings they erected; how far their possessions reached; what laws they made; what councils they called; what honor they received from kings and emperors; what princes and countries they brought under their authority, with other similar stratagems of great pomp and royalty;

on the other side, they leave untold —

what vices these popes brought with them to their seat; what abominations they practiced; what superstition they maintained; what idolatry they procured; what wicked doctrine they defended contrary to the express word of God; what heresies they fell into; what division of sects they cut the unity of Christian religion into; how some practiced by simony, some by necromancy and sorcery, some by poisoning, some contracted with the devil to come by their papacy; what hypocrisy was in their lives; what corruption in their doctrine; what wars they raised; what bloodshed they caused.

They leave untold what treachery they traversed against their lords and emperors, imprisoning some, betraying some to the templars and Saracens in bringing others under their feet; also in beheading some, as they did with Frederick and Conradine, the heirs and offspring of the house of Frederick Barbarossa, A.D. 1269. Furthermore, how mightily

¹ A "see" is the seat within a bishop's diocese, where the cathedral is located. The See of Rome refers to the pre-eminent seat of jurisdiction in the Roman Catholic Church. Foxe takes exception to this in his Preliminary Dissertation.

Almighty God has stood against them, how their wars never prospered against the Turks, how the godly and learned from time to time have ever opposed their errors, etc. Not one word has been said of these and a thousand other things, but all were kept as secret as in auricular confession. ²

When I considered this partial dealing and corrupt handling of historians, I thought nothing was more wanting in the church than a full and complete history. Being faithfully collected out of all our monastic writers and written monuments, should neither contain every vain written fable, for that would be too much; nor leave out anything necessary, for that would be too little. But with a moderate discretion, taking the best of everyone, it should both ease the labor of the reader from turning over such a number of writers, and also open the plain truth of times that have long lain hidden in the obscure darkness of antiquity. Thereby, beholding as in a glass the stay, course, and alteration of religion, the decay of doctrine, and the controversies of the church, all studious readers might better discern between antiquity and novelty. For if the things which are *first* are to be preferred before those which are *later* (following the rule of Tertullian), then the reading of history is very necessary in the church, in order to know what went before, and what followed after. Therefore, it is not without cause that in old authors, history is called the Witness of Times, the Light of Verity, the Life of Memory, Teacher of Life, and shower of Antiquity, etc. Without the knowledge of history, man's life is blind, and it may soon fall into any kind of error. We see this by manifest experience in these desolate times of the church, when the bishops of Rome, under color of antiquity, have turned truth into heresy, and brought such new-found devices of strange doctrine and religion, as were never heard of in the former age of the church, and which are now believed — all through ignorance of times, and for lack of true history.

For, to say the truth, if times had been well-searched, or if those who wrote histories had without partiality gone upright between God and Baal, halting on neither side, it might well have been found that most of all this catholic corruption intruded into the church by the bishops of Rome, such as —

transubstantiation, elevation and adoration of the sacrament, auricular confession, forced vows of priests not to marry, veneration of images, private and satisfactory masses, the order of Gregory's mass that is now used, the usurped authority and supreme power of the See of Rome, with all the rest of their ceremonies and weeds of superstition now overgrowing the church —

all these (I say) are new nothings, recently coined in the mint of Rome, without any stamp of antiquity. I trust this will sufficiently appear by reading this History. Therefore, I have here taken that history in hand, which other writers have previously employed their labor to magnify the church of Rome, so that in this history there might appear to all Christian readers the image of *both* churches, the one as well as the other; especially of the poor, oppressed, and persecuted church of Christ. This persecuted church, though it has been for a long season trodden under foot by enemies, neglected in the world, not regarded in histories, and scarcely visible or known to worldly eyes, has it been the only true church of God. It is the one in which He has mightily wrought up to now, preserving it in all extreme distresses, continually stirring

² *Auricular confession: a spoken confession of sins heard by a priest, and kept secret by him.*

up faithful ministers from time to time, who have always kept some sparks of His true doctrine and religion.

Now, because the true church of God does not go lightly alone, but is accompanied with some other church of the devil to deface and malign it, it is necessary that the difference between them should be seen, and that the descent of the right church be described from the apostle's time, which up to now has been lacking in most histories. This was partly for fear, because men dared not describe it, and partly for ignorance, because men could not discern rightly between the one and the other. Beholding the church of Rome so visible and glorious in the eyes of all the world, and so shining in outward beauty as to bear such a port, to carry such a train and multitude, and to stand in such high authority, they supposed it to be the only right catholic mother. The other, because it was not so visibly known in the world, they thought that it could not therefore be the true church of Christ. In this they were much deceived. For although the right church of God is not so invisible in the world that none can see it, yet neither is it so visible that every worldly eye may indeed perceive it. For as is the nature of truth, so is the proper condition of the true church, that commonly none see it except those who as are the members and partakers of it. And therefore, those who require that God's holy church should be evident and visible to the whole world, seem to define the great *synagogue* of the world, rather than the true spiritual church of God.

In Christ's time, who would have thought that the congregations and councils of the pharisees had not been the right church? And yet Christ had another church on earth besides that one. Although it was not so manifest in the sight of the world, yet it was the only true church in the sight of God.

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Christ referred to this church, speaking of the temple which he would raise again the third day. And yet, after the Lord was risen, he did not show himself to the world, but only to his elect, who were but few. After that, the same church increased and multiplied mightily among the Jews. Yet the Jews did not have eyes to see God's church, but persecuted it, till at length their whole nation was destroyed.

After the Jews, came the heathen emperors of Rome. Having the whole power of the world in their hands, they did all the world could do to extinguish the name and church of Christ. Their violence continued the space of three hundred years, all of which time the true church of Christ was not great in the sight of the world, but rather was abhorred everywhere. And yet notwithstanding this, the same small flock, so despised in the world, the Lord highly regarded, and mightily preserved. For although many of the Christians suffered death, yet their death was neither loss to them, nor a detriment to the church. Rather, the more they suffered, the more of their blood increased.

In the time of these emperors, God raised up in this realm of Britain, diverse worthy preachers and witnesses, such as Elnanus, Meduinus, Meltivianus, Amphibolus, Albanus, Aaron, Julius, and others, in whose time the doctrine of faith, without men's traditions, was sincerely preached. After their death and martyrdom, it pleased the Lord to provide a general quietness to his church, by which the number of his flock began to increase. In this age, then followed in this land, Fastidius, Nivian, Patrick, Bacchiarius, Dubricius, Congellus, Kentigern,

Helmutus, David, Daniel, Sampson, Elnodugus, Asaphus, Gildas, Heulanus, Elbodus, Dinothus, Samuel, Nivius, and many more, who governed the church of Britain by Christian doctrine for a long season. But the civil governors for the time were then dissolute and careless (as Gildas very sharply lays to their charge), and so at length they were subdued by the Saxons.

All this while, about the space of four hundred years, religion remained uncorrupt in Britain, and the word of Christ was truly preached. This was until about the coming of Austin the monk,³ and his companions from Rome, when many of the said British preachers were slain by the Saxons. After that, Christian faith began to enter and spring among the Saxons, in a certain Romish way. Yet, notwithstanding, it was somewhat more tolerable than the times which followed. This was through the diligent industry of some godly teachers who then lived among them, such as Aidanus, Finianus, Coleman, archbishop of York, Bede, John of Beverly, Alenin, Noetus, Hucharius, Serlo, Achardus, Ealtesus, Alexander, Neckham, Negellus, Fenallus, Alfricus, Sygeferthus, and such others who, though they erred in a few things, yet they are not so greatly to be complained about, compared with the abuses that followed. For as yet, the error of transubstantiation and elevation, with auricular confession, had not crept in for a public doctrine in Christ's church, as may appear by their own Saxon sermon made by Elfric, set out in this present history. During this time, although the bishops of Rome were held in some reverence by the clergy, they had nothing as yet to do in making laws regarding matters of the church of England, but pertained only to the kings and governors of the land, as will be seen in this history.

And thus, although the church of Rome began then to decline from God, yet during all this time it remained in some reasonable order till, at length, the bishops of Rome began to shoot up in the world, through the liberality of good princes, and especially of Matilda, a noble duchess of Italy. At her death she made the pope heir of all her lands, and endowed his see with great revenues. Then riches begat ambition, and ambition destroyed religion, so that all came to ruin. Out of this corruption sprang forth here in England (as it did in other places) another Romish kind of monkery, worse than the other before it, being much more drowned in superstition and ceremonies. This was during the tenth century. Of this swarm were Egbert, Aigelbert, Egwine, Boniface, Wilfred, Agathon, James, Romain, Cedda, Dunstan, Oswald, Athelwold, Althelwine, duke of Eastangles, Lanfranc, Anselme, and such others.

And yet in this time also, through God's providence, the church did not lack some of better knowledge and judgment, to weigh against the darkness of those days. For although King Edgar, with Edward, his base son, was then a great author and favorer of superstition — being seduced by Dunstan, Oswald, and other monks — and erected as many monasteries as there are Sundays in the year; yet notwithstanding, this did not continue for long. For soon after the death of Edgar came King Ethelred, and Queen Elfhred his mother, with Alferus, duke of Merceland, and other peers and nobles of the realm. They displaced the monks again, and restored the married priests to their old possessions and livings. Moreover, after that also followed the Danes, who overthrew those monkish foundations as fast as King Edgar had set them up before.

³ *Austin: Augustine of Canterbury (c. 5th century to 604).*

And thus stood the condition of the true church of Christ up till then, although not without some opposition and difficulty. It was yet in some mediate state of the truth and verity, till the time of Pope Hildebrand, called Gregory VII. (about A.D. 1080), and Pope Innocent III. (A.D. 1215), by whom all was turned upside down. All order was broken, discipline dissolved, true doctrine defaced, and Christian faith extinguished. Instead of these, the preaching of men's decrees, dreams, and idle traditions was set up. And whereas before, truth was free to be disputed among learned men, now liberty was turned into law, and argument into authority. Whatever the bishop of Rome announced, that stood for an oracle to be received of all men, without opposition or contradiction. Whatever was contrary to it was heresy, to be punished with faggot ⁴ and flaming fire! Then the sincere faith of this English church which had held out so long, began to quail. Then the clear sunshine of God's word was overshadowed with mists and darkness, appearing like sackcloth to the people, who could neither understand what they read, nor were permitted to read what they could understand. In these miserable days, as the true visible church now began to shrink and keep in for fear, so started up a new sort of player to furnish the stage, ⁵ such as school doctors (scholastics), canonists, and four orders of friars, besides other monastic sects and fraternities of infinite variety. These have ever since kept such an influence in the church, that almost none dared stir, neither Caesar, king, nor subject. What they defined stood; what they approved, was catholic; what they condemned was heresy; whomever they accused, few indeed could save. And thus these continued, or rather *reigned* in the church, the space of now four hundred years and odd. During this time, although the true church of Christ did not dare to openly appear in the face of the world, being oppressed by tyranny, yet neither was it so invisible and unknown, that some remnant of it did not always remain, by the providence of the Lord. This not only showed secret good affection for sincere doctrine, but it also stood in open defense of truth against the disordered church of Rome.

In this catalogue, we must first omit Bertram and Berengarius, who were before Pope Innocent III. But a learned multitude of sufficient witnesses might be produced here, whose names are neither obscure, nor doctrine unknown: such as Joachin, abbot of Calabria; Almeric, a learned bishop in the time of Innocent, judged a heretic for opposing images; the martyrs of Alsatia, of whom a hundred were burned by Innocent in one day, as Herman Mucius writes. We may likewise add to these the Waldenses, or Albigenses, which to a great number, separated themselves from the church of Rome. To this number also belonged Reymund, earl of Toulouse, Marsilius Patavius, William de S. Amore, Simon Tornacensis, Arnold de Nova Villa, John Semeca, besides diverse preachers in Suevia ⁶ who stood against the pope (A.D. 1440); Laurence, of England, a master of Paris (A.D. 1260); Peter John, a minorite (Franciscan monk), who was burned after his death (A.D. 1290); Robert Gallus, a Dominican friar (A.D. 1291); Robert Grossthead (or Grosseteste), bishop of Lincoln, who was called the *Hammer of the Romanists* (A.D. 1250); and Lord Peter de Cugneriis (A.D. 1329).

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⁴ *Faggot*: kindling (a bundle of sticks) for a fire.

⁵ *Player*: a stage actor, playing a part.

⁶ *Suevia* or *Swabia*: a region in southwestern Germany.

To these we may add, moreover, William of Ockam, Bongratus Bergomensis, Leopold, Andrew Laudensis, Ulric Hangenor, treasurer to the emperor; John de Ganduno (A.D. 1330), mentioned in the extravagants, Andreas de Castro, Buridian, Euda, duke of Burgundy, who counselled the French king not to receive the new-found constitutions and extravagants of the pope into his realm, Dante Alligerius, an Italian who wrote against the pope, monks, and friars, and against the donation of Constantine (A.D. 1330.) Taulerus, a German preacher; Conrad Hager, imprisoned for preaching against the mass (A.D. 1339); the author of the hook called *Poenitentarius Asini*, compiled about the year 1343; Michael Cesenas, a gray friar; Peter de Corbaria, with John de Poliaco, mentioned in the extravagants, and condemned by the pope; John de Castilione, with Francis de Arcatara, who were burned about the year of our Lord 1322; John Rochtaylada, otherwise called Haybalus, with another friar, martyred about the year 1346; Francis Petrarch, who called Rome “the whore of Babylon,” etc. (A.D. 1350); George Ariminensis (A.D. 1350); John de Rupe Scissa, imprisoned for certain prophecies against the pope (A.D. 1340); Gethard Ridder, who also wrote against monks and friars, a book called *Lacrymae Ecclesiae* (A.D. 1350); Godfrid de Fontanis, William de Landuno; John the monk; Richard Armachanus; Nicolas Orem, preacher (A.D. 1364); Militzius, a Bohemian, who then preached that antichrist had come, and was excommunicated for it (A.D. 1366); James Misnensis; Matthew Parisiensis, Bohemian born, and a writer against the pope (A.D. 1370); John Montziger, rector of the university of Ulm (A.D. 1384); Nilus, archbishop of Thessalonica; Henry de Jota; Henry de Hassia, etc. (A.D. 1371.)

I am only reciting the principal writers and preachers in those days. How many thousands there were who never bowed their knees to Baal, is known to God alone. Of these, we find in the writings of one Brushius, that thirty-six citizens of Maguntia were burned (A.D. 1390). Following the doctrine of the Waldenses, they affirmed the pope to be the great antichrist. Also Massaeus records one hundred and forty who were put to the fire in the province of Narbon, for not receiving the decretals of Rome. These are besides those who suffered at Paris, numbering twenty-four at one time (A.D. 1210); and the year after, four hundred were burnt under the name of *heretics*. Also, a certain good hermit, an Englishman, mentioned in John Bacon (Dist. 2. Quaest. 1.), was committed for disputing in Paul’s church against certain sacraments of the church of Rome, A.D. 1306.

Now to descend somewhat lower in drawing out the descent of the church. What a multitude there were of faithful witnesses in the time of John Wickliffe (A.D. 1379),⁷ such as Ocliff, William Thorp, White, Purvey, Fatshal, Pain, Gower, Chaucer, Gascoin, William Swinderby, Walter Brute, Roger Dexter, William Sautry, about the year 1400. John Badby (A.D. 1410), Nicholas Tailer, Richard Wagstaff, Michael Scrivener, William Smith, John Henry, William Parchmenar, Roger Goldsmith, with an anchorite named Matilda, in the city of Leicester; Lord Cobham, Sir Roger Acton knight, John Beverley preacher, John Huss (Jan Hus), Jerome of Prague, a schoolmaster, with a number of faithful Bohemians, and Taborites untold. To these I might also add Laurence Valla, and John Picus, the learned Earl of Mirandula. But why do I stand upon a recital of names, which are almost infinite?

⁷ “Wycliffe” is variously spelled, e.g., Wiclif, Wyclif, Wycliff, Wycliffe, or Wickliffe. The last is used throughout.

Therefore, if anyone is so deceived as to think that the doctrine of the church of Rome (as it now stands) is of such antiquity, and that it was never opposed before the time of Luther and Zuinglius (Zwingli), let him read these histories. Or if he thinks *this* history is not of sufficient credit to alter his persuasion, let him peruse the acts and statutes of parliament passed in this realm, and in them consider and discern the course of times. In the 5th of Richard II (A.D. 1382),⁸ he may read of a great number (who are there called *evil persons*) going about from town to town in frieze gowns,⁹ preaching to the people, etc. These preachers, although the words of the statute term them “dissembling persons, preaching diverse sermons containing heresies and notorious errors, to the emblemishment of the Christian faith, and of holy church,” etc., as the words there pretend. Yet notwithstanding, every true Christian reader may conceive of those preachers as teaching no other doctrine than they now hear their own preachers in pulpits, preaching against the bishop of Rome, and the corrupt heresies of his church.

He may also read in the 2nd of Henry IV. chap. 15, (A.D. 1402), of another like company of good preachers and faithful defenders of true doctrine, who stood against blind heresy and error. However, because of the corruption of that time, the words of the statute falsely term them “false and perverse preachers, under dissembled holiness, openly and privately teaching new doctrines and heretical opinions, contrary to the faith and determination of holy church,” etc. Yet notwithstanding, whoever reads histories, and discerns the order and descent of times, will understand these to be no false teachers, but faithful witnesses of the truth. They were not teaching any new doctrines contrary to the determination of “holy church.” Rather, the reader will find the church which they preached against, to be unholy, itself teaching heretical opinions that were contrary both to antiquity and the verity of Christ’s *true* catholic church.

In a letter from Henry Chichesly, Archbishop of Canterbury, to Pope Martin the Fifth, in the fifth year of his popedom (A.D. 1422), we find mention of a like number of faithful favorers and followers of God’s holy word, of whom he says, “there are many here in England infected with the heresies of Wickliffe and Huss; and without the force of an army, they cannot be suppressed,” etc. Upon which, the pope sent two cardinals to the archbishop, to cause a tithe to be gathered from all spiritual and religious men, and the money to be laid in the apostolic chamber. And if that were not sufficient, the remainder was to be comprised of chalices, candlesticks, and other implements of the church, etc.

Do we then need any more witnesses to prove this matter, when you see, so many years ago, whole armies and multitudes thus standing against the pope? Though they were then termed *heretics* and *schismatics*, yet in what their enemies called *heresy*, they served the living Lord within the ark of His true spiritual and visible church.

Where then is the frivolous boast of the papists (who make so much of their painted sheath, and would bear us down), that this government of the church of Rome which now exists, has been of such an old standing, time out of mind, even from primitive antiquity; and that there never was any other visible church here on earth for men to follow, besides the only catholic

⁸ [The British number their statutes by monarch; this is the 5th statute signed by Richard II.](#)

⁹ [Frieze: heavy woolen fabric with a long nap.](#)

mother-church of Rome? As we sufficiently proved before, by the continual descent of the church till this present time, the church *after* the doctrine which is now “reformed,” is no newly-begun matter. Rather, the *old* church, which has continued by the providence and promise of Christ, is still standing. Though in recent years it has been repressed by the tyranny of Roman bishops more than before, yet *notwithstanding*, it was never so oppressed that God did not maintain in it the truth of His gospel, *against* the heresies and errors of the church of Rome. This is to be seen more fully in this history.

Let us now proceed further in deducing this descent of the church to the year 1501, when grievous afflictions and bloody persecutions began to ensue upon Christ’s church for his gospel’s sake, as described in this history. Herein is to be seen what Christian blood has been spilt, what persecutions raised, what tyranny exercised, what torments devised, what treachery used against the poor flock and church of Christ — in such way that greater has not been seen since Christ’s time.

And now we come from that time (A.D. 1501), to the present year (A.D. 1570). In this time, the full seventy years of the Babylonish captivity well draws to an end. Or if we reckon from the beginning of Luther and his persecution, then subtract sixteen years. Now, what the Lord will do with this wicked world, or what rest He will give to his church after these long sorrows, he is our Father in Heaven. His will be done on earth as seems best to his divine Majesty.

[5]

In the meantime, for our parts, let us with all patient obedience await God’s time, and glorify his holy Name, and edify one another with all humility. And if there cannot be an end of our disputing and contending against one another, yet let there be moderation in it. And as it is the good will of our God, that Satan should thus be let loose among us for a short time, yet let us in the meanwhile strive as we can to amend the malice of the time with mutual humanity. Those who are in error, let them not disdain to learn; those who have greater talents of knowledge committed to them, let them instruct in simplicity those who are simple. No man lives in that commonwealth where nothing is amiss. Yet, because God has so placed us Englishmen here in one commonwealth, and also in one church, as in one ship together, let us not mangle or divide the ship, being divided perishes. But let every man serve with diligence and discretion in his order in which he is called. Let those who sit at the helm keep well the point of the needle, to know how and where the ship goes. Whatever weather betides us, the needle, if well-touched with the loadstone of God’s word, will never fail. Let those who labor at the oars, start for no tempest, but do what they can to keep from the rocks. Likewise, let those who are in inferior stations take heed that they move none to sedition or disturbance against the rowers and mariners. No storm is so dangerous to a ship on the sea, as discord and disorder in a commonwealth. The countries, nations, kingdoms, empires, cities, towns, and houses, that have been dissolved by discord is so manifest in history, that I need not spend time in repeating examples. May the God of peace, who has power over both land and sea, reach out his merciful hand to help those up who sink, to keep them up who stand, to still these winds and surging seas of discord and contention among us, so that we, *professing one Christ*, may in one unity of doctrine gather ourselves into one ark of the true church together. There, continuing steadfast in faith, we may at last be conducted safely to the joyful port of

our desired landing-place, by His heavenly grace! To Him be all power and glory, both in heaven and earth, with his Father and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

THE UTILITY OF THIS HISTORY

The world being filled with such an infinite multitude of all kinds of books, I may seem, perhaps, to take a superfluous and needless matter in hand at this present time, to write such volumes — especially of histories — considering that the world is so greatly pestered, not only with plenty of these, but with all other treatises. Books now seem to lack readers, rather than readers to lack books. I do not doubt that many both perceive, and lament the boldness of many these days, both in writing and printing this multitude of books. To say the truth, for my part I lament this as much as any man. I would therefore have no man think that I have attempted this enterprise unadvisedly or with rashness, but rather as someone who is not only doubtful, but also bashful and fearful for publishing it. For I perceived how learned this age of ours is in reading books. Nor could I tell what the judgment of readers would be, to see so weak a being undertake such a weighty enterprise. For I am not sufficiently furnished with eloquence to do justice to so great a history, nor sufficient to serve either the use of the studious, or the delight of the learned. The more I perceived this ability to be wanting in me, the less bold I felt to become a writer.

But again, on the other hand, when I weighed with myself what memorable acts have occurred in this later age of the church, by the patient sufferings of the worthy martyrs, I thought it not to be neglected, that so many precious monuments worthy of being recorded and registered, should be buried under darkness and oblivion, by my default. I thought something was to be said of them for their well-deserving, and something also for the benefit which we have received by them. But above all things, nothing so urged me forward as the consideration of the common utility which every man may plentifully receive by reading those monuments of martyrology. And as I have taken this history in hand chiefly for the use of the English church, I have written it in that tongue which the simple people could best understand.

Now, if men commonly delight so much in other chronicles which treat only matters of policy, and they take pleasure in reading the variable events of worldly affairs, the stratagems of valiant captains, the terror of battle fields, the sacking of cities, the turmoils of realms and people — and if men think it is such a great thing in a commonwealth to commit to history an account of these things, and to bestow all their wit and eloquence in adorning those — then how much more fitting is it for Christians to preserve in remembrance, the lives, acts, and doings, not of bloody warriors, but of the humble and constant martyrs of Christ? These serve not so much to delight the ear, as to improve the life, to show us examples of great profit, and to encourage men to all kind of Christian godliness.

And first, by reading about these, we may see a lively testimony of God's mighty working in the life of man, contrary to the opinion of the atheists. For as someone said of Harpalus in times past,¹⁰ that his doings gave a lively testimony against God, because being so wicked a man, he had escaped unpunished for so long. So contrariwise, in these martyrs we have a

¹⁰ *Harpalus*: a Macedonian aristocrat and childhood friend of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC.

much more assured and plain witness of God, in whose lives and deaths there appeared such manifest declarations of God's divine working. While in such sharpness of torments, we behold in them such constant strength above man's reach, such readiness to answer, such patience in imprisonment, such godliness in forgiving, such cheerfulness and courage in suffering, besides the manifold sense and feeling of the Holy Spirit which they so plentifully tasted in their afflictions, that in reading their letters we may evidently understand. Besides this, the humble deaths of the saints not a little avail to establish a good conscience, to teach us the contempt of the world, and to bring us to the fear of God. Moreover, they confirm faith, increase godliness, abate pride in prosperity, and open a hope of heavenly comfort in adversity. For what man reading the misery of these godly persons, may not behold in them, as in a mirror, his own case, whether he is godly or godless? For if God gave adversity to good men, what may not the better sort expect, or the evil fear? Just as by reading of profane histories, we are made perhaps more skillful in warlike affairs, so by reading this, we are made better in our livings. Besides this, we are better prepared for similar conflicts (if by God's permission they happen hereafter), made wiser by their doctrine, and more steadfast by their example.

To be brief, they declare to the world what true Christian fortitude is, and what is the right way to conquer. This does not stand in the power of man, but in the hope of the resurrection to come, and I trust, is now at hand.

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In consideration of this, I think I have good cause to wish that not only subjects, but also kings and princes, who commonly delight in heroic stories, would diligently peruse such monuments of martyrs, and keep them always in sight — not only to read, but to follow; and that they would paint them on their walls, cups, rings, and gates. For doubtless such persons as these are more worthy of honor than a hundred Alexanders, Hectors, Scipios, and warlike Caesars. And though the world judges things preposterously, yet with God, the true Judge, those who kill one another with a weapon are not to be reputed, but rather those who being killed in God's cause, retain an invincible constancy against the threats of tyrants, and the violence of tormentors. Such as these are indeed the true conquerors of the world. We learn true manhood from them, so many as fight under Christ, and not under the world. With this valiantness, that most humble Lamb and invincible Lion of the tribe of Judah, first of all went before us. We hear this prophetic admiration of His unspeakable fortitude, in Isa 63.1: "Who is this, travelling in the greatness of His strength?" Truly, it is the high Son of the high God, once conquered by the world, and yet conquering the world in the same manner that He was "conquered." Rom 8.37

All His martyrs followed in like course, to whom the ancient church attributed so much honor, as never king or emperor could purchase in this world — not with all their images, pillars, triumphs, temples, and all their solemn feasts. In proof of this, we see with what admiration the memory of those good martyrs was received and kept among the ancient Christians. It is thereby manifest in what estimation the martyrs were held in times past — with what gratulation, mirth, and general joy the afflictions of those godly men, dying in Christ's quarrel, were sometimes received and solemnized. And that was not without good and reasonable cause; for the church well considered how much she was beholden to them, by whose death

she understood her treasures to increase. Now then, if martyrs are to be compared with martyrs, I see no reason why the martyrs of our time deserve any less commendation than the others in the primitive church. They assuredly are in no point inferior to them, whether we view the number of those who suffered, or the greatness of their torments, or their constancy in dying, or consider the fruit that they brought to the improvement of posterity, and the increase of the gospel. The primitive martyrs watered with their blood, the truth that was newly springing up; so these later martyrs by their deaths restored it again, that truth being so decayed and fallen down. *They*, standing in the vanguard of the fray, received the first encounter and violence of their enemies, and taught us by that means to overcome such tyranny; *these* with like courage again, like old beaten soldiers, won the field in the rear of the battle. Like famous husbandmen of the world, they sowed the fields of the church that at first lay unfertilized and wasted; *these* with the richness of their blood caused it to grow and fructify. Would to God the fruit might speedily be gathered into the barn, which now only remains to come!

Now, if we ascribe reputation to godly preachers (and worthily so) who diligently *preach* the gospel of Christ, notwithstanding that they live, by the benefit of time, without any fear of persecution, then how much more cause do we have to praise and extol those men who stoutly spend their lives for its *defense*? All these premises being duly considered, and seeing that we have found such famous martyrs in this age of ours, let us not fail to publish and set forth their doings, lest in that point we seem more unkind to them than the writers of the primitive church were to theirs. And though we do not repute those primitive ashes, chains, and swords to be relics, yet let us yield this much to their commemoration: to glorify the Lord in his saints, and to imitate their deaths (as much as we may) with like constancy, or their lives at least with like innocency. They offered their bodies willingly to the rough handling of their tormentors. And is it so great a matter, then, for us to mortify our flesh, with all its members? ^{Col 3.5} They neglected not only the riches and glory of the world for the love of Christ, but also their lives. And shall we then make so great a stir against one another for the transitory trifles of this world? They continued in patient suffering when they had the greatest wrongs done to them, and when their very heart's blood gushed out of their bodies. And yet, will we not forgive our poor brother, however small the injury, but instead be ready to seek his destruction for every trifling offence? Wishing well to all men, they forgave their persecutors of their own accord. And therefore, we who are now the posterity and children of the martyrs, should not degenerate from their steps. But being admonished by their examples, even if we cannot express their charity toward all men, we can at least imitate it to the extent of our power and strength. Let us give no cause for offence; ^{2Cor 6.3} and if any offence is given to us, let us overcome it with patience — forgiving and not revenging it. And let us not only keep our hands from shedding blood, but also our tongues from hurting the fame of others. Besides this, if the case so requires it, by martyrdom or loss of life, and according to their example, let us not hesitate to yield our life in the defense of the Lord's flock. If men would do this, there would be much less contention in the world than there now is.

And thus much regarding the utility of this History.