

37. **The Millenary Petition, 1603**

The humble petition of the ministers of the Church of England, desiring reformation of certain ceremonies and abuses of the Church

To the most Christian and excellent prince, our gracious and dread sovereign, James, by the grace of God, [&c.], We, the ministers of the Church of England that desire reformation, wish a long, prosperous and happy reign over us in this life, and in the next everlasting salvation.

Most gracious and dread sovereign, seeing it hath pleased the Divine Majesty, to the great comfort of all good Christians, to advance your Highness according to your just title, to the peaceable government of this Church and Commonwealth of England; we the ministers of the gospel in this land, neither as factious men affecting a popular parity in the Church, nor as schismatics aiming at the dissolution of the state ecclesiastical; but as the faithful servants of Christ, and loyal subjects to your Majesty, desiring and longing for the redress of divers abuses of the Church, could do no less, in our obedience to God, service to your Majesty, love to his Church, than acquaint your princely Majesty with our particular griefs. For, as your princely pen writeth: 'The king, as a good physician, must first know what peccant humours his patient naturally is most subject unto, before he can begin his cure.' And, although divers of us that sue for reformation have formerly, in respect of the times, subscribed to the [Prayer] Book, some upon protestation, some upon exposition given them, some with condition[s], rather than the Church should have been deprived of their labour and ministry; yet now we, to the number of more than a thousand, of your Majesty's subjects and ministers, all groaning as under a common burden of human rites and ceremonies, do with one joint consent, humble ourselves at your Majesty's feet to be eased and relieved in this behalf. Our humble suit, then, unto your Majesty is, that [of] these offences following, some may be removed, some amended, some qualified:

I. *In the church-service.* That the cross in baptism, interrogatories ministered to infants, confirmation, as superfluous, may be taken away:

¹ HMC, 3rd report, p. 28b; *House of Lords Manuscripts*, xi, 3291.

baptism not to be ministered by women, and so explained: the cap and surplice not urged: that examination may go before the communion: that it be ministered with a sermon; that divers terms of *priests* and *absolution*, and some others used, with the ring in marriage, and other such like in the Book, may be corrected: the longness of service abridged: church-songs and music moderated to better edification: that the Lord's day be not profaned, the rest upon holy-days not so strictly urged: that there may be a uniformity of doctrine prescribed: no popish opinion to be any more taught or defended: no ministers charged to teach their people to bow at the name of Jesus: that the canonical scripture only be read in the church.

II. *Concerning church ministers.* That none hereafter be admitted into the ministry but able and sufficient men; and those to preach diligently, and especially upon the Lord's day: that such as be already entered, and cannot preach, may either be removed, and some charitable course taken with them for their relief; or else be forced, according to the value of their livings, to maintain preachers: that non-residency be not permitted: that King Edward's statute for the lawfulness of ministers' marriage be revived: that ministers be not urged to subscribe but according to the law to the Articles of Religion, and the King's Supremacy only.

III. *For church-livings and maintenance.* That bishops leave their commendams; some holding prebends, some parsonages, some vicarages with their bishoprics: that double-beneficed men be not suffered to hold some two, some three, benefices with cure, and some two, three, or four dignities besides: that impropriations annexed to bishoprics and colleges be demised only to the preachers-incumbents, for the old rent: that the impropriations of laymen's fees may be charged with a sixth or seventh part of the worth, to the maintenance of the preaching minister.

IV. *For church-discipline.* That the discipline and excommunication may be administered according to Christ's own institution; or, at the least, that enormities may be redressed: as, namely, that excommunication come not forth under the name of lay persons, chancellors, officials, &c.: that men be not excommunicated for trifles, and twelve-penny matters: that none be excommunicated without consent of his pastor: that the officers be not suffered to extort unreasonable fees: that none having jurisdiction, or registers' places, put out the same to farm: that diverse popish canons (as for restraint of marriage at certain times) be

reversed: that the longsomeness of suits in ecclesiastical courts, which hang sometimes two, three, four, five, six, or seven years, may be restrained: that the oath *ex officio*, whereby men are forced to accuse themselves, be more sparingly used: that licences for marriage, without banns asked, be more cautiously granted.

These, with such other abuses yet remaining, and practised in the Church of England, we are able to show not to be agreeable to the scriptures, if it shall please your Highness farther to hear us, or more at large by writing to be informed, or by conference among the learned to be resolved. And yet we doubt not but that, without any farther process, your Majesty, of whose Christian judgement we have received so good a taste already, is able of yourself to judge the equity of this cause. God, we trust, hath appointed your Highness our physician to heal these diseases. And we say with Mordecai to Esther, 'Who knoweth, whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time?' Thus your Majesty shall do that which, we are persuaded, shall be acceptable to God; honourable to your Majesty in all succeeding ages; profitable to his Church, which shall be thereby increased; comfortable to your ministers, who shall be no more suspended, silenced, disgraced, imprisoned, for men's traditions; and prejudicial to none, but to those that seek their own quiet, credit and profit in the world. Thus, with all dutiful submission, referring ourselves to your Majesty's pleasure for your gracious answer, as God shall direct you; we most humbly recommend your Highness to the Divine Majesty; whom we beseech for Christ's sake to dispose your royal heart to do herein what shall be to his glory, the good of his Church, and your endless comfort.

Your Majesty's most humble subjects, the ministers of the gospel, that desire not a disorderly innovation, but a due and godly reformation.

Fuller, *Church History*, III, 215-17

38. A proclamation enjoining conformity to the form of the service of God established, 16 July 1604

The care which we have had, and pains which we have taken, to settle the affairs of this Church of England in a uniformity, as well of doctrine as of government, both of them agreeable to the Word of God, the doctrine of the primitive Church, and the laws heretofore established for these matters in this realm, may sufficiently appear by our former actions. For no sooner did the infection of the plague, reigning im-

mediately after our entry into this kingdom, give us leave to have any assembly, but we held at our honour of Hampton Court for that purpose a conference between some principal bishops and deans of this Church and such other learned men as understood or favoured the opinions of those that seek alteration, before ourself and our Council.

Of which conference the issue was, that no well-grounded matter appeared to us or our said Council why the state of the Church here by law established should in any material point be altered. Nor did those that before had seemed to affect such alteration, when they heard the contrary arguments, greatly insist upon it, but seemed to be satisfied themselves, and to undertake within reasonable time to satisfy all others that were misled with opinion that there was any just cause of alteration. Whereupon we published by our proclamation¹ what had been the issue of that conference, hoping that when the same should be made known, all reasonable men would have rested satisfied with that which had been done, and not have moved further trouble or speech of matters whereof so solemn and advised determination had been made.

Notwithstanding, at the late assembly of our Parliament there wanted not many that renewed with no little earnestness the questions before determined, and many more as well, about the Book of Common Prayer, as other matters of church government, and importuned us for our assent to many alterations therein; but...the end of all their motions and overtures falling out to be none other in substance than was before at the conference at Hampton Court, that is, that no apparent or grounded reason was shown why either the Book of Common Prayer or the church discipline here by law established should be changed, which were unreasonable considering that particular and personal abuses are remediable otherwise than by making general alterations, we have thought good once again to give notice thereof to all our subjects by public declaration, who we doubt not but will receive great satisfaction when they shall understand that after so much impugning there appeareth no cause why the form of the Service of God wherein they have been nourished so many years should be changed; and consequently to admonish them all in general to conform themselves thereunto, without listening to the troublesome spirits of some persons who never receive contentment, either in civil or ecclesiastical matters, but in their own fantasies, especially of certain ministers who, under pretended zeal of reformation, are the chief authors of divisions

¹ Of 5 March 1604, *Foedera*, XVI, 574-6.