

An other letter or epistle of M. Bilney, to Cuthbert Tonstall B of London.

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Malchus hearing of Sermons.

Notes and differences between the true and false church.

Esay 38. Iere. 6. 3. Luke 11.

2. Theff. 2.

Notes and arguments proving, that it is not the true word of God, which hath bene preached in the Popes Church.

Amos 8.

This letter may well answer to the note of D. Saunders booke, intituled: The rocke of the Church, fol. 14. & nota. 5.

Apoc. 3.

Albeit I do not remeber, reuerent father in Christ, whether I haue either spoken or written, that the Gospell hath not bene sincerely preached now of long time, which your Lordshippe seemeth to haue gathered epyther by some Homes and sinfull hearers of my Sermons, who lyke Malchus hearing they right eare cut off, onely bying they left care to Sermons, or els by some wordes or writings of mine, which haue rashly passed me, rather then vpon any euill intent: yet for so much as in this behalte, your reuerence doth commaund me, and that of a good minde. I trust (for how can I thinke in Tonstall any craft or double-nes to dwell:) I will briefly declare vnto you, what I haue learned of God througħ Christ, in the Scriptures, & howe that the Doctors euen of great name & renowme, haue not taught the same of late in theyr sermons, referring or rather submitting all things vnto your fatherly iudgement, which is more quicke and sharpe, then that it can by any means be blinded, and so sincere, that it will not in any point seek flaunder or discord. Therefore I do confesse that I haue oft ben afraid, that Christ hath not bene purely preached now a long time, for who hath bene now a long season offered througħ him: who hath now this many yeares suffered any persecution for the Gospells sake? where is the sword which he came to send vpon the earth? And finally where are the rest of the sincere and vncorrupt fruites of the Gospell: which, because we haue not a long time seene, is it not to be feared that the tree which bringeth forth those fruites hath now a long time bene wanting in our region or colli-try: much lesse is it to be beleued, that it hath bene nourished amongst vs. Haue we not seene all things quiet and peaceable a long time? But what sayth the church? My grief most bitter, is turned to peace. &c. But the malignant church sayth: Peace, peace, and there is no peace: but onely that wherof it is written: When the mighty armed man kepeth his gates, he possesseth all things in quiet. But when he seeth, that he shall be vanquished of a stronger then he him selfe is, he spoyleth and destroyeth all things. What now a dayes begynneth agayne to be attempted? I dare not say. God graunt vs grace that we doe not refuse and reiect (if it bee Christ) him that cometh vnto vs, least that we doe feele that terrible iudgement agaynst vs: because (sayth he) they haue not receiued the loue of trueth, that they might be faued: therefore God will send vpon them the blindness of error, that they shall geue credite vnto lyes: & terrible sentence. (whiche God knoweth whether a great number haue not already incurred) that all they might bee iudged which haue not geuen credite vnto the trueth, but consented vnto iniquity. The tyme shall come (sayth he) when that they will not suffer the true doctrine to be preached. And what shall we the say of that learning, which hath now so long tyme raigned and triumphed, so that no man hath once opened his mouth agaynst it? Shall we thinke it sound doctrine? Truly iniquity did neuer moze abound, nor charity was neuer so cold. And what should we say to be the cause thereof? hath the cause bene for lacke of preaching agaynst the vices of men, and exhorting to charity? What cannot be, for many learned and greates clearkes sufficiently can witnesse to the contrary. And yet all these notwithstanding, we see the life and maners of men do greatly degenerate from true Christianity, and seme to cry out in deede, that it is fulfilled in vs, which God in times past threatened by his Prophet Amos, saying: Beholde, the day shall come (sayth the Lord) that I will send hunger vpon the earth, not hunger of bread, neither thirst of water, but of hearing the word of God, and the people shall be moued from sea to sea, and from the West vnto East, and shall runne about seekinge for the word of God, but shall not finde it. In those dayes the fayre Virgines and young men shall perish for thirst. &c. But now to passe ouer many things, wherby I am moued to feare, that the word of God hath not bene purely preached, thys is not the leaste argument, that they whiche come and are sent, and endeuour themselves to preach Christ truly, are euill spoken of for his name, which is the rocke of offence, and stumbling blocke vnto them which stumble vpon hys wordes, and doe not belcure on hym, on whome they are builded.

But you will aske who are those men, & what is theyr doctrine? Truly I say, whosoener entereth in by the doore Christ, into the shepfold: which thing all such shall do as seeke nothing els but the glozy of God, and saluation of soules. & all such it may be truly said, that whom y Lord sendeth, he presenteth the Angel of the church of Philadelphia, vnto whom Saynt John writeth, saying: This sayth he, which is holy and true, which hath the keyes of Dauid, whiche

openeth and no man shutteth, shutteth and no man openeth. Behold, sayth he speaking in the name of Christ (which is the doore and doorekeeper) I haue set before thee an open doore, that is to say, of the Scriptures opening thy sense, that thou shouldst vnderstand the Scriptures, and that, because thou hast entred in by me which am the doore: For whoso- euer, entereth in by me which am the doore shall be faued, he shall goe in and come out and find pasture, for the doorekeeper openeth the doore vnto him, and the sheepe heare his voyce. But contrariwise, they whiche haue not entred in by the doore, but haue clymed in some other way, by ambition, auarice or desire of rule, they shall, euen in a moment goe downe into hell, except they repent. And of them is the saying of Jeremye verified: All beautye is gone away from the daughter of Syon, because her princes are become lyke rammes, not finding pasture. And why so? Because like theeces & robbers they haue clymed an other way, not being called nor sent. And what meruaile is it, if they doe not preach, when as they are not sent, but tume for lucre, seeking theyr owne glozy, and not the glory of God and saluation of soules? And this is y roote of all mischief in the Church, that they are not sent inwardly of God. For without this inward calling, it helpeth nothing before God to be a hundred times cleete and consecrate, by a thousand Bulles, epyther by Pope, King, or Emperour. God be holdeth the harte, whose iudgements are according to truth, howsoeuer we deceyue the iudgement of men for a tyme: which also at the last, shall see theyr abhominacion. This (I say) is the originall of all mischief in the Church, that we thrust in our selues into the charge of soules, whose saluation and the glory of God (which is to enter in by the doore) we doe not thinke nor seeke for, but altogether our owne lucre & profit.

Whereupon it cometh, that wee knowe not howe to preach Christ purely: For how should they preach Christ (sayth the Apostle) except they be sent: for otherwise many theeces and robbers do preach him, but with theyr lippes onely, for theyr hart is farre from him. Neither yet do we suffer those which do know how to preach, but perforce them, and go about to oppresse the Scriptures now springing, vnder the pretence of godlinesse, fearing (as I suppose) least the Romaines should come & take our place. As thou wicked enemy Herode, why art thou afraid that Christe shoulde come: he taketh not away mortall and earthly kingdomes, which geueth heauenly kingdomes. & blindness, & our great blindnesse, yea more then that of Egypt: of the which if there be any that would admonish the people, by and by sayth Pharao: Moyses and Aaron, why do ye cause the people to cease from theyr labours? and truly called they labours. Get you to your burdens: Lay more worke vpon them, and cause them to do it, that they harken not vnto lyes. Thus the people was dispersed througħout all y land of Egypt, to gather by chaffe: I say to gather by chaffe, who shall graunt vnto vs the God shall say: I haue looked downe, and beholden the affliction of my people, which is in Egypt, and haue heard theyr sighes, and am come downe to deliuer them. But whether hath thys zeale carryed me? whether after knowledg or not, I dare not say: it pertyneth to you, reuerent father, to iudge the- vpon.

Now you do looke y I should shew vnto you at large (as you write) how that they ought sincerely to preach, to the better edefying hereafter, of your flocke. Here I cōfesse I was afraid, that you had spoke in some derision, vntill that I well perceiued, that you had written it with your owne hand. When agayne, I beganne to doubt for what intent Tonstall should require that of Bilney: an old soldour, of a young beginner: the cheife Pastor of London, of a poore silly sheepe. But for what intente so euer you did it, I trust it was of a good minde. And albeit that I am weake of bodie, yet througħ the grace of Christ geuen vnto me, I will attempt this matter, although it doe farre passe my power: vnder the which burden, if I be oppressed, yet I will not deceiue you, for that I haue promised nothing, but a prompt and ready will to do that which you haue commaunded.

As touching that pertyneth to y preaching of the Gospell, I would to God you would geue me leaue pryuate to talke w you, that I mighte speake freely, that which I haue learned in the holy Scriptures for the consolation of my conscience: which if you will so do, I trust you shall not repent you. All things shall be submitted vnto your iudgement: who (except I be utterly deceaued) will not breake the reede that is bruised, and put out the flaxe that is smoking, but rather, if I shall be found in any error (as in deed I am a man) you as spirituall, shall restore me througħ y spirite of gentleness, considering your selfe, least that you also be temptyd: For euery Byshop which is taken from among men, is ordayned for menne, not violentlye to assaults. those which

John 80.

Who entereth in by the doore, &c who not.

Lament. 1.

Outward calling by kynges and princes in Chrities ministry away- leth nothing without the inward calling of God.

The roote of all mischief in the Church. Ex Prudentio.

Lay thys letter agaynst Doct. Saunders booke afore sayd. Exod. 5.

The persecuters of our time compared to Pharao.

Esay 42.

Hebr. 5.