

The English Catholics' Letter to James I (1603)

Transcript

British Library, Stowe MS 180, ff. 3r–3v

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Most puyfant prince and orient monarch. suche are the rare p[er]fecc[i]ons and admirable guyftes wherew[i]th the bountyfull hande of goddes devyne ma[jes]tie hathe indewed yo[u]r ma[jes]tie, as in the depth of yo[u]r provident Iudgment, wee doubt not but you foresee what concerneth both the spyrituall and temporall goverment of all your kingdoms and domynyons Notw[i]thstandinge, yo[u]r graces most afflicted subiect[es] and devoted s[e]rvant[es], the Catholiques of England, partelie to p[re]sent synister informac[i]ons w[hi]ch happelie maie possesse yo[u]r sacred eares, before o[u]r aunswere be harde, p[ar]telie, as men, almost overwhelmed w[i]th p[er]secuc[i]ons for o[u]r conscience, wee are inforced to haue speedie recourse in hope of speedie reliefe from yo[u]r highnes, And to p[re]sent theese humble lynes vnto yo[u]r Roiall p[er]son, to pleade for vs some com[m]yserac[i]on and favour / Alas what alleageance can any temporall prince desier or expecte at his vassall[es] handes, w[hi]ch wee are not addressed to p[er]forme/ Howe manie noble men, and worthie gentlemen most zealous in the Catholique religion, haue indured, som[m]e losse of land[es] and lyving[es], some exile, some ymprisonment, for yo[u]r blessed mothers right vnto the Septer of Albion, Naye, whose fynger did ever ake, but Catholiques for yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ies] p[re]sent title and dominion, howe many fled to yo[u]r Courte, offeringe them selves as hostages for their frendes, to lyve and die in yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ies] quarrell, yf ever adversarie had opposed hymself against the equitie of yo[u]r cause, yf this they attempted w[i]th their princes disgrace, to obtaine yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ies] grace, what will they doe, naye what will they not doe, to lyve w[i]thout disgrace in yo[u]r graces favor, {the many} of this {Realme yf} wee respecte Religion, (settinge pettie sectes aside) consisteth vpon fowre p[ar]tes, Protestant[es], whoe haue dominyred all the former Queenes daies) Purytant[es], whoe haue crept vpp apace amongst them, Athiest[es], or polliticians, whoe were bred vpon their brawles and contenc[i]ons in matters of faithe, [*Left margin: The Papist[es] supplicac[i]on to the Kinge.]* And Catholiques, whoe as they are opposite to all, soe are they detested of all, because error was ever an enemy to truthe. Hardlie all, or any twoe of oþ the first three, can be suppressed, and therefore wee beseeche yo[u]r ma[jes]tie to yelde vs as muche favour, as others of contra^rie religion, To what shalbe publiquellie p[ro]fessed in England, shall obteyne at yo[u]r hand[es], For yf o[u]r faulte be lyke or lesse, or none at all in equitie, our punyshement ought to be like, lesse, or none at all/ The gates, Arches, and pyramydes of Fraunce proclaymed the p[re]sent kynge *pater patriae pacis restitutor* / Because that kingdome beinge willinge wellnigh torne in peeces w[i]th Civell warres, and made a prairie to forreigne foes, was by his p[ro]vident wysdome and valoure, acquitted in hit self, and hostile straungers expelled, the w[hi]ch^{he} principallie effected, by condescendinge to tollerate them of an adverse Religion to that was openlie p[ro]fessed Questionlesse, (dreede sou[er]aigne) the kingdome of England by cruell p[er]secucion of Catholiques, hath bene almost odious to all [Christ]iane nac[i]ons, Trade, and Traffique, is exceedinglie decayed, warres and bloude hathe seldome ceased, Subsidies and Taxes, never soe many, discontent myndes innumerable, all w[hi]ch yo[u]r

ma[jes]t[ies] princelie counten^ance to yo[u]r humble suppliant[es] the afflicted Catholiques, will easelie redresse, speciallie at

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this yo[u]r highnes first ingresse, *Si loquatur ad eos verba levia, erant tibi servi cunctis dictus*. And the sage Counsellors of Solomon to Reboam for enlargement after affliction, resembleth a p[re]sent gale after a vehement tempest and a benyfytt in distresse doubleth the value thereof/ Howe gratefull will yt be to all Catholique princes abroade, and honorable be yo[u]r ma[jes]ty to vnderstande, howe Q. E. severitie is chaunged into yo[u]r Royall clemencye, and that the lenitie of a man, reedified that, with the mysinformed angre of a woman destroyed, That the Lion Rampant is passant, whereas the passant had some Rampant/ Howe acceptable shall all yo[u]r subiect[es] be to all Catholique Countries, whoe are nowe almost abhorred of all, when they shall p[er]ceave yo[u]r highnes p[re]pareth not pikes and prisons for the p[ro]fessors of their faiethe, but p[er]mytteth them temples and Altars for the vse of their religion/ Then wee shall see w[i]th eies, and touche w[i]th o[u]r fyngers, that happie benedic[i]on of Esaie in this lande, that sword[es] are chaunged into ploughes, and launces into Sythes, And all nacions admiringe vs, will saye, *Hi sunt semen cui benedixit dominus* / Wee request noe more favor at yo[u]r graces handes, then that wee maie securelie beleve and p[ro]fesse that Catholique Religion, w[hi]ch all yo[u]r happie pr[e]decessors p[ro]fessed, from Dowaldus first converted vnto yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ies] pereles mother last martired. A Religion most venerable for antiquitie, maiesticall, for amplitude, constant, for contynuaunce, irrepr[e]hensible for doctrine, indurrynge to all kynde of vertue and pietie, diswadinge from all synnes and wickednes, A Religeon beleved by all primatyve pastors, established by all æconomicall Counsayll[es], vphelde by all auncient doctors, maynteyned by the first and best [Christ]ian Emperours, recorded almost alone in all ecclesiasticall histories, sealed w[i]th the bloud of myllions of martirs, adorned w[i]th the vertues of soe many confessors, beautified w[i]th the puritie of thowsand[es] of virgins, soe conformable to natural sence and reason, And finallie soe agreable to godes worde and gospell, the free vse of this religion wee request, yf not in publique Churches, at least in private howses, yf not w[i]th approbac[i]on, yet w[i]th tollerac[i]on w[i]thout malestac[i]on, Assure yo[u]r grace that howsoever some p[ro]testant[es] or puritanes incited by morall honestie ^{of liefe}, or innated instincte of nature, or for feare of some temporall punyshement, p[re]tende obedience to yo[u]r highnes lawes, yet certenlie, the onlie Catholiques for conscience ^{sake} observe them, for they defendinge that princes p[re]cept[es] and statut[es], oblige noe subiect[es] vnder the penaltie of synne, will lyttle care in conscience to transgresse them, w[hi]ch principally is tormented w[i]th the guylte of synne, But catholiques confessinge merit in obeying and demerite in transgressinge, cannot but in soule be grevouslie touched for the least p[er]variac[i]on thereof/ Wherefore most m[er]cifull sou[r]aigne, wee yo[u]r longe afflicted subiect[es] the Catholiques, in all dutyfull submyssion, p[ro]test before the ma[jes]tie of god and all his holie Aungell[es], as loiall obedience, and as ym[m]aculate alleageaunce vnto yo[u]r grace, as ever did faithfull subiect[es] in England or Scotland vnto yo[u]r highnes p[ro]genytors, and intend as suerlie w[i]th o[u]r goodes and lyves to serve you, as ever did the loiallest Isralites, kyng David, or the trustiest legions, the Romane Emperours/ And thus expectinge yo[u]r ma[jes]t[ies] custom[ar]y favor and gracious bountie we rest yo[u]r devout suppliant[es] to hym whose hand doe mannage the hartes of king[es]^{and} w[i]th reciprocate mercie will acquite the m[er]cifull

yo[u]r sacred ma[jes]t[ies] most devoted servaunt[es] the Catholiques of England

Other manuscript witnesses

- All Souls College, MS 155, ff. 54–56v
- British Library, Additional MS 44848, ff. 111v–114r
- British Library, Harley MS 3791, ff. 120x–121x
- British Library, Harley MS 4761, ff. 10r–13r
- British Library, Sloane MS 1775, ff. 57r–58v
- 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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<https://mpese.ac.uk/t/CatholicsLetterJamesI1603v1.html>