

Letter to his Father, the Earl of Manchester (21 November 1635)

Walter Montagu

Transcript

British Library, Additional MS 22591, ff. 99r–101r

99r

Maister Walter Montague his letter to his Father the E[arl] of Manchester lorde Privye seale touching his Reconconsilement to the Church of Rome, Paris xxith Nove[m]b[er] 1635:

My lord

After my duetie remembred much debate Concerninge the Fittest Expr[ess]ion of my duetie vnto you[r] Lo[rds]hipp, whether I ought by Scilence, Seeke to Suspend yo[u]r Beleeve of the declaracion of my Selfe / I haue made heere by A Cleere Profession of it, I assure you/ of what I Feare to present w[i]th an Apprehension of A misinterpr[e]ted affection, I Conclude what was most Satisfactory to my Selfe / and Imediate duetie, to God was most Iustificable to my Second / and derivatiue to Nature / Therefore I resolved soe soone to give you this Ingenious Accompte of my Selfe /

The greatest parte of my liffe Capable of distinctions of Religions, hath bine Employed in Places, and Conversant with p[er]sons opposite to the Faithe I was bredd in / Therefore itt had bine Strang if Naturall Curiositie / w[i]thout anye Spirrituall p[ro]vocation had not invited mee to the desire of looking w[i]th mine owne Eyes / vpon the Foundacions I troade vpon / rather then holding Fast blind Folde by my Educacion to agree to be carryed awaye allwayes after Insensible of all Stocks / I meante to vnfasten mee / And besydes I was Sollicited by the reproaches Protestants Presse vpon the Cathoquies that they blindly beleeeue all the Impostures of the Church / w[i]thout anye Illuminacio[n] of [the]ir Iudgement / This mee thought enioyned mee the clearest Information of my Selfe/ of the differences betwixt vs I could p[ro]pose to my Capacitye/ Soe all my last Iourneye into Italie/ I did applie all my leysure to A more Iustefiable Settlem[en]t of my beleeve (as I there w[i]th Imagyned by Confirmacion of my Iudgement in what had bine Introduced by my Birthe and Educacion/ I begann w[i]th this Consideration that there were two Sortes of questions betweene the Catholiques and the Protestants/ The One of right doctrine, the other of Facte or Storye / as This / Whether Luther were the newe Erector of the Protestant Faithe / Whether it had A vissible Appearance of Pastors, and Teachers before his Tyme / I resolved to begin my Enquirye w[i]th the questions of Faithe / For theis reasons First because theis are Soe fewe / and Be Compr[e]hensible by all Capacity^{es} and the Controversies of doctrine soe Intricate, and soe manye as they required much Tyme / and learning For their disquisition onelye / and I Found my selfe vnprovided of both theies Inquisitions for this vndertaking / and for the derision of the oth[er] I needed not much p[re]sumption to beleeve ~~{gap: illegible}~~ my selfe A Competent Iudge, when it consisted onelye in the p[er]usuall of authentique Testimonys Secondlye I considered that there was noe One pointe of Controld

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verted doctrine / whereon all the rest depended / but ^{that} this One question of Faith was such as the derision thereof determynd

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all the ~~{gap: illegible}~~ rest, For yf Luther could be proved to be Innovater of [th]e Protestant Faith / it is then necessariye {Evicted} to be the true au[n]tient Apostolicall religion / therefore I begann w[i]th this Enquiry w[hi]ch Protestants are bound to make to au[n]swere this obiection / to finde out an Existence of some Professors of the reformed doctrines before Luthers Tyme / For Finding the Protestan the Catholiques were not to prove their Negatiue, it was my parte to p[ro]ue my Selfe the affirmatiue/ that our Religion was noe Innovat[i]on By some Preexistence before that Tyme / But in the perusall of all the historyes / or Recordes Ecclesiasticall / or Civill I could chose, I could Finde noe Au[n]tienter a dissencion from the Romaine church then Waldoe / Wickliffe / or Husse / whoe scarce had relacion to the newe Professed Protestancye / Soe as I Found A dissention from about Eight hundred yeares From the Tyme all Protestan[t]es Confesse an Vnitie w[i]th the Church of Rome / downe to thos p[er]sons w[i]thout anye Apparant Profession / to A different Faithe / To answeere my Selfe in this Pointe / I read manye of our Protestant Authours, that treated of it, and I Founde most of them repleye to this Sence in w[hi]ch I Cite heere one of the most Authentique, doct[or] whitaker, in his Cent: 243 : Pa: 479: where they aske of vs where our Church was heeretofore for Soe manye Ages / wee au[n]swere that it was in a Secrett Solitude / that is to saye it was concealed / and laye hid From the Sight of men / And Further the same docter Chap: 4: Pag 502: Our Church allwayes was / but you saye it was not Visible, doth that proue that it was nott / For itt laye hidd in in A Solitarye Concealement/ To this direct Sence all the A[u]nsweres were that I could meete to this Obiection / This Confession of Invisibilitie in our Church For Soe manye Ages / did much p[er]plex mee / it seduced to mee to offend even Naturall reason / Such A derogation fro[m] Gods power and Providence as the sufferance of soe greate an Eclipse as the light of his True Church / And such A Church as this is described to be / ~~seduced~~ Seemed to mee to be repugant to the maine reason whye God hath A Church vpon Earthe / w[hi]ch is to be Conseruor of the doctrine Christ preached / and to convey it From Age to Age, vntill the Ende of the worlde / Therefore I applyed my Studye to p[er]use such Arguments as the Catholiques brought For the p[ro]ofe of the necessitie of the Continuall Vissibillitye of the true Church downe from the Apostles Tyme / in all Ages / And in Apperau[n]ce of Pastors teaching and Administring the Sacram[en]t[es] / In p[ro]ofe of this I Found they brought manye Prophesyes out of the Scriptures, But this Text most litterall / out of the 4th of Ephesians / Christe hath Placed in his Church / Pastors / and doctors till [th]e Co[n]sum[matio]n of the Saincts / till wee all meete in the vnitye of the Faith / And next they discourse vpon w[hi]ch they Inferre this necessary visible Succession of the Church Seemed to mee to be a most rationall and {Convislaige} One w[hi]ch is to this Effecte Naturall reason being not Able to Proportion vnto A man A Course [tha]t might certainlye bring him to State of sup[er]naturall happinesse / yett such a Cou[r]se being necessarye to Mankinde / w[hi]ch other wise would totallie faile of the End it was Created For, there remayned noe other waye, but that it must be p[ro]posed vnto vs by one whose authoritye wee could not doubte of / and that in soe plaine A Manner as the Simple might be capable of / As well as the Learned/ This worke was p[er]formed by our Saviour From whose Mouth all our Faithe is originallie derived / But the Succeeding Ages nott being able to receive it from thence / it was necessarye it should

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bee conveyed vnto them that lived in by those that did receive it From Christs owne Mouthe/ and soe from Age to Age/ to end of the worlde And in w[ha]t Age soever the thrid of doctrine should be broken it might be Acknowledged for the reasons above mentiond/ that the light [tha]t should Conveye Mankinde through the darke passages of this world was Extinguished/ and it selfe w[i]thout A guide to Infallable ruine w[hi]ch cannott stand w[i]th Gods Providence / and goodnes w[hi]ch St Augustine affirmeth in his opynion directlye in his Booke *de utilitate Credendi* Cap: 16 : Saying if devine Providence doth Presede our humaine affayes / it is not to be doubted but that there is some authoritye Constituted by the same God vpon w[hi]ch goeing as vpon Certaine Steps wee are carryed vpp to God/ nor can it be sayde that he meante the Scriptures onelye by theis Stepps, Since experience sheweth that the alteration about the right Sence of the Severall most important Causes of it; That what there is Conceived there cannott bee A Competent rule for Mankinde, w[hi]ch Consisteth more of [th]e simple then learned men / And besydes the Scriptures must be supposed to haue bine kept safe in some handes whose authoritie must begett acceptau[n]ce of itt, w[hi]ch being noe other then the Church in all Ages wee haue noe more reason to beleeeve that it hath pr[r]served [th]e Scriptures free from Corrupc[i]on then that it hath mayneteyned it Selfe w[i]th A Continuall visibiletie, w[hi]ch St Augustine Concludeth to be A Certaine Marke of the True Church in theis wordes in his Booke *Contra Petil[iani]* Cap:140: The true Church hath this Certane signe that it cannott be hidd / therefore it must be knowne to all Nations, but that Parte of the donatists is vnknowne vnto manye / therefore it cannott be true/ Noe Inference can be Stronger then fro[m] thence that the Concealem[en]t of A Church disproveth the truth of it, Lastlie not to Insist vpo[n] theire Allegation of the sence of all the Fathers of the Church in everye Severall Age/ w[hi]ch seemed to me most Cleere that w[hi]ch in this Case weighed much w[i]th mee, was the Confession / and Testemonye of the Approved doctors themselues of the Protestant Church / as in Hoker, in his First Booke of Ecclesiasticall Pollicye Page 126: God allwayes had and must haue some visible Church vpon Earthe / doct[or] Feild 1: of Ecclesiasticall Polecye Cap:10: It cannot be but that those that are the true Church must be knowne by the Profession of Truthe / And Further the same doc[tor] Saithe how should the Church be in the World / and noe Boddye professe openlye that saveing Truth of God / And doct[or] white in his defence of the waye Cap:44: Pag: 79: The Providence of God hath lefte Monuments, and Storyes For the Confirmatio[n] of our Faithe / And I Confesse truelye that our Religion is False if A Continuall descent of it Cannot be demonstrated by those Monuments downe From Christs Tyme / this appeared to mee A direct Submission of themselves to Produce the Apparant testimonyes of the Publique Profession of theire Faithe as the Catholiques demaunded But this I could never reade or knowe of anye that had performed itt For docter White himselfe for wante of Proofoe of this is Faine to saye in another place in his waye to the Churche pa:5: The doctors of our Church haue had A Contynued Successeon though not visible to the World. Soe as he flyeth from his vndertaking of A Conspicuous demonstrac[i]on of [th]e monum[en]t[es] of his Faithe, to an Invisible Subterfuge of releife w[i]thout Apperance for he saithe in the same booke in another place Pag. 84: all [th]e Exte[r]nall governem[en]t of the Church maye Faile / Soe a locall/ and personall

su[c]cession

Succession of Po-~~gap: illegible~~-stors maye be Interrupted, And Pag 403: wee doe not Contest for an externall Succession. It sufficeth that they succeeded in the doctrine of the Apostells / and the Faithfull / w[hi]ch in all ages did Embrace the same Faithe / Soe as heere he renounceth absolutely all Externall prooffe of Succession w[hi]ch before hee consented to be Iudged by / I Cannott saye I haue Verbatim Cited theis authors / because I haue translated theis Places / though the Originall bee in English I am sure the sence is noe wayes Iniured / And I haue chosen to alledge doct[or] Whits Authoreties because hee is an Orthodox Professor of [th]e P[ro]testa[n]t Church The reflection vpon the Estate of this question wherein I haue Found the Protestants defend themselves onely by Flying out of Sight By Confessing A longe visibilitie in their Church / the Appearance of Pastors / and doctors left mee much loosened from the fastnes of my Professed Religion / but had not yett transposed me in to the Catholique Church / For I had an opynion that [th]e devines might yett fill vpp this vacuitie w[i]th some more substantiall Matter then I could meete w[i]th / Soe I came backe into England w[i]th A Purpose of Seeking nothinge more Intentlye / as this Satisfacc[i]on / and this p[ur]pose I did Covertlye vnder anothers name send this my Scruple to one in whose learning / and Sufficiencie I had most Affyance in theis Termes whether there was noe Visible Succession in [th]e p[ro]testa[n]t Church since the Apostles Tyme downe to Luther / And what was to be au[n]swered to that Obiection / besydes the Confession of a Latencie & Invisibletie for soe manye Ages / to this I could gett noe au[n]swere, but that this Pointe had bine largelie and learnedlye handled by doctor White and manye others of our Church / vppon this I resolved to Enforme my Selfe in some other Points w[hi]ch seemed to be vnwarrantable and sup[er]stitious in the Ceremonies of the Romaine Church Since I had such an Inducement as soe little Satisfaction in A pointe that seemed to mee soe Essentiall / and in all theis Scruples I found myne owne mistakes in the behalfe of the tenent[es] of the Catholique Church gaue mee [th]e only occasion of Scandall / and not the practise of their doctrine / and to co[n]firme mee in that satisfacc[i]on I found the practise and authoritie of most of [th]e au[n]tient Fathers / and in the Protestants refutations of their doctrines theire refutac[i]ons of theire Authorities / as men that might erre Since that the question seemed then to mee / whether I would rather hazard the Erring w[i]th them / then w[i]th the Latter reformers w[hi]ch Consequentye might erre allsoe in their dissenting from them / I will not vndertake to disipate the severall tenent[es] Controducted / Nor doubt that yo[u]r Lo[rds]hipp will suspect that I omitted my Satisfaction in anye of them / since my resolucion of reconciling my Selfe to the Romaine Church / is not lyable to any suspicion of too Forwards or precipitate A resignation of my Selfe / My Iudgment maye be censured of Seducement / my affecc[i]on cannot bee or Corrupc[i]on / vppon theis occasions I did soone after my retourne into England reconsyle my selfe to the Romaine Catholicke Church by her externall workes / and her Internall obiect Faithe soe dexteriouslye as yf my Fortune had read it vnto mee / Nor doe I nowe professe it to be soe da[n]gerous / but it maye recover, For I knowe the kings wisdom is rightlye enformed that the Catholique Faithe doth not tend to the Alienation of the heart of A Subiect, it rather sup[er] infuseth obedience / and reverence to Monarchie / & strengtheneth and straightneth the bonds to our obedience to our naturall Prince / and his grate and goodnes shall never finde any oth[er] occasion or diversion of them fro[m] the Naturall / and vsuall exercise of the[m]selves vpon those that haue had the honor to haue bine bredd w[i]th App[ro]batio[n] of Fidelitie in his Service / Nor cann I Feare that yo[u]r Lo[rds]hipp should

appr[e]hend

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appr[e]hend anye Change in my duetie, even yo[u]r displeasure w[hi]ch maye apprehend
vpon this misinterpreted occasion shall never giue anye of the least recession from my duetie /
In w[hi]ch Profession I humblye aske yo[u]r Blessinge

yo[u]r lo[rdshi]ps most obedient sonne

paris 21: nouemb: 1635:

The Answere

maister Walter Mountague Cheifflye insists vppon [tha]t pointe where was our Church before
Luther

A Sacke of Meale was brought From Mill and when it came into the backehouse some Few
Pecks were taken out and boulted, and soe the Flower Sep[ar]ated From the Brane / till nowe
more Tell mee nowe where was the Flower whilst the grist was coming from the Mill / will
you not saye it was in the Sacke / but you will saye itt was not then boulted / tis True and
thats the verye pointe / Our church is nothing els but A parte of the Romaine Church / or
rather of Westerne Church / boulted in this last age / and the Fine Flower [tha]t was there
sep[ar]ated From the branne of Superstion and other Popishe Ceremonies tell mee nowe
where was our Church before Luther

Other manuscript witnesses

- British Library, Harley MS 1576, ff. 309x–311r
- British Library, Harley MS 6866, ff. 210x–225x
- British Library, Lansdowne MS 209, ff. 109x–164x
- Beinecke Library, Osborn File 16729
- Bodleian Library, 4o Rawl. 550, ff. 6v–17v
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 749, item 9, 2–9
- Lambeth Palace Library, MS 943, ff. 381–388
- Queen's College, MS 121, ff. 53–63
- UCL, Ogden MS 7/29, ff. 68r–v

Seventeenth-century print exemplars

- Walter Montagu, *The Cobby of a letter sent from France by Mr. Walter Mountagu to his father the Lord Privie Seale, with his answere thereunto also a second answere to the same letter by the [Lord] Faulkland* (1641) [Wing M2472]
- Lucius Cary, 2nd Viscount Falkland, *A discourse of infallibillity...also Mr Walter Mountague (Abbot of Nanteul) his letter against Protestantism and his Lordship's answer thereunto* (1651) [Wing F317], pp. 269–298
- Lucius Cary, 2nd Viscount Falkland, *A discourse of infallibillity...also Mr Walter Mountague (Abbot of Nanteul) his letter against Protestantism and his Lordship's answer thereunto* (1660) [Wing F318], pp. 269–298