

186. Prohibiting Unlicensed Printing of Scripture, Exiling Anabaptists, Depriving Married Clergy, Removing St. Thomas à Becket from Calendar

[Westminster, 16 November 1538, 30 Henry VIII]

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THE KING'S MOST ROYAL MAJESTY, being informed that sundry contentions and sinister opinions have, by wrong teaching and naughty printed books, increased and grown within this his realm of England and other his dominions among his loving subjects of the same, contrary to the true faith, reverence, and due observation of such sacraments, sacramentals, laudable rites, and ceremonies as heretofore have been used and accustomed within the Church of England, whereof his highness is justly and lawfully sovereign, chief, and supreme head in earth immediately under Christ; esteeming also that by occasion of sundry printed books in the English tongue that be brought from outward parts, and by such like books as have been printed within this his realm, set forth with privilege, containing annotations and additions in the margins, prologues, and calendars, imagined and invented as well by the makers, devisers, and printers of the same books, as by sundry strange persons called Anabaptists and Sacramentaries, which be lately come into this realm, where some of them do remain privily unknown, and by some

his highness' subjects, using some superstitious speeches and rash words of erroneous matters, and fanatical opinions, both in their preachings and familiar communications, whereby divers and many of his loving simple subjects have been induced and encouraged, arrogantly and superstitiously, to argue and dispute in open places, taverns, and alehouses, not only upon the Holy Sacrament of baptism, but also upon the most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, and further to break, contemn, and despise of their own private wills and appetites, other Holy Sacraments, laudable rites, and ceremonies heretofore used and accustomed in his grace's realm and Church of England, not only to the great slander of sundry the King's true, simple, and unlearned subjects and other, but also to the reproach and vituperation of this said whole realm and church, to his grace's high discontentation and displeasure, with danger of increase of the said enormities and abuses, unless his highness should speedily reform and redress the same:

Whereupon his majesty, most prudently pondering and considering the great cure and charge which it hath pleased Almighty God of his infinite goodness to commit to his majesty over all the congregation of the said Church of England, and above all things earnestly willing and desiring to advance and set forth the holy word of God, to his divine honor and glory, and to conserve his said realm and church, committed to his charge, in peace, unity, rest, and tranquillity, clear and void from all wicked errors, erroneous opinions, and dissension, doth therefore straightly charge and command by this his present proclamation, as well all and singular his subjects, of what degree or quality soever they be, as all other residents or inhabitants within this his realm, or within any his grace's dominions, that from henceforth they and every of them for his part shall obey, keep, and observe all and singular such articles as hereafter follow, upon the pains and penalties contained and specified in the same.

First, for expelling and avoiding the occasion of the said errors and seditious opinions by reason of books imprinted in the English tongue, brought and transported from outward parts, the King's most royal majesty straightly chargeth and commandeth that no person or persons, of what estate, degree, or condition soever he be, shall from henceforth (without his majesty's special license) transport or bring from outward parts into this his realm of England, or any other his grace's dominions, any manner books printed in the English tongue, nor sell, give, utter, or publish any such books from henceforth to be brought into this realm, or into any his highness' dominions, upon the pains that the offenders in that article shall not only incur and run into his grace's most high displeasure and indignation but also shall lose and forfeit unto his majesty all his or their goods and chattels and have imprisonment at his grace's will.

Item, that no person or persons in this realm shall from henceforth print any book in the English tongue, unless upon examination made by some

of his grace's Privy Council, or other such as his highness shall appoint, they shall have license so to do; and yet so having, not to put these words *cum privilegio regali*, without adding *ad imprimendum solum*, and that the whole copy, or else at the least the effect of his license and privilege be therewith printed, and plainly declared and expressed in the English tongue underneath them; nor from henceforth shall print or bring into this his realm any books of divine Scripture in the English tongue with any annotations in the margin, or any prologue or additions in the calendar or table, except the same be first viewed, examined, and allowed by the King's highness or such of his majesty's council, or other, as it shall please his grace to assign thereto, but only the plain sentence and text, with a table or repertory instructing the reader to find readily the chapters contained in the said book, and the effects thereof; nor shall henceforth print any book of translations in the English tongue unless the plain name of the translator thereof be contained in the said book; or else that the printer will answer for the same as for his own privy deed and act, and otherwise to make the translator, the printer, and the setter forth of the same, to suffer punishment, and make fine at the King's will and pleasure.

Item, that no person or persons using the occupation of printing of books in this realm shall print, utter, sell, or cause to be published any books of Scripture in the English tongue until such time as the same books be first viewed, examined, and admitted by the King's highness, or one of his Privy Council, or one bishop of this realm, whose name also his grace willeth shall be therein expressed, upon pain not only to incur and run into the King's most high displeasure and indignation but also to lose and forfeit all their goods and chattels and suffer imprisonment at his grace's will and pleasure.

Item, forasmuch as divers and sundry strangers of the sect and false opinion of the Anabaptists and Sacramentaries been lately come into this realm, where they lurk secretly in divers corners and places, minding craftily and subtly to provoke and stir the King's loving subjects to their errors and opinions, whereof part of them by the great travail and diligence of the King's highness and his council be apprehended and taken: the King's most royal majesty declareth and notieth to all his loving subjects that his highness, like a godly and a Catholic prince, abhorreth and detesteth the same sects and their wicked and abominable errors and opinions, and intendeth to proceed against such of them as be already apprehended, according to their merits and the laws of his realm, to the intent his subjects shall take example by their punishments not to adhere to their false and detestable opinions, but utterly forsake and relinquish the same, which his highness straightly commandeth them to do, upon pain of like punishment; and also wheresoever any such be known, they shall be detected, and with as convenient diligence as may be, disclosed unto his majesty, or some of his council, to the intent they may be punished according to their deserts;

and the maintainers, abettors, printers, sellers, keepers, or utterers of any books, out of the which any such lewd opinions, either against the most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, or setting forth any erroneous opinion of the said Anabaptists, may be gathered, his highness also intendeth in like case to punish, as is aforesaid, without any favor or mercy to be showed to any of them offending in any of the premises.

And over this his majesty straightly chargeth and commandeth all other strangers of the same Anabaptists' and Sacramentaries' erroneous sects, not being apprehended or known, that they within eight or ten days after this present proclamation, with all celerity shall depart out of this realm and all other his dominions, upon pain of loss of their lives and forfeiture of all their goods, without any favor, remission, or indulgence to be administered to any of the offenders against the tenor of this present article.

Item, forasmuch as the most Blessed and Holy Sacrament of the altar is the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior and Redeemer, and so hath and ought to be taken and believed by the whole congregation of Christian men, upon the peril of damnation, truly and without any sinister arguments or sophistical opinions grounded without faith upon fantastical reasons, his highness therefore, minding earnestly to conserve his people in the true and just faith of the said Holy and Blessed Sacrament, and that they shall not be seduced or beguiled by fantastical reasons and arguments, straightly chargeth and commandeth all and singular his loving subjects, and other residents within this his realm and all other his dominions, that they nor any of them from henceforth shall reason, dispute, or argue upon the said Holy and Blessed Sacrament nor of the mysteries thereof, upon pain of loss of their lives and forfeiture of their goods, without any favor or pardon to be shown by his majesty to any offending in this behalf; except and reserved to learned men in Holy Scripture, instructed and taught in the universities, their liberty and privilege in their schools and places accustomed concerning the same, and otherwise in communication without slander of any man, for the only confirmation and declaration of the truth thereof.

Item, forasmuch as divers and sundry persons have presumed and do arrogantly attempt of their own sensual appetites and froward rash wills to contemn, break, and violate divers and many laudable ceremonies and rites heretofore used and accustomed in the Church of England, and yet not abrogated by the King's highness' authority; whereby daily riseth much difference, strife, and contention among divers and sundry his loving subjects, as for and concerning the ceremonies of holy bread, holy water, procession, kneeling and creeping on Good Friday to the Cross, and Easter day, setting up of lights before the Corpus Christi, bearing of candles upon the day of the Purification of Our Lady, ceremonies used at the purification of women delivered of child, and offering of their chrisoms, keeping of the

four offering days, payment of tithes according to the old customs of the realm, and all other such like laudable ceremonies heretofore used in the Church of England, which as yet be not abolished nor taken away by the King's highness: his majesty, for avoiding such contentions and the occasions of the same among his loving subjects, doth straightly charge and command all and singular his subjects, and other residents within this his realm, that they and every of them shall observe and keep all and singular the ceremonies before specified, and all other such like ceremonies heretofore used and accustomed in this realm, and not abrogated nor abolished by his highness, nor by his laws or authority royal, so as they shall use the same without superstition, and esteem them for good and laudable ceremonies, tokens, and signs to put us in remembrance of things of higher perfection, and none otherwise, and not to repose any trust of salvation in them, but take them for good instructions until such time as his majesty doth change or abrogate any of them, as his highness upon reasonable considerations and respects, if it shall hereafter seem to his most excellent wisdom so to be convenient and expedient, for the quietness of his people and the advancement of his commonwealth, both may and intendeth to do.

Finally his majesty, understanding that a few in number of this his realm being priests, as well religious as other, have taken wives and married themselves, contrary to the wholesome monitions of St. Paul *ad Timotheum*, *ad Titum*, and *ad Corintheos*, both in the First and Second, and contrary also to the opinions of many of the old Fathers and expositors of Scripture, not esteeming also the avow and promise of chastity which they made at the receiving of their holy orders: his highness, in no wise minding that the generality of the clergy of this his realm should with the example of such a few number of light persons proceed to marriage without a common consent of his highness and his realm, doth therefore straightly charge and command as well all and singular of the said priests as have attempted marriages that be openly known, as all such as will hereafter presumptuously proceed in the same, that they nor any of them shall minister any sacrament or other ministry mystical, nor have any office, dignity, cure, privilege, profit or commodity heretofore accustomed and belonging to the clergy of this realm, but shall utterly, after such marriages, be expelled and deprived from the same, and be had and reputed as lay persons to all purposes and intents; and that such as shall after this proclamation, contrary to this commandment, of their presumptuous mind take wives and be married, shall run in his grace's indignation and suffer further punishment and imprisonment at his grace's will and pleasure.

And whereas his most royal majesty heretofore, most prudently considering as well the great and manifold superstitions and abuses which have crept into the hearts and stomachs of many his true, simple, and unlearned loving subjects for lack of the sincere and true explication, and the declaring of

the true meaning and understanding of Holy Scripture, sacramentals, rites and ceremonies, as also the sundry strifes and contentions which have and may grow among many of his said loving subjects for lack of the very perfect knowledge of the true intent and meaning of the same, hath divers times most straightly commanded all and singular his archbishops, bishops, and other ministers of the clergy of this his most noble realm, in their sermons and preachings, plainly, purely, sincerely, and with all their possible diligence, to set forth first the glory of God and truth of his most blessed word, and after, the true meaning and end of the said sacramentals and ceremonies, to the intent that, all superstitious abuses and idolatries being avoided, the same sacramentals, rites, and ceremonies might be quietly used for such only intent and consideration as they were first instituted and meant:

His majesty, having knowledge that this his most godly and most virtuous commandment hath not been executed according to his trust and expectation, therefore straightly eftsoons chargeth and commandeth all his said archbishops and bishops of this his realm not only in their own persons with more diligence to preach, teach, open, and set forth to his people and loving subjects within their cures, committed to them by his highness for that purpose, as often as they conveniently may, the word of God, sincerely and purely declaring such difference between things commanded by God, and the rites and ceremonies aforesaid, and the use of them, in such wise as his people, being under their cures, by his highness to them committed, may be brought to the true knowledge of their lively faith to God, and obedience to his highness, with their love and charity also to their neighbors; but also his highness straightly chargeth and commandeth all archdeacons, deans, provosts, parsons, vicars, curates, and other ministers, and every of them, in their own persons, within their cures, truly and diligently to do the same, and further in all their said sermons and collations to stir and exhort the people to charity, love, and obedience, and also to read and hear with simplicity and without any arrogancy the very Gospel and Holy Scripture, and to conform by earnest deeds their minds and wills unto the same, avoiding all manner of contention, strife, and occasions thereof: upon pain not only to incur his majesty's indignation, but also for their slackness and negligence in the executing of their cures and charges, committed unto them by his highness, to be imprisoned and punished at his majesty's pleasure.

Item, forasmuch as it appeareth now clearly that Thomas Becket, sometime Archbishop of Canterbury, stubbornly to withstand the wholesome laws established against the enormities of the clergy by the King's highness' most noble progenitor, King Henry II, for the commonwealth, rest, and tranquillity of this realm, of his froward mind fled the realm into France and to the Bishop of Rome, maintainer of those enormities, to procure the abrogation of the said laws, whereby arose much trouble in this said realm;

and that his death, which they untruly called martyrdom, happened upon a rescue by him made; and that, as it is written, he gave opprobrious words to the gentlemen, which then counseled him to leave his stubbornness and to avoid the commotion of the people risen up for that rescue; and he not only called the one of them bawd, but also took Tracy by the bosom and violently shook and plucked him in such manner that he had almost overthrown him to the pavement of the church, so that upon this fray one of their company perceiving the same, struck him, and so in the throng Becket was slain; and further that his canonization was made only by the Bishop of Rome because he had been a champion to maintain his usurped authority and a bearer of the iniquities of the clergy: for these and for other great and urgent causes, long to recite, the King's majesty, by the advice of his council, hath thought expedient to declare to his loving subjects that, notwithstanding the said canonization, there appeareth nothing in his life and exterior conversation whereby he should be called a saint, but rather esteemed to have been a rebel and traitor to his prince.

Therefore his grace straightly chargeth and commandeth that from henceforth the said Thomas Becket shall not be esteemed, named, reputed, nor called a saint, but Bishop Becket, and that his images and pictures through the whole realm shall be put down and avoided out of all churches, chapels, and other places, and that from henceforth the days used to be festival in his name shall not be observed, nor the service, office, antiphons, collects, and prayers in his name read, but erased and put out of all the books; and that all other festival days, already abrogate, shall be in no wise solemnized, but his grace's ordinance and injunctions thereupon observed, to the intent his grace's loving subjects shall be no longer blindly led and abused to commit idolatry as they have done in times past, upon pain of his majesty's indignation and imprisonment at his grace's pleasure.

Finally his majesty willeth and chargeth all his said true, loving, and obedient subjects, that they and every of them for his part shall keep and observe all and singular the injunctions made by his majesty, upon the pain therein contained, and further to be punished at his grace's pleasure.