**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 King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, defender of the faith &c., we the ministers of the Church of England that desire reformation wish a long 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 diverse abuses of the Church, could do no less in our obedience to God, service to your Majesty, love his Church, then to 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 diverse of us that sue for reformation have formerly, in respect of the times, subscribed to the book, some upon protestation, some upon expositions given them, some with condition, rather than the Church should have been deprived of our labours and ministry; yet now wee to the number of more than a thousand of your Majesty’s subjects and ministers, all groaning as under one 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 those offences following, some may be removed, some amended, some qualified.

1. In the Church service: that the cross in baptism, interrogatories ministered to infants, [and] conformation, as superfluous, may be taken away: 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 diverse terms of priest, absolution, and some others used, with the ring in marriage, and other such like in the book may be corrected; the longsomeness of the service abridged; church songs and music moderated to better edifying; that the Lord’s Day be not profaned; the rest upon holy days not so strictly urged; that there may be an uniformity of doctrine prescribed: no popish opinion to be any more taught or defended, nor ministers charged to teach their people to bow at the name of Jesus; that the canonical scriptures only be read in the church.

2. 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; and 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-residence 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.

3. For Church Livings and Maintenance. That bishops leave their commendams, some holding prebends, some parsonages, some vicarages, with their bishoprics; that double beneficed men ben to suffered to hold, some two, some three benefices with cure [of souls], and some two, three, or four dignities besides; that impropriations annexed to bishoprics and colleges be demised only to the preacher incumbent for the old rent; that impropriations of laymens’ fee may be charged with a sixth or seventh part of the worth to the maintenance of the preaching minister.

4. For Church discipline. That the discipline and excommunication may be administered according to Christ his own institution; or at least, that these enormities may be redressed: As namely, that excommunication come not forth under the name of lay persons, chancellors [or] officials; that men bee not excommunicated for trifles, and twelvepenny matters; that none be excommunicate without consent of his pastor; that the officers be not suffered to extort unreasonable fees; that none having jurisdiction or [a] registrar’s place put out the same to farm; that diverse popish canons (as for the restraining of marriage at certain times) be reversed; that the longsomeness of suits in ecclesiastical courts, which hang sometimes 2 3 4 5 6 7 years may be restrained; that the oath *ex officio*, whereby men are forced to accuse themselves, be more sparingly used; that the licences for marriage without bans-asking, bee more cautiously granted.

These with other such 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 further 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 further process Your Majesty (of whose Christian judgement we have received so good a taste already) is able of yourself to judge of the equity of this cause. God, we trust, hath appointed your highness our Physician to heal those diseases, and we say with Mordechai to Esther, who knoweth whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time? This Your Majesty shall doe 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 more; comfortable to your ministers, which shall be no more suspended, silenced, degraded, imprisoned for men’s tradition; and prejudicial to none, but to those that seek their own quiet credit and profit in the world. Thus with all dutiful submission, referring or selves to Your Majesty’s pleasure for your gracious answer, as God shall direct you, wee most humbly commend Your Highness to the divine 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

[British Library, Add. MS 28571, 176r-v]