
HUGH LATIMER

ca. 1492–1555

The foremost preacher of that part of the English Reformation which coded with the accession of Henry VIII's Catholic daughter Mary in 1553, Latimer was hailed by his Protestant admirers as the apostle to the English. During this period the English church was separated from Rome, the monasteries were destroyed and the consequent economic redistribution strengthened the power of the crown, and the Bible was made available to the people in their own tongue. In all of this process Latimer was extremely influential. The ambassador of the emperor Charles V wrote in 1535 that Latimer had made more heretics than Luther.

Latimer was for a time Bishop of Worcester in the reign of Henry VIII, but he resigned his see and reached his greatest fame as a preacher in the short reign of Edward VI (1547–53). During Lent of 1549 he preached seven Friday sermons at court which were taken down in some kind of shorthand by a devoted follower, one Thomas Some, and published. In the previous year he had preached a series of sermons at Paul's Cross, in behalf of the government, but unfortunately only one of them has survived. It is the famous sermon on the plowers. Latimer sustains his homely metaphor of preachers as plowmen through a long discourse, but his style is chiefly remarkable for its vivid concreteness, his familiar illustrations, and his satirical descriptions of nonpreaching prelates and superstitious Catholics.

When Mary came to the throne in 1553, that phase of the English Reformation was over. The most prominent leaders of it—Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury; Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London; and Hugh Latimer—were condemned as heretics. In 1554 they were compelled to engage in a disputation at Oxford on the doctrine of the Mass. Following that, parliament reenacted an old statute for the punishment of heretics (it had been repealed in Edward's reign) and passed the Great Act of Reconciliation with Rome. As a consequence, the Oxford Martyrs, as they are now called, were burned at the stake, Ridley and Latimer together and Cranmer separately. The account of Latimer's death in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* is the most famous narrative in that famous book.

From Sermon of the Plowers

ROMANS XV.4

Quaecunq̄ue scripta sunt ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt.

“All things which are written, are written for our erudition and knowledge. All things that are written in God's book, in the Bible book, in the book of the holy scripture, are written to be our doctrine.”

I told you in my first sermon, honorable audience, that I purposed to declare unto you two things. The one, what seed should be sown in God's field, in God's plow land; and the other, who should be the sowers: that is to say, what doctrine is to be taught in Christ's church and congregation, and what men should be the teachers and preachers of it. The first part I have told you in the three sermons past, in which I have assayed¹ to set forth my plow, to prove

1. Tried. The “three sermons past” were never printed.

what I could do. And now I shall tell you who be the plowers: for God's word is a seed to be sown in God's field, that is, the faithful congregation, and the preacher is the sower. And it is in the gospel: *Exiuit qui seminat seminare semen suum*. "He that soweth," the husbandman, the plowman, "went forth to sow his seed,"² so that a preacher is resembled to a plowman, as it is in another place: *Nemo admota aratro manu, et a tergo respiciens, aptus est regno Dei*. "No man that putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back, is apt for the kingdom of God."³ That is to say, let no preacher be negligent in doing his office. Albeit this is one of the places that hath been racked,⁴ as I told you of racking scriptures. And I have been one of them myself that hath racked it, I cry God mercy for it, and have been one of them that have believed and have expounded it against religious persons that would forsake their order which they had professed, and would go out of their cloister: whereas indeed it toucheth not monkery, nor maketh any thing at all for any such matter; but it is directly spoken of diligent preaching of the word of God.

For preaching of the gospel is one of God's plow-works, and the preacher is one of God's plowmen. Ye may not be offended with my similitude, in that I compare preaching to the labor and work of plowing, and the preacher to a plowman. Ye may not be offended with this my similitude; for I have been slandered of some persons for such things. It hath been said of me: "Oh, Latimer! nay, as for him, I will never believe him while I live, nor never trust him; for he likened our blessed Lady to a saffron-bag," where indeed I never used that similitude. But it was as I have said unto you before now, according to that which Peter saw before in the spirit of prophecy, and said, that there should come afterward men *per quos via veritatis maledictis afficeretur*, there should come fellows "by whom the way of truth should be ill spoken of"⁵ and slandered. But in case I had used this similitude, it had not been to be reproved, but might have been without reproach. For I might have said thus: as the saffron-bag that hath been full of saffron, or hath had saffron in it, doth ever after savor and smell of the sweet saffron that it containeth; so our blessed Lady, which conceived and bare Christ in her womb, did ever after resemble the manners and virtues of that precious babe which she bare. And what had our blessed Lady been the worse for this? or what dishonor was this to our blessed Lady? But as preachers must be ware and circumspect that they give not any just occasion to be slandered and ill spoken of by the hearers, so must not the auditors be offended without cause. For heaven is in the gospel likened to a mustard-seed. It is compared also to a piece of leaven; as Christ saith, that at the last day he will come like a thief: and what dishonor is this to God? or what derogation is this to heaven? Ye may not then, I say, be offended with my similitude, for because I liken preaching to a plowman's labor, and a prelate to a plowman. But now you will ask me whom I call a prelate. A prelate is that man, whatsoever he be, that hath a flock to be taught of him; whosoever hath any spiritual charge in the faithful congregation, and whosoever he be that hath cure of soul.⁶ And well may the preacher and the plowman be likened together. First for their labor of all seasons of the year. For there is no time of the year in which the plowman hath not some special work to do: as in my

2. Matthew 13.3.

3. Luke 9.62.

4. Given a forced or strained interpretation.

5. 2 Peter 2.2.

6. Care of souls, pastoral duties.

country in Leicestershire, the plowman hath a time to set forth, and to assay his plow, and other times for other necessary works to be done. And then they also may be likened together for the diversity of works and variety of offices that they have to do. For as the plowman first setteth forth his plow, and then tilleth his land, and breaketh it in furrows, and sometime ridgeth it up again; and at another time harroweth it, and clotteth⁷ it, and sometime dungeth it, and hedgeth it, diggeth it, and weedeth it, purgeth and maketh it clean: so the prelate, the preacher, hath many divers offices to do. He hath first a busy work to bring his parishioners to a right faith, as Paul calleth it. And not a swerving faith, but to a faith that embraceth Christ, and trusteth to his merits; a lively faith, a justifying faith, a faith that maketh a man righteous, without respect of works: as ye have it very well declared and set forth in the Homily.⁸ He hath then a busy work, I say, to bring his flock to a right faith, and then to confirm them in the same faith: now casting them down with the law, and with threatenings of God for sin; now ridging them up again with the gospel, and with the promises of God's favor; now weeding them, by telling them their faults, and making them forsake sin; now clotting them, by breaking their stony hearts, and by making them supple-hearted, and making them to have hearts of flesh, that is, soft hearts, and apt for doctrine to enter in; now teaching to know God rightly, and to know their duty to God and to their neighbors; now exhorting them, when they know their duty, that they do it, and be diligent in it; so that they have a continual work to do. Great is their business, and therefore great should be their hire. They have great labors, and therefore they ought to have good livings, that they may commodiously feed their flock; for the preaching of the word of God unto the people is called meat. Scripture calleth it meat; not strawberries, that come but once a year, and tarry not long, but are soon gone: but it is meat, it is no dainties. The people must have meat that must be familiar and continual, and daily given unto them to feed upon. Many make a strawberry of it, ministering it but once a year; but such do not the office of good prelates. For Christ saith: *Quis putas esse servus prudens et fidelis? qui dat cibum in tempore.* "Who think you is a wise and a faithful servant? he that giveth meat in due time."⁹ So that he must at all times convenient preach diligently. Therefore saith he: "Who trow¹ ye is a faithful servant?" He speaketh it as though it were a rare thing to find such a one, and as though he should say, there be but a few of them to find in the world. And how few of them there be throughout this realm that give meat to their flock as they should do, the Visitors² can best tell. Too few, too few, the more is the pity, and never so few as now.

By this then it appeareth that a prelate, or any that hath cure of soul, must diligently and substantially work and labor. Therefore saith Paul to Timothy: *Qui episcopatum desiderat, hic bonum opus desiderat:* "He that desireth to have the office of a bishop," or a prelate, "that man desireth a good work."³ Then if it be good work, it is work. Ye can make but a work of it. It is God's work, God's plow, and that plow God would have still⁴ going. Such then as loiter and live idly, are not good prelates or ministers. And of such as do not preach and teach, nor do not their duties, God saith by his prophet Jeremy: *Maledictus*

7. Breaks up clods.

8. One of the homilies or sermons printed and ordered by royal authority to be read in church.

9. Matthew 24.45.

1. Think.

2. Ecclesiastical inspectors.

3. 1 Timothy 3.1.

4. Always.

qui facit opus Dei fraudulenter; “guilefully” or “deceitfully”: some books have *negligenter*, “negligently” or “slackly.”⁵ How many such prelates, how many such bishops, Lord, for thy mercy, are there now in England? And what shall we in this case do? shall we company with them? O Lord, for thy mercy! shall we not company with them? O Lord, whither shall we flee from them? But “cursed be he that doth the work of God negligently or guilefully.” A sore word for them that are negligent in discharging their office, or have done it fraudulently; for that is the thing that maketh the people ill.

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But now methinketh I hear one say unto me: Wot ye what you say? Is it a work? Is it a labor? How then hath it happened that we have had so many hundred years so many unpreaching prelates, lording loiterers, and idle ministers? Ye would have me here to make answer, and to show the cause thereof. Nay, this land is not for me to plow; it is too stony, too thorny, too hard for me to plow. They have so many things that make for them, so many things to lay for themselves, that it is not for my weak team to plow them. They have to lay for themselves long customs, ceremonies, and authority, placing in Parliament, and many things more. And I fear me this land is not yet ripe to be plowed; for, as the saying is, it lacketh weathering: this gear⁶ lacketh weathering; at least way it is not for me to plow. For what shall I look for among thorns, but pricking and scratching? What among stones, but stumbling? What (I had almost said) among serpents, but stinging? But this much I dare say, that since lording and loitering hath come up, preaching hath come down, contrary to the Apostles’ times. For they preached and lorded not, and now they lord and preach not. For they that be lords will ill go to plow. It is no meet office for them. It is not seeming for their estate. Thus came up lording loiterers. Thus crept in unpreaching prelates; and so have they long continued. For how many unlearned prelates have we now at this day? And no marvel: for if the plowmen that now be were made lords, they would clean give over plowing, they would leave off their labor, and fall to lording outright, and let the plow stand. And then both plows not walking, nothing should be in the commonweal but hunger. For ever since the prelates were made lords and nobles, the plow standeth, there is no work done, the people starve. They hawk, they hunt, they card, they dice, they pastime in their prelacies with gallant gentlemen, with their dancing minions, and with their fresh companions, so that plowing is set aside. And by the lording and loitering, preaching and plowing is clean gone. And thus if the plowmen of the country were as negligent in their office as prelates be, we should not long live, for lack of sustenance.* * *

But now for the fault of unpreaching prelates, methink I could guess what might be said for excusing of them. They are so troubled with lordly living, they be so placed in palaces, couched in courts, ruffling in their rents,⁷ dancing in their dominions, burdened with ambassages, pampering of their paunches, like a monk that maketh his jubilee; munching in their mangers, and moiling⁸ in their gay manors and mansions, and so troubled with loitering in their lordships, that they cannot attend it. They are otherwise occupied, some in the king’s matters, some are ambassadors, some of the privy council, some to

5. Jeremiah 48.1.

6. State of affairs.

7. Swaggering in their riches.

8. Working hard.

furnish the court, some are Lords of the Parliament, some are Presidents,⁹ and some Comptrollers of mints.

Well, well. Is this their duty? Is this their office? Is this their calling? Should we have ministers of the church to be comptrollers of the mints? Is this a meet office for a priest that hath cure of souls? Is this his charge? I would here ask one question: I would fain know who controlleth the devil at home at his parish, while he controlleth the mint? If the Apostles might not leave the office of preaching to be deacons, shall one leave it for minting? I cannot tell you; but the saying is, that since priests have been minters, money hath been worse than it was before. And they say that the evilness of money hath made all things dearer.* * *

And now I would ask a strange question: who is the most diligentest bishop and prelate in all England, that passeth all the rest its doing his office? I can tell, for I know him who it is, I know him well. But now I think I see you listening and hearkening, that it should name him. There is one that passeth all the other, and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will ye know who it is? I will tell you. It is the Devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure; ye shall never find him unoccupied; he is ever in his parish he keepeth residence at all times; ye shall never find him out of the way: call for him when you will, he is ever at home; the diligentest preacher in all the realm; he is ever at his plow: no lording nor lottering can hinder him; he is, ever applying his business, ye shall never find him idle, I warrant you. And his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery. He is ready as can be wished, for to set forth his plow; to devise as many ways as can be to deface and obscure God's glory. Where the Devil is resident, and hath his plow going, there away with books, and up with candles; away with Bibles, and up with beads; away with the light of the gospel, and up with the light of candles, yea, at noondays. Where the Devil is resident, that he may prevail, up with all superstition and idolatry; censing, painting of images, candles, palms, ashes, holy water, and new service of men's inventing;¹ as though man could invent a better way to honor God with, than God himself hath appointed. Down with Christ's cross, up with purgatory pickpurse, up with him, the popish purgatory of mean. Away with clothing the naked, the poor and impotent; up with decking of images and gay garnishing of stocks and stones. Up with man's traditions and his laws, down with God's traditions and his most holy word. Down with the old honor due to God, and up with the new god's honor: let all things be done in Latin. There must be nothing but Latin, not as much as *Memento homo quod cinis es, et in cinerem reverteris*: "Remember, man, that thou art ashes, and into ashes thou shalt return";² which be the words that the minister speaketh to the ignorant people, when he giveth them ashes upon Ash Wednesday; but it must be spoken in Latin: God's word may in no wise be translated into English.

O that our prelates would be as diligent to sow the corn of good doctrine, as Satan is to sow cockle and darnel!³* * *

* * * And this is the prick,⁴ this is the mark at the which the Devil shooteth, to evacuate the cross of Christ, and to mingle the institution of the Lord's

9. I.e., Lord President of the Privy Council, advisors to the sovereign.

1. All, in Latimer's view, papist "superstition and idolatry."

2. Genesis 3.19.

3. Weeds.

4. Bull's-eye.

Supper; the which although he cannot bring to pass, yet he goeth about by his sleights and subtle means to frustrate the same; and these fifteen hundred years he hath been a doer, only purposing to evacuate Christ's death, and to make it of small efficacy and virtue. For whereas Christ, according as the serpent was lift up in wilderness, so would he himself to be exalted, that thereby as many as trusted in him should have salvation. But the Devil would none of that. They would have us saved by a daily oblation propitiatory,⁵ by a sacrifice expiatory, or remissory.

Now if I should preach in the country, among the unlearned, I would tell what propitiatory, expiatory, and remissory is; but here is a learned auditory, yet for them that be unlearned I will expound it. Propitiatory, expiatory, remissory, or satisfactory, for they signify all one thing in effect, and is nothing else but a thing whereby to obtain remission of sins, and to have salvation. And this way the Devil used to evacuate the death of Christ, that we might have affiance⁶ in other things, as in the daily sacrifice of the priest; whereas Christ would have us to trust in his only sacrifice. So he was: *Agnus occisus ab origine mundi*, "The Lamb that hath been slain from the beginning of the world";⁷ and therefore he is called *juge sacrificium*, "a continual sacrifice,"⁸ and not for the continuance of the Mass, as the blanchers⁹ have blanched it, and wrested it; and as I myself did once mistake it. But Paul saith, *per semetipsum purgatio facta*, "by himself," and by none other, Christ "made purgation" and satisfaction for the whole world.¹

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Then let us trust upon his only death, and look for none other sacrifice propitiatory, than the same bloody sacrifice, the lively sacrifice; and not the dry sacrifice, but a bloody sacrifice. For Christ himself said, *consummatum est*: "It is perfectly finished":² I have taken at my Father's hand the dispensation of redeeming mankind. I have wrought man's redemption, and have dispatched the matter. Why then mingle ye him? Why do ye divide him? Why make you of him more sacrifices than one? Paul saith, *Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus*: "Christ our passover is offered up";³ so that the thing is done, and Christ hath done it, and he hath done it *semel*, "once for all." And it was a bloody sacrifice, not a dry sacrifice.

Why then, it is not the Mass that availeth or profiteth for the quick and the death. Woe worth⁴ thee, O Devil, woe worth thee, that hast prevailed so far and so long, that hast made England to worship false gods, forsaking Christ their Lord! Woe worth thee, Devil, woe worth thee, Devil and all thy angels! If Christ by his death draweth all things to himself, and draweth all men to salvation, and to heavenly bliss, that trust in him; then the priests at the Mass, at the popish Mass, I say, what can they draw, when Christ draweth all, but lands and goods from the right heirs? The priests draw goods and riches, benefices and promotions to themselves; and such as believed in their sacrifice they draw to the Devil. But Christ it is that draweth souls unto him by his bloody sacrifice. What have we to do then but *epulari in Domino*, "to eat in the Lord" at his Supper?⁵

5. In the Catholic service, the offering of bread and wine in the eucharist.

6. Faith.

7. Revelation 13.8.

8. Daniel 8.11.

9. Distorters, perverters of the true meaning.

1. Hebrews 1.3.

2. John 19.30; Christ's last words on the Cross.

3. 1 Corinthians 5.7.

4. Betide.

5. 1 Corinthians 11.20.

What other service have we to do to him? and what other sacrifice have we to offer, but the mortification of our flesh? What other oblation have we to make, but of obedience, of good living, of good works, and of helping our neighbors? But as for our redemption, it is done already, it cannot be better. Christ hath done that thing so well, that it cannot be amended. It cannot be devised how to make that any better than he hath done it.* * *

* * * And good hope there is, that it shall be likewise here in England; for the King's Majesty is so brought up in knowledge, virtue, and godliness, that it is not to be mistrusted but that we shall have all things well, and that the glory of God shall be spread abroad throughout all parts of the realm, if the prelates will diligently apply their plow, and be preachers rather than lords. But our blanchers, which will be lords, and no laborers, when they are commanded to go and be resident upon their cures, and preach in their benefices, they would say, "What? I have set a deputy there; I have a deputy that looketh well to my flock, and the which shall discharge my duty." "A deputy," quoth he! I looked for that word all this while. And what a deputy must he be, trow ye? Even one like himself: he must be a canonist; that is to say, one that is brought up in the study of the Pope's laws and decrees; one that will set forth papistry as well as himself will do; and one that will maintain all superstition and idolatry; and one that will nothing at all, or else very weakly, resist the Devil's plow; yea, happy it is if he take not part with the Devil; and where he should be an enemy to him, it is well if he take not the Devil's part against Christ. But in the mean time the prelates take their pleasures. They are lords, and no laborers, but the Devil is diligent at his plow. He is no unpreaching prelate. He is no lordly loiterer from his cure, but a busy plowman; so that among all the prelates, and among all the pack of them that have cure, the Devil shall go for my money, for he still applieth his business. Therefore, ye unpreaching prelates, learn of the Devil to be diligent in doing of your office. Learn of the Devil. And if you will not learn of God nor good men, for shame learn of the Devil, *ad erubescenciam vestram dico*, "I speak it for your shame."⁶ If you will not learn of God, nor good men, to be diligent in your office, learn of the Devil. Howbeit there is now very good hope that the King's Majesty, being by the help of good governance of his most honorable counselors, he is trained and brought up in learning and knowledge of God's word, will shortly provide a remedy, and set an order herein, which thing that it may so be, let us pray for him. Pray for him, good people, pray for him. Ye have great cause and need to pray for him.