

AN
ACCOUNT
OF
Mr. John Pilkington's
PUBLICK RECANTATION
OF THE
Errors of the Romish Church:

Containing also the Means and Manner of his Conviction, &c. Which he pronounc'd before a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, meeting in *Hart-street, Covent-Garden*, on the 28th of May, 1699.

Publish'd by Mr. *Piggott*.

Before Mr. *Pilkington* read his Retraction, Mr. *Piggott* addressed himself to the Auditory and him in the following words.

CHRISTIAN Auditors, I am at this time to acquaint you, that there is one present in this Assembly, who having been educated in the Popish Religion, after many inward Conflicts, does profess himself to be thorowly convinc'd of the Errors he had imbib'd while he continu'd in that Communion; and being desirous to be admitted a Member of this Protestant Church, he has declar'd his willingness to signify to this Congregation the Means and Manner of his Conviction, and the Reasons of his forsaking the Erroneous and Idolatrous Church of Rome. The Person of whom I now speak, that professes to be truly penitent, as well as convinc'd of his former Errors, is Mr. John *Pilkington*, who was lately a Novice in the Benedictin Order of Monks in the Monastery of St. Edmund in Paris. And now, Sirs, let me entreat you to banish from your Minds all Prepossession and Prejudice, and impartially attend to what he will presently pronounce; let me beseech you to put on Bowels of Mercy; don't usurp the Authority of God, and pretend to search his Heart: for my own part, Charity obliges me to believe that he is sincere; my blessed Lord having left me no other Rule to judg of the Goodness or Badness of a Tree, but by its Fruits.

And now, Mr. *Pilkington*, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Elect Angels, and in the presence of this numerous Auditory, that you speak nothing but the Truth: if you are conscious to your self of any base Ends in the Recantation you are come to make, confess and give Glory to God; for the God whom we serve, and under whose Banner you desire to be enroll'd, cannot be deceiv'd, and will not be mock'd. Sir, you and I must shortly appear before the Judg of the Quick and Dead; and if you should be sincere, I, that now thus exhort and admonish you, must be a swift Witness against you at the great Assize. And now I call God to Record this day, that I am clear of your Blood; and I call every one in this place to witness of the solemn Charge I have given to you: if therefore you are sincere, (of which I would not admit a doubt) go on by the Grace of God to pronounce your written Narrative and Recantation.

And then Mr. *Pilkington* read as follows.

Mr. *John Pilkington's* NARRATIVE.

FOR the Satisfaction of all my Countrymen and Brethren in general, and of this worthy Congregation in particular, whereof I am desirous to be a Member, I beg your attention to the following Narrative, which contains the Means and Manner of my Conviction.

In order hereunto, I think it necessary to acquaint you with some part of my Life past; which as it will evidence a particular Goodness and Mercy of God towards me, so I hope it may give this Auditory some grounds to judg of the Reality of my Repentance.

After my Education of five Years and a half by Romish Emissaries in *England*, I was judg'd, by the proficiency I had made in the Mysteries of Popery, not unfit for the Interest of their Cause, and therefore sent to the *English* Seminary at *Lisbon*, in order to be duly qualified for the Mission.

What erroneous Notions, and almost insuperable Prejudices, in Matters of Religion, I there insensibly imbibed, 'tis easy for any Person to imagine, who has but an imperfect *Idea* of the Virulency and rigid Severity those Nations are possess'd with, where the Inquisition rages, against all Persuasions differing from their own.

The Education I receiv'd in that place, for the space of three Years and upwards, had so powerful an influence on my Mind, that, the better to secure my Soul from the Dangers of *Heresy*, (for that was the Notion I had conceived of Protestancy) I was resolv'd to quit all thoughts of becoming a Missionary Priest, and betake my self to a Religious State. But the President of our College, unwilling to lose one of his Flock, and withal apprehensive of my Friends Resentments, who design'd me for other Ends; hearing I had made Interest with Monks of a certain Order, and had obtain'd their Consent to be admitted to their Habit, quickly put a stop to my Design, by his frequent applications to the Pope's Nuncio. This unexpected Disappointment was not only Fuel of great Heats and Animositities to the two Houses, but likewise exasperated me to that degree, that I refus'd to perform those Duties to which the Constitutions of the College oblig'd me, and desir'd to be dismiss'd in order to my return into *England*; tho I were satisfied, my Friends would be highly disgusted at my proceedings.

This Thought continuing, I resolv'd to search into the Doctrines of the Church of *England*; not doubting but that, if I could persuade my self of a possibility of Salvation out of the Church of *Rome*, I should meet with other Friends in *England*, to maintain meat one of the Universities. In pursuance of this Resolution, I acquainted Mr. *Colbatch*, Minister of the *English* Factory (whom I had discours'd three times before about controverted Points in Religion) with my Design; and withal desired his Recommendation to some of the Clergy of *England*, who might be assisting to me in my inquiry after the Truth. He wrote a Letter to the Bishop of *Salisbury's* Chaplain; but he being out of Town upon my arrival at *London*, I was forc'd to apply my self to others, who made me known to the Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury*.

The great Incouragements I met with at this juncture, dispell'd for the present all apprehensions of my Soul's future State; and Prejudice giving way to the glittering hopes of Preferment, I forgot the Resolution I had made, of not forsaking the Romish Communion, till I were satisfied I might be saved out of it. I said I had found the Truth, and thought so too, during this short retreat of my Prejudice, when I had hardly begun to search after it. Upon my request to take Orders in the Church of *England*, I was sent to *Oxford*. Here Prejudice again took place, tho I strove all I could to stifle and suppress it, together with its Consequents, the Doubts and Scruples that rose in my Mind, to the disadvantage of Protestancy: yet all endeavours fell short of the desired Effect, the quieting of my troubled Conscience.

The Preferments that were promis'd me, tho very considerable, and the Civilities I found in the Universilty, tho far above my expectation, were Bands too weak to keep me (after four Terms spent in the University) from easing my Conscience of its burden, by a shameful and wicked return to the Church of *Rome*.

Upon my re-admission into that Communion, I submitted to the foolish Penance of a Pilgrimage, to be perform'd on foot, and by begging, from *London* to *Holy-Well* in *Wales*; and after eighteen Months, the Peace being concluded with *France*, I was admitted to the Habit of a Benedictin Monk, in the English Monastery of *St. Edmund* in *Paris*; in which I continued near a Year. But here I am forc'd, through an excess of Admiration, to cry out with the Apostle, *O the depth of the Riches, both of the Wisdom and Knowledg of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out!* For the Divine Providence so order'd it, that that very place design'd by Satan for trepanning the Souls of Men into eternal Perdition, became an effectual Instrument of opening my Eyes, and freeing me from that Cloud of more than *Egyptian* Darkness, which had so long hinder'd me from discerning the Bottomless Pit I was hastening into; and so it was an effectual means of banishing all manner of Prejudice, and making me that in Reality, which before I was but in Effigy; that is to say, a true and real Protestant. 'Twas a desire of seeing whether the strange things I had

read and heard of the Professors of this Life, had any colour of Truth to support them, that inspired me with a more than usual curiosity, to observe and inspect narrowly into all their practices. Nor did I find the Province very difficult, for besides that I was present at all Conventual Duties, I was privy to most of their secret Intrigues, by supplying the place of Secretary of the Convent, the Secretary himself being very antient. Good God! how was I surpriz'd, to find all things run counter to my expectations; to see the whole Family miserably divided into Parties and Factions, where I look'd for a Brotherly Love, Charity and Union, not much inferior to that of the blessed Spirits in Heaven! How was I amazed, in the room of the most profound Humility and Self-Abnegation, to see the highest Ambition, Pride and Self-love to take place! That Temperance they so much boast of, I found oftentimes turn'd into shameful Excess and Gluttony, but this was done in private, to avoid giving Scandal. These things I very much wonder'd at, but much more, when I was an Eye-witness to the General and other Superiors regaling of young Women in a close Chappel of our Church, with Wine and other Dainties. Their Hospitality and Poverty were quite vanish'd, and nothing to be seen but an insatiable Avarice and Thirst after Riches. Their Obedience appear'd most in obeying their own unbridled Lusts and Passions. In a word, it seem'd to me, their chief study was, which of them should be most wicked at home, and yet be thought the most holy abroad; that is to say, who should most genteelly play the Hypocrite.

Such Practices as these, one would think, were sufficient to have convinced me I had taken wrong measures for my Soul's Safety; and that it was at least as easy to have work'd out my Salvation in *Sodom* or *Gomorrah*, as in a Cloyster: but yet the great desire I had of that Life, inclin'd me to believe, I might live up to the Rule and Constitutions of the Order (which in reality are very severe) tho others gave themselves the liberty to break them.

This Thought had Well-nigh persuaded me to stay when taking a Bible into my hands, I providentially cast my Eyes on this Verse, it the 9th Chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. and the 26th: *Ego igitur sic curro, non quasi in incertum: sic pugo, non quasi aerem verberans. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: so to fight I, not as one that beateth the Air.* This Scripture, after serious deliberation, back'd by that other in the first Chapter of *Isaiah* and the 12th Verse; *Quis hac quasivit de manibus vestris? Who hath required these things at your hands?* occasioned various Doubts and Apprehensions in my Mind, which suffer'd me to take little rest day or night.

To be short, after frequent Disputes within my self, for and against the Exercise of those Mortifications and Austerities the Rule enjoin'd, I began to consider the Reasonableness and Weigh of our Saviour's Assertion: *When ye shall have done all those things which commanded you, say, We are unprofitable Servants.* And that of the Apostle, *That the Sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be revealed in us.*

Being fully convinced, that the Romish Doctrine of Merits, and Works of Supererogation, was highly derogatory to the Honour of Christ, I could not excuse that of Saints-Worship from the same Censure, when I was daily an Eye-witness of their paying far greater Veneration to the Virgin *Mary* than they did to her Son, by pulling off their Hoods, kneeling, and lighting the Altar-Candles whilst they sung her Anthems, which it was not their Custom to do at other parts of the Office.

These and many other Discoveries being happily made, and my former Prejudice by degrees vanishing away, I began to examine all the rest of their Doctrines, the greatest part of which I found so extremely repugnant to God's Word, that I could not chuse but be greatly astonish'd at my former Stupidity and Blindness, in not discerning that Sink of Errors, Superstitions and Abominations I had wallow'd in.

Upon the whole, that I might prevent all danger of relapsing into any one of those Corruptions for the future, I took up a firm Resolution to shut my Ears against all Doctrines whatsoever that could not be plainly made good out of the Scriptures; and (all Motives of Interest laid aside) to join in Communion with that Church, whose Opinions and Worship I should find most conformable thereunto. In pursuance hereof I return'd to *England*, and was present at the Sermons not only of the Church-of-*England* Clergy, but also of Dissenting Ministers of different Persuasions; I seriously perused their Books, and particularly read over the Thirty nine Articles of the Church of *England*: and truly I should have been very glad, had I found them so agreeable to Scripture in all Points, as that I might with Satisfaction have sat down in that Communion; but I cannot assent to the 34th, 35th and 36th Articles, nor to those words in the 20th, viz. "That the Church hath Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and Authority in Controversies of Faith:" also part of the 27th touching Infant-Baptism, which are the same the Parliament was pleased to except in behalf of those Christians that are generally known by the Name of *Anabaptists*, into whose Communion I heartily desire to be admitted, as thinking them to come nearest, in their Doctrine and Worship, to the Holy Scriptures, which they profess to make the Rule of their Faith and Practice.

Having thus, Christian Auditors, given you a most exact and impartial Account of the most remarkable Passages of my Life, and the manner of my Conviction; it remains that I now particularly renounce the Errors I formerly embraced in the Romish Church.

Mr. *PILKINGTON*'s RECANTATION.

I *John Pilkington*, being highly sensible of the Favour of Almighty God, in rescuing me out of the Jaws of the Devil, and truly sorrowful for all the Sins of my Life past, and particularly those I immediately incurred, whilst I adher'd to the Romish Communion; Do here, in the presence of the All-seeing God, and Judg of all Men, most candidly and sincerely acknowledg, that I am not only fully convinced of all the palpable Errors, Corruptions and Novelties of that Church, as well in Doctrine as Practice, but do also utterly disown, renounce and abjure the same, with the greatest abhorrence and detestation I am capable of.

And in particular, as to those Doctrines that concern the Infallibility and Supremacy of the Bishop or Church of *Rome*, the main Foundations on which all the other Abominations of the Papists are built: I utterly abjure them, as grosly intrenching on the Prerogatives of God.

Their Doctrine, That Salvation cannot be had out of their Communion, is so far from being countenanced in Scripture, that I'm persuaded, it is most Uncharitable and Anti-christian.

Moreover, I utterly abhor their impious and idolatrous Sacrifice of the Mass as also their Doctrines of Transubstantiation, and Half-Communion: the same being not only contrary to the Word of God, but to the solid Principles of Reason.

Their equalling Unwritten Traditions to the Holy Scriptures, I'm assured, is highly blasphemous, and as such I abhor it.

I look upon their forbidding Ecclesiasticks to marry, and the Laity to read the Scriptures, as also their multiplied Fasts and Abstinences, under pain of Mortal Sin; their practice of Auricular Confession, and their Vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience; as tyrannical, and destructive of true Gospel-Liberty: and therefore do freely renounce and forsake them.

I likewise abjure their Doctrine touching Indulgences, Purgatory, Merits, Works of Supererogation, Prayers in an unknown Tongue, and the Seven Sacraments.

Lastly, I renounce, as derogatory, to the Honour of God, and Merits of the Lord Jesus, their Adoration of the Cross, Images and Relicks: as likewise their Invocation of the Blessed Virgin, Angels and Saints.

These and all other Errors, Corruptions, Novelties and Superstitions, taught and practised by the Church of *Rome*, besides, or in opposition to the Purity of the Gospel, I do from the bottom of my Soul disown, renounce and abjure, and am resolved, by the Grace of God, so to do to my Life's end.

And now, to conclude all, I earnestly desire this pious Auditory, to pray for and with me, That the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who sent his Beloved Son into the World to redeem and save Sinners, and to call them to Repentance, would vouchafe to give me a Repentance never to be repented of, and such powerful Assistances of his Holy Spirit, that I may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, and adorn the Doctrine of God my Saviour in all things, who has wrought this wonderful Change in my Soul. And I do here, in the presence of God, his Holy Angels, and this Congregation, protest that I have done and said all this, freely, without Equivocation or Mental Reservation; and do solemnly promise and oblige my self (in case I be admitted a Member of this Church) to continue in sincere and constant Communion with the same, or others of the same Persuasion, God assisting, as long as the Members thereof shall keep to the Purity of the Gospel.

This text was transcribed from image files generated from the Google Books version of John Piggott's book, *Eleven Sermons Preach'd Upon Special Occasions* (London: John Darby, 1714), 473-487 (<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=ARkHAAAAQAAJ>). The original is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

Note: In the original text, there were a number of marginal references (mainly Scripture references). These have been rendered as footnotes in this text. The position of these footnotes were assigned by the transcriber and any inaccuracy in their positioning is his alone.

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