

A COPY OF A LETTER

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by

John Cotton

(1585-1652)

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A Copy of a Letter of Mr Cotton first published 1641

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A
COPY
OF
A LETTER
of Mr. COTTON of
Boston, in New-England, sent
in answer of certain Objections
made against their Discipline
and Orders there, directed
to a FRIEND.

With the *Questions* propounded to
such as are admitted to the *Church-*
fellowship, and the COVENANT
it SELF.

Printed in the year, 1641.

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OF

Of a LETTER of Mr COTTON
of *Boston*, in answer of certain
Objections made against their Disci-
pline and Orders their directed to
a FRIEND.

*With the Questions put to such as are
admitted to the Church-fellowship,
and the COVENANT it self.*



Here have been things (as it seemeth)
reported unto you;

First, that we receive none into
our Church-fellowship until they
first disclaim their Churches in
England as no Churches, but as
limbs of the devil; now, I answer,
God forbid, God forbid: It is true, one *Sheba* of *Bickry*
blew a Trumpet of such a seditious Separation; I
mean, one Mr *Williams*, late Teacher of *Salem*, but
himself and others that followed stiffly in that way,

2

who were all excommunicated out of the Church and banished out of the Common-wealth, for men in that way and of such a spirit are wont not only to renounce the Churches of *England*, but ours also, because we held communion with them in *England* in the things which are of God; see therefore how unjustly we are slandered for renouncing communion, with you, as is mentioned, and for it they themselves are punished in our Common wealth, censures in our Churches; for such Antichristian exorbitures; by this you may see the Objection clearly answered.

The second Calumny is, that our members must profess their repentance for all former communion with the Churches among you: Now for the answer, we profess no such things, but only in general so far as we have polluted our selves with any corruptions or inventions of men, or defiled God's Ordinances with any corruption of their own, whereby you may gather answer from the second Calumny.

The third Calumny is, that we enter into covenant solemnly, never to have communion with the present Churches of *England*, whereas in truth we never have such words or meaning in any part of our Covenant, but that we profess to walk in all the Ordinances of the Lord, according to his will revealed in his Word.

Of the fourth report you mention, there is some ground for it, our practice, power indeed is given among us to the people to choose their Ministers, so likewise to receive any member unto the Church fellowship, and to join in the excommunication of such as grow scandalous, which yet is very rare. Among us through the goodness of God scarce two or three have been excommunicated out of our Churches, which is more for rejecting communion with the Churches, than for any other crime: It is true also, that we allow any members of the Church to complain of an of-

3

sense given him by any brother, if a private way of Admonition according to the rule have not reformed him, *Matth.* 18:17. out that hath fallen out very seldom since I came hither, for ought I have heard, either in our own or other Churches, they much wrong both you and us who told you that Master *Wilson* was suspended from his Ministry for his Journey into *England?* or for any Communion he had with the Churches there; nor to my remembrance did any of the Brethren question him about it, till of himself he began to give some account of his journey to the Church, and then indeed two or three grave and godly men desired him to clear a passage or two; first, how he could leave the whole Congregation above twelve months together without their consent, and how he could leave his wife (as I remember) without her consent; to both which he gave a satisfactory answer, and was not at all suspended by the Church, but of himself he forbear one day, or at the least half a day, till he had declared both the particulars; that which you add of grace and gifts of Christ, or of his presence in the Ministry of his servants among you, we willingly & thankfully acknowledge, and do profess, that the hope which most of us have obtained of the common salvation wee received from the preaching of Gods faithful Ministers among you, we cannot, we dare not deny to *Blesse the Womb which bare us, and the Paps which gave us suck;* and long may these Lights shine among you, with all peace, purity, and power, *Amen.*

What you speak of Separatists and Brownists; we generally here do consent with you, that the bitterness of Separation whereby men doe not only cut themselves from the inventions of men, but also from the Ordinances of God, and fellowship of his servants; for who so have done, they never were blessed with peace: As for those scruples you pray me to weigh without prejudice, we here doe consent with you therein,

4

only there is a passage or two which I crave leave to explain my self in first that you say our Pastor Mr *Wilson* affirms among you that we did not follow *Calvin's* platform as an Episcopal he saith, he doth not remember any such word to have fallen from him, only thus much he confesseth, as we do all here, that we do not transact all things so reservedly in a consistory, but though we be prebestary, do prepare all things for the Church, yet we transact no public act, but in their presence, and with their consents, unless any of their brethren can give a reason from the Scripture to the contrary, or some better intelligence of his own, which latter sometimes falls out; secondly, what you speak of prophesying, need not say much of it, it is very warily used here, unless it be in absence, and weakness of Ministers, and for any abuse herein allow it not, but dislike it as you do: Now you have shewed so much for to inquire the truth of these matters, I pray you inform others also what answer you have received, which will be a further testimony of your love; pray for us, as we do for you, so taking leave I rest,

*Your unworthy weak
Brother in Christ,
JOHN COTTON.*

*Questions put to such as are admitted to
the Church-Fellowship.*

HOW it pleased God to work in them, to bring them home to Christ, whether the law have convinced them of sin, how the Lord hath won them to deny themselves and their own righteousness, and to rely on the righteousness of Christ, then they make a brief confession, or else an answer to a few questions about the main fundamental points of Religion, that it may appear indeed whether they be competently endued with the knowledge of the truth, and sound in the faith, and about the Godhead, the Trinity, the work, our first estate of innocency, the fall our redemption, Christ his Natures, his Offices, Faith, the Sacraments, the Church, the Resurrection, the last judgement, such as every Christian man is bound to learn and give account of; we refuse none for weakness, either knowledge or grace, if the whole be in them, and that any of the Church can give testimony of their Christian and sincere affections, and then the Church contenting to their admission, one of the Elders propounded to the party, the covenant that he must enter into with God and the Church, whereunto the party expressly covenants, then is reciprocally received the Churches covenant back again by the voice of the elder. This is all the secret we have among us, neither have we any more secret carriage, than this which no godly man that ever came over to us have ever disliked, you come not more willingly to have communion with us, then we receive you, upon no harder terms then have been declared.

The COVENANT itself.

*Since it hath pleased God to move you brethren to hold forth
the right hand of fellowship, It is your part, and that which*

6

I am to require of you in the name of the Lord, and of his Church, before you can be admitted thereunto whether you be willing to enter a holy Covenant with God, and with them and by the grace and help of Christ be willing to deny your self, and all your former pollutions, and corruptions, wherein in any sort you have walked, and so to give up your self to the Lord Jesus, making him your only priest and atonement, your only profit, your only guide and King, and Lawgiver, and to walk before him in all professed subjections unto all his holy Ordinance, according to the rule of the Gospel, and to walk together with his Church and the members thereof in brotherly love, and mutual edification and succour according to God; then do I also promise unto you in the name of this Church, that by the help of Christ, we likewise will walk towards you in all brotherly love and holy watchfulness to the mutual building, up one of another in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus, Amen, Amen.

FINIS.