

Thomas More Reader: Clerical Satire and Apocrypha: Part One

39. "Sickness in Heretics"

[From *The Supplication of Souls* ; Works, p. 322a]

But then shall ye sometimes see there some other whose body is so incurably corrupted that they shall walter and tolter, ¹ and wring their hands, and gnash their teeth; and their eyes water, their head ache, their body fret, their stomach wamble, ² and all their body shiver for pain; and yet shall never vomit at all: or if they vomit, yet shall they vomit still and never find ease thereof.

Lo, thus fareth it as a small thing may be resembled to a great by the souls deceased and departed the world. Ye, such as be clean and unspotted, can in *that* fire feel no disease at all, and on the other side such as come thence so deadly poisoned with sin that their spots be indelible and their filthiness unpurgeable, lie fretting and frying in the fire forever.

40. "Lutherans: Wise as Wild Geese"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, p. 179a-b]

"The church of Christ also is a thing that always hath stood and continued. But the sects of heretics and their churches never continued but shortly decayed and vanished quite away; so farforth that of all the old heretics their books also be gone and lost (when there was no law made yet to burn them), so that it is easy to see that God Himself destroyed them, and the world clean gave them up at sometime, though new heretics now long after take them up again. For if their opinions had anywhere continually endured there would their books have continually reserved, ³ which be now quite gone many years ago. And thus may you well see that there can no such folk be the church that in so many years have no church nor come to none but to theirs in which they say themselves they worship idols."

"Well," quoth he, ⁴ "peradventure they will not stick much to assign you a place and shew you a company and congregation which they will say is the very church. For what if they will shew you Bohemia and now in Saxony where Luther is, and peradventure in a good part of Germany? "Marry," quoth I, "if they say so, then leap they like a flounder out of a frying pan into the fire. For in Saxony first and among all the Lutherans there be as many heads as many wits. And all as wise as wild geese. And as late as they began yet be there not only as many sects almost as men but also the masters themselves change their minds and their opinions every day and wot ner ⁵ where to hold them. Bohemia is also in the same case: one faith in the town, another in the field. One in Prague, another in the next town. And yet in Prague itself one faith in one street, another in the next. So that if ye assign it in Bohemia ye must tell in what town. And if ye name a town yet must ye tell in what street. And yet all they acknowledge that they cannot have the sacraments ministred but by such priests as be made by authority derived and conveyed from the Pope which is under Christ vicary and the head of our church."

41. "Of Luther and his Leman"

[From *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* ; Works, p. 463a-b]

And upon the third text, because Saint Paul saith that it is better to marry than to burn, Tyndale deduceth that it is better for a friar to marry than to forbear lechery, and considereth not that when he breaketh his vow and weddeth an harlot, then he burneth both body and soul, first here in the fire of foul filthy lust and after this world in everlasting fire of hell. Is not this conclusion worshipfully deduced upon scripture? It is a marvel that he deduceth it not rather upon the text that he speaketh of here: "Love thy neighbor as thyself," and upon this text also: "Do to another as thou wouldest be done to thyself." These have yet some better color for Luther and his leman, and I doubt not but he will find them at last and say that his marriage is grounded there because he loveth her with such a lewd lousy love as the lewd lousy lover in lechery loveth himself and is so righteously disposed, that he will never desire that she shall lie with him, but when he is even as well content that himself shall lie with her. This, that we say now in sport, he will say once in earnest, I warrant you!

NOTE

(1) More mocks Martin Luther's marriage (in 1525) to Katharina von Bora, a Cistercian nun. His scathing epithets and short attacks upon Luther, usually cast in alliterative phrases, appear throughout his polemical dialogues and even in private correspondence, such as his "Letter to Bugenhagen" (trans. by Frank Manley, CW 7, p. 29): "Or is it a lie to say that Luther himself, when he was an Augustinian monk, engaged in whoredome, not marriage, with a nun dedicated to God for many years and then stolen from him"; and equally violent: "Give up your illegitimate bishopric. Send away that unfortunate girl [Katharina von Bora] you whore with in the name of marriage" (p. 103). Johann Bugenhagen officiated at Luther's wedding in 1525 and was Luther's friend and confessor for many years. Politeness, much less diplomacy, was not always de rigueur among brilliant renaissance men in their correspondence. According to Schuster (CW 8, p.1265) More identified Luther as "a lecherous monk" more than 60 times in the first three books of *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer!*

42. "Friar Frappe and Kit Cate his Mate"

[From *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* ; Works, p. 780a-b]

Now let us then suppose also that there had in the same time been a fond frantic friar, and that his name had been Luther, and that there had then also been a naughty nun, and that her name had been Cate, and that this fond frantic friar had wedded this naughty nun; and that there had been then one William Tyndale that had been so mad as to say they did well because the friar himself for the defence of his own lechery had told him that by the scripture he might lawfully do it, and that there had been then also another friar called Robert Barnes that misliked it not, but was himself also run out of religion, abjured of heresy, and perjured by relapse, and roiled about

like a layman, railing against religion and all the known Catholic Church, in contempt of his vow and his oath, too; and of all good Christian people upon earth, and withdrawing their honor from all the saints in heaven.

Suppose me now that in this full general council of the whole universal church assembled, this matter were proposed, and there the same Friar Frappe and Kit Cate his mate, and those other that would allow them, were brought forth to be heard (being at that time but these persons that I have rehearsed you), what they would say thereto:

And thereupon Luther himself having the words whereof he would never lack plenty (till frensy lack folly!) would there not only defend but also boast his beastly marriage and say that vows of chastity could bind no man, for no man ought to make them; but if he had that gift given him of God; for it is a thing which every man can not do, and a gift which no man can give himself, but if it be given him of God. And therefore whoso maketh any such vow, weening that he have the gift because he feeleth no contrary grudge at that time, yet whensoever he feeleth after any fleshly motion in his frail members, * he may then perceive well and be very sure that he hath not the gift, and that therefore he was deceived by the devil when he made himself a friar. And that he may now therefore run out of his religion and follow the flesh. And when he findeth a nun that feeleth the like, and that each of them feel other and like well each other for their feeling faith, then may they both be sure that they may boldly break both their vows and wed themselves together. And thereby shall they feel by their fleshly feeling faith that they two be two special elects predestinate by God before the world was wrought to go together in this world and bring forth holy fruit to serve the devil at his dinner!

NOTES

(1) **Friar Frappe and Kit Cate his mate:** A sarcastic allusion to Martin Luther (Friar Frappe), an Augustinian Friar, and Katharina von Bora (Kit Cate), a former Cistercian nun whom Luther married. "Friar Frappe" is a nickname, the contracted form of the original French, *frère frappart*, that is, "a libertine and debauched friar." The term appears earlier, in Sir Thomas More's poem, "*A Merry jest how a Sergeaunt would learn to play the friar*" (1503): "The friar frappe — Gat many a swap — Till he was full nigh slain." The epithet "Kit Cate" is probably drawn ultimately from William Langland's "*Piers Plowman*," in which poem Piers affectionately calls his wife and daughter "Kitty and Kalot." According to Schuster (CW 8, p. 1694), 'the name "Kit" in the sixteenth century could be used generically of promiscuous women.

(2) Sir Thomas More probably neither read nor knew of Luther's extraordinarily candid attitude about the need for normal sexual relationships. Luther had written: "Unless she is in a high and unusual state of grace, a young woman can do without a man as little as she can do without eating, drinking, sleeping, or other natural requirements. Nor can a man do without a woman" (J. Pelikan and H.T. Lehmann, [XXXIX, p. 297]). **elects predestinate** : Luther's doctrine of predestination of the elect, that is, God chooses whom He will have (election) and whom He will leave to perish (reprobation), a doctrine derived from St. Augustine, was not the center of his theological system but only "a corollary to his doctrine of the bondage of the will, and the utter helplessness of man without the grace of God.

It appears in its most absolute form in his treatise, *De Servo Arbitrio* , " which was a reply to a treatise by Erasmus on the subject of free will. (H.E. Jacobs, p. 365). For Luther, a man is justified before God, that is, forgiven and saved only by the merit of Christ, which merit is appropriated only through faith.

In his *Preface to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (1522), Luther says that "But since God is dependable his predestination cannot fail, and no one can withstand—we still have hope in the face of sin. Here, now, for once we must put a stop to those wicked and high flying spirits who first apply their own reason to this matter. They begin at the top to search the abyss of divine predestination, and worry in vain about whether they are predestined" (J. Pelikan and H.T. Lehmann, p. 378). The *O.E.D.* credits More with the first recorded example of the word "Elects" meaning "chosen of God".

43. "Lutheran Preachers in England"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies: Works*, pp. 271-272a]

And this for conclusion he ⁊ declared to be their very plain mind and opinion for all the cloaks that he set upon the matter before to make it seem that they meant in their words none harm.

And there it clearly appeared that he and his fellows (which in their preaching do covertly and craftily set out the damnable sect of Luther) hope and gape ⁊ always for some other time in which they trust openly and boldly to play the ravenous wolves and devour the sheep and mar the whole flock: and in the mean season, lie content to play the wily foxes and worry ⁊ simple souls and poor lambs as they may catch them straggling from the fold; or rather like a false shepherd's dog that would but bark in sight and seem to fetch in the sheep, and yet kill a lamb in a corner.

Men speak of some that bear two faces in one hood. ¹²

[*IN MARGIN : The Lutheran preachers bear two faces in one hood!*]

I never saw any that more verily play that pageant ⁊ than do this kind of such preachers. For in preaching to the people they make a visage as though they came straight from heaven to teach them a new better way and more true than the church teacheth or hath taught this many hundred years.

And then to the church in examination they shew themselves as poor men of middle earth, and as though they taught none otherwise than the church doth. But in conclusion when they be well examined, and with much work, the falsehood of their cloaked collusion is pulled off, then appeareth there all the malicious treachery and what poison they put forth under the cloak of honey.

44. "Talkative Heretics"

[From *The Apology of Sir Thomas More Knight* ; Works, p. 922a]

For like as a few birds always chirking ^{is} and fleeing from bush to bush many times seem a great many, so these heretics be so busily walking, that in every ale house, in every tavern, in every barge, and almost every boat, as few as they be, a man shall always find some, and there be they so busy with their talking; and in better places also where they may be heard, so fervent and importune in putting forth of anything which may serve for the furtherance of their purpose, that between their importune pressing and the diligence or rather the negligence of good Catholic men appeareth oftentimes as great a difference as between frost and fire.

NOTES

(1) Protestant reformers were known to have congregated in taverns, inns, warehouses, etc., for discussions and for proselytizing. The White Horse Tavern in Cambridge was notorious at the time for its meetings of Protestant university scholars, led by Dr. Robert Barnes (See E. G. Rupp, p. 19).

45. "A Protestant Rhetorician"

[From *The Supplication of Souls* ; Works, pp. 299a-b; 305a-b]

Lo! How this great Zelator ^{is} of the commonwealth crieth out upon the King that his sword is not strong and sharp to strike off innocents' heads. He hath of likelihood ransacked up all Dame Rhethorique's rolls to find out this goodly figure—to call upon the King and ask his Highness "Where is your sword," and tell him his sword is too dull—as though he would bid him bear it to the tutelers ^{is} to grind that he might strike off Doctor Horsey's head, whom his grace had found faultless, and testified him, himself, for an innocent. If this man were here matched with some such as he is himself that hath the eloquence that he hath, that could find out such comely figures of rhetoric as he findeth, set forth and furnished with such vehement words as he thundreth out like thunder blasts, that hath no less matter in his mouth than the great broad bottomless ocean sea full of evils, the weakness and dullness of the King's sword, the translation of the King's kingdom, the ruin of the King's crown, with great exclamations: "O grievous and painful exactions! O cause most horrible! O grievous shipwreck of the commonwealth!" What might one that had such like eloquence say here to him? Surely so much and in such wise as we silly poor, puling ^{is} souls neither can devise nor utter....

But yet, lest folk should abhor his hard heart and cruelty: that man tempereth his matter with a goodly visage of the sore inward sorrow that he taketh for the minishment of mankind, and with that great zeal that he beareth to generation for the good increase of Christian people in the land. For he would for that cause in any wise that all the clergy should have wives. For he asketh the King's highness (as the man hath wrought a great pleasure to oppose the King, wherein he useth a figure of rhetoric that men call "Sauce malapert") ^{is} what an infinite number of people might have been increased to have peopled your realm, if this sort of folk had been married like other men. This matter that priests must needs have wives he bringeth in diversely in 3 or 4 places.

And among other he hath one wherein he sheweth in railing against the clergy a principal part of his excellent eloquence. For there he useth his royal figure of rhetoric called "repetition," repeating often by the whole clergy, "these be they," in the beginning of his clause: "These be they that have made 100,000 idle whores in your realm! These be they that draw men's wives into incontinency in your realm." And after divers of such "these be they" he concludeth and knitteth up the matter with his accustomed vehemence fet out of Luther's volumes, asking who is able to number the great broad bottomless ocean sea full of evils, that this mischievous and sinful generation bringeth up upon us? As though all the whole clergy were of his condition and no man else but they. But among all his "these be they," this is one which as the sorest and the most vehement he setteth in the forefront of them all: "These by they that by their abstaining from marriage do let the generation of the people, whereby all the realm at length if it should be continued shall be made desert and inhabitable." » Lo! The deep insight that this beggar's proctor hath in the broad bottomless ocean sea full of evils to save the grievous shipwreck of the commonwealth!

He seeth far further than ever Christ was aware of, or any of his blessed Apostles, or any of the Old Fathers of Christ's faith and religion since his holy ascension hitherto till now that Luther came of late and Tyndale after him, and spied out this great secret mystery that neither God nor goodman could espy. If their abstaining from marriage should make all the land desert and inhabitable, how happeneth it that habitation endureth therein so long? For the land hath lasted sith the beginning of their abstaining from marriage, ye wot well, many a fair day.

NOTES

(1) Simon Fish ("**This great Zelator**") , theologian and pamphleteer, having displeased Cardinal Wolsey, fled to Holland where he wrote his attack against the clergy for its materialism and its belief in purgatory (See also No. 26, n.4).

(2) **Dame Rhetorique's rolls** : i.e., *elocutio* , the third part of classical rhetoric, the treasure-trove of figures and schemes. Lists of terms, often with examples, were available in numerous contemporary renaissance handbooks and were ransacked by poet and prose writer alike.

(3) **Doctor Edward Horsey** , the Bishop of London's Chancellor, was accused with John Spalding, a bellringer, of having murdered Richard Hunne, who was found hanged in the Lollards' Tower after being prosecuted for heresy in 1514. Sir Thomas More was unshakeable in his conviction that Hunne committed suicide and that Dr. Horsey was innocent of all charges. He dealt with the case at length elsewhere (see below, notes to nos. 93 and 94). More unfairly parodies the style of the so-called "Zelator," for Simon Fish's rhetoric was not remarkably high-blown, as More would have us believe.

¹ *Walter and toltter* : stumble and hobble

² *Stomach wamble* : i.e., get nauseated

³ Remained in existence

⁴ I.e., the Messenger of the *Dialogue*

⁵ *Wot ner* : know not

⁶ Lover

⁷ Wandered, roamed

⁸ I.e., sexual organs

⁹ I.e., William Tyndale

¹⁰ Wish

¹¹ Devour, kill

¹² *Bear...hood* : i.e., be guilty of duplicity

¹³ *Play...pageant* : i.e., employ trickery, deception

¹⁴ *Chirking*: chirping

¹⁵ I.e., Simon Fish

¹⁶ (Figurative), tale bearers

¹⁷ Whimpering

¹⁸ *Sauce malapert* : I.e., impertinence

¹⁹ *Inhabitable*: i.e., uninhabitable, uninhabited