

SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

Henry VIII (1509–1547)

1546

Although my Chancellor for the time being has before this time used, very eloquently and substantially, to make answer to such orations as have been set forth in this high court of Parliament, yet is he not so able to open and set forth my mind and meaning, and the secrets of my heart, in so plain and ample manner as I myself am and can do; wherefore I taking upon me to answer your eloquent oration, Master Speaker, say that where you, in the name of our well-beloved Commons have both praised and extolled me for the notable qualities that you have conceived to be in me, I most heartily thank you all that you have put me in remembrance of my duty, which is to endeavour myself to obtain and get such excellent qualities, and necessary virtues, as a prince or governor should or ought to have, of which gifts I recognize myself both bare and barren; but of such small qualities as God has endowed me withal, I render to His goodness my most humble thanks, intending with all my wit and diligence to get and acquire to me such notable virtues and princely qualities as you have alleged to be incorporate in my person.

These thanks for your loving admonition and good counsel first remembered, eftsoons thank you again, because that you, considering Our great charges (not for Our pleasure, but for your defences, not for Our gain, but to Our great cost), which We have lately sustained, as well in defence of Our and your enemies as for the conquest of that fortress which was to this realm most displeasent and noisome, and shall be by God's grace hereafter to Our nation most profitable and pleasent, have freely of your own mind granted to Us a certain subsidy specified in a certain act, which verily We take in good part, regarding more your kindness than the profit thereof, as he that sets more by your loving hearts than by your substance.

Besides this hearty kindness, I cannot a little rejoice when I consider the perfect trust and sure confidence which you have put in me, as men having undoubted hope and unfeigned belief in my good doings and just proceedings for you, without my desire or request, have committed to mine order and disposition all chantries, colleges, hospitals, and other places specified in a certain act, firmly trusting that I will order them to the glory of God and the profit of the commonwealth. Surely if I, contrary to your expectation, should suffer the ministers of the Church to decay, or learning (which is so great a jewel) to be ministered, or poor and miserable people to be unrelieved, you might say that I being put in so special a trust, as I am in this case, were no trusty friend to you, nor charitable man to mine even Christian, neither a lover of the public wealth nor yet one that feared God, to whom account must be rendered of all our doings. Doubt not I pray you, but your expectation shall be served, more godly and goodly than you will wish or desire, as hereafter you shall plainly perceive.

Now since I find such kindness on your part towards me, I can not chose but love and favour you, affirming that no prince in the world more favours his subjects than I do you, nor no subjects or commons more love and obey their sovereign lord than I perceive you do me, for whose defence my treasure shall not be hidden, nor, if necessity require, my person shall not be unadventured; yet although I with you, and you with me, be in this perfect love and concord, this friendly amity can not continue except both you, my lords temporal, and you, my lords spiritual, and you, my loving subjects, study and take pain to amend one thing which surely is amiss and far out of order, to the which I most heartily require you, which is that charity and concord is not amongst you, but discord and dissention bears rule in every place. Saint Paul says to the Corinthians in the thirteenth chapter, "charity is gentle, charity is not envious, charity is not proud," and so forth, in the said chapter, behold then what love and charity is amongst you, when the one calls the other heretic and anabaptist, and he calls him again papist, hypocrite, and pharisee. Be these tokens of charity amongst you? Are these the signs of fraternal love between you? No, no, I assure you, that this lack of charity among yourselves will be the hindrance and assuaging of the fervent love between us, as I said before; except this wound be salved and clearly made whole, I must needs

judge the fault and occasion of this discord to be partly by negligence of you the fathers and preachers of the spirituality.

If I see a man boast and brag himself, I cannot but deem him a proud man. I see and hear daily that you of the clergy preach one against another, teach one contrary to another, inveigh one against another without charity or discretion. Some be too stiff in their old Mumpsimus, others be too busy and curious in their new Sumpsimus. Thus all men almost be in variety and discord, and few or none preach truly and sincerely the word of God, according as they ought to do. Shall I now judge you charitable persons doing this? No, no, I cannot so do—alas, how can the poor souls live in concord when you preachers sow amongst them in your sermons debate and discord? Or if they look for light, and you bring them to darkness? Amend these crimes I exhort you, set forth God's word, both by true preaching and good example giving, or else I, whom God has appointed His vicar and high minister here, will see these divisions extinct and these enormities corrected, according to my very duty, or else I am an unprofitable servant, and untrue officer.

Although as I say, the spiritual men be in some fault that charity is not kept amongst you, yet you of the temporality be not clean and unspotted of malice and envy, for you rail on bishops, speak slanderously of priests, and rebuke and taunt preachers, both contrary to good order and Christian fraternity. If you know surely that a bishop or preacher errs or teaches perverse doctrine, come and declare it to some of Our council or to Us, to whom is committed by God the high authority to reform and order such causes and behaviours, and be not judges yourselves of your own fantastical opinions and vain expositions, for in such high causes you may lightly err.

And all though you be permitted to read Holy Scripture and to have the word of God in your mother tongue, you must understand that it is licensed you so to do only to inform your own conscience, and to instruct your children and family, and not to dispute and make scripture a railing and a taunting stock against priests and preachers (as many light persons do). I am very sorry to know and hear how un-reverently that most precious jewel the word of God is disputed, rhymed, sung, and jangled in every alehouse and tavern, contrary to the true meaning and doctrine of the same. And yet I am even as much sorry that the readers of the same follow it in doing so faintly and coldly; for of this I am sure, that charity was never so faint amongst you, and virtuous and Godly living was never less used, nor God himself amongst Christians was never less revered, honoured, or served.

Therefore, as I said before, be in charity one with another, like brother and brother, love, dread, and serve God (to the which I, as your supreme head and sovereign lord, exhort and require you) and then I doubt not but that love and league that I spoke of in the beginning shall never be dissolved or broken between us. And the making of laws, which be now made and concluded, I exhort you the makers to be as diligent in putting them in execution as you were in making and furthering the same, or else your labour shall be in vain, and your commonwealth nothing relieved. Now to your petition, concerning Our royal assent to be given to such acts as passed both the houses. They shall be read openly, and you may hear them.