

## Nii6 Religion the most sacred power on earth

*Notes.* This poem, primarily concerned with the continental wars of religion, and reflecting in its course both on perceived threats to English Protestantism and on the inherent corruption of princely courts, is dated 1623 in one source (BL MS Stowe 962), and stated in another as having been “Written after the beginning of the Bohemian war” (Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50). In the source used here, it is placed between poems on “A Papist” and “A true Puritan without disguise”, which are both taken from Leighton(?), The Interpreter.

### “Religion”

Religion the most sacred power on earth  
reviv'd, and formd in our blest Saviours birth  
trew cherrisher of peace why should theys warrs  
tearme thee the author of theys civill Jars  
whilst under thy white Banner they with blood 5  
pollute those places wheer thine alter stood  
O Princes leave to use theyse wicked artes  
Religion's in your eyes not in your harts  
yett your high purple Preist bids yow proceede  
tis merritorius for the church to bleed 10  
what though tenn thousand perrish, soe you win  
a stinking hole to thrust this doctrine in  
it is enough, O that this Papall beast  
should drive yow thus on slaughter, make a jeast  
att your lost lives, laughing to thinke how hee 15  
can make yow runn on danger himselfe fre,  
yett safe he is not for the powerfull God  
will whip his pride with his omnipotent rodd  
but he doth stay his vengeance & doth cherishe  
his proude ambition till hees fitt to perrish 20  
and his deare sone (that Catholicke Monarchie

that would grasp all within his empyre)<sup>1</sup>  
 why with intestine arms doth he oppress  
 the trew religion? when his rich excess  
 of riott, spoyle, & rapine doe abound 25  
 great King beware least thou thy selfe confound  
 in thy ambitious thoughts; strive to be good  
 not greater then thou art, tis durt and mudd  
 make up a vitious Prince, when verteous Kings  
 are Gods on earth holly & glorious things 30  
 enough of this, but, poore religion, thou  
 that are more happy wheer the labouring plough  
 doth teare the earth then in great Princes Courts  
 wheer nought but high impyety imports  
 wheer vertues never raysd for vertues cause 35  
 wheer will & power doth make & forfeit Lawes  
 wheer flattery rules & pride doth governe all  
 wheer nothings good, but what is bestiall  
 wheer wilt thou goe in safty? England, no  
 Spanyne theer doth plott thy utter overthrowe<sup>2</sup> 40  
 Fraunce will in peces teare the, the Rich states<sup>3</sup>  
 will the but coldly use, fly to the Gates  
 of Heaven & enter: O most wretched times  
 when wee must loose religion by our Crimes.

**Source.** Huntington MS HM 198, 1.84-85

**Other known sources.** Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37, fol. 76v; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fol. 29r; BL MS Stowe 962, fol. 142r

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<sup>1</sup> *His deare sone...his empyre*: the King of Spain. Protestant polemicists argued that the Spanish aimed at a “Universal Monarchy”.

<sup>2</sup> *Spanyne theer...overthrowe*: allusion to fears that the Spanish planned to overthrow English Protestantism and reestablish Catholicism in the wake of the Spanish Match treaty.

<sup>3</sup> *The rich states*: the Dutch United Provinces.