



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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## THE PROVINCIAL SYNOD OF CONNAUGHT.

The second public Session was held on the 25th ult. The sermon was preached by His Lordship the Bishop of Killala. We make the following extracts:—

Faith alone is capable of correcting the mobility, the inconsistency, the fickleness of the mind. We know by fatal experience into what a labyrinth of errors the want of faith has drawn and implicated, not only Pagan philosophy, but also our dissenting brethren, and, indeed, all those who, from the days of the Apostles down to the present, following their proud, deceptive human reason as their guide, have refused to subject their necks to the sweet yoke of faith.—Were I to recite a catalogue of the mere names of all the heresies and sects which have hitherto infested the Church of Christ, I should weary you indeed. All of them, differing as much from each other as they do from the one true Catholic Church, are united in one point only, and that is, in opposition to the Catholic Church, just as all errors are opposed to truth; and the Catholic Church is opposed to all heresies and sects, just as truth is opposed to all errors. This wonderful discrepancy of jarring sects and of conflicting doctrines is the necessary result of the sort of rule of faith which these sectaries adopt as their guide in matters of religion. Their rule of faith is the Scripture interpreted by private judgment. Now, let us see to what consequences such a principle must lead. First, in order that this principle would be a safe and true guide to follow in matters of faith, it should be necessary that the reason of each individual, *i. e.*, his private judgment, should be clear enough to comprehend the meaning of every text of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. But is it so? In the first place, what will become of that unfortunate large class of ignorant persons in England, Ireland, and Scotland, and throughout the world, who can neither read nor write? How can the Bible, interpreted by private judgment, be a rule of faith to them, whereas they cannot read a single word of it? And how many of those, even who can read a little, scarcely understand the meaning of one-sixth of the words which they read? The Bible therefore interpreted by private judgment could never have been intended by our merciful Redeemer to be a rule of faith for all. Secondly.—In order, *&c.*, it should be necessary that the Scriptures should be clear, so as that all who can read them can understand them by their private judgment. But are they so clear? The Scripture itself tells us not.—St. Peter in his second Epistle, cap. 8, ver. 16, speaking of the Epistles of St. Paul, says of them that “in them are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” The inspired Apostle, St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, the head of the Church, the Vicar of Christ, the rock on which Christ built His Church, assures us that the Scriptures are not clear, but hard to be understood, and that the unlearned and unstable wrest their meaning to their own destruction; and why? The same Apostle tells us why, and the reason is because they interpret the Scriptures by private reason in private judgment, a mode of interpretation expressly condemned and prohibited by him, as we read in the same epistle, i. 20, where he says—“Understanding this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is made by private interpretation.” Besides, any person conversant with Scripture will see at a glance that no writings are more obscure in many parts than the Scriptures, especially the prophetic portions of them, the Apocalypse, and other portions of them; so that it is not only the unlearned, but they who in their own eyes suppose themselves to be very learned, unless they are guided in their interpretation of them by the infallible authority of the Church, are soon beguiled by the glimmer of their delusive reason into mazes of error and contradiction. Witness the late and present edifying disputes in the Anglican Establishment, the Gorham case regarding baptism, some with Gorham maintaining that it (baptism) is not necessary for salvation—others, even some called Bishops, maintaining its necessity, and the Queen in Council, the she head of the Anglican Establishment, leaving the controversy undecided, but promoting Gorham in the meantime to a rich benefice. Witness again the dispute in parliament, some years ago, about the indissolubility of marriage—the then so called Archbishop of Tuam, with others, maintaining its indissolubility, and the parliamentary Archbishop of Canterbury, with others, maintaining the opposite opinion of its dissolubility, and both, notwithstanding this open and public contradiction of opinion and of doctrine, not only tolerated as Bishops, and teachers, and Doctors of the Protestant Church, but highly rewarded with thousands and tens of thousands of pounds yearly for their scandalous teachings of error

and of heretical doctrines; for, if the Archbishop of Tuam was right, as he chanced to be, upon this point of doctrine, it is evident that the Archbishop of Canterbury, who held the opposite opinion, must have been wrong, and must have taught heretical doctrine; and yet all these learned disputants on these all-important and vital points of doctrine quoted Scripture, and the very self-same texts of Scripture, for their respective and conflicting opinions. How, then, can they say that the Scriptures are so clear that every one can understand them by the aid of his reason, or by private judgment, when we see these dignitaries of a parliamentary Church, learned in their own eyes, deducing such opposite and conflicting doctrines from the same texts of Scripture?—Must not we say of them, in the language of St. Paul, “That, professing themselves to be wise, they become fools.” And this must continue to be so as long as they refuse to submit their necks to the sweet yoke of faith—as long as they refuse to be guided by the infallible authority of the Church, the pillar and the ground of truth (1st Timothy, iii. 5), against which the gates of Hell shall never prevail—which always had, and will have to the end of the world, the Holy Ghost assisting her in her teachings, as we are assured by the promises of Our Redeemer Jesus Christ—so long will they be tossed about by every wind of doctrine, because they have no principle of unity of faith—nay, I may say they have no Divine faith at all in the canonicity and inspiration of the Scriptures; because, to make an act of Divine faith, without which “it is impossible to please God,” it is necessary to give the full, unhesitating assent of the mind to the object of the act of faith—*i. e.*, to the truth to be believed. But no Protestant can give unhesitating assent to the canonicity and inspiration of the Scriptures, because he admits no infallible authority—he is not infallible himself, nor is his Church, as he freely admits; if, then, the canonicity of the Scriptures be proposed to his belief, according to his principle, he cannot be sure whether the translation of them into the vernacular language, which is put into his hands by the Ministers of his Church, is correct and conformable to the original text and accurately conveys its meanings, because he believes his Church to be fallible. He must, therefore, to satisfy himself of the accuracy of the translation, begin his inquiry by comparing the translation with the original, and to do this he must have a thorough knowledge of Greek, of Hebrew, of Syriac, of Syro-Chaldaic, and of Latin. How few, if any, Protestants have a perfect knowledge of these languages? To acquire it would occupy the greater portion of one's life, and to institute a comparison between all the books of the English translation of the Bible, and the same books written in the original languages, would occupy the remaining portion of his life, however long it may be, and during all this time his mind is in doubt about the accuracy of the translation; but let me suppose that at the end of his life he is satisfied as to its accuracy, he is only at the commencement of a new inquiry, not less difficult as to the canonicity of the Scriptures, and whatever the result of this inquiry may be, he can have no certainty as to its correctness, because he is fallible himself, as also his Church, as he admits, and therefore both may be in error; and therefore he can never be sure that he has the canonical Scriptures. Now this want of certainty is incompatible with an act of Divine faith, which requires an unhesitating full assent of the mind to the object of the act of faith, or to the doctrine proposed to be believed, consequently he can make no act of faith in the canonicity of the Scriptures placed in his hands; and if this be true of the learned Protestant, who is master of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Syro-Chaldaic, by a much stronger reason it is true of the illiterate, and of those who are merely able to spell or read imperfectly. Now, if he cannot make an act of faith in the canonicity of the Scriptures, because he must, according to his principles, be always in doubt about their canonicity, much less can he make an act of faith in any one doctrine which he wants to prove by any texts of Scripture, for, in the first place, he must be in doubt whether the texts of Scripture by which he desires to prove any doctrine is the Word of God at all; and, in the next place, he must be in doubt whether the texts of Scripture in question prove to a certainty the doctrine he maintains by them; for, as he and his Church are both fallible, he can never be sure that he understands them in their right meaning, particularly as he sees that others equally learned as himself, or perhaps more learned, deduce from these texts of Scripture a doctrine different and sometimes quite opposed to the doctrine which he deduces from them. He must, therefore, be afraid that he may be wrong in his interpretation of them, and must therefore be in doubt about their meaning, and consequently cannot make an act of faith in the doctrine which he maintains by them, for, as I have often said, an act of faith excludes all

doubt. Oh! how pitiable is the state of a Protestant, who says that faith alone, without good works, is sufficient for salvation. Yet we see that this Protestant has no faith at all, that he has never made, and never can make, an act of true Divine faith, until he renounces his heresy, and becomes a member of the One Only True, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church; or, to make the unenviable state of a Protestant clear and intelligible in a few words, if he is in sin, he says the only means of obtaining forgiveness is faith; but I have proved that, according to his own rule of faith, therefore he has no means of obtaining forgiveness of his sins—melancholy consequence of separating from the True Church, the pillar and the ground of truth.—Yet, these are the persons who, as St. Peter says, “Go about like a roaring lion, seeking whom they may devour” (1st Peter, 5th c.) thrusting their corrupt and spurious versions of the Bible into the hands of poor illiterate Catholics, victims of famine, whom they may endeavor by their bribes of money and food to pervert from the Faith. With what clear prophetic vision St. Peter foresaw and foretold these false teachers, as we read in his 2nd Epistle, 2nd c., “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there shall be among you lying teachers, who shall bring in sects of perdition, bringing upon themselves swift destruction, and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you, whose judgment now for a long time lingereth not, and their perdition slumbereth not.” I earnestly exhort you, my brethren, to be on your guard against them, and I say to you, in the words of St. Peter, “Be sober and watch, and resist them, strong in faith”—for, my brethren, the crime of apostasy from the Faith is a grievous, enormous sin. Hear the Apostle St. Paul speaking of this sin of apostasy:—“It is impossible for those who were once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good Word of God, and are fallen away, to be renewed again to penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery. For the earth that drinketh in the rain which cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is siled, receiveth blessings from God. But that which bringeth forth thorns and briars is reprobate, and very near unto a curse, whose end is to be burnt” (Heb. 6th c.) Hear again Saint Peter on the same subject. He says—“For flying from the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they be again entangled in them and overcome, their latter state is become unto them worse than the former—for it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than after they have known it to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them. For that of the true proverb has happened. The dog is returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” (Peter, 2nd Epistle, 2nd c., vv. 20, to end of chapter.) Hear St. Paul again, Heb., 10, c. 26 v. c.—“For if we sin wilfully, after having the knowledge of the truth, there is now left no sacrifice for sins, but a certain dreadful expectation of judgment and the rage of a fire which shall consume the adversaries.” Preserve then with all possible care this precious gem of faith, “without which it is impossible to please God.” But our faith, in order to be acceptable to God, must have certain qualities which I will briefly sketch. 1st—It must be simple and humble, *i. e.*, we must believe the truths of religion, without being over curious to fathom their depth—we must believe them on the authority of God revealing them, and of the Church proposing them to our belief, as having been revealed by God. Our duty is to learn from the Church the truths which God has revealed, and then firmly to believe them on the authority of God, who cannot be deceived himself, as His knowledge is infinite, and cannot deceive us, because He is truth itself, and detests every lie and wilful falsehood. We know that God comprehends thousands of truths, which soar aloft far above our comprehension, but nothing could be more unreasonable than to deny these truths when revealed by God, merely because we cannot comprehend them; this would be setting up our own feeble judgment against the illimitable judgment of God, and preferring the glimmering rushlight of our deceptive human reason to the dazzling effulgence of the luminary of Heaven. It would be the height of intolerable pride and of the most stupid folly—nay, it would be blasphemy of the most execrable kind—it is tantamount to language of this sort:—You, my God, have assured us by revelation that you are one in substance and three persons, but I do not and cannot comprehend this by my reason, therefore I believe you are not telling me the truth, and I believe my own reason in preference to your omniscient intellect. What blasphemy! what folly! what diabolical Luciferian pride! We refuse to believe on the

authority of God what God positively assures us is the fact, and set up our own Will-o'-the-Wisp reason to combat the omniscient, falsehood-hating, truth-loving God. Oh! prodigious folly and execrable blasphemy of weak, imbecile, human reason! Yourself and everything in nature that encompasses you is to you an unfathomable mystery, and hypostatical union of your soul and body, *i. e.*, of spirit and matter, is incomprehensible to you; the grain of wheat committed by the husbandman to the bosom of the soil must first rot before it begins to vegetate and to fructify an emblem, according to St. Paul, of the death and resurrection of your own body. Yet how this is accomplished you cannot comprehend. You will not, however, on that account, deny these truths in the natural order, because you have the evidence of your senses to attest their existence. Why, then, should you deny the existence of many truths in the supernatural order, which to you are incomprehensible, since you have the infallible testimony of God himself to attest their existence? St. Paul tells us that faith is the evidence of things that appear not; for if they appeared, *i. e.*, if you had the evidence of the senses to prove their existence, your belief in them would not be faith at all; it would be only human belief, without merit or reward. Our faith must therefore be humble, ready to sacrifice this understanding to Him who sacrificed himself for your redemption. Faith is like the pillar of cloud which conducted the Israelites through the desert; it was the pillar of cloud by day to protect them from the scorching rays of the sun, and a pillar of fire by night to guide their steps in the darkness, and to prevent them from wandering away from the right path which led them to the Land of Promise. So it is with faith; when things appear to our senses, then we do not want faith, just as the Israelites in the desert did not require by day the pillar of fire for their guidance, but when the darkness and obscurity of supernatural truths and mysteries overtake us, then it is that there is room and need for the exercise of faith, which then, like a pillar of fire, conducts us safely through the mazes and perplexities of doctrines and opinions, free from all error and deception, to the true land of promise. Secondly, our faith must be active and working, exemplary and edifying; it must not be a mere idle speculative faith by which we believe the truths of religion, but neglect to practice the virtues which faith commands; faith of that sort is not practical, and if not practical it is dead. Hear the Apostle St. James, speaking of faith of that sort—(2 c., 14, et cetera):—“What shall it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but hath no works; shall faith be able to save him? No; for even as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” And what shall it profit you, if you believe that Christ instituted the Sacraments to impart grace and spiritual life to your soul, and that He and the Church command you to receive them? What doth it profit a rich man to believe that God commands him to give alms to the poor, if he neglect to do the good work? What doth it profit the voluptuary if he believe that there is a God, and yet leads such a life of luxury and sensuality as if there were no God? “Thou believest,” says Saint James, “that there is one God: thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble.” What doth it profit you to believe in your heart all the truths of the Catholic religion, if you are afraid or ashamed to avow and profess them openly?—“for with the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Rom., 10 c. 10 v.) To refuse to believe the truths of religion would be one of the greatest misfortunes, but to believe these truths, and yet to live in such a way as if one did not believe them, is one of the greatest of crimes—nay, the very greatest of all sins. The best means of preserving the precious gift of faith is fervent and assiduous prayer and frequent meditation on its inestimable value—on the deplorable conduct of those who have the misfortune of being born in error, and brought up in heresy or infidelity. Oh! we can never sufficiently be grateful to God for having endowed us with His heavenly gift. Let us beg of Him with all the ardor of our souls to preserve to us this theological virtue, “The beginning of salvation, the foundation and the root of all justification.” O God, we beseech Thee not to inflict on our nation that dreadful punishment, that awful and terrible chastisement with which Thou hast Thy wrath visited those neighboring sister islands a few centuries ago. Before then they professed the true faith in all its purity and brilliancy, but since then to the present time they have become a frightful aby, a bottomless pit, whence arise in the greatest abundance the thickest, the darkest, and the most pernicious vapors of schism, of error, of impiety, of heresy, of libertinism, and of licentiousness, and an almost countless number of sects, having no faith or religion but such as may be dictated to each individual by his own caprice—those nations have enjoyed great wealth, great