

**REASONS FOR ABJURING
ALLEGIANCE TO THE SEE
OF ROME. A LETTER TO
THE EARL OF SHREWSBURY**

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Reasons for abjuring allegiance to the See of Rome. A letter to the earl of Shrewsbury by Pierce Connelly

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PIERCE CONNELLY

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REASONS

FOR ABJURING ALLEGIANCE

TO

THE SEE OF ROME.

A Letter

TO

THE EARL OF SHREWSBURY.

BY **PIERCE CONNELLY, M.A.,**
FORMERLY RECTOR OF TRINITY, NATCHEZ, LATE DOMESTIC
CHAPLAIN TO THE EARL OF SHREWSBURY.

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A LETTER,

&c.

DEAR LORD SHREWSBURY,

THE friendship with which you have honoured me for more than fifteen years,—from the day when your kind courtesy first brought you to my modest apartment in "Via della Croce," and subsequently led you to stand sponsor for me upon entering the Church of Rome,—which at last placed me in the confidential relationship of your domestic chaplain and in close intimacy,—a friendship proclaimed so honourably to me in my absence, and ever proved so affectionately at home, and which, on an occasion of great affliction, supported me by a sympathy given with manly frankness, but with all a woman's gentleness,—such a friendship, deeply felt and dearly remembered, imposes it on me, almost as a duty, to offer you publicly, if not an apology, at least the reasons, for my renouncing, as much against my feelings as your own, not only a position of much happiness and many worldly advantages, but the religion, which at one-and-thirty years of age I had deliberately chosen, and to which you solemnly took upon you to answer for my fidelity.

You doubtless will remember my printed letter to my Bishop, when I gave up my preferment in the Protestant Church in America, long before taking any more decisive step. You will remember the principle which lay at the bottom of all my dissatisfaction with Protestantism, and what dear Bishop Otey called, my horror of the restless spirit of democracy in Church and State.

I am not yet ashamed of that principle, however I may be of the conclusions to which it led me. Nor am I ashamed of having been deluded into thinking purity and charity to be synonymous with morality in a Church which showed me such living examples as Gwendaline Talbot and Carlo Odescalchi.

Hierarchical subordination, whether in State or Church, in a kingdom or in a family, I still consider the only basis for a com-

munity to be built upon; the tranquillity of order, the only tranquillity that deserves the name. And the virtues of the angelic persons I have named, (and of others I could mention, not yet gone to their reward, seen so nearly as I saw them, were enough to establish Rome's claim to sanctity, if they had only been Rome's real coinage. But they were not. They were the pure gold that counterfeiters show you to make their base coin current.

Facts, moreover, so often a fatal source of error, from being misunderstood or imperfectly comprehended, had previously helped to lead me astray in the great matter of religion. I saw the masses of slaves around me apparently beyond the reach of the Protestant Church; while, at no great distance, on the banks of the very same river, the Roman Catholic clergy had over them absolute control, and the pious white laity of their communion thought it no shame to kneel side by side with the negroes at the foot of a common altar. I saw in the Church of Rome not only an ability to conquer, as I supposed, unto God, but an ability to control effectively and to satisfy the spirits of those it conquered. I saw a wonderful unity of dogma and, as I supposed, a logical congruity in the system built upon it.

But what I saw required a constituted "power" as well as a commission, a human Head with a divine authority; and such an authority,—an authority which could make *doubt*, anathema,—to be just or valid, must be infallible. I wanted supernatural attributes embodied visibly. I started with wholly mistaken notions of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth. I was more than half a Romanist before I ever dreamed of Rome. And when, at last, I so avowed myself to myself, it was upon no examination of such dogmas as transubstantiation, the merit of good works, or the like; it was in submission to a polity which I believed to be divinely established upon earth and to stand upon the same level as the highest dogma. I became a Roman Catholic wholly and solely on the ground of there being amongst men a living, infallible interpreter of the mind of God, with divine jurisdiction and with authority to enforce submission to it. Well do I remember the elaborate argument of one of the most distinguished—if not the most distinguished—of the canonists of Rome, which convinced me of the right and duty of papal persecution. And I defy any honest man of ordinary capacity to resist the argument, if he once acknowledge the *lowest* pretensions of the Papal Church. To burn heretics whenever practicable and expedient, (and it is now inculcated on the Roman Catholic children of England by command of Dr. Wiseman,) is as binding as abstinence upon a Friday.*

* A proposition denying the right of the Papal Church to do so, was solemnly condemned by Pius VI. "Thefts, adulteries, murders, committed by

From the moment that I accepted infallibility and a visible supreme headship over Christendom, I frankly and deliberately gave up my reason, or at least, in all matters of faith and discipline, solemnly purposed to renounce it. From that moment I never examined one single doctrine of the Church of Rome with any other view than to be able to defend it against heretics and other "infidels." And I not only gave up myself, body and spirit, but, God forgive me! I gave up all that was entrusted to me, all that was dear to me, to my new obedience. I believed myself to be the most thorough of Roman Catholics, a very fakir in my allegiance; and my ecclesiastical superiors believed me to be so too.

How often the strange *unreality* of this deep conviction must have occurred to you, dear Lord Shrewsbury, since our sad parting! Like the infallibility on which it was founded, it was a delusion. I never was wholly a subject of the mysterious Church of Rome, no more than tens of thousands of others who live and die in her.

I had put my natural affections under ban, I had renounced the senses which our Lord himself bade his Apostle, St. Thomas, appeal to finally. I had renounced much of my private reason. But I never had let go my conscience.

And so I never was—you are not, my Lord, you never can be—truly a Romanist. No man can be *truly* a Romanist who is not so *unlimitedly and without reserve*. Conscience and the creed of Pius IV. are contraries, contradictories. To make a consistent, congruous Roman Catholic, there must be unreasoning submission in morals as in faith. Bellarmine's inference from the Roman Catholic doctrine is only the inference of common sense. That doctrine practically blots God out from the moral government of all

the true believer, may be concealed, even at the expense of what we call perjury; but the crime even of secret heresy, nay, even of suspected heresy, stands in another category. Rome knows no horror like her horror of heresy. But, next to heresy, the highest of all sins in her catalogue, is *THE VOLUNTARY TOLERATION OF AN HERETIC*. With an heretic all bonds are *de jure* broken; and it is only by a cursed necessity that they may be submitted to *de facto*. No matter what may be the danger of the denunciation, no matter what may be the fate of the denounced, the brother is bound, as he hopes for heaven, to betray his brother, the child his own father, the wife her husband. Nor is the want of power to bring proof any excuse whatever from the obligation. And not only is this denunciation of the nearest and dearest a bounden duty, but the fierce zeal that would lead a man voluntarily to assist in torturing the doomed *HERETIC* is, to this day, solemnly set forth in the public liturgy of Rome as a blessed title to canonization; and, year after year, the people of Italy and Spain are summoned to kneel before the altar of 'St. Ferdinand of Castile,' and bless God for the model-king, who, whenever an *HERETIC* was burnt, came forward, and with his royal hands heaped fagots on the pile, which, as he believed, anticipated hell."—"Cases of Conscience, by Pascal the Younger."—*Bosworth, Regent Street*. The Author gives the frightful but irrefragable authorities at length.

who believe it. "*The Church*," (that is, the baptized,) says Belarmine, "*is inviolably bound to believe that to be morally good which the Sovereign Pontiff commands, and that morally bad which he forbids.*" The conscience must be ready to be given up to another and for another, who is held to represent Omnipotence, who is held to have the right to absolve from all individual responsibility, and to whom obedience paid blindly is accounted the very highest practice of Christian virtue. "LET HIM THAT DESIRES TO GROW IN GODLINESS GIVE HIMSELF UP TO A LEARNED CONFESSOR, AND BE OBEDIENT TO HIM AS TO GOD. HE THAT THUS ACTS IS SAFE FROM HAVING ANY ACCOUNT TO RENDER OF ALL HIS ACTIONS. THE LORD WILL SEE TO IT THAT HIS CONFESSOR LEADS HIM NOT ASTRAY."*

But though my allegiance to the Church of Rome was a delusion, and a culpable delusion,—for it had its origin in carnal-mindedness and pride,—it was most sincere. The sacrifices which I made, and the ways in which I proved my devotedness, you, my dear Lord, and many other illustrious Roman Catholics, will not need to be reminded of, and will not allow to be forgotten. At the time I made those sacrifices, they were the almost involuntary expression of my passionate love to the Church of my imagination and my hope. They are even now my poor excuses to myself. Devotion to any cause, as to any person, finds its natural utterance in sacrifices. And to the last, it was not from sacrifices nor sufferings that I drew back—I drew back from nothing, even in my most secret thoughts, till I was required to be a *conscious* partaker in undoubted sin.

The great well-spring of practical iniquity in the Church of Rome, is what are called, THE COUNCILS OF PERFECTION.

These councils are *poverty, chastity, and obedience*, practised according to a vow. A vow of any of them, or of all three, may be made and *religiously* observed, either by persons living in the world of business or of fashion, or by persons living in a community separated from the world. The three vows do not, however, even in this latter case, constitute what is called a "religious" man or woman: and indeed, so far as I know, there is not a single religious woman, or legally professed nun, in any convent either in England or Scotland, though there are hundreds who believe themselves to be so, and who are not likely to be undeceived, any more than they are ever likely to learn that they have the right to demand a confessor of their own choosing.†

To constitute a religious, or one whose vows are recognised by

* "St. Philip Neri," quoted by Liguori.

† I was once admonished, in writing, by the superior of a religious congregation, how extremely dangerous it was for a nun to be made acquainted with this fact.

the Church of Rome, it is necessary that the vows should have been made in an established community which has been solemnly acknowledged and, according to set forms, proclaimed to Christendom, by the Pope, as an order of the Church of Rome. Such, for instance, is the community of the Benedictines or the Jesuits. In the case of a female, moreover, in order to constitute a religious, it is necessary that she should be *cloistered*, that is, imprisoned for life. Finally, it is necessary, for either man or woman, that the vows should be perpetual. Any other religious vows, *no matter with what solemnity of words or ceremonial they may be made, are only simple promises*, which a bishop or a priest can at any moment dispense from, at the pleasure of *either* party, the presumed consent, *or even the privity*, of the person who has made the vows being unnecessary.*

As of course *all* vows are merely conventional in the Church of Rome,† the Pope can dispense with those of a real religious, but, inasmuch, as such vows are acknowledged to be really vows, and not only nominally so, the Pope reserves to himself the right to dispense from them.

A vow of *poverty*, in the mind of the Church of Rome, whether made in religion or out of it, does not include any idea of want, or suffering, or abjection. It allows the use of the *largest* amount of wealth, and when expedient, the *proudest* show of state, and the freest indulgence in luxury. It does not even forbid the personal possession or acquisition of property of any kind, with *dominium radicale*, provided the right of appropriating it to private purposes at private discretion be not set up nor exercised. It only forbids the possession or the use of property by the individual *independently*.

Nay, it may be well to add,—for these are truths as little known to Roman Catholics in general as to Protestants,—that the obligation of the vow of poverty, even in religion, does not require that a valid license, given to an individual to make use of wealth, should be limited to virtuous or lawful purposes. That license once given, the individual is as free from the obligation of his vow, as if it never had been made. He stands upon the footing of any un-oathed person, just (say the divines quoted by Liguori) as when the Pope by dispensation allows near relatives to marry, he not only

* *Dispensatio potest impetrari non tantum pro ignorante sed etiam invito.*
—LIGUORI.

† This is so absolutely and unlimitedly true, that though the Pope is at liberty to swear whatever he pleases, *it is impossible for him to bind himself*,—the Vice-God,—by any oath that he may make. This was logically proved and frankly maintained, without contradiction, by the General of the Jesuits in the Council of Trent. "Supposes," said Laynez, "the Pope were to engage, under a solemn oath taken by himself, not to make use of his dispensing power—the oath would cease to be obligatory the very instant that charity counselled him to break it!" *PALL. CON. TRIN. XXI. 14.*