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CATHOLIC BELIEF

Excerpts from the Pastoral Letter of
BISHOP KEILEY



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CATHOLIC BELIEF.

The following paragraphs are taken from the Pastoral letter of Rt. Rev. Benj. J. Keiley, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Savannah, which was read in all the Catholic Churches of Georgia at the beginning of the Lenten season:

“It is well known to all that at present in this State there is a manifestation of very bitter dislike for the Catholic Church. This is shown in the papers, discussions and politics of the State.”

“During the sixteen years that I have been Bishop of this Diocese, I do not recall as bitter attacks on the Catholic Church as have taken place recently.”

“We who know the sublime beauty and divine character of the teaching and work of the Catholic Church, cannot understand the motives that prompt the false accusations that are made.”

“I believe it would clear the situation if the people of Georgia are told how utterly false these charges are and how we suffer from the mistaken views of those who do not see.”

“I am persuaded there are many in Georgia who have never heard the truth about the Catholic Church and her teaching and they dislike her simply because they do not know her.”

“Our laws require that whoever charges another with a crime shall support the charge with evidence. Hence, in our courts, the accused must furnish competent witnesses to prove the truth of his charge and the accused has the right to establish his inno-

cence, by the examination of the witnesses against him, by showing their unreliability or by a denial established by his own witnesses."

"Now, all of these essential provisions are completely ignored when the Catholic Church is accused. The most monstrous charges are made against her teaching and practice on the unsupported utterance of the accuser and when we deny the truth of the charges and appeal to the court of public opinion and prove by our plea and by numberless witnesses, that we do not hold or teach the things alleged, no witnesses are brought by our adversaries to substantiate the charges.

All they do is to say: "O! of course you deny it."

"They accuse us of the worship of idols and of believing and teaching that no Protestant can be saved. We deny both of these false statements. They have been again and again denied, only to be again and again reiterated, and it certainly seems strange that for the most part men will listen and believe the charge and pay no attention to the denial."

"If the Catholic Church concealed her teaching and would not allow her children to tell the "Faith that was in them", there might be some excuse; but a penny will buy a catechism that contains all the doctrine of the Church, and any Catholic will gladly tell what the Church teaches. It seems to be recognized that ignorance of her teaching and her practice is a chief qualification for discussing them."

"The following seem to be the charges most frequently brought against us:

1. "It is said that we Catholics cannot be loyal citizens of this Republic, because we pay allegiance to a 'foreign power,' the Pope.

"It would be just as sensible, and equally as true, to say that the obedience that a child pays to his father and mother interferes with, or is an obstacle to, the obedience due the State."

"The Catholic Church tells us that we owe allegiance, obedience, service and loyalty to the State. The laws of God require us to give these tributes to the State, and its laws and institutions. The allegiance we pay to the Pope has nothing to do with the service we are bound to render to the State. The allegiance we pay to the Pope regards only our religious duties to God."

"Loyalty with us has the sanction and approval, and is a precept of our religion. As a matter of fact, did the Pope interfere in matters of a political nature, Catholics would not be bound to obey him."

"In the war between the States there were 30 Federal Generals who were members of the Catholic Church. In our Southern army there were 15 who were Catholics. There has never been a time in the History of this country from the war of Independence to the present that Catholics did not respond to the call of their country.

2. "Catholics are accused of forming a Catholic political party in the United States.

"Now if this were true the result would be that in those states where Catholics predominate, they would hold the offices. Now, Catholics exceed all other denominations combined in Arkansas, Connecticut, Colorado; are equal to all others combined in Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Nevada, Michigan, Wyoming; have an overwhelming majority in Massachusetts, Maine, Louisiana, New Mexico, Montana, Rhode Island, Vermont; yet only one of these states has a Catholic Governor.

"Catholics exceed those of any other denomination in 30 states, is second in 6 states,

third in 7 states and fourth in 12 states. Some of these states are always in the Democratic column, some always in the Republican column, some shift from one to the other. All of which goes to show that Catholics vote like other people and do not get together, even when one of their own runs for office."

3. "It is charged that the Bishops of the Church are interfering with political affairs.

This is not true, of course. They are citizens and have the right the same as others to vote and express their views; but to say that they use their position to further political ends or aims is false.

"Our Bishops may be Republicans or Democrats, and many of them, I know, have well defined politic preference regarding the policies of our Government; but it is certainly not true that they are seeking to influence politics by interfering in public affairs as Bishops of the Church."

4. "The attitude of Catholics towards Public Schools is a subject of misapprehension.

"We regard moral training as indispensable in the training of our children. It is not generally practical or fair to impart moral training in the public schools; hence we establish schools of our own where our children are taught the faith of their fathers. The public schools can teach their pupils everything of Washington or Lee, of Davis and Stephens; but nothing of Christ. Whoever is satisfied with the public schools, well and good; but we wish our children to know of God, of Christ and of salvation."

5. "It is said that Catholics worship the Virgin and the Saints.

"That we honor them is true. That we pay supreme honor or adoration to other than God is not true. We ask the Virgin Mother and Saints to pray for us. Our separated

friends likewise at least ask the prayers of fellow beings on earth. The Son of the Virgin Mother is the Savior: my Lord and my God and Perfect Man. He knew and observed the commandment, "Honor thy Father and Mother," and I am not ashamed to honor one whom Jesus honored. We honor highly Mary the creature; we adore only God, the creator."

6. "It is said that Catholics pay priests to forgive their sins.

"This is not true. That Christ gave power to his apostles to forgive sins is known to all; that this power was for the benefit of all men and for all times is evident; that it passed to the successors of the apostles is a necessity: Hence, we say in the Apostles Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." But it is false to say we pay for the forgiveness of sins."

7. "It is said we grant indulgences to commit sin.

"This is not true. Indulgences have nothing whatever to do with sin; either with forgiveness or pardon of sin, or with permission to commit sin. An indulgence can be gained only after the sin has been remitted and the guilt has been removed. An Indulgence is nothing else than the remission of punishment due after sin has been forgiven. The governor of a state grants an indulgence when he pardons a criminal. He remits the punishment due for the offense done."

8. "It is said that Catholics are forbidden to read the Bible.

"I have only to say that if they know how to read and have the small price of a Bible, or can borrow one, they may read it day and night. The only precaution prescribed by the Church is that the Bible, the whole Bible, and not a mutilated or incorrect version be used."

9. "It is said that women are kept in convents against their will.

"This is not true. No woman is retained in any convent against her will. On entering a convent, she is not allowed to make a vow to remain before at least six years have passed, and during those years she is at perfect liberty to leave when she pleases without being so much as told that she is doing wrong. And afterwards, after her final vow, she has only to say that she WILL leave and, while she will be told that it is wrong to break her vows, the doors are open and she can walk out."

10. "It is said that Catholics are taught to believe that protestant marriage are invalid, because not contracted before a priest, and that their children are illegitimate.

This is not true. The truth is that the Church holds such marriages valid and binding until death. The decree *Ne Temere*, requiring Catholics contracting marriage, to go before a priest, expressly and in terms, exempts Protestants from its operation, and it is false to say that Protestant marriages are declared invalid by the Church, or that the children of such marriages, are regarded as illegitimate.

"As an evidence of the fact that Catholics do not believe that the marriages of Protestants are void, it may be well to state that when protestants are received into the Church, the Church never thinks of requiring them to go through another ceremony of marriage which she would be obliged to do if she believed they were not lawfully married."

"There is hardly any excuse for such a wrong belief because the marriage law of the Church is centuries old and is readily accessible, in the Latin or authorized translations. Moreover, it has been in force in large portions of the country since the Coun-

cil of Trent and the object of the Ne Temere was only to make its observance uniform. The idea that Catholics are taught to believe that the marriages of Protestants are invalid and their children illegitimate is a hate breeding idea, and it is a social crime to circulate such a false and malicious belief."

"I know nothing which more clearly establishes the false character of these attacks on Catholics than the publication of an alleged oath said to be taken by the 4th degree members of the Knights of Columbus. It has been shown again and again that this so called oath is a forgery and a lie, but again and again has the charge been reiterated and I have, no doubt, it is believed by many in the State today."

"Catholics are not asking any privilege in this State, or in the United States. We do not, and never will oppose anybody on account of their religious belief. We helped to make the country what it is, a land of freedom, where no religious tests shall be exacted or applied, and we propose to do everything in our power to keep it so."

"We want no union of State and Church. Protestant England and Protestant Germany have such a union, and we have no desire to follow their example. We only ask to be left in peace while we obey the laws. Equal freedom with others; equal rights. Nothing more; nothing less."

