

THE PALMERSTON CONTROVERSY

A FINAL LETTER AND A CHALLENGE

The following letter from the Rev. Father Lynch appeared in the *Palmerston and Waikouaiti Times* of August 15:—

'Sir,—In your issue of July 25 Rev. Mr. Clarke wrote: "Everybody knows that when infallible definitions of Popes and authoritative statements of doctrine by Roman Catholic Councils are given as evidence, individual opinions by Roman Catholic writers, such as my neighbor has quoted, do not count for anything." Christian charity and the position of clergyman which Mr. Clarke holds prevent me from giving this statement the unsavory designation it deserves. I challenge him to name even one well-informed, fair-minded man who would cheerfully subscribe to such a statement. An honest appeal to his own conscience will tell him that it is utterly false. "Everybody knows." What Pope, what General Council even declared it to be so? Let us have some proof, some candid, reliable, impartial authority for your statement twice repeated. Your private declarations, unsupported by one scrap of evidence, "do not count for anything."

'The infallible definitions of General Councils and Popes are irreformable—i.e., fixed and unchangeable for all time. It is so with many statutes of our civil law, with the decisions of Supreme Court judges. May no official body, therefore, give an explanation of them? If not, then alas for the lawyers—"Othello's occupation's gone!" Now, what do we find in regard to this axiom? That all Catholic theologians are unanimous in giving it a certain meaning. When, therefore, all Catholic theologians are thus agreed in giving this expression a certain, fixed meaning; when, moreover, this unanimity of opinion has the completest approval of the highest authorities of the Church—e.g., Pius IX.—then we have not mere "personal explanations," or "individual opinions," but the official declaration of the Teaching Church, whose approval and authentic mouthpiece they are

'Despite his loud talking about infallible definitions of Popes and Councils, Mr. Clarke has not (wonderful to relate) quoted a single one. The Profession of Faith (less correctly called the Creed) of Pius IV. is neither an infallible definition of that Pontiff nor of the Council of Trent. It is merely a summary or collection of truths always and everywhere taught and believed by the Church. Why, nearly half of it was drawn up by the Council of Nice, A.D. 325. How absurd, then, to call this document "the infallible definition of Pius IV. and the Council of Trent." The author of the Athanasian Creed somehow knew of this awful axiom when he wrote towards the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century: "Whoever wishes to be saved before all things, it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith, which, unless a man shall have preserved whole and inviolate without a doubt, he shall eternally perish." Yet the Anglican Church and the formula concordiae of the other Reformed Churches recognise this ancient symbol. Wherein, then, have "Romanists" offended? They knew of it in the fourth Council of the Lateran, A.D. 1215. St. Clement of Rome knew of it in the year 95 A.D. But Mr. Clarke will have it that it was invented by Pius IV. and the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. How ruthlessly the "patent rights" of the manufacturers have been violated every student of the Westminster and other Protestant Confessions of Faith well knows!

'I feel pained to have to direct attention once more to Rev. Mr. Clarke's lack of information. His words at the beginning of my letter constrain me, though unwilling, to do so.

'1. Has Mr. Clarke never heard of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, which the Fathers of the Council ordered to be drawn up as a simple and orderly explanation of the said Council's infallible definitions?

'2. Does he not know that there is in Rome a congregation of learned ecclesiastics whose office it is

to give official explanations of the said definitions and decrees?

3. Should not one in his position be expected to know that Catholic dogmatic theology, with its hundreds of authors and thousands of works, is for the most part but an explanation of the concise and highly technical language used by the Church in defining matters of Faith?

4. Might not a little reflection tell him that, since the works of Catholic theologians are printed and published only after due examination and approval by the highest authorities in the Church, the explanations and teaching therein contained must be in strict agreement with the official teaching of Popes and Councils, and therefore no mere "individual opinions"? Otherwise, it is hard to see how sane men would devote time and energy to the writing of explanations that are (says Mr. Clarke), as far as Catholic teaching goes, nothing more or less than "worthless."

'5. May I ask if he has read Pallavicini's *History of the Council of Trent*? If not, he may do so with profit. There in three big volumes he will learn the *modus agendi* of General Councils: long discussions and debates on words and definitions without even a hint that approved theologians may never presume to explain what is the exact tenor and import of such infallible utterances.

'6. He quotes the Catechism of the Plenary Council of Australasia as if it were an infallible definition. I called his attention before to his confounding General with Plenary Councils. Will Mr. Clarke kindly read and mark the following: "We say no one can be saved outside the Church; we mean by this, no one who remains outside the Church through his own fault can be saved." Now, where, think you, are these words to be found? In a little book written for the use of the Catholic children of Australia, and with the approval of the Australian bishops: *Manual of Religious Instruction, Explanatory of the Catechism Approved for General Use by the Cardinal Delegate Archbishops and Bishops of the Australian Commonwealth*, lesson 10, page 29.

'Mr. Clarke attempts "to whitewash" the Calvinism of the *Presbyterian Confession of Faith* seem as easy as to poultice the humps on a camel's back. In fact, under the stress of controversy, he has altogether abandoned this Presbyterian stronghold, and taken refuge in the pages of the "open Bible." Even there it is only by ceding all dogmatic Christianity he can hope to find any consolation. This, in effect, he has done. Proteus-like, he imagines he can appear, vanish, and disguise himself at pleasure. But the official declaration on the title-page of the *Confession of Faith*, like the hand-writing on the wall of Baltassar's banquet-hall, stands ever over against him: "The *Confession of Faith* . . . approved by the General Assembly, 1647, and ratified and established by Acts of Parliament, 1649 and 1690, as the public and avowed confession of the Church of Scotland." Herein it is declared that the Catholic Church is the "Synagogue of Satan" (p. 106), "The Pope of Rome is Anti-Christ" (p. 107), death is to be inflicted "on Papists and adversaries of true religion" (p. 342), those who do not accept the Confession of Faith are "no members of the said Kirk within this realm and true religion presently professed," "Papistry in general stands damned and confuted by the Kirk of Scotland," "We detest that Roman Anti-Christ," "his five bastard sacraments," "his devilish mass," "his blasphemous priesthood" (p. 340-341), "with our hands lifted up to the Most High God we swear that we shall endeavour the extirpation of Popery" (p. 348-349). Lo! the climax: "The Assembly doth bless the Lord and thankfully acknowledge His great mercy, in that so excellent a Confession of Faith is prepared" (p. 13)! Mr. Clarke has not yet admitted that "Romanists" may be saved. He cannot do so and remain a Presbyterian parson, for "Papistry in general" was long ago "damned by the Kirk of Scotland."

'Public Challenge.

'The Rev. Mr. Clarke may now arrange with me to select a competent judge, who shall decide the issue

J. & R. HEWITT

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