

# RALEIGH REGISTER

AND NORTH-CAROLINA GAZETTE.

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STATE CONVENTION.

DEBATE  
ON THE THIRTY-SECOND ARTICLE.

Mr. BRAN said, young as I am compared with those who surround me, and reluctant as I may be to address this Committee, I feel Mr. Chairman, a consciousness, that silence on this all important subject, affecting alike the honor and prosperity of North Carolina, as well as the character, and reputation of her citizens, would be truly criminal indeed. I feel a great veneration and respect for our good old Constitution, under which we have so long, and happily lived, and believe me Sir, I would have been unwilling to have touched, or impaired any feature of that sacred compact of our liberties and rights, save the one now under discussion; and I may truly say, that this affection has been much heightened and increased, by witnessing the great veneration and respect which the old citizens of my county, (Carteret) entertained for this bond of union, and declaration of their rights, and the painful reluctance and unwillingness, which they evinced, to have one single feature of that matchless instrument, altered or impaired. In my humble judgment, in the existence of this feeling, and the great repugnance to innovation and change, the cautious prudence in seeking after something new, and the great tenacity with which we hold on to the "well tried work" of our fathers, as well as our great respect for their dear bought experience and unsullied honesty and integrity, will be found the surest guaranty for the perpetuity of our liberty and independence. Our old Constitution was the work, and production of no ordinary men—they lived in the times that "tried men's souls," they came fresh from the raging Revolution with the full consciousness of the value of our liberties and rights—they felt the necessity of preserving them inviolate, and manfully went to work, to effect this great and patriotic object. I need not say that the world has seldom seen an assemblage of men, more distinguished for their talents, their patriotism, the purity of their reputation, and the sterling honesty and integrity of their characters, than those who composed the Congress of Halifax, and by whom our Constitution was formed; and as humiliating as the reflection may be to the present generation, and to whatever nameless motive it may be attributed, I verily believe, that not one-third of the people of North Carolina would have been found willing to have committed the destinies of our good old State, and the formation of an entirely new Constitution, to an unlimited Convention. Nay Sir, in these times of trouble and distrust, there would not be found on this floor ten advocates, in favour of the exercise of this unlimited power, and of the surrender on the part of the people of that sovereignty, which is always least to be feared, when confined to its appropriate and legitimate sphere. I will not stop to enquire whence arises this melancholy state of affairs, but will only remark, that to my mind it affords one of the strongest arguments, why the ancient and well established order of things should be as little upset, as the necessity of our situation, and the change in our political condition, can possibly require. Our State, rich in talent and worth as she is in her exhaustless mineral productions and internal resources, has hitherto been little appreciated; and to me, Sir, when abroad, it was a matter of pride, and self-congratulation to hear her commended for those monuments of wisdom, taste, and refinement—her old Constitution, and her inevitable statue of Washington. But alas! how similar is their melancholy fate! The hand of power has stripped the former of its fair proportions, its just, and liberal exercise of power, and many of its wise, and wholesome regulations; whilst the ruthless and unmerciful element, has struck the "living marble" of the latter, dumb and speechless, disrobed it of its matchless mantle, despoiled it of its beautiful symmetry, and left it a melancholy ruin, over which genius, in its gloomy despondency, may truly exclaim, "we never shall look upon its like again." But Sir, it is a gratifying reflection, and an apt illustration of the value and congeniality of our institutions, that this great and mighty revolution in public sentiment, has been effected, not by the bay-

onet and sword, but by the constitutional exercise of the free, and uncontrolled opinions, of a majority of our fellow-citizens.

We are told by the gentleman from Warren, (Mr. Edwards,) that a great and extraordinary excitement pervades our State, upon this subject; and I may be permitted to remark, that the greater that excitement becomes, the more cool, deliberate, and determined, should be our discussions here. We should regard it as a sacred duty, instead of adding fuel to the flame, *componere tantas lites*.

It is not my intention to discuss the much vexed question, among writers on public and political law, "how far a free government, has the right and power to interfere in matters of Religion," or to charge the framers of our Constitution, with an arrogant and unwarranted assumption of power, in the adoption of the obnoxious and intolerant Article, the amendment of which forms the subject matter of this grave and exciting debate. Sufficient for me it is, that they have exercised this power, and that among all the wise and prudent regulations for our peace, happiness and security which that instrument contains, this alone forms, a solitary exception, and affords the only engine, with which the proscriptive demon of bigotry, fanaticism and prejudice may wreak its vengeance upon a portion of the free, equal and inoffensive citizens of our country, and glut its insatiable appetite, upon the consciences of the followers of the living God! When I read that provision which proclaims "that no person who shall deny the being of God, or the truth of the Protestant Religion, or the divine authority either of the old, or new Testament, or who shall hold Religious principles, incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State," shall be capable of holding any office, or place of trust, or profit, in the civil department within this State," I pronounce an anathema—a political excommunication—far more terrible and grating to the ears of a freeman, than were "the thunders of the Vatican" in by-gone days, to the blind and ignorant devotee, at the shrine of Papal power and supremacy. A. A. Sir, whom is this mighty excitement directed? It is useless, Sir, to disguise the fact—it is against the Roman Catholics! They are openly and loudly denounced, as denying the truth of the Protestant Religion, and holding Religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State. Who are those who profess the Protestant Religion, and what are the tests of Protestantism? What is the Protestant religion, and what tribunal is to determine its orthodox character? Why Sir, the Shaking Quaker who, in the honest credulity of his heart, believes that (what appears to us) fantastic capers and grotesque antics, are pleasing in the sight of God, is firmly convinced that his religious opinions constitute the perfection of Protestantism; and the host of dissenters, and schismatics, who have strayed from from the great sheepfold of the more standard sects, with equal propriety and right, lay claim to the same purity, because at last, it is a mere matter of opinion. I would respectfully ask if the Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist &c. be the Protestant Religion? I fear that in seeking for some standard of faith, that these will be found to differ from each other more essentially, than does the Catholic from them all, and that this great Protestant family will be discovered to be so divided against itself, as to be unable of themselves, to conform to any uniform standard, or rule, which, in the plenitude of its power, it may prescribe for others. What are the truths of the Protestant Religion? A belief in the Trinity, in the divine authenticity of the Old and New Testaments, the sanctifying influences of the holy Eucharist, Baptism, &c. These Sir, constitute the standard and fundamental truths of the Protestant religion, and form the leading articles of what is denominated the Protestant faith. If it be admitted that these are the truths of the Protestant religion, the Catholic does not deny it—he religiously believes them all, but he is to be excluded from office, because in the plenitude of his faith he believes more—his faith does not stop short at the right place—it is too latitudinarian, "for the freedom and safety of the State." The absurdity to which this train of reasoning will lead us, conclusively shews the utter inutility of retaining this Article, and the cruel system of legislation, which holds out to the unwary and ignorant, a snare to trap the conscience and to lull the credulous into a deceitful security. It may be remarked, that if it be a mere *brutum fulmen*—if the Catholic can hold office notwithstanding its existence, and he is not excluded by its practical operation, why alter, or amend it? Sir, if such be its practical effect why retain it? Why do its advocates hold on to it with such determined pertinacity, and evince so much reluctance to part with it? If it has no effect, it is an useless encumbrance to the Constitution, and in the minds of many gives doubt and uncertainty to the construction of that instrument, which above all others, should be certain, and well defined. But Sir, I believe that it

was intended to exclude the Roman Catholics from the enjoyment of office, and such is the generally received opinion throughout the State; and this construction instead of diminishing the proscriptive odiousness of its character raises in high and bold relief its tyranny and oppression, and exhibits to the liberal and unprejudiced mind, the groundless fears and misconceptions of our forefathers upon the subject of religious freedom. This article in its judicial construction may have failed to answer its purpose, but as has been truly remarked, more remains to be done; for though they are free by the law, they are not so in practice. Public opinion erects itself into an inquisition, and exercises its office with as much fanaticism, as fans the flame of an *auto de fe*. The certain proscription of the law, is to my mind far less odious, and more tolerable, than that of vindictive public opinion—the one is silent and despot in its operation, whilst the other, fed and sustained by the bitter prejudices and passions of our nature, is deaf to the voice of reason and justice, and but too seldom fails in seeking to assert and sustain the principle for which it contends, to overwhelm in one common ruin the antagonist principles of its feeble and persecuted victim, and the fair character and reputation of him, who is intimately connected therewith. Upon this subject the people have labored under a gross delusion. Heaven and earth have been moved to alarm their fears and excite their feelings,—misrepresentations and false statements of the Roman Catholic doctrines, have been spread far and wide—the ignorant and credulous have been threatened with a subversion of their religion—the Press, the demagogue, and the fanatic have lent their mighty aid to produce this wide-spread error and prejudice, and it has been proclaimed from the Pulpit, the Muster and Electioneering grounds, that the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church, are replete, with treason and conspiracy against the government of these United States! How miserable and contemptible must be that cause, in the minds of all honorable men, which requires for its support, a resort to an expedient so degrading to our nature, and so revolting to every christian feeling. Sir, if the Catholic were some monster in human shape, a foe to virtue, and at enmity with God and man, human language could not bestow upon him more despicable epithets, or clothe him with more hideous deformity than that which the spirit of wild and senseless bigotry and fanaticism, has invested him with.—What know the mass of the people of the true doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church? What know they of the character and commission of Pope Gregory the Seventeenth? Do they know, that for ages before Protestantism was conceived of, this venerable and Apostolic Church, dispensed the light of divine truth to a benighted and sinful world? Do they know, that "it is founded upon the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself, being the chief corner Stone?" Do they know that it is one of the oldest, and most venerable Christian churches of which we have any authentic account, tracing its descent, and driving its authenticity from the Apostles themselves? Do they know that it implicitly believes, in the divine authenticity of the Old and New Testaments, and that this is the Rock, upon which it is built? The Catholic believes that christianity existed before the Old Testament, and that the new Revelation has come down to us in its purity through the traditions of the Fathers—these traditions too, he has incorporated in his Religious faith. And I would ask, if these traditions are not entitled to our faith, what evidence have we, of the divine authenticity of the Old and New Testaments? With what weapons could we combat the infidel notion, that these sacred books are spurious in their divine character, and are the productions of mere mortal men, unaided by inspiration from above? Sir, when the Protestant demolishes the *Christian character* of the Roman Catholic Church, he destroys his own hopes of salvation hereafter—he cuts up by the very roots, the saving faith upon which he stands—he reviles and abjures the same sacred Trinity, and Holy Ordinances, which in his own Church, he professes to worship and love—he rejects the same Bible, which is the standard of their common faith, and deriving, as he must, his only authentic knowledge of Revelation and a hereafter, through this venerable church, he admits their truth and authenticity, whilst he refuses to recognize her sacred and christian character. The Catholic believes in a future state of rewards, and punishments—that the righteous will be saved and the wicked lost, and that those who are not entirely estranged from God, will for a time, occupy an intermediate state, which is denominated, Purgatory. With a saving faith like this, he has a right to believe his to be the true and Apostolic Church; and in so doing, he does not interfere with the religious privileges of others, but merely entertains that belief, which every Protestant sect triumphantly claims for their own. The Catholic is charged with advocating the heretical opinion, that the Pope is infallible; this

as an abstract assertion, is false. If the doctrines of the Catholic Church conform to the sacred word of God, and the traditions of the Fathers, all who believe that those sacred sources of divine truth are exempt from error, must likewise, admit the infallibility of the Church; and he who administers in holy things, in strict conformity to this divine law, must necessarily in his acts partake of infallibility. This is a doctrine which the most puritanical of the Protestant sects cannot deny, and instead of being a reproach and ground of persecution to the Catholic, it holds up in bold relief his faith in the sacred scriptures, and his belief that a conformity to the divine commands therein contained, will ensure eternal life. And I would ask Sir, to whom is the Catholic responsible for his faith? Is it to his God, or to the Protestant? Who invested the latter with the power and authority, to tamper with, and control the conscience of the Catholic? Who made him a judge of the errors, and heresies of the Catholic faith? Alas! Sir, the very system of persecution and oppression, which is so loudly charged upon the Catholics, is practised in a form by the Protestants, ten times more tyrannical and despotic; because in a government constituted like this, a perversion and deception of the public opinion, amounts to the vilest and most proscriptive tyranny. Where Sir, is the blessed charity of that Gospel, which at its advent, proclaimed peace and good will to all mankind? Where is that Christian spirit of meekness, forgiveness and love, which is so beautifully illustrated in the life and doctrines of the Saviour of the world? Where is to be found that golden rule of doing unto others, as we would have others to do unto us? The Protestant, in his blind and headlong eagerness and zeal to proscribe the doctrines of the Catholic Church and its Evangelical character, cannot have forgotten that the Bible and its saving truths form the text book of their common faith and hope.

I would ask you, Mr. Chairman, if the mass of the people in your section of the State have any just and true notions and conceptions of the character of the Pope? Have not bigotry, fanaticism and prejudice, there too, dressed him up in the garb of a fiend—an enemy and reviler of the Protestant Religion, and a foe to religious freedom and the rights of man? Do they know that he is a good old man—the great shepherd alike of the Civil and Religious rights of his people, dispensing to them the wholesome and salutary regulations of Church and State, and as venerable for his years, as he is estimable for his piety and learning. It is said that the Catholic owes an allegiance to the Pope which is in conflict with his allegiance to the Government, and therefore incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State. This declaration, Sir, is more specious and attractive, than true—for it is erroneous in fact, and those who know any thing of our Republican form of Government and its happy Institutions, must at one glance, see the utter absurdity and futility of such an assertion. The allegiance due to the Pope is not of a civil character, but is merely a *spiritual obedience* in matters purely Ecclesiastical, and does not detract from, or come in collision with that obligation of subjects to Government, which, as citizens, it is their bounden duty to render. The same spiritual dominion is exercised by the Protestant, Bishops and Elders, and the same spiritual obedience and submission are exacted of the members of the respective Protestant Churches; and yet, Sir, none of these have ever entertained the opinion, that in thus acknowledging their supremacy in the dispensation of matters purely spiritual and Ecclesiastical, the duty and allegiance due to the Government from them, as faithful citizens, were in the least impaired or dispensed with. This doctrine, which, on this side of the Atlantic, is fraught with so much injustice to the Catholic, becomes a more grave and serious charge in the Kingdom of Great Britain, where, from the peculiar character of her Institutions, its tyranny and oppression is most sorely felt; and perhaps, Sir, the assertion of its existence here, is made without reference to the dissimilarity in the civil and political Institutions of the two countries.

In England, there is an union of Church and State, and the King is recognized by law as the supreme head of both; and the Catholics acknowledge the Pope as the supreme head of their Church. Here, Sir, is an obvious conflict for supremacy, which is repudiated as belonging either to the King or the Pope, by subjects of the same realm, according to their different Religious persuasions or predilections—the Protestant Episcopalians claiming it for the King, and the Catholic for the Pope. So intimate is this connection in England, between the Protestant Episcopal Church and the State, that the King, upon his coronation, when asked by Archbishop or Bishop—"Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the laws of God, the true profession of the Gospel, and the Protestant Reformed Religion, established by law? And will you preserve to the Bishops and Clergy of

this Realm, and to the Churches committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges as by law do and shall appertain unto them, or any of them?"—is bound to answer on oath—"All this I promise to do." And moreover, he is compelled to repeat and subscribe the declaration against Popery, according to the statute of Charles. And this, Sir, is not all—the Catholic, before he is permitted to enjoy office, was required to pass through the fiery ordeal of the Corporation and Test Acts; which may safely be pronounced as amounting to an odious and tyrannical proscription. They demanded of him a violation of the rights of conscience and a repudiation of some of the favorite and long-cherished doctrines of his Church; they required him to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the rites of the Church of England, and they enjoined upon him the absolute necessity of taking the oath of allegiance and supremacy, and of making the declaration against transubstantiation. Here then, Sir, is the test of his allegiance, and the creation of that *imperium in imperio*, which brought down upon the devoted head of the unfortunate Catholic all the pains and penalties of a *premunire*. In accepting office, he must acknowledge the King as the head of the Church, and thereby repudiate the Pope; he must receive the holy Eucharist from the hands of those whom his conscience taught him to believe "had no authority," and in a manner totally repugnant to his long-cherished notions of that sacred rite; and to close the scene of this warfare upon conscience, he must deny the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Catholic in England does deny this supremacy of the King, and therefore may be said to refuse to acknowledge an *unqualified allegiance*; but in this free and happy country, where no connection between Church and State exists, and there is no Religion established by law, the charge becomes a slander upon his religious character, and is unfounded in truth and fact. If our Protestant friends would turn their attention to their own denominations, they would find more to regret and less to criminate in the Catholic Church, than their overwrought and phrenzied zeal will permit them to believe. Why do those things which we ought not to do, and leave undone those things which ought to be done? I would not have it believed, Mr. Chairman, that while I advocate the unrestricted rights of conscience, and the abrogation of all civil disqualifications on account of religious opinions, that I entertain any unfriendly feelings, or could be guilty of the slightest disrespect to any Protestant denomination—for "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, and the divine Author of our Religion came to bring 'the glad tidings of salvation' alike to the Jew and the Gentile." Is the persecution of the Catholic for conscience sake required of us in the Bible or by our faith? Or are we not, like the Pagan, conscious of our own self-righteousness, and glad that we are not, like (to us) that sinful and perverse denomination?—Whence arises the diversity in our faith—the dissention in our religious opinions—the great variety of our Sects—and the want of conformity among ourselves to any uniform standard of orthodoxy? May it not be found in the uncontrolled exercise and freedom of conscience and opinion—in the untrammelled adoption of a reasonable and popular construction of the Bible, and in the want of unity, in adhering to that excellent Catholic rule of referring all disputed and doubtful points of faith and interpretation, to a Council of the great, the learned and the pious. And yet, Sir, we who have no common and uniform standard of faith, require of the Roman Catholic, before he can be permitted to enjoy office, that he must not deny the truth of the Protestant Religion! This tyranny and despotism of opinion may well have flourished during the existence of the dark ages, but in all coming time, it will hardly be credited, that in the enlightened period of the nineteenth century, there could have been found bigotry, fanaticism and prejudice enough to have cherished and supported so intolerant a doctrine.

Honorable gentlemen on this floor are prepared to recount the bloody deeds, the cruel martyrdoms, and horrible persecutions, which the Catholics in their infuriated zeal, and bigotry, have inflicted on the Protestants. Is this, Sir, a fair and legitimate argument? Have we met together here, to administer the law of retaliation? Why do gentlemen, who on other occasions shout their patriotic passions, that all men are by nature free and equal, and that in this boasted land of liberty, it is a natural and unalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, refuse now to give a practical illustration of the sincerity of their declaration? Have the Protestants been guilty of no excesses? I will not condescend, Mr. Chairman, to expose the hideous frailty, the cruel persecutions, and moral depravity of either sect, in by-gone days, for the purpose of weighing them in golden balances to ascertain on which side the scale of guilt will preponderate. It argues a want of Christian charity, to visit the sins of their forefathers upon the Roman Catholics of these United States. As well might you declare a war of extermination against the descendants of the poor and miserable Jews, because their forefathers in the blindness of their infatuation and relentless persecution, murdered the Redeemer of the world! Why preach this crusade against the Catholic Church? Why take upon ourselves the awful responsibility of denouncing this ancient Religious sect? What if this be the true Apostolic Church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail? Persecution, Sir, never did effect the object for which it was intended—it seldom fails to create a strong and powerful sympathy in favor of its victim, and instead of crushing its unhappy subject in its infuriated fangs, it gives additional life, power and activity to its progress. If this spirit is permitted to prevail, probably, the venerable gentleman from Warren (Mr. Macon) was not so far wrong the other day, when he declared that he did not believe that the Revolution of 1688, had done any essential good—for, Sir, from that has sprung the bigoted intolerance, which I am sorry to say has descended to this generation, and is too plainly manifested on this floor.

If the Catholic is excluded from the offices of honor and emolument, is there any justice or honesty in subjecting him to the taxes and drudgery of the Government? To my mind, the exclusion from the one, and the exaction of the other, is a violation of his rights; and if he be this poor deluded being, occupying this nondescript position in our community, our Protestant zeal might be manifested in more strict conformity to the charity of the Gospel, by sending to them the Missionary heralds of the Cross, to call them back from the errors of their ways, "to lead them to pure fountains of living water," and to beseech them to abjure the heresies of their "mother Church"! For if their Church be not of God it cannot prosper—it will fall without the aid and persecution of man; but if it be of God, persecution becomes impious and profane, because he has declared that he will be with it "even unto the end of the world." Common charity, Mr. Chairman, should induce us to believe the contrary, but it is much to be feared, that a bitter spirit of malignant jealousy and sectarian rivalry, has rather prompted and engendered this uncharitable and senseless persecution of our Catholic brethren, than an honest desire to promote the cause of the Gospel and the dissemination of its divine truths. Why do I say so? Because, Sir, such a course of conduct, is in conflict with the religious doctrines of the Protestant faith, does not accord with the charitable disposition and tender commiseration which they evince even for the Heathen and those who deny the existence of God, and is in implied admission of the weakness, fallibility and want of truth of their own faith. The first settlements of this country were produced, and the broad foundations of this great Republic were laid, by this same spirit of religious persecution towards our forefathers, which the bigoted zealots of this day, nay Sir, of this hour, are now evincing against the Roman Catholics. It was a boasted birthright, to be born in a land of Civil and Religious freedom—the persecuted of all climes were invited to this asylum of the oppressed, where each man might "sit down under his own vine and fig-tree" and worship Almighty God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Restraints upon conscience, and civil disqualifications in consequence thereof, were denounced as violations of the great fundamental rights of man—taxation without the enjoyment of its concomitant civil rights, was pronounced odious and oppressive—our Pulpits, Legislative Halls, and popular Assemblies, rang in tones "trumpet tongued," against this violent invasion upon our civil and religious rights, until this noble and indignant spirit, no longer controlled by the fear of such oppressive power, produced our great and mighty Revolution. Then, Sir, we felt our own weakness and inability to breast the storm, and thought it then no heresy to seek the aid of a Catholic King—the current of popular goodwill and affection ran strong in favor of our Catholic brethren of France, and the dominant political party of our country, even after the attainment of Independence, was openly and loudly charged with being under French influence. It was not even whispered then, Sir, that our Catholic friends and allies entertained religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the Country, and the charge then, would have been deemed base and treasonable ingratitude. Who periled his life, his fortune and his all, in the establishment of civil and religious freedom on this side of the Atlantic? Need I, Sir, mention to this Convention, the name of Lafayette—and with him, his associates in deeds of noble daring, in behalf of that sacred cause, Rochambeau, Pulaski, De Kalb and others, the Catholic defenders and supporters of civil and religious liberty, whose gallant exertions in our revolutionary struggle, to maintain these inalienable rights of man, give the lie to the assertion that their religion is dangerous to the cause of freedom.—Our country cannot too often remember,