

The Speech of Fr. John Plessington

(Originally posted as 'Mr. W. William Plessington')

Who was EXECUTED in CHESTER

(For being a priest of the Church of Rome)

19th July 1679

Dear Countrymen.

I am here to be executed, neither for Theft, Murder, nor anything against the Law of God, nor any fact or Doctrine inconsistent with Monarchy or Civil Government. I suppose several now present heard my trial the last Assizes, and can testify that nothing was laid to my charge but Priesthood, and I am sure that you will find that Priesthood is neither against the Law of God nor Monarchy, or Civil Government. If you will consider either the Old or New Testament (for it is the Basis of Religion [...]), St Paul tells us in Hebrews 7:12 that the Priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change of the Law, and consequently the Priesthood being abolished, the Law and Religion is quite gone.

But I know it will be said that a Priest ordained by authority derived from the See of Rome is by the Law of the nation to die as a traitor, but if that be so what must become of all the Clergymen of England, for the first Protestant Bishops had their Ordination from those of the Church of Rome, or none at all, as appears by their own writers, so that Ordination comes derivatively to those now living.

As in the Primitive times, Christians were esteemed Traitors, and suffered as such by National Law, so are the Priests of the Roman Church here esteemed, and suffer such. But as Christianity then was not against the law of God, Monarchy or Civil Policy, so now there is not any one Point of the Roman Catholic Faith (of which Faith I am) that is inconsistent therewith, as is evident by induction in each several point.

That the Pope hath power to depose or give license to murder Princes is no point of our belief. And I protest in the sight of God and the Court of Heaven that I am absolutely innocent of the Plot so much discoursed of, and abhor such bloody and damnable designs. And although it be Nine Weeks since I was sentenced to die, there is not anything of that laid to my charge, so that I may take comfort in St. Peter's words, 1 Peter 14-16, "Let none of you suffer as a Murderer, or as a Thief, or as an Evil doer, or as a Busy Body in other men's matters, yet if any man suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed or Sorry".

I have deserved a worse death, for though I have been a faithful and true Subject to my King, I have been a grievous sinner against God; [others would have lived] in a greater perfection [than] I have done had they received so many favours and graces from him as I have.

But as there was never a sinner who truly repented and heartily called to Jesus for mercy, to whom he did not show mercy, so I hope by the merits of His Passion, He will have mercy on me, who is heartily sorry that ever I offended him.

Bear witness, good hearers, that I profess that I undoubtedly and firmly believe all the Articles of the Roman Catholic Faith, and for the truth of any of them (by the assistance of God) I am willing to die, and I had rather die than doubt of any Point of Faith, taught by our Holy Mother the Roman Catholic Church.

In what condition Margaret Plat one of the chiefest witnesses against me was before, and after she was with me, let her nearest relations declare. George Massey, another witness, swore falsely when he swore I gave him the Sacrament, and said Mass at the time and place he mentioned, and [I] verily think that he never spoke to me, or I to him, or saw each other but at the Assizes week. The third witness, Robert Wood, was suddenly killed, but of the Dead why should I speak? These were all the witnesses against me, unless those that only declared what they heard from others. I heartily and freely forgive all that have been or are any way instrumental to my Death, and heartily desire that those that are living may heartily repent.

God bless the King and the Royal Family and grant his Majesty a prosperous Reign here and a crown of glory hereafter, God grant peace to the Subjects, and that they live and die in true Faith, Hope, and Charity. That which remains is that I recommend myself to the mercy of Jesus, by whose merits I hope for mercy. O Jesus, be to me a Jesus.