

such. Nearly all that either oracle has done in this respect, has been to condemn such propositions as, in a moral point of view, are false, or dangerous, or rash; and these condemnations, besides being such as, in fact, will be found to command the assent of most men, as soon as heard, do not necessarily go so far as to present any positive statements for universal acceptance.

11. With the mention of condemned propositions I am brought to another and large consideration, which is one of the best illustrations that I can give of that principle of minimizing so necessary, as I think, for a wise and cautious theology; at the same time I cannot insist upon it in the connexion into which I am going to introduce it, without submitting myself to the correction of divines more learned than I can pretend to be myself.

The infallibility, whether of the Church or of the Pope, acts principally or solely in two channels, in direct statements of truth, and in the condemnation of error. The former takes the shape of doctrinal definitions, the latter stigmatises propositions as heretical, next to heresy, erroneous and the like. In each case the Church, as guided by her Divine Master, has made provision for weighing as lightly as possible on the faith and conscience of her children.

As to the condemnation of propositions, all she tells us is, that the thesis condemned when taken as a whole, or, again, when viewed in its context, is heretical, or blasphemous, or impious, or whatever other epithet she affixes to it. We have only to trust her so far as to allow ourselves to be warned against the thesis, or the work containing it. Theologians employ themselves in determining what precisely it is that is condemned in that thesis or treatise; and doubtless in most cases they do so with success; but that determination is not *de fide*; all that is of faith is that there is in that thesis itself, which is noted, heresy or error, or other peccant matter, as the case may be, such that the censure is a peremptory command to theologians, preachers, students, and all other whom it concerns, to keep clear of it. But so light is this obligation, that instances frequently occur, when it is successfully maintained by some new writer, that the Pope's act does not imply what it has seemed to imply, and questions which seemed to be closed, are after a course of years re-opened. In discussions such as these, there is a real exercise of private judgment, and an allowable one; the act of faith which cannot be superseded or trifled with, being, I repeat, the unreserved acceptance that the thesis in question is heretical, or erroneous in faith, etc., as the Pope or the Church has spoken of it.

In these cases, which in a true sense may be called the Pope's *negative* enunciations, the opportunity of a legitimate minimizing lies in the intensely concrete character of the matters condemned; in his affirmative enunciations a like opportunity is afforded by their being more or less abstract. Indeed, excepting such as relate to persons, that is, to the Trinity in Unity, the Blessed Virgin, the Saints, and the like, all the dogmas of Pope or of Council are but general, and so far, in consequence, admit of exceptions in their actual application,—these exceptions being determined either by

* The Pope
invincible ignorance
designare limit
tam multarum