

less, discord. Therefore, She cannot exist without inherent legislative powers. Therefore, by virtue of the natural law of self-preservation, the Church has the right to legislate: and to deny her the right to legislate, is to deny her the right of existence.

On the other hand, we have proved that the legislative power without the complementary power to judge and to enforce the law, would be illusive and worthless; therefore, by virtue of the natural law, the Church possesses full legislative, judicial and executive sovereignty.

Must we conclude from what precedes that the Power or Authority of the Church is Absolutely Unlimited?

[373] By no means. In the first place, the authority of the Church is *subordinate* to, as well as in perfect harmony with, the law of God and of nature. In the second place, it is circumscribed by the requirements of her own self-preservation and welfare. That is to say, it ceases to be the moment it ceases to edify or benefit the Church but rather tends to her injury. For, the Holy Ghost teaches with emphasis that it is a power "unto edification" only, "and not unto destruction:" 2 Cor. 3' 10 and 10' 8.

In this connection, it is of capital importance to note that, if material or corporal punishments, *miraculously* inflicted by a S. Peter or by a S. Paul, irresistibly produce repentance or edification—they produce a contrary effect when inflicted by ordinary human agencies: hence the well nigh inspired wisdom of S. Bernard's advice to pope Eugenius III. —to smite with "the word and *not* with the sword" (ad. loc. cit.)—The wisdom of the advice was gratefully recognized by pope Eugenius and by the great pope Benedict XIV. in his celebrated work on heroic virtue, Eng. tr., page 311.

Religious coercion or persecution is a most "execrable heresy," says S. Athanasius:

[374] The Saviour spurned *the mere suggestion* of coercing men into the Kingdom of Heaven (Lk. 9' 54). He tells us that he had legions of Angels at his service (Mt. 26' 53)—and he could have employed these to coerce and crush all opposition. With infinite ease He could have enlisted the Roman legions on his side to achieve the conquest of the world at the point of the sword, but He scorned such a cowardly and Mahomet-like mode of conquest. He warned His disciples that the spirit of religious coercion, which is but another name for religious persecution, is not of God but of the devil (Lk. 9' 55). Christ's all conquering weapon, according to his own declaration, was to be the all-consuming love of the Cross: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (Jn. 12' 32). "Now this He said signifying what death He should die" (Ibidem).

His Apostles, of course, held and taught the same divine doctrine; so did His beloved Church; so did the Fathers.