

pronounce to have been revealed by Jesus Christ, that is, to be contained in Scripture, or in tradition, or in both at the same time, Learned and ignorant, the decision is for all: not that it is forbidden to those who feel so disposed, to seek for the truth of the dogma, either in scripture or in the monument of tradition: far from that, this study would merit praise and commendation: being previously directed and put in the way by the judgment of the Church, they will more easily trace in it her doctrines. But nothing obliges us in general to undertake this laborious and fatiguing examination; our masters, our fathers in faith have done it for us. They have afterwards decided that such a dogma is in scripture, that such another comes from an apostolic tradition: they are of one accord in teaching it: we know it, it is a fact, it is known by the most simple: this is sufficient for all. All are equally bound to receive with the most unshaken confidence a decision which in itself is the most impartial and the most imposing that can be found upon earth, and which, moreover, heaven has engaged to raise to infallibility.*

As this doctrine has been hitherto quite a stranger to you, and as it properly constitutes the distinctive characteristic between the Catholic church and all protestant societies, allow me to lay it open to you in a new light, in order to make you more sensible of it. In the first place, always keep in mind that, according to all our proofs, the promise of infallibility made in the apostles to their successors, does not regard any of these personally and in particular, because Jesus Christ does not remain forever with any one, none of them being immortal: but that it is addressed to all their successors collectively and in a body. Likewise it follows that, separately and individually they are susceptible of error, they cannot, by virtue of the promise we so, when united together; that whatever deference their personal opinions require from us, we nevertheless do not owe the sacrifice of our opinion or our interior submission except to their unanimous decision; that truth being always to be found in the general agreement, it is this agreement we are bound to know and follow, since by following it we cannot go astray, and by not following it, on the contrary, we do go astray, for then we go out of the way and the one that Jesus Christ has drawn for us, and we leave the guides whom he has expressly appointed to conduct us. Let us therefore be cautious how we ever close our ears to their voices, or ever depart from their uniform instructions. In whatever circumstances their consent is manifested, when once it is known, when once it becomes manifest to us, it is sufficient: our duty is to submit, and our salvation to remain firmly attached to it.

And here I beg you to observe that a dogmatical decision may be given in many ways, but that it only becomes decisive and peremptory in one way,

*"Nothing should be more venerable upon earth than the decision of a truly œcumenical council." — Leibnitz, letter to the Dutchess of Brunswich. July 2d, 1694.

that is, by the general consent, or the acceptance of the episcopal body united to its head. I will explain myself on the two parts of this proposition.

The bishops, the successors of the apostles, like them the guardians of the faith, by the high dignity with which they are invested in the Church, possess exclusively the right of interpreting scripture and tradition, and of pronouncing after the one or the other upon points of faith.* A pernicious doctrine threatens to trouble or infect a diocese; the bishop has the power and the right to assemble his clergy, and, after having maturely deliberated with it, to pronounce a doctrinal sentence, when he becomes of opinion that this is a suitable and efficient means of stifling the error in its infancy. Arius began to spread the venom of his doctrine in Alexandria, and had already gained partisans by the subtlety of his reasoning. The holy patriarch "wishing to reclaim him by sweetness rather than compel him by authority, selected some priests from the two parties, who defended their arguments on both sides in a regular disputation, while he, surrounded with the principal of his clergy, presided as judge in this conference, to decide the difference by a solemn decision.—He terminated the dispute by pronouncing sentence in favour of those who had supported the divinity and eternity of the Son of God, and forbade Arius to teach or to hold an opinion that destroyed the foundations of the Christian religion."

With how much more reason does this same right pre-eminently belong to him, who presides over the entire episcopacy, and who, from the centre of unity where he holds his see, extends his superintendance and jurisdiction over all the churches of the world: Accordingly we find, even from the most remote periods, that the greater part of the dogmatical decisions have originated from this principal see, from which beams the ray of government, according to an expression as correct as it is brilliant. If you consider on the one hand the ever active vigilance exercised by the vicar of Jesus Christ over all the Churches; on the other, those intimations which, in great causes, every bishop thinks himself bound to forward to him; you will easily conceive that nothing essential in religion could escape his knowledge, nothing of importance occurs at the most distant extremities, without being immediately echoed to the centre, and then, without giving time to the error to increase, without waiting for the bishops to assemble in council, the chief pastor goes before the evil, drags to light the rising heresy, solemnly condemns it, and against it, produces to the eyes of the world the ever pure and indefectible tradition of the holy see.

*"Episcopum oportet judicare, interpretari, consecrare." *Pontif Rom.* in fol. p. 50.—The bishop is the only ordinary and natural judge of whatever regards religion, and it is for him to decide upon questions of faith and morality, by interpreting the sacred scripture and by faithfully relating the traditions of the fathers.* Henry, Institut, au droit eccl. t. I. ch. XIII.

We learn also from the history of the Church that the bishops of a province or an empire, frequently united together in private councils, and that there, to ward off the blows aimed against faith, they have proscribed erroneous opinions, and taught the true doctrine of revelation in their dogmatical decrees.

Here then are doctrinal decrees given in three different manners, or coming from three different tribunals. Each of these decisions has an authority proper to itself, and proportioned to the tribunal from which it emanates: yet none of them are decisive, although they may become so by acceptance. For if the decree of a private council, or of the sovereign pontiff, or even that of a private bishop is found to be received and generally approved of by the bishops dispersed throughout catholicity, and by the pope at the head of all, they then become the decrees of the universal Church; their being generally received attaches to them the seal of infallibility and ranks them thenceforward among the articles of faith.

There occur, in fact, less frequent but graver and more solemn occasions, on which the Church explains and proclaims its doctrine in the most splendid manner. For example, a pernicious doctrine, after having infested the country where it sprung up, reaches the neighbouring nations, is propagating through more distant countries, and threatens to extend its ravages still farther: a general plague requires a co-extensive remedy: from all parts of the world, at the request or with the consent of the sovereigns, the bishops are convoked by the head of the church: they anathematize the innovators and their opinions, both to fix in the faith those who have hitherto professed it, and to bring back those who have strayed from it: they proclaim to the world what Jesus Christ has revealed. I do not enter with you into the questions that are discussed among divines, on the conditions requisite to constitute these councils, called general in spite of the weak minority of the bishops who compose them compared with those who do not assist at them. What is incontestable and acknowledged is, that the acceptance of the published decrees gives to these councils the splendid proof of their being œcumenical, and thus puts out of doubt and in full evidence the infallibility of their doctrine.

I could justify the principles I have just laid down, by the testimony of a multitude of writers; of these I shall cite but one, who was the light of his own age, and will be the light of ages to come. "The last mark we can have that a council or assembly truly represents the Catholic church, is when the whole body of the episcopacy, and the whole society that makes profession of receiving instruction from it, approves and receives it: this is the last seal to the authority of this council, and of the infallibility of its decrees." "The council of Orange, of which mention is made in the Reply, was nothing less than general. It contained chapters whom the pope had sent. There hardly were twelve or thirteen bishops in this council. But because it was received without opposition, its decisions are no more rejected than those of the coun-