

the gospel against that which the Church teaches.

"*Whose madness is this? Believe them (Catholics) that we ought to believe Christ but learn of us (Manicheans) what Christ said*"\*

And writing against Cresconias, he argues that we believe the scriptures, by believing the Church, since the scriptures commend the authority of the Church to us;

"Whosoever feareth to be deceived with the obscurity of this question, let him require the Church, which the holy scriptures, without any ambiguity, doth demonstrate."

St. Vincent of Lerius, after naming several of the heresies which had arisen, says:

"For this reason to avoid the labyrinth of so many contrary errors, it is very necessary that the line of Prophetic and Apostolic conceptions should be drawn according to the rule of ecclesiastical and Catholic sense, or understanding."

St. Leo, writing concerning penitential fasts says:

"It is not to be doubted that all Christian observance is of divine instruction, and that whatsoever is received by the Church into the custom of devotion doth come from Apostolic tradition, and from the doctrine of the Holy Ghost"

We find also among the testimonies of antiquity many express commendations of the authority of councils to determine controversies. The ancient canons, termed *apostolical*, and though admitted not to have been drawn up by the Apostles themselves, yet certainly a work of the first ages, by some even attributed to St. Clement—These canons specify,

"That Bishops should twice a year hold councils, and among themselves examine the decrees of religion, and settle such ecclesiastical controversies as should arise."

Here is proof of an authority to compose ecclesiastical disputes at least.

St. Ignatius testifies,

"That was the order in his time, that synods and assemblies of Bishops were frequently celebrated."

Tertullian witnessed the same concerning councils held in Greece. And the historian Socrates, records this memorable saying of the Emperor Constantine:

"Whatever is decreed in the Holy Council of Bishops, that is universally to be ascribed to the Divine Will" †

St. Ambrose terms the decrees of the council of Nice,

"*Hæreditaria signacula, hereditary seals*, not to be violated by the rash boldness of any man." ‡

These proofs, from antiquity, multiply before the inquirer, in proportion as his investigation brings him down from century to century. He discovers first, that the Bishop, in his diocese, was the ruler; that he possessed the spiritual authority and power, necessary for administering

the affairs of that part of the fold, of which he had immediate charge. St. Ignatius is found thus exhorting:

"Do you all follow your Bishop as Christ did his Father. Without the Bishop let no man presume to do any of those things which belong to the Church."\*

He discovers, *secondly*, that provincial and national synods have still more authority than single Bishops, but not an *unerring* authority. Their decrees must be subject to the approbation or rejection of the Universal Church, united under its head. If the decrees of particular synods, accorded with what had been "everywhere delivered and believed," they might stand, but not otherwise. Hence Pope Stephen caused the Bishops of an African council to reverse one of their decrees on the subject of *rebaptization*. The letter of the Pope set forth that this decree opposed the traditional faith and practice of the universal Church, and declared that "no innovation should be admitted, but what was handed down should be retained."

But he observes, *thirdly*, that it is a well ascertained and settled point, that a plenary, Ecumenical council of the whole Church, over which the incumbent of Peter's see presided, had *supreme authority* to decree what had been the doctrine always taught and believed; and such decisions were, every where and by all Catholics, received with reverence and submission, and regarded as *final and conclusive*. These decisions "could not be violated by the rash boldness of any man," who cared for the sacred unity of faith, and respected the authority which Christ vested with his Church.

This current of traditional testimony shows that all Christians, from the earliest ages, held to the tenet of religious faith maintained by Catholics at present, "that there exists in the Church of Christ a *supreme unerring authority*," and *proves conclusively*, that any Christian society pretending to be Christ's Church, and not having, or even professing to have, such authority, is, by this fact alone, proved to be something else, than the Church of Christ.

The present Catholic Church is the only Christian society which claims now, as she has always claimed, this *supreme unerring authority*, and, therefore, she must be the Church of primitive Christians, the Church which Christ founded on the rock Peter, the Church which, in the words of St. Cyprian, all must "have as mother who will have God for father:" "in a word, she must be **THE TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST**."

The force of the testimony, furnished by the unanimous consent of the fathers and doctors of past ages, to convince us of this fundamental doctrine, of the *unerring authority of the Church*, is shown by the following considerations, among others which might be presented.

1st. The doctrines of Christ were orally delivered to the Apostles, and orally delivered by them to the Christians, who first formed the Apostolic Church. By the way of oral tradition, therefore,

Christianity was established and spread over the world.

2ndly. *This way* is no where set aside in scripture, but on the contrary, it is especially commended.

3rdly. It is the most sure and safe way for preserving the true doctrines of Christ.

We will, in brief, show that these three considerations are well grounded.

And first, We find from the scriptures, that the Apostles were taught by Christ, from his own lips, and sent by Christ to preach the gospel to every creature. Christ wrote no scripture himself, and there is no evidence that he commanded his Apostles to write. It seems to have been his purpose; not to write his law, upon tablets of stone or upon paper, but in the hearts of believers. He wished his Apostles to preach, and the people to obtain faith by hearing the word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing," says St. Paul. There is no evidence that all the Apostles wrote scripture, or that those, who wrote, did so, as a duty, commanded, or deemed absolutely necessary. There is no evidence that the sum of these writings, admitted to be inspired, or any of them, was designed to be the sole guide in matters of Faith, independent of the Church, which Christ instituted and commissioned to teach his doctrines. Evidently, with the Apostolic body was invested the authority to teach by oral tradition, and no where in scripture do we find that *this way* was at any period to be changed for another.

But secondly, *this way* is expressly commended and approved in scripture. "There are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." (Query: Did these persons wish to change the written word?)—"As we said before, so I say now again, if any one preach to you a gospel besides that which you have received let him be anathema."\*

The Gallatians had received the gospel, but certainly not a written one, otherwise, here was a fit and convenient place for the Apostles to say, "see what is written in the gospel which you have received, and judging for yourselves believe as you please." They received the gospel from his preaching, and by what they had received, they were to test the preaching of these persons who came to disturb them.

Again St. Paul writes to the Philippians: "The things which you have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do ye. †

The Apostles wished them to practice those things which by word and example they had learned from him. Their faith, thus reduced to daily practice, would be preserved precisely as it had been delivered and received.

To the Thessalonians he said emphatically, "Therefore brethren stand firm; and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word, or by our epistle." ‡

And to Timothy he said; "Hold the form of sound words, which thou hast heard from me in faith, and in the love which is in Christ Jesus."

"Keep the good deposited in trust to thee by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." §

And to the same he said, "And the things which thou hast heard from me, before many witnesses, the same commend to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others also." ¶

Again he declared to him: "The Church is the pillar and ground of Truth." †

There is, in these passages, an express approbation of the way of tradition for ensuring the preservation and propagation of Christian doctrines and practices. The Greek word, *paradosis*, used by the Apostles, is rendered literally by the word *traditions*. A deposit of these was made with Timothy, to be, by him, delivered to "faithful men," to be by them, delivered to others. And, no where do we find that this way was, at any time, to become inadequate, or to be displaced by another.

We have said thirdly that this way of securing the transmission of the doctrines of religion, is the best and most secure. For the doctrines of Christ were so interwoven with daily practice and observance, that change was not possible, unless first the authority of tradition was itself despised. As long as Christians believed and practised as they had learned and received, as long as they taught to their posterity to believe and practice as they did themselves, change and innovation were impossible. They daily reduced their faith to practice; they daily instructed their children to believe and observe as they did themselves. And in every part of the Christian fold, the same things were believed and observed, and the same things taught and delivered, so that novelty was recognised as false, by the very sign, that it was novel, and hitherto unheard of, and unobserved.

No writings or books could possibly be so well preserved as *traditional doctrines*, cherished in the minds and hearts of Christians every where dispersed.—Mere abstract and speculative positions, not often thought of by the people, and having no direct relation to the every-day conduct of life, might indeed soon be changed or forgotten, but doctrines of divine faith, identified with *daily observance* by all Christians, could not be in such danger, as writings accessible only to a few, and perhaps read and studied by fewer still.

Besides we are not left to mere surmise on this point. It can be proved satisfactorily, that the writings and books of scripture, owing to circumstances, have not always been preserved precisely as they were written. A multitude of transcribers and copyists, not necessarily protected from error in their labours, have passed the scriptures through their hands, and hence are found various readings of the same passages. Even in the original languages, these varieties are found, and perhaps no other volume presents the same difficulty on this point.—It is said on the authority of Dean Paulin de Cressy, once a Church of England minister, and afterwards a convert to the Catholic faith, that the learned Archbishop Usher declared, "that whereas he had of many years before a design to publish the New Testament in Greek, with various readings and annotations, and for that purpose, had spent much money, to furnish himself with manuscripts and memoirs from several learned men abroad, yet in conclusion he was forced to desist utterly from that undertaking, lest if he should ingeniously have noted all the several differences of readings which he himself had collected, the incredible multitude of them in almost every verse, should rather have made men atheistically to doubt of the truth of the whole book, than satisfy them of the true reading of any particular passage."

If such were the fact, notwithstanding the reverence which the Catholic Church

\* Lib. de utilitate credenti.  
† Soc. hist. eccles. lib. 1:  
‡ St. Amb. de Fide. lib. 3.

\* Ig. Ep. ad Smyrn.

\* Gal. i. 7. &c.  
† 2 Thes. xi. 14.

† Phil. iv. 9.  
‡ 2 Tim. i. 13.

\* 2. Tim. xi. 2. † 1. Tim. iii. 35.