

THE SUPPOSED FALL OF HONORIUS AND HIS CONDEMNATION.

OCCASIONS for discussing the mooted points of Catholic teaching are never wanting. Objections of opponents a thousand times met and answered, are repeated by tyros and half-fledged controversialists with all the assurance of a first discovery and of infallible certainty. A very particular interest attaches to the case of Pope Honorius, so often cited against the doctrine of Papal infallibility, because it is the strongest case presented in the history of the Church, and to an unpracticed controversialist has the appearance of being unanswerable. The simple fact that this Pope was, after his death, condemned by a Council of the Church, and that the decree was sanctioned by another Pope, seems to stare us in the face and demand a satisfactory explanation. What, then, are the facts in reference to this interesting case?

The Synod of Ephesus had defined, in opposition to Nestorius, that in our Lord there is but one person; the Council of Chalcedon had defined, against Eutyches, that there are, in Christ, two natures. From these two definitions arose a new heresy, teaching that there is only one will in Christ and one operation. The followers of this opinion were called Monothelites.

Cyrus, Patriarch of Alexandria, in a solemn and public agreement which he made with the Egyptian heretics, in order to reconcile them to the Church, was the first to formulate the error. This he did in the VIIth chapter, in the following terms: "That this same Christ, one and the Son, performs both the actions which belong to him as God, and those which are human, by *one, sole, theandric operation.*" St. Sophronius, at that time a monk, and shortly after Patriarch of Jerusalem, implored Cyrus to abstain from the expression, "one sole theandric operation;" for if there were two natures in Christ, each perfect, it was necessary to acknowledge also two wills and two operations. To all the arguments, counsel and prayers of Sophronius, Cyrus remained inflexible. Sophronius thereupon had recourse to Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, in order that the latter might dissuade his friend Cyrus from his error. Sergius, who was more astute than Cyrus, though himself also a Monothelite, answered Sophronius that neither the word *one* will, nor the word *two* wills should be used; that these terms were new and would be a scandal to the faithful and an impediment to the conversion of heretics. Sophronius, however, repudiated this plan of silence. At this point he was chosen Patriarch. Sergius, fearful lest Sophronius, strengthened by his new dignity, should prove too

formidable an adversary to the Monothelites, sent letters to the Roman Pontiff, in which he defended the formula of Cyrus, and asked that his plan of silence should be approved by Honorius. To defend Cyrus's formula he used this argument: If there are in Christ two wills, one must be divine, willing the things that are divine; the other human, willing the things that are human.

But the human will, willing human things, may will sin; which is contrary to the divine will. There will, therefore, be in Christ two contrary wills. But it is absurd to admit two contrary wills in the one person of Christ; therefore it is absurd to say there are two wills. This epistle of Sergius is full of cunning, and written with the greatest apparent submission and deference. Honorius, in his answer, drew a very clear distinction between the *substance* of the doctrine concerning two wills in Christ, and the *formulas* by which that doctrine is expressed. As to the *substance* of the doctrine, he says that we must admit, in the one person of Christ, two perfect and entire natures, the divine nature operating divine actions, and the human nature operating human actions, each unconfused, distinct, not only operating, but the principle of its own operations (*operantes et operatrices*) in regard to those things which are proper to itself.

As to the *formula* by which this doctrine, entirely contrary to Monothelism, ought to be expressed, Honorius says, "You must confess, with us, one Christ our Lord, operating in either nature, divine or human actions (*in utrisque naturis divina vel humana operantem*").

Now this formula is directly opposed to that of Cyrus, who had not said, "operating divine or human actions," distinctively and separately, but "operating divine *and* human actions," conjunctively and in a mixed manner, by one, sole, operation, which was neither simply human nor simply divine, but always theandric,—that is, compounded of divine and human.

Honorius adds that the Church has always spoken thus, and so we ought to speak.

As to the question relative to this formula, as to the use, namely, of the words *one* or *two* he says, explicitly, that he does not wish to give a definition upon it, leaving it to the grammarians; he therefore approves Sergius's counsel in regard to silence, and confirms it by his own exhortations. But Sergius had defended the article of Cyrus's agreement in regard to the use of the word *one* (as for the word *theandric*, Sergius had prudently suppressed it in his appeal to Honorius). Honorius, therefore, expressly and solidly confutes both Sergius and Cyrus by this argument. According to the expression of Scripture, Christ assumed human flesh. Now, in human flesh there are two wills; one upright,

which is conformed to the divine will ; the other vitiated and contrary to the divine will. Hence, in the Scriptures, flesh is taken in two senses ; there is good flesh, which is conformed to the will of God, and vitiated flesh, which is contrary to the will of God. Now Christ did not assume these *two* wills of human nature ; he assumed *one*,—the good will ; because he did not assume human nature *vitiated*, but upright.

The preceding is an analysis of the epistle which Honorius wrote to Sergius. It is this epistle which gave rise to the whole question in regard to Honorius ; for the heretics not only violated the rule of silence imposed upon them, but, through bad faith, distorting, to suit their own ends, the word *one* used by Honorius in speaking exclusively of the *human nature* of Christ, not of his person, they claimed Honorius as a Monothelite, and, resting on his authority, propagated their error.

The Catholics immediately took up the defence of Honorius. The Abbot John, who was scribe and secretary to Honorius, and who had written the letter, testified as follows : " We said that there is one will in the Lord, not of his divinity and humanity, but of his humanity solely." St. Maximus, Doctor, a " hammer " of the Monothelites, and afterwards martyred by them, asserted and proved that the writings of Honorius did not favor the Monothelites, and that his intention had been to maintain *one* will in the *human nature* of Christ, not in his person. John IV., who, after Severinus, succeeded Honorius in the Papal chair, wrote a defence of Honorius to the Emperor Constantine, in which he makes the same assertions that Maximus had made.

The Lateran Synod, convoked by St. Martin against the Monothelites, fifteen years after the date of Honorius's letter, condemned the Monophysites and anathematized them by name, without making any mention of Honorius ; nay, it even asserted that all the Roman pontiffs had not, since the rise of the heresy, desisted from solicitude for the faith, writing to the erring, etc. The series of these pontiffs is as follows : Honorius I. (628), Severinus (640), John IV. (642), Theodore I. (649), St. Martin I., Pope St. Agatho, who convened the Sixth General Council, defended Honorius before the Fathers there assembled, and said that Honorius had exhorted the erring that, "*at least, by keeping silence, they should desist from the error of their doctrine.*"

Notwithstanding all this the Sixth Council burned the letters of Honorius, called Honorius himself a heretic, anathematized him after he had been dead for forty-two years, and this sentence of the Sixth Council was approved by Pope St. Leo II. and following Pontiffs, and was, moreover, approved and repeated by the Seventh and Eighth Councils.

From this series of events and the condemnation by the Council arise the following questions: What is the true sense of this condemnation? What argument can be derived from it against the infallibility of the Pope? And what against the orthodoxy of Honorius himself as a private person? We shall say a few words about each of these in order.

First: In what sense was Honorius condemned by the Council? Not as one who had asserted, taught, or propagated heresy, but as one negligent in his pastoral office, one who had favored *heretics* (not heresy), and had been overindulgent to Sergius.

Let it be observed, in the first place, that, from the first ages of the Church, the name heretic was applied, first, to those who taught or maintained error in good faith; secondly, to those who taught or maintained heretical doctrine, not only with a knowledge of their error, but also with pertinacity and obstinacy; and, lastly, to those who neither taught nor maintained error themselves, but were accessory to the pertinacity of heretics, whether by protecting them, by favoring them, or by not repressing them, if they were obliged to do so by their office; and it was said, moreover, that bishops were obliged to this repression by apostolic tradition and the discipline of the Holy Fathers. The first class of heretics that we have mentioned were not punished; the second and third were visited with equal penalties. What we have said is clearly evident from ecclesiastical history, from the discipline of the primitive Church, and from the Fathers.

Having premised these remarks we may proceed to our arguments.

I. Many were condemned by the Sixth Council; Sergius, Cyrus, Pyrrhus, Petrus, Paulus, Macarius, etc., and together with these, Honorius. Of all the rest we find it said, in the condemnatory clauses of the Council, that they had maintained one will in Christ; nowhere is this said of Honorius. Therefore it cannot be proved by the authority of the Council that Honorius taught one will in Christ.

II. In none of the Acts of the Council is it said that Honorius is called a heretic because he maintained or taught heresy.

III. It is said expressly, and not once only, that Honorius is condemned because, by his silence, he fostered the Monothelites and followed the counsel of Sergius. For example, Act. Conc. XIII., "We execrate the impious dogmas of these men, and we judge that their own names shall be cast forth from the Holy Church of God, that is to say, Sergius, Cyrus, Pyrrhus, Peter, and Paul, and also Theodore. . . . And with these we order that Honorius be cast out and anathematized, *because* we find by the writings, made to Sergius, that in all things he followed his coun-

sel and confirmed his impious doctrines." The Latin has *sequi mentem ejus*, which is ambiguous, and may mean either to follow the *doctrine*, or follow the intention and plan of Sergius; but the original Greek text, of which the Latin is a translation, has, without any ambiguity, "followed the counsel."

Honorius, therefore, is not condemned like the rest for his impious dogmas, but because, by following the counsel of Sergius, he did not repress but strengthened (*confirmavit*) an impious dogma.

IV. It is expressly said in the Acts, that God cannot endure that rule of silence, "*Et quomodo non indigneretur Deus qui blasphemebatur et non defendebatur.*" "And how could God but be indignant, who was blasphemed and not defended?" (*In Sermo Prosphonetics*, Act. XVIII.) Hence, also, and for the same reason the Council is indignant, and hurls its anathema against Honorius.

V. The letters of Honorius were burned because they were destructive to the Church and favorable to the heretical contumacy of Sergius, not indeed, in doctrine, but in their approbation of the rule of silence and in too great lenity toward the heresiarch. They are condemned not because they *contained* the same impiety as the writings of the others, but because "*ad unam eandemque impietatem tenderent*;" they *tended* (in the Greek *concurred*) to one and the same impiety."

VI. If, therefore, Honorius is called a heretic, and is anathematized and cast out, it is not for heresy, but for connivance towards heretics. And expressly in this sense was the intention of the Council interpreted by the Emperor Constantine, who was not only present at the Council, but took part in it. In the same sense did St. Leo interpret it, who, having carefully examined the Acts of the Council and conferred with the legates who presided over it, approved them and translated them into Latin. Both Constantine and Leo say that Honorius was condemned, not because he taught error, but because he had favored and strengthened heretics, and had not stained the Church himself, but suffered it to be distained by others.

Second: What argument can be drawn from the condemnation of Honorius against the infallibility of the Pope?

The Catholic doctrine of infallibility is this: "When the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as Teacher of all Christians, he defines, by his apostolic authority, a doctrine of faith or morals, to be held by the Universal Church, he possesses, through the divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, that infallibility which our Divine Redeemer willed that His Church should possess in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals; and therefore, such definitions

of the Roman Pontiff, of themselves, and not by reason of the consent of the Church, are immutable (*irreformabiles*)." *Council of the Vatican*.

In order, therefore, that the condemnation of Honorius should prove that the Popes did not always possess this infallibility, two things must be established. 1st. That Honorius, exercising his office of Pastor and Teacher, *defined* some doctrine to be held by the Universal Church. 2d. That this doctrine, thus defined, was heretical. But neither can be shown.

For 1st, in Honorius's letters there is no *definition*. In the first place, Honorius says that he does not wish to define anything, and he merely approves the plan of imposing silence; and he assigns no reason for this precept of silence except the fear of giving scandal and offence; and the simplicity of men, which are not motives for defining but for withholding a definition. In the second place, Honorius, in his letters, did only that which Sergius asked of him, and it was because he followed, in this way, the counsels of Sergius, that he was condemned. But Sergius had asked no definition, but only an approbation of the precept of silence. Therefore Honorius gave no sentence of definition, but only a precept of silence.

In the third place, Honorius said to Sergius, in his letter: "It does not behoove us to affirm *one* or *two* operations." "*Non nos oportet unam aut duas operationes predicare.*" But he could not, possibly, define that there was *neither* one nor two wills in Christ, because it is absolutely necessary that there should be *either* one or two. Therefore, Honorius defined nothing, but simply forbade that any should say one or two.

And, 2d, the Council condemned no heresy as having been maintained by Honorius.

In the first place, there was no heresy in Honorius's letters, as we have proved.

In the second place, the Council condemned him, not for heresy, but for connivance with heretics.

Third: What can be drawn from the condemnation, against the faith and uprightness of Honorius as a private person?

1st. That Honorius was not sound in the faith we have shown to be false. The Council did not condemn heresy as having been maintained by Honorius. Therefore his orthodoxy is unquestionable.

2d. Honorius was condemned by the Council for a sin of omission in a most weighty matter which was destructive to the peace of the Church. This condemnation was "*in foro externo*," first, because, in Councils, it is external actions that are condemned, not the intentions of the conscience that are judged; and secondly,

because, forty-two years after the death of Honorius, no judgment could be passed, or was, in fact, passed, upon his intentions. This being premised, it is more than certain that the precept of silence imposed by Honorius and condemned "*in foro externo*" was, as to its objective nature, culpable in itself and in the highest degree pernicious to the Church. It merited, therefore, the condemnation which it received from the Council. But what shall we say of this same precept "*in foro conscientiae*;" that is to say, in reference to the culpability of the act, not considered in itself, but in relation to the intentions of Honorius and the guilt which he thereby incurred, or did not incur, before God? Could Honorius, without any fault before God, have judged that, in those particular circumstances, silence was more opportune than the condemnation of error? Honorius was a Pope, not a prophet. His letter should not be judged by the effects which it produced, but by that which human prudence could suggest to him at the time. What then could human prudence suggest to him? We cannot, here, pass any sentence on this point. There are many Catholics who condemn Honorius; there are others who absolve him from all fault. Any one may believe what seems to him more probable. The Popes are not impeccable, but infallible, and this only when they *define*, with all solemnity, *ex cathedra*.

But it may be said that St. Leo II. asserts that Honorius, being departed, has been punished with eternal condemnation. Therefore, he asserts him to have sinned. We answer that the only possible sense to be attributed to these words is, that Honorius had committed an act, which, *in itself*, merited eternal condemnation. For, as to the *fact* of his perdition, a fact of this kind cannot be decided upon by the Church without most certain signs and miracles; because that fact is one which is hidden from human knowledge. It is true that in the canonization of saints, the Pope judges that eternal salvation has certainly been obtained by the saint canonized; but he judges from indubitable prodigies by which God confirms the arguments of human prudence.

We answer, in the second place, that this testimony of St. Leo would prove, not that Honorius was a heretic (for in that very same passage St. Leo says that Honorius was condemned, "because by his negligence he had fanned the flame of heretical dogma"), but that Honorius had sinned grievously, which opinion any one is free to hold who thinks he sees probable ground for it.