

CHAPTER 8.

Of the power of the Church in articles of faith. The unbridled licence of the Papal church in destroying purity of doctrine.

This chapter is divided into two parts,—

1. The limits within which the Church ought to confine herself in matters of this kind, sec. 1-9.
2. The Roman Church convicted of having transgressed these limits, sec. 10-16.

Sections.

1. The marks and government of the Church having been considered in the seven previous chapters, the power of the Church is now considered under three heads—viz. Doctrine, Legislation, Jurisdiction.
2. The authority and power given to Church-officers not given to themselves, but their office. This shown in the case of Moses and the Levitical priesthood.
3. The same thing shown in the case of the Prophets.
4. Same thing shown in the case of the Apostles, and of Christ himself.
5. The Church astricted to the written Word of God. Christ the only teacher of the Church. From his lips ministers must derive whatever they teach for the salvation of others. Various modes of divine teaching. 1. Personal revelations.
6. Second mode of teaching—viz. by the Law and the Prophets. The Prophets were in regard to doctrine, the expounders of the Law. To these were added Historical Narratives and the Psalms.
7. Last mode of teaching by our Saviour himself manifested in the flesh. Different names given to this dispensation, to show that we are not to dream of anything more perfect than the written word.
8. Nothing can be lawfully taught in the Church, that is not contained in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles, as dictated by the Spirit of Christ.
9. Neither the Apostles, nor apostolic men. nor the whole Church, allowed to overstep these limits. This confirmed by passages of Peter and Paul. Argument a fortiori.
10. The Roman tyrants have taught a different doctrine—viz. that Councils cannot err, and, therefore, may coin new dogmas.
11. Answer to the Papistical arguments for the authority of the Church. Argument, that the Church is to be led into all truth. Answer. This promise made not only to the whole Church, but to every individual believer.
12. Answers continued.
13. Answers continued.
14. Argument, that the Church should supply the deficiency of the written word by traditions. Answer.

15. Argument founded on Mt. 18:17. Answer.

16. Objections founded on Infant Baptism, and the Canon of the Council of Nice, as to the consubstantiality of the Son. Answer.

1. We come now to the third division—viz. the Power of the Church, as existing either in individual bishops, or in councils, whether provincial or general. I speak only of the spiritual power which is proper to the Church, and which consists either in doctrine, or jurisdiction, or in enacting laws. In regard to doctrine, there are two divisions—viz. the authority of delivering dogmas, and the interpretation of them. Before we begin to treat of each in particular, I wish to remind the pious reader, that whatever is taught respecting the power of the Church, ought to have reference to the end for which Paul declares (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10) that it was given—namely, for edification, and not for destruction, those who use it lawfully deeming themselves to be nothing more than servants of Christ, and, at the same time, servants of the people in Christ. Moreover, the only mode by which ministers can edify the Church is, by studying to maintain the authority of Christ, which cannot be unimpaired, unless that which he received of the Father is left to him—viz. to be the only Master of the Church. For it was not said of any other but of himself alone, “Hear him” (Mt. 17:5). Ecclesiastical power, therefore, is not to be mischievously adorned, but it is to be confined within certain limits, so as not to be drawn hither and thither at the caprice of men. For this purpose, it will be of great use to observe how it is described by Prophets and Apostles. For if we concede unreservedly to men all the power which they think proper to assume, it is easy to see how soon it will degenerate into a tyranny which is altogether alien from the Church of Christ.

2. Therefore, it is here necessary to remember, that whatever authority and dignity the Holy Spirit in Scripture confers on priests, or prophets, or apostles, or successors of Apostles, is wholly given not to men themselves, but to the ministry to which they are appointed; or, to speak more plainly, to the word, to the ministry of which they are appointed. For were we to go over the whole in order, we should find that they were not invested with authority to teach or give responses, save in the name and word of the Lord. For whenever they are called to office, they are enjoined not to bring anything of their own, but to speak by the mouth of the Lord. Nor does he bring them forward to be heard by the people, before he has instructed them what they are to speak, lest they should speak anything but his own word. Moses, the prince of all the prophets, was to be heard in preference to others (Exod. 3:4; Deut. 17:9); but he is previously furnished with his orders, that he may not be able to speak at all except from the Lord. Accordingly, when the people embraced his doctrine, they are said to have believed the Lord, and his servant Moses (Exod. 14:31). It was also provided under the severest sanctions, that the authority of the priests should not be despised (Exod. 17:9). But the Lord, at the same time, shows in what terms they were to be heard, when he says that he made his covenant with Levi, that the law of truth might be in his mouth (Mal. 2:4-6). A little after he adds, “The priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” Therefore, if the priest would be heard, let him show himself to be the messenger of God; that is, let him faithfully deliver the commands which he has received

from his Maker. When the mode of hearing, then, is treated of, it is expressly said, "According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee" (Deut. 17:11).

3. The nature of the power conferred upon the prophets in general is elegantly described by Ezekiel: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (Ezek. 3:17). Is not he who is ordered to hear at the mouth of the Lord prohibited from devising anything of himself? And what is meant by giving a warning from the Lord, but just to speak so as to be able confidently to declare that the word which he delivers is not his own but the Lord's? The same thing is expressed by Jeremiah in different terms, "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28). Surely God here declares the law to all, and it is a law which does not allow any one to teach more than he has been ordered. He afterwards gives the name of chaff to whatever has not proceeded from himself alone. Accordingly, none of the prophets opened his mouth unless preceded by the word of the Lord. Hence we so often meet with the expressions, "The word of the Lord, The burden of the Lord, Thus saith the Lord, The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."¹ And justly, for Isaiah exclaims that his lips are unclean (Isa. 6:5); and Jeremiah confesses that he knows not how to speak because he is a child (Jer. 1:6). Could anything proceed from the unclean lips of the one, and the childish lips of the other, if they spoke their own language, but what was unclean or childish? But their lips were holy and pure when they began to be organs of the Holy Spirit. The prophets, after being thus strictly bound not to deliver anything but what they received, are invested with great power and illustrious titles. For when the Lord declares, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant," he at the same time gives the reason, "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jer. 1:9, 10).

4. Now, if you look to the apostles, they are commended by many distinguished titles, as the Light of the world, and the Salt of the earth, to be heard in Christ's stead, whatever they bound or loosed on earth being bound or loosed in heaven (Mt. 5:13, 14; Luke 10:16; John 20:23). But they declare in their own name what the authority was which their office conferred on them—viz. if they are apostles they must not speak their own pleasure, but faithfully deliver the commands of him by whom they are sent. The words in which Christ defined their embassy are sufficiently clear, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19, 20). Nay, that none might be permitted to decline this law, he received it and imposed it on himself. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). He who always was the only and eternal counsellor of the Father, who by the Father was constituted Lord and Master of all, yet because he performed the ministry of teaching, prescribed to all ministers by his example the rule which they ought to follow in teaching. The power of the Church, therefore, is not infinite, but is subject to the word of the Lord, and, as it were, included in it.

5. But though the rule which always existed in the Church from the beginning, and ought to exist in the present day, is, that the servants of God are only to teach what they have learned from himself, yet, according to the variety of times, they have had different methods of learning. The mode which now exists differs very much from that of former times. First, if it is true, as Christ says, "Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Mt. 11:27), then those who wish to attain to the knowledge of God behoved always to be directed by that eternal wisdom. For how could they have comprehended the mysteries of God in their mind, or declared them to others, unless by the teaching of him, to whom alone the secrets of the Father are known? The only way, therefore, by which in ancient times holy men knew God, was by beholding him in the Son as in a mirror. When I say this, I mean that God never manifested himself to men by any other means than by his Son, that is, his own only wisdom, light, and truth. From this fountain Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, drew all the heavenly doctrine which they possessed. From the same fountain all the prophets also drew all the heavenly oracles which they published. For this wisdom did not always display itself in one manner. With the patriarchs he employed secret revelations, but, at the same time, in order to confirm these, had recourse to signs so as to make it impossible for them to doubt that it was God that spake to them. What the patriarchs received they handed down to posterity, for God had, in depositing it with them, bound them thus to propagate it, while their children and descendants knew by the inward teaching of God, that what they heard was of heaven and not of earth.

6. But when God determined to give a more illustrious form to the Church, he was pleased to commit and consign his word to writing, that the priests might there seek what they were to teach the people, and every doctrine delivered be brought to it as a test (Mal. 2:7). Accordingly, after the promulgation of the Law, when the priests are enjoined to teach from the mouth of the Lord, the meaning is, that they are not to teach anything extraneous or alien to that kind of doctrine which God had summed up in the Law, while it was unlawful for them to add to it or take from it. Next followed the prophets, by whom God published the new oracles which were added to the Law, not so new, however, but that they flowed from the Law, and had respect to it. For in so far as regards doctrine, they were only interpreters of the Law, adding nothing to it but predictions of future events. With this exception, all that they delivered was pure exposition of the Law. But as the Lord was pleased that doctrine should exist in a clearer and more ample form, the better to satisfy weak consciences, he commanded the prophecies also to be committed to writing, and to be held part of his word. To these at the same time were added historical details, which are also the composition of prophets, but dictated by the Holy Spirit; I include the Psalms among the Prophecies, the quality which we attribute to the latter belonging also to the former. The whole body, therefore, composed of the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, and Histories, formed the word of the Lord to his ancient people, and by it as a standard, priests and teachers, before the advent of Christ, were bound to test their doctrine, nor was it lawful for them to turn aside either to the right hand or the left, because their whole office was confined to this—to give responses to the people from the mouth of God. This is gathered from a celebrated passage of Malachi, in which it is enjoined to remember the Law, and give heed to it until the preaching of the Gospel (Mal. 4:4).

¹ The French adds, "Vision receue du Seigneur; Le Seigneur des armées l'a dit;"—A vision received from the Lord; The Lord of hosts hath spoken it.

For he thus restrains men from all adventitious doctrines, and does not allow them to deviate in the least from the path which Moses had faithfully pointed out. And the reason why David so magnificently extols the Law, and pronounces so many encomiums on it (Ps. 19, 119), was, that the Jews might not long after any extraneous aid, all perfection being included in it.

7. But when at length the Wisdom of God was manifested in the flesh, he fully unfolded to us all that the human mind can comprehend, or ought to think of the heavenly Father. Now, therefore, since Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, has arisen, we have the perfect refulgence of divine truth, like the brightness of noon-day, whereas the light was previously dim. It was no ordinary blessing which the apostle intended to publish when he wrote: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1, 2); for he intimates, nay, openly declares, that God will not henceforth, as formerly, speak by this one and by that one, that he will not add prophecy to prophecy, or revelation to revelation, but has so completed all the parts of teaching in the Son, that it is to be regarded as his last and eternal testimony. For which reason, the whole period of the new dispensation, from the time when Christ appeared to us with the preaching of his Gospel, until the day of judgment, is designated by the last hour, the last times, the last days, that, contented with the perfection of Christ’s doctrine, we may learn to frame no new doctrine for ourselves, or admit any one devised by others. With good cause, therefore, the Father appointed the Son our teacher, with special prerogative, commanding that he and no human being should be heard. When he said, “Hear him” (Mt. 17:5), he commended his office to us, in few words, indeed, but words of more weight and energy than is commonly supposed, for it is just as if he had withdrawn us from all doctrines of man, and confined us to him alone, ordering us to seek the whole doctrine of salvation from him alone, to depend on him alone, and cleave to him alone; in short (as the words express), to listen only to his voice. And, indeed, what can now be expected or desired from man, when the very Word of life has appeared before us, and familiarly explained himself? Nay, every mouth should be stopped when once he has spoken, in whom, according to the pleasure of our heavenly Father, “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), and spoken as became the Wisdom of God (which is in no part defective) and the Messiah (from whom the revelation of all things was expected) (John 4:25); in other words, has so spoken as to leave nothing to be spoken by others after him.

8. Let this then be a sure axiom—that there is no word of God to which place should be given in the Church save that which is contained, first, in the Law and the Prophets; and, secondly, in the writings of the Apostles, and that the only due method of teaching in the Church is according to the prescription and rule of his word. Hence also we infer that nothing else was permitted to the apostles than was formerly permitted to the prophets—namely, to expound the ancient Scriptures, and show that the things there delivered are fulfilled in Christ: this, however, they could not do unless from the Lord; that is, unless the Spirit of Christ went before, and in a manner dictated words to them. For Christ thus defined the terms of their embassy, when he commanded them to go and teach, not what they themselves had at random fabricated, but whatsoever he had commanded (Mt. 28:20). And nothing can be plainer than his

words in another passage, “Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ” (Mt. 23:8-10). To impress this more deeply in their minds, he in the same place repeats it twice. And because from ignorance they were unable to comprehend the things which they had heard and learned from the lips of their Master, the Spirit of truth is promised to guide them unto all truth (John 14:26; 16:13). The restriction should be carefully attended to. The office which he assigns to the Holy Spirit is to bring to remembrance what his own lips had previously taught.

9. Accordingly, Peter, who was perfectly instructed by his Master as to the extent of what was permitted to him, leaves nothing more to himself or others than to dispense the doctrine delivered by God. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11); that is, not hesitatingly, as those are wont whose convictions are imperfect, but with the full confidence which becomes a servant of God, provided with a sure message. What else is this than to banish all the inventions of the human mind (whatever be the head which may have devised them), that the pure word of God may be taught and learned in the Church of the faithful,—than to discard the decrees, or rather fictions of men (whatever be their rank), that the decrees of God alone may remain steadfast? These are “the weapons of our warfare,” which “are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4, 5). Here is the supreme power with which pastors of the Church, by whatever name they are called, should be invested—namely, to dare all boldly for the word of God, compelling all the virtue, glory, wisdom, and rank of the world to yield and obey its majesty; to command all from the highest to the lowest, trusting to its power to build up the house of Christ and overthrow the house of Satan; to feed the sheep and chase away the wolves; to instruct and exhort the docile, to accuse, rebuke, and subdue the rebellious and petulant, to bind and loose; in fine, if need be, to fire and fulminate, but all in the word of God. Although, as I have observed, there is this difference between the apostles and their successors, they were sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit; and, therefore, their writings are to be regarded as the oracles of God, whereas others have no other office than to teach what is delivered and sealed in the holy Scriptures. We conclude, therefore, that it does not now belong to faithful ministers to coin some new doctrine, but simply to adhere to the doctrine to which all, without exception, are made subject. When I say this, I mean to show not only what each individual, but what the whole Church, is bound to do. In regard to individuals, Paul certainly had been appointed an apostle to the Corinthians, and yet he declares that he has no dominion over their faith (2 Cor. 1:24). Who will now presume to arrogate a dominion to which the apostle declares that he himself was not competent? But if he had acknowledged such licence in teaching, that every pastor could justly demand implicit faith in whatever he delivered, he never would have laid it down as a rule to the Corinthians, that while two or three prophets spoke, the others should judge, and that, if anything was revealed to one sitting by, the first should be silent (1 Cor. 14:29, 30). Thus he spared none, but subjected the authority of all to the censure of the word of God. But it will be said, that with regard to the whole Church the case is different. I answer, that in another place Paul meets the objection also when he says, that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). In other words, if faith depends upon the word of God alone, if it

regards and reclines on it alone, what place is left for any word of man? He who knows what faith is can never hesitate here, for it must possess a strength sufficient to stand intrepid and invincible against Satan, the machinations of hell, and the whole world. This strength can be found only in the word of God. Then the reason to which we ought here to have regard is universal: God deprives man of the power of producing any new doctrine, in order that he alone may be our master in spiritual teaching, as he alone is true, and can neither lie nor deceive. This reason applies not less to the whole Church than to every individual believer.

10. But if this power of the church which is here described be contrasted with that which spiritual tyrants, falsely styling themselves bishops and religious prelates, have now for several ages exercised among the people of God, there will be no more agreement than that of Christ with Belial. It is not my intention here to unfold the manner, the unworthy manner, in which they have used their tyranny; I will only state the doctrine which they maintain in the present day, first, in writing, and then, by fire and sword. Taking it for granted, that a universal council is a true representation of the Church, they set out with this principle, and, at the same time, lay it down as incontrovertible, that such councils are under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, and therefore cannot err. But as they rule councils, nay, constitute them, they in fact claim for themselves whatever they maintain to be due to councils. Therefore, they will have our faith to stand and fall at their pleasure, so that whatever they have determined on either side must be firmly seated in our minds; what they approve must be approved by us without any doubt; what they condemn we also must hold to be justly condemned. Meanwhile, at their own caprice, and in contempt of the word of God, they coin doctrines to which they in this way demand our assent, declaring that no man can be a Christian unless he assent to all their dogmas, affirmative as well as negative, if not with explicit, yet with implicit faith, because it belongs to the Church to frame new articles of faith.

11. First, let us hear by what arguments they prove that this authority was given to the Church, and then we shall see how far their allegations concerning the Church avail them. The Church, they say, has the noble promise that she will never be deserted by Christ her spouse, but be guided by his Spirit into all truth. But of the promises which they are wont to allege, many were given not less to private believers than to the whole Church. For although the Lord spake to the twelve apostles, when he said, “Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mt. 28:20); and again, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17), he made these promises not only to the twelve, but to each of them separately, nay, in like manner, to other disciples whom he already had received, or was afterwards to receive. When they interpret these promises, which are replete with consolation, in such a way as if they were not given to any particular Christian but to the whole Church together, what else is it but to deprive Christians of the confidence which they ought thence to have derived, to animate them in their course? I deny not that the whole body of the faithful is furnished with a manifold variety of gifts, and endued with a far larger and richer treasure of heavenly wisdom than each Christian apart; nor do I mean that this was said of believers in general, as implying that all possess the spirit of wisdom and knowledge in an equal degree: but we

are not to give permission to the adversaries of Christ to defend a bad cause, by wresting Scripture from its proper meaning. Omitting this, however, I simply hold what is true—viz. that the Lord is always present with his people, and guides them by his Spirit. He is the Spirit, not of error, ignorance, falsehood, or darkness, but of sure revelation, wisdom, truth, and light, from whom they can, without deception, learn the things which have been given to them (1 Cor. 2:12); in other words, “what is the hope of their calling, and what the riches of the glory of their inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). But while believers, even those of them who are endued with more excellent graces, obtain in the present life only the first-fruits, and, as it were, a foretaste of the Spirit, nothing better remains to them than, under a consciousness of their weakness, to confine themselves anxiously within the limits of the word of God, lest, in following their own sense too far, they forthwith stray from the right path, being left without that Spirit, by whose teaching alone truth is discerned from falsehood. For all confess with Paul, that “they have not yet reached the goal” (Phil. 3:12). Accordingly, they rather aim at daily progress than glory in perfection.

12. But it will be objected, that whatever is attributed in part to any of the saints, belongs in complete fulness to the Church. Although there is some semblance of truth in this, I deny that it is true. God, indeed, measures out the gifts of his Spirit to each of the members, so that nothing necessary to the whole body is wanting, since the gifts are bestowed for the common advantage. The riches of the Church, however, are always of such a nature, that much is wanting to that supreme perfection of which our opponents boast. Still the Church is not left destitute in any part, but always has as much as is sufficient, for the Lord knows what her necessities require. But to keep her in humility and pious modesty, he bestows no more on her than he knows to be expedient. I am aware, it is usual here to object, that Christ hath cleansed the Church “with the washing of water by the word: that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle” (Eph. 5:26, 27), and that it is therefore called the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). But the former passage rather shows what Christ daily performs in it, than what he has already perfected. For if he daily sanctifies all his people, purifies, refines them, and wipes away their stains, it is certain that they have still some spots and wrinkles, and that their sanctification is in some measure defective. How vain and fabulous is it to suppose that the Church, all whose members are somewhat spotted and impure, is completely holy and spotless in every part? It is true, therefore, that the Church is sanctified by Christ, but here the commencement of her sanctification only is seen; the end and entire completion will be effected when Christ, the Holy of holies, shall truly and completely fill her with his holiness. It is true also, that her stains and wrinkles have been effaced, but so that the process is continued every day, until Christ at his advent will entirely remove every remaining defect. For unless we admit this, we shall be constrained to hold with the Pelagians, that the righteousness of believers is perfected in this life: like the Cathari and Donatists we shall tolerate no infirmity in the Church.¹ The other passage, as we have elsewhere seen (chap. 1 sec. 10), has a very different meaning from what they put upon it. For when Paul instructed Timothy, and trained him to the office of a true bishop, he says, he did it in order that he might learn how to behave himself in the Church of God. And to make him devote himself to the work with greater seriousness and zeal, he adds, that the Church is the

¹ The French adds, “Or, nos adversaires mesmes tiennent tous ceux-la pour heretiques.”—Now, our opponents themselves regard all those as heretics.

pillar and ground of the truth. And what else do these words mean, than just that the truth of God is preserved in the Church, and preserved by the instrumentality of preaching; as he elsewhere says, that Christ “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;” “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ?” (Eph. 4:11, 14, 15) The reason, therefore, why the truth, instead of being extinguished in the world, remains unimpaired, is, because he has the Church as a faithful guardian, by whose aid and ministry it is maintained. But if this guardianship consists in the ministry of the Prophets and Apostles, it follows, that the whole depends upon this—viz. that the word of the Lord is faithfully preserved and maintained in purity.

13. And that my readers may the better understand the hinge on which the question chiefly turns, I will briefly explain what our opponents demand, and what we resist. When they deny that the Church can err, their end and meaning are to this effect: Since the Church is governed by the Spirit of God, she can walk safely without the word; in whatever direction she moves, she cannot think or speak anything but the truth, and hence, if she determines anything without or beside the word of God, it must be regarded in no other light than if it were a divine oracle. If we grant the first point—viz. that the Church cannot err in things necessary to salvation—our meaning is, that she cannot err, because she has altogether discarded her own wisdom, and submits to the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the word of God. Here then is the difference. They place the authority of the Church without the word of God; we annex it to the word, and allow it not to be separated from it. And is it strange if the spouse and pupil of Christ is so subject to her lord and master as to hang carefully and constantly on his lips? In every well-ordered house the wife obeys the command of her husband, in every well-regulated school the doctrine of the master only is listened to. Wherefore, let not the Church be wise in herself, nor think any thing of herself, but let her consider her wisdom terminated when he ceases to speak. In this way she will distrust all the inventions of her own reason; and when she leans on the word of God, will not waver in diffidence or hesitation but rest in full assurance and unwavering constancy. Trusting to the liberal promises which she has received, she will have the means of nobly maintaining her faith, never doubting that the Holy Spirit is always present with her to be the perfect guide of her path. At the same time, she will remember the use which God wishes to be derived from his Spirit. “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). How? “He shall bring to your remembrance all things whatsoever I have said unto you.” He declares, therefore, that nothing more is to be expected of his Spirit than to enlighten our minds to perceive the truth of his doctrine. Hence Chrysostom most shrewdly observes, “Many boast of the Holy Spirit, but with those who speak their own it is a false pretence. As Christ declared that he spoke not of himself (John 12:50; 14:10), because he spoke according to the Law and the Prophets; so, if anything contrary to the Gospel is obtruded under the name of the Holy Spirit, let us not believe it. For as Christ is the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets, so is the Spirit the fulfilment of the Gospel” (Chrysost. Sermon de Sancto et Adorando Spiritu.) Thus far Chrysostom. We may now easily infer how erroneously our opponents act in vaunting of the Holy Spirit, for no other end

than to give the credit of his name to strange doctrines, extraneous to the word of God, whereas he himself desires to be inseparably connected with the word of God; and Christ declares the same thing of him, when he promises him to the Church. And so indeed it is. The soberness which our Lord once prescribed to his Church, he wishes to be perpetually observed. He forbade that anything should be added to his word, and that anything should be taken from it. This is the inviolable decree of God and the Holy Spirit, a decree which our opponents endeavour to annul when they pretend that the Church is guided by the Spirit without the word.

14. Here again they mutter that the Church behoved to add something to the writings of the apostles, or that the apostles themselves behoved orally to supply what they had less clearly taught, since Christ said to them, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12), and that these are the points which have been received, without writing, merely by use and custom. But what effrontery is this? The disciples, I admit, were ignorant and almost indocile when our Lord thus addressed them, but were they still in this condition when they committed his doctrine to writing, so as afterwards to be under the necessity of supplying orally that which, through ignorance, they had omitted to write? If they were guided by the Spirit of truth unto all truth when they published their writings, what prevented them from embracing a full knowledge of the Gospel, and consigning it therein? But let us grant them what they ask, provided they point out the things which behoved to be revealed without writing. Should they presume to attempt this, I will address, them in the words of Augustine, “When the Lord is silent, who of us may say, this is, or that is? or if we should presume to say it, how do we prove it?” (August. in Joann. 96) But why do I contend superfluously? Every child knows that in the writings of the apostles, which these men represent as mutilated and incomplete, is contained the result of that revelation which the Lord then promised to them.

15. What, say they, did not Christ declare that nothing which the Church teaches and decrees can be gainsayed, when he enjoined that every one who presumes to contradict should be regarded as a heathen man and a publican? (Mt. 18:17.) First, there is here no mention of doctrine, but her authority to censure, for correction is asserted, in order that none who had been admonished or reprimanded might oppose her judgment. But to say nothing of this, it is very strange that those men are so lost to all sense of shame, that they hesitate not to plume themselves on this declaration. For what, pray, will they make of it, but just that the consent of the Church, a consent never given but to the word of God, is not to be despised? The Church is to be heard, say they. Who denies this? since she decides nothing but according to the word of God. If they demand more than this, let them know that the words of Christ give them no countenance. I ought not to seem contentious when I so vehemently insist that we cannot concede to the Church any new doctrine; in other words, allow her to teach and oracularly deliver more than the Lord has revealed in his word. Men of sense see how great the danger is if so much authority is once conceded to men. They see also how wide a door is opened for the jeers and cavils of the ungodly, if we admit that Christians are to receive the opinions of men as if they were oracles. We may add, that our Saviour, speaking according to the circumstances of his times, gave the name of Church to the Sanhedrim, that the disciples might learn afterwards to revere the sacred meetings of the Church. Hence it

would follow, that single cities and districts would have equal liberty in coining dogmas.

16. The examples which they bring do not avail them. They say that paedobaptism proceeds not so much on a plain command of Scripture, as on a decree of the Church. It would be a miserable asylum if, in defence of paedobaptism, we were obliged to betake ourselves to the bare authority of the Church; but it will be made plain enough elsewhere (chap. 16) that it is far otherwise. In like manner, when they object that we nowhere find in the Scriptures what was declared in the Council of Nice—viz. that the Son is consubstantial with the Father (see August. Ep. 178)—they do a grievous injustice to the Fathers, as if they had rashly condemned Arius for not swearing to their words, though professing the whole of that doctrine which is contained in the writings of the Apostles and Prophets. I admit that the expression does not exist in Scripture, but seeing it is there so often declared that there is one God, and Christ is so often called true and eternal God, one with the Father, what do the Nicene Fathers do when they affirm that he is of one essence, than simply declare the genuine meaning of Scripture? Theodoret relates that Constantine, in opening their meeting, spoke as follows: “In the discussion of divine matters, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit stands recorded. The Gospels and apostolical writings, with the oracles of the prophets, fully show us the meaning of the Deity. Therefore, laying aside discord, let us take the exposition of questions from the words of the Spirit” (Theodoret. Hist. Eccles. Lib. 1 c. 5). There was none who opposed this sound advice; none who objected that the Church could add something of her own, that the Spirit did not reveal all things to the apostles, or at least that they did not deliver them to posterity, and so forth. If the point on which our opponents insist is true, Constantine, first, was in error in robbing the Church of her power; and, secondly, when none of the bishops rose to vindicate it, their silence was a kind of perfidy, and made them traitors to Ecclesiastical law. But since Theodoret relates that they readily embraced what the Emperor said, it is evident that this new dogma was then wholly unknown.

CHAPTER 9.

Of councils and their authority.¹

Since Papists regard their Councils as expressing the sentiment and consent of the Church, particularly as regards the authority of declaring dogmas and the exposition of them, it was necessary to treat of Councils before proceeding to consider that part of ecclesiastical power which relates to doctrine.

1. First, the authority of Councils in delivering dogmas is discussed, and it is shown that the Spirit of God is not so bound to the Pastors of the Church as opponents suppose. Their objections refuted, sec. 1-7.
2. The errors, contradictions, and weaknesses, of certain Councils exposed. A refutation of the subterfuge, that those set over us are to be obeyed without distinction, sec. 8-12.
3. Of the authority of Councils as regards the interpretation of Scripture, sec. 13, 14.

¹ See Calvin's *Antidote to the Articles of Sorbonne*; Letter to Sadolet; *Necessity of Reforming the Church*; *Antidote to the Council of Trent*; Remarks on the Paternal Admonition of the Pope.

Sections.

1. The true nature of Councils.
2. Whence the authority of Councils is derived. What meant by assembling in the name of Christ.
3. Objection, that no truth remains in the Church if it be not in Pastors and Councils. Answer, showing by passages from the Old Testament that Pastors were often devoid of the spirit of knowledge and truth.
4. Passages from the New Testament showing that our times were to be subject to the same evil. This confirmed by the example of almost all ages.
5. All not Pastors who pretend to be so.
6. Objection, that General Councils represent the Church. Answer, showing the absurdity of this objection from passages in the Old Testament.
7. Passages to the same effect from the New Testament.
8. Councils have authority only in so far as accordant with Scripture. Testimony of Augustine. Councils of Nice, Constantinople, and Ephesus, Subsequent Councils more impure, and to be received with limitation.
9. Contradictory decisions of Councils. Those agreeing with divine truth to be received. Those at variance with it to be rejected. This confirmed by the example of the Council of Constantinople and the Council of Nice; also of the Council of Chalcedon, and second Council of Ephesus.
10. Errors of purer Councils. Four causes of these errors. An example from the Council of Nice.
11. Another example from the Council of Chalcedon. The same errors in Provincial Councils.
12. Evasion of the Papists. Three answers. Conclusion of the discussion as to the power of the Church in relation to doctrine.
13. Last part of the chapter. Power of the Church in interpreting Scripture. From what source interpretation is to be derived. Means of preserving unity in the Church.
14. Impudent attempt of the Papists to establish their tyranny refuted. Things at variance with Scripture sanctioned by their Councils. Instance in the prohibition of marriage and communion in both kinds.

1. Were I now to concede all that they ask concerning the Church, it would not greatly aid them in their object. For everything that is said of the Church they immediately transfer to councils, which, in their opinion, represent the Church. Nay, when they contend so doggedly for the power of the Church, their only object is to devolve the whole which they extort on the Roman Pontiff and his conclave. Before I begin to discuss this question, two points must be briefly premised. First, though I mean to be more rigid in discussing this subject, it is not because I set less value than I ought on ancient councils. I venerate them from my heart, and would have all to hold them in due honour.² But there must be some limita-

² French, “Si je tien ici la bride roide pour ne lascher rien facilement à nos adversaires, ce n'est pas à dire pourtant que je prise les conciles anciens moins que je ne doy. Car je les honore de bonne affection, et desire que chacun les estime, et les ait en reverence.”—If I here keep the reins tight,

tion, there must be nothing derogatory to Christ. Moreover, it is the right of Christ to preside over all councils, and not share the honour with any man. Now, I hold that he presides only when he governs the whole assembly by his word and Spirit. Secondly, in attributing less to councils than my opponents demand, it is not because I have any fear that councils are favourable to their cause and adverse to ours. For as we are amply provided by the word of the Lord with the means of proving our doctrine and overthrowing the whole Papacy, and thus have no great need of other aid, so, if the case required it, ancient councils furnish us in a great measure with what might be sufficient for both purposes.

2. Let us now proceed to the subject itself. If we consult Scripture on the authority of councils, there is no promise more remarkable than that which is contained in these words of our Saviour, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” But this is just as applicable to any particular meeting as to a universal council. And yet the important part of the question does not lie here, but in the condition which is added—viz. that Christ will be in the midst of a council, provided it be assembled in his name. Wherefore, though our opponents should name councils of thousands of bishops it will little avail them; nor will they induce us to believe that they are, as they maintain, guided by the Holy Spirit, until they make it credible that they assemble in the name of Christ: since it is as possible for wicked and dishonest to conspire against Christ, as for good and honest bishops to meet together in his name. Of this we have a clear proof in very many of the decrees which have proceeded from councils. But this will be afterwards seen. At present I only reply in one word, that our Saviour’s promise is made to those only who assemble in his name. How, then, is such an assembly to be defined? I deny that those assemble in the name of Christ who, disregarding his command by which he forbids anything to be added to the word of God or taken from it, determine everything at their own pleasure, who, not contented with the oracles of Scripture, that is, with the only rule of perfect wisdom, devise some novelty out of their own head (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18). Certainly, since our Saviour has not promised to be present with all councils of whatever description, but has given a peculiar mark for distinguishing true and lawful councils from others, we ought not by any means to lose sight of the distinction. The covenant which God anciently made with the Levitical priests was to teach at his mouth (Mal. 2:7). This he always required of the prophets, and we see also that it was the law given to the apostles. On those who violate this covenant God bestows neither the honour of the priesthood nor any authority. Let my opponents solve this difficulty if they would subject my faith to the decrees of man, without authority from the word of God.

3. Their idea that the truth cannot remain in the Church unless it exist among pastors, and that the Church herself cannot exist unless displayed in general councils, is very far from holding true if the prophets have left us a correct description of their own times. In the time of Isaiah there was a Church at Jerusalem which the Lord had not yet abandoned. But of pastors he thus speaks: “His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which never have enough, and they are

and do not easily yield anything to our opponents, it is not because I prize ancient councils less than I ought. For I honour them sincerely and desire that every man esteem them, and hold them in reverence.

shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way” (Isa. 56:10, 11). In the same way Hosea says, “The watchman of Ephraim was with my God: but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God” (Hosea 9:8). Here, by ironically connecting them with God, he shows that the pretext of the priesthood was vain. There was also a Church in the time of Jeremiah. Let us hear what he says of pastors: “From the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely.” Again, “The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them” (Jer. 6:13; 14:14). And not to be prolix with quotations, read the whole of his thirty-third and fortieth chapters. Then, on the other hand, Ezekiel inveighs against them in no milder terms. “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls.” “Her priests have violated my law, and profaned mine holy things” (Ezek. 22:25, 26). There is more to the same purpose. Similar complaints abound throughout the prophets; nothing is of more frequent recurrence.

4. But perhaps, though this great evil prevailed among the Jews, our age is exempt from it. Would that it were so; but the Holy Spirit declared that it would be otherwise. For Peter’s words are clear, “But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily will bring in damnable heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). See how he predicts impending danger, not from ordinary believers, but from those who should plume themselves on the name of pastors and teachers. Besides, how often did Christ and his apostles foretell that the greatest dangers with which the Church was threatened would come from pastors? (Mt. 24:11, 24). Nay, Paul openly declares, that Antichrist would have his seat in the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:4); thereby intimating, that the fearful calamity of which he was speaking would come only from those who should have their seat in the Church as pastors. And in another passage he shows that the introduction of this great evil was almost at hand. For in addressing the Elders of Ephesus, he says, “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29, 30). How great corruption might a long series of years introduce among pastors, when they could degenerate so much within so short a time? And not to fill my pages with details, we are reminded by the examples of almost every age, that the truth is not always cherished in the bosoms of pastors, and that the safety of the Church depends not on their state. It was becoming that those appointed to preserve the peace and safety of the Church should be its presidents and guardians; but it is one thing to perform what you owe, and another to owe what you do not perform.

5. Let no man, however, understand me as if I were desirous in everything rashly and unreservedly to overthrow the authority of pastors.¹ All I advise is, to exercise discrimination, and not suppose, as a matter of course, that all who call themselves pastors are so in reality. But the Pope, with the whole crew of his bishops, for no other reason but because they are called pastors, shake off obedi-

1 French, “Toutesfois je ne veux point que ces propos soyent entendus comme si je vouloye amoindrir l’authorite des pasteurs, et induire le peuple à la mepriser legerement.”—However, I would not have these statements to be understood as if I wished to lessen the authority of pastors, and induce the people lightly to despise it.

ence to the word of God, invert all things, and turn them hither and thither at their pleasure; meanwhile, they insist that they cannot be destitute of the light of truth, that the Spirit of God perpetually resides in them, that the Church subsists in them, and dies with them, as if the Lord did not still inflict his judgments, and in the present day punish the world for its wickedness, in the same way in which he punished the ingratitude of the ancient people—namely, by smiting pastors with astonishment and blindness (Zech. 12:4). These stupid men understand not that they are just chiming in with those of ancient times who warred with the word of God. For the enemies of Jeremiah thus set themselves against the truth, “Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet” (Jer. 18:18).

6. Hence it is easy to reply to their allegation concerning general councils. It cannot be denied, that the Jews had a true Church under the prophets. But had a general council then been composed of the priests, what kind of appearance would the Church have had? We hear the Lord denouncing not against one or two of them, but the whole order: “The priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder” (Jer. 4:9). Again, “The law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients” (Ezek. 7:26). Again, “Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them,” etc. (Micah 3:6). Now, had all men of this description been collected together, what spirit would have presided over their meeting? Of this we have a notable instance in the council which Ahab convened (1 Kings 22:6, 22). Four hundred prophets were present. But because they had met with no other intention than to flatter the impious king, Satan is sent by the Lord to be a lying spirit in all their mouths. The truth is there unanimously condemned. Micaiah is judged a heretic, is smitten, and cast into prison. So was it done to Jeremiah, and so to the other prophets.

7. But there is one memorable example which may suffice for all. In the council which the priests and Pharisees assembled at Jerusalem against Christ (John 11:47), what is wanting, in so far as external appearance is concerned? Had there been no Church then at Jerusalem, Christ would never have joined in the sacrifices and other ceremonies. A solemn meeting is held; the high priest presides; the whole sacerdotal order take their seats, and yet Christ is condemned, and his doctrine is put to flight. This at once proves that the Church was not at all included in that council. But there is no danger that anything of the kind will happen with us. Who has told us so? Too much security in a matter of so great importance lies open to the charge of sluggishness. Nay, when the Spirit, by the mouth of Paul, foretells, in distinct terms, that a defection will take place, a defection which cannot come until pastors first forsake God (2 Thess. 2:3), why do we spontaneously walk blindfold to our own destruction? Wherefore, we cannot on any account admit that the Church consists in a meeting of pastors, as to whom the Lord has nowhere promised that they would always be good, but has sometimes foretold that they would be wicked. When he warns us of danger, it is to make us use greater caution.

8. What, then, you will say, is there no authority in the definitions of councils? Yes, indeed; for I do not contend that all councils

are to be condemned, and all their acts rescinded, or, as it is said, made one complete erasure. But you are bringing them all (it will be said) under subordination, and so leaving every one at liberty to receive or reject the decrees of councils as he pleases. By no means; but whenever the decree of a council is produced, the first thing I would wish to be done is, to examine at what time it was held, on what occasion, with what intention, and who were present at it; next I would bring the subject discussed to the standard of Scripture. And this I would do in such a way that the decision of the council should have its weight, and be regarded in the light of a prior judgment, yet not so as to prevent the application of the test which I have mentioned. I wish all had observed the method which Augustine prescribes in his Third Book against Maximinus, when he wished to silence the cavils of this heretic against the decrees of councils, “I ought not to oppose the Council of Nice to you, nor ought you to oppose that of Ariminum to me, as judging the question. I am not bound by the authority of the latter, nor you by that of the former. Let thing contend with thing, cause with cause, reason with reason, on the authority of Scripture, an authority not peculiar to either, but common to all.” In this way, councils would be duly respected, and yet the highest place would be given to Scripture, everything being brought to it as a test. Thus those ancient Councils of Nice, Constantinople, the first of Ephesus, Chalcedon, and the like, which were held for refuting errors, we willingly embrace, and reverence as sacred, in so far as relates to doctrines of faith, for they contain nothing but the pure and genuine interpretation of Scripture, which the holy Fathers with spiritual prudence adopted to crush the enemies of religion who had then arisen. In some later councils, also, we see displayed a true zeal for religion, and moreover unequivocal marks of genius, learning, and prudence. But as matters usually become worse and worse, it is easy to see in more modern councils how much the Church gradually degenerated from the purity of that golden age. I doubt not, however, that even in those more corrupt ages, councils had their bishops of better character. But it happened with them as the Roman senators of old complained in regard to their decrees. Opinions being numbered, not weighed, the better were obliged to give way to the greater number. They certainly put forth many impious sentiments. There is no need here to collect instances, both because it would be tedious, and because it has been done by others so carefully, as not to leave much to be added.

9. Moreover, why should I review the contests of council with council? Nor is there any ground for whispering to me, that when councils are at variance, one or other of them is not a lawful council. For how shall we ascertain this? Just, if I mistake not, by judging from Scripture that the decrees are not orthodox. For this alone is the sure law of discrimination. It is now about nine hundred years since the Council of Constantinople, convened under the Emperor Leo, determined that the images set up in temples were to be thrown down and broken to pieces. Shortly after, the Council of Nice, which was assembled by Irene, through dislike of the former, decreed that images were to be restored. Which of the two councils shall we acknowledge to be lawful? The latter has usually prevailed, and secured a place for images in churches. But Augustine maintains that this could not be done without the greatest danger of idolatry. Epiphanius, at a later period, speaks much more harshly (Epist. ad Joann. Hierosolym. et Lib. 3 contra Haeres.). For he says, it is an unspeakable abomination to see images in a Christian temple. Could those who speak thus approve of that council if they were alive in the present day? But if historians speak true,

and we believe their acts, not only images themselves, but the worship of them, were there sanctioned. Now it is plain that this decree emanated from Satan. Do they not show, by corrupting and wresting Scripture, that they held it in derision? This I have made sufficiently clear in a former part of the work (see Book I. chap. 11 sec. 14). Be this as it may, we shall never be able to distinguish between contradictory and dissenting councils, which have been many, unless we weigh them all in that balance for men and angels, I mean, the word of God. Thus we embrace the Council of Chalcedon, and repudiate the second of Ephesus, because the latter sanctioned the impiety of Eutyches, and the former condemned it. The judgment of these holy men was founded on the Scriptures, and while we follow it, we desire that the word of God, which illuminated them, may now also illuminate us. Let the Romanists now go and boast after their manner, that the Holy Spirit is fixed and tied to their councils.

10. Even in their ancient and purer councils there is something to be desiderated, either because the otherwise learned and prudent men who attended, being distracted by the business in hand, did not attend to many things beside; or because, occupied with grave and more serious measures, they winked at some of lesser moment; or simply because, as men, they were deceived through ignorance, or were sometimes carried headlong by some feeling in excess. Of this last case (which seems the most difficult of all to avoid) we have a striking example in the Council of Nice, which has been unanimously received, as it deserves, with the utmost veneration. For when the primary article of our faith was there in peril, and Arius, its enemy, was present, ready to engage any one in combat, and it was of the utmost moment that those who had come to attack Arius should be agreed, they nevertheless, feeling secure amid all these dangers, nay, as it were, forgetting their gravity, modesty, and politeness, laying aside the discussion which was before them (as if they had met for the express purpose of gratifying Arius), began to give way to intestine dissensions, and turn the pen, which should have been employed against Arius, against each other. Foul accusations were heard, libels flew up and down, and they never would have ceased from their contention until they had stabbed each other with mutual wounds, had not the Emperor Constantine interfered, and declaring that the investigation of their lives was a matter above his cognisance, repressed their intemperance by flattery rather than censure. In how many respects is it probable that councils, held subsequently to this, have erred? Nor does the fact stand in need of a long demonstration; any one who reads their acts will observe many infirmities, not to use a stronger term.

11. Even Leo, the Roman Pontiff, hesitates not to charge the Council of Chalcedon, which he admits to be orthodox in its doctrines, with ambition and inconsiderate rashness. He denies not that it was lawful, but openly maintains that it might have erred. Some may think me foolish in labouring to point out errors of this description, since my opponents admit that councils may err in things not necessary to salvation. My labour, however, is not superfluous. For although compelled, they admit this in word, yet by obtruding upon us the determination of all councils, in all matters without distinction, as the oracles of the Holy Spirit, they exact more than they had at the outset assumed. By thus acting what do they maintain but just that councils cannot err, of if they err, it is unlawful for us to perceive the truth, or refuse assent to their er-

rors? At the same time, all I mean to infer from what I have said is, that though councils, otherwise pious and holy, were governed by the Holy Spirit, he yet allowed them to share the lot of humanity, lest we should confide too much in men. This is a much better view than that of Gregory Nanzianzen, who says (Ep. 55), that he never saw any council end well. In asserting that all, without exception, ended ill, he leaves them little authority. There is no necessity for making separate mention of provincial councils, since it is easy to estimate, from the case of general councils, how much authority they ought to have in framing articles of faith, and deciding what kind of doctrine is to be received.

12. But our Romanists, when, in defending their cause, they see all rational grounds slip from beneath them, betake themselves to a last miserable subterfuge. Although they should be dull in intellect and counsel, and most depraved in heart and will, still the word of the Lord remains, which commands us to obey those who have the rule over us (Heb. 13:17). Is it indeed so? What if I should deny that those who act thus have the rule over us? They ought not to claim for themselves more than Joshua had, who was both a prophet of the Lord and an excellent pastor. Let us then hear in what terms the Lord introduced him to his office. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:7, 8). Our spiritual rulers, therefore, will be those who turn not from the law of the Lord to the right hand or the left. But if the doctrine of all pastors is to be received without hesitation, why are we so often and so anxiously admonished by the Lord not to give heed to false prophets? "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Harken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you; they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord" (Jer. 23:16). Again, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mt. 7:15). In vain also would John exhort us to try the spirits whether they be of God (1 John 4:1). From this judgment not even angels are exempted (Gal. 1:8); far less Satan with his lies. And what is meant by the expression, "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch"? (Mt. 15:14) Does it not sufficiently declare that there is a great difference among the pastors who are to be heard, that all are not to be heard indiscriminately? Wherefore they have no ground for deterring us by their name, in order to draw us into a participation of their blindness, since we see, on the contrary, that the Lord has used special care to guard us from allowing ourselves to be led away by the errors of others, whatever be the mask under which they may lurk. For if the answer of our Saviour is true, blind guides, whether high priests, prelates, or pontiffs, can do nothing more than hurry us over the same precipice with themselves. Wherefore, let no names of councils, pastors, and bishops (which may be used on false pretences as well as truly), hinder us from giving heed to the evidence both of words and facts, and bringing all spirits to the test of the divine word, that we may prove whether they are of God.

13. Having proved that no power was given to the Church to set up any new doctrine, let us now treat of the power attributed to them in the interpretation of Scripture. We readily admit, that when any doctrine is brought under discussion, there is not a better or surer remedy than for a council of true bishops to meet and

discuss the controverted point. There will be much more weight in a decision of this kind, to which the pastors of churches have agreed in common after invoking the Spirit of Christ, than if each, adopting it for himself, should deliver it to his people, or a few individuals should meet in private and decide. Secondly, When bishops have assembled in one place, they deliberate more conveniently in common, fixing both the doctrine and the form of teaching it, lest diversity give offence. Thirdly, Paul prescribes this method of determining doctrine. For when he gives the power of deciding to a single church, he shows what the course of procedure should be in more important cases—namely, that the churches together are to take common cognisance. And the very feeling of piety tells us, that if any one trouble the Church with some novelty in doctrine, and the matter be carried so far that there is danger of a greater dissension, the churches should first meet, examine the question, and at length, after due discussion, decide according to Scripture, which may both put an end to doubt in the people, and stop the mouths of wicked and restless men, so as to prevent the matter from proceeding farther. Thus when Arius arose, the Council of Nice was convened, and by its authority both crushed the wicked attempts of this impious man, and restored peace to the churches which he had vexed, and asserted the eternal divinity of Christ in opposition to his sacrilegious dogma. Thereafter, when Eunomius and Macedonius raised new disturbances, their madness was met with a similar remedy by the Council of Constantinople; the impiety of Nestorius was defeated by the Council of Ephesus. In short, this was from the first the usual method of preserving unity in the Church whenever Satan commenced his machinations. But let us remember, that all ages and places are not favoured with an Athanasius, a Basil, a Cyril, and like vindicators of sound doctrine, whom the Lord then raised up. Nay, let us consider what happened in the second Council of Ephesus when the Eutychian heresy prevailed. Flavianus, of holy memory, with some pious men, was driven into exile, and many similar crimes were committed, because, instead of the Spirit of the Lord, Dioscorus, a factious man, of a very bad disposition, presided. But the Church was not there. I admit it; for I always hold that the truth does not perish in the Church though it be oppressed by one council, but is wondrously preserved by the Lord to rise again, and prove victorious in his own time. I deny, however, that every interpretation of Scripture is true and certain which has received the votes of a council.

14. But the Romanists have another end in view when they say that the power of interpreting Scripture belongs to councils, and that without challenge. For they employ it as a pretext for giving the name of an interpretation of Scripture to everything which is determined in councils. Of purgatory, the intercession of saints, and auricular confession, and the like, not one syllable can be found in Scripture. But as all these have been sanctioned by the authority of the Church, or, to speak more correctly, have been received by opinion and practice, every one of them is to be held as an interpretation of Scripture. And not only so, but whatever a council has determined against Scripture is to have the name of an interpretation. Christ bids all drink of the cup which he holds forth in the Supper. The Council of Constance prohibited the giving of it to the people, and determined that the priest alone should drink. Though this is diametrically opposed to the institution of Christ (Mt. 26:26), they will have it to be regarded as his interpretation. Paul terms the prohibition of marriage a doctrine of devils (1 Tim. 4:1, 3); and the Spirit elsewhere declares that “marriage is honourable in all” (Heb. 13:4). Having afterwards interdicted their priests

from marriage, they insist on this as a true and genuine interpretation of Scripture, though nothing can be imagined more alien to it. Should any one venture to open his lips in opposition, he will be judged a heretic, since the determination of the Church is without challenge, and it is unlawful to have any doubt as to the accuracy of her interpretation. Why should I assail such effrontery? to point to it is to condemn it. Their dogma with regard to the power of approving Scripture I intentionally omit. For to subject the oracles of God in this way to the censure of men, and hold that they are sanctioned because they please men, is a blasphemy which deserves not to be mentioned. Besides, I have already touched upon it (Book I chap. 7; 8 sec. 9). I will ask them one question, however. If the authority of Scripture is founded on the approbation of the Church, will they quote the decree of a council to that effect? I believe they cannot. Why, then, did Arius allow himself to be vanquished at the Council of Nice by passages adduced from the Gospel of John? According to these, he was at liberty to repudiate them, as they had not previously been approved by any general council. They allege an old catalogue, which they call the Canon, and say that it originated in a decision of the Church. But I again ask, In what council was that Canon published? Here they must be dumb. Besides, I wish to know what they believe that Canon to be. For I see that the ancients are little agreed with regard to it. If effect is to be given to what Jerome says (Praef. in Lib. Solom.), the Maccabees, Tobit, Ecclesiasticus, and the like, must take their place in the Apocrypha: but this they will not tolerate on any account.