

THE CASE OF POPE HONORIUS I

Excerpts from
**THE PRIMACY AND INFALLIBILITY OF THE SOVEREIGN
PONTIFFS: LESSONS FROM HISTORY**



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This work was originally published in French under the title La Primauté et l'Infaillibilité des Souverains Pontifes (Québec: L. H. Huot, 1873). The following is an English translation of the author's foreword and of Chapter 6 (pages 225-261), which treats of Pope Honorius.

FOREWORD

At the beginning of January of this year (1873), I was called upon to give a public course on Church history at Laval University. The subject was left to my choosing. Knowing from the experience I had acquired during my studies at the Roman College how useful it is to throw light on numerous historical questions debated in our times, and upon which so many clouds continue to hover; knowing, on the other hand, that the divine prerogatives of the primacy and the infallibility of the Sovereign Pontiffs have been and continue to be the object of the most violent attacks, I believed it necessary to choose this topic, to lay down the facts as clearly and as succinctly as possible, and to thereby show the fulfillment of Jesus Christ's promises in the annals of history.

This subject obtained the approval and met the desires of our Catholic Canadian public in Quebec. The interest was found to be even greater due to the publication of a brochure, printed in Montreal, in the form of a speech which Bishop Strossmayer had allegedly delivered at the Vatican Council. Upon the first reading of this document, it was easy to recognize that it was a spurious work, and that it must have been written by someone who had never belonged to the Catholic Church. This sickly work, bandied about the parishes of the province, was left without any response. Several individuals asked me to make a refutation which our newspapers would then publish. This request coincided with that which was made of me to give a public course in history at the university. To avenge the Popes of the serious charges of power usurpation and heterodoxy—such was the subject which presented itself so naturally to my studies in the circumstances at the time.

Besides the students from the Faculties of Theology, Medicine, Law and Arts, who, according to university regulations, had to be present at these courses, a quite large audience made up of the elite of our population, clergy and laity, wished to honor with their presence the modest lessons which I offered them. Love for the truth, the perfectly natural desire to know the history of the leaders of the great Catholic society to which the Canadian people glory in belonging, and the legitimate curiosity to know how to resolve certain historical difficulties which the enemies of the Church so often present to us—these are the causes which explain the favorable attention with which this course was followed. It was at the same time an encouragement given to Laval University, whose greatest fortune is producing good and making known the truth in all fields.

Many of my listeners as well as other individuals who were unable to be present at my lessons urged me to publish them. I hesitated for some time; in the end I believed it necessary to yield to their entreaties in the hope that, despite the imperfections which inevitably slip into such a speedy work, it would result in some good for our society, which bears such a filial love for the Church and its leaders.

One will at times find protractions, numerous repetitions, and throughout the aridity of the didactic genre; this is because when I wrote these pages, I had no intention of writing a book, but of giving a course. In this latter genre there is greater latitude; in order to throw a more

powerful light on controversial questions, it is necessary to recall facts often and to permit oneself certain digressions which would be out of place in an ordinary work.

I do not pretend to have exhausted the questions I have endeavored to address; each one of them, to be studied thoroughly, would require sometimes more than a volume. I wished uniquely to respond with clarity and precision to the difficult principles which are central to the authority and orthodoxy of the successors of St. Peter. May I help dissipate some of the old prejudices concerning the history of the Popes! May I also—this is my most ardent desire—be but a faithful echo of the teaching of the Roman College, of this venerable international institution so deservedly supported by the Holy Father, preserved even now from the invaders of Rome, and which has already produced such good throughout the Catholic world!

SIXTH LESSON

POPE HONORIUS AND MONOTHELETISM

Origin and progression of Monothelism. Heraclius, Sergius and Sophronius. Letter of Sergius to Honorius and the latter's response. Diverse opinions on the question of Honorius. Authenticity of the documents on which the controversy rests. The accusation of Monothelism brought against Honorius is false; favorable testimonies of John IV, St. Martin I, St. Agatho and St. Maximus. The letters of Honorius to Sergius are orthodox; he teaches therein two wills and two operations in Jesus Christ. Solution to a difficulty. Honorius defined nothing in his letters. The condemnation of this Pope by the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Councils is real; what is its significance according to St. Leo II. What the word *heretic* signifies. Objection drawn from the legends of the Breviary, and response. What was the personal culpability of Honorius in this matter.

GENTLEMEN:

We are going to occupy ourselves today with the famous question of Pope Honorius, who is accused of having fallen into the heresy of Monothelism. This question caused quite a stir, as you know, at the time of the Vatican Council. Father Gratry, a man of talent and sincere piety, but more versed in metaphysics than in the study of history, believed it necessary to go down into the arena; unfortunately for him, he encountered a number of formidable opponents, the most distinguished being Archbishop Dechamps of Mechelen and Dom Guéranger, the Abbot of Solesmes, among others. Let us say right away that Fr. Gratry, as an obedient son of the Catholic Church, gave his full and entire adherence to all the decrees of the Vatican Council and concluded his life by a holy death.

I propose, gentlemen, to resolve this evening all the objections levied against the orthodoxy of Pope Honorius. It is good for all to be acquainted with this controversy which has upset souls so much and which the enemies of the Church have abused so often against the papacy and Catholicism in general. The author of the small brochure recently published at the *Witness* office in Montreal was content to say, "Honorius (625 A.D.) adhered to Monothelism, as Father Gratry has plainly shown." The accusation is quite terse, but the response shall not be such; at least we do not want to content ourselves to dryly deny as was gratuitously asserted.

Let us begin by recalling the principal facts which naturally project a certain light on the question. It was the seventh century. Honorius governed the Church from 625 to 638, and the Sixth Council, which condemned him, took place about 42 years after his death, that is to say around 680.

The emperors of the East had a mania that one could consider as hereditary among them: this was the mania of dogmatization, of making themselves theologians, of wanting to make their religious opinions articles of faith, of wanting to subjugate the Church to the State, and to

command the Pope, the episcopacy, and Catholic consciences as one commands an army of soldiers.

It seems the successive and bloody invasions of the Persians and Mohammedan Arabs should have inspired in the Byzantine emperors a salutary fear and a strong desire to reattach themselves to the vigorous trunk of the Roman faith in order to draw from there the sap of truth and life. It seems they should have at least concentrated their efforts to push back the serious dangers which threatened the empire and that every religious quarrel should have been put aside in such a solemn moment; but a blindfold was over their eyes; nothing could prevent them from plunging themselves into the fray. Heraclius himself, one of the wisest sovereigns of the Lower Empire, permitted himself to be drawn into the midst of the whirlwind of religious questions; he published his *Ecthesis* or profession of faith in 638 and became one of the abettors of the Monothelite heresy. Perhaps he also wanted for political motives to reconcile the Monophysites with the Catholic Church and by this to strengthen the Eastern Empire from within and from without; the fact is he did not attain this goal.

You will undoubtedly recall that the Eutychians or Monophysites were condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and that this council defined that there is in Christ but one single person in two natures, without mixing, change, separation, or division. To define the duality of natures was to define *implicitly* that there are in Jesus Christ two wills, two operations. The Eutychians, unhappy to see themselves thus anathematized, sought to hide their errors in a new formula. They did recognize there were two natures in Jesus Christ but they implicitly rejected this doctrine by wanting to confess only one operation, only one will. This was a way of appearing to approve of the Council of Chalcedon without nevertheless renouncing their old error. The people could hardly discover the heretical element hidden in this formula, but the Eutychian prelates gazed fondly at it like an old friend decked in a new costume. It was evident that Monothelism was nothing but an offshoot of Monophysitism; the more recent error of one single will in Jesus Christ followed from the old, which admitted only one nature. The Monothelites did not say whether this unique operation, whether this unique will, was divine or human, or a mixing of the two; from this followed an equivocation which gave place to a divergence of opinions.

It is probable enough that Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, favored by Emperor Heraclius, was the author of the new heresy. He relied on misinterpreted passages from St. Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Cyril, and claimed that neither councils nor popes ever taught two wills in Jesus Christ. Several letters he wrote to Theodorus of Pharan, the Monophysite George, and others met with favorable responses; all affirmed that the oneness of the person of Christ necessarily followed from the oneness of action and will. Thanks to imperial protection, the three sees of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople were occupied by Monothelites.

They met a terrible opponent in the monk Sophronius, who was subsequently elevated to the patriarchal see of Jerusalem in 634. He entreated them, but in vain, not to publish such a doctrine. Withdrawn in a monastery, he continued his research on this important question and showed by way of 600 texts taken from the Holy Fathers that the entire Church always attributed

two wills to Jesus Christ, one divine and the other human. Once elevated in dignity, he acted with still greater energy and anathematized the partisans of the new doctrine at a synod.

Sergius was frightened by Sophronius's threatening attitude, and by the powerful party which supported him; he saw well that his authority would be insufficient to go up against such a formidable opponent. He hastily wrote to Pope Honorius; prudence and cleverness were not lacking in him. His letter exaggeratedly praised the general return of the Monophysites to the Church; he said it would be difficult to reduce to apostates so many millions of Christians for a single word which one had made the condition of unity, seeing that more than a fair number of Holy Fathers had made use of this same word. He added that the best means of success was to speak of neither one nor two operations in Christ, for by this certain of the faithful would believe the doctrine of two natures was done away with while others would necessarily deduce the existence of two wills in Jesus Christ opposing each other.

Honorius, who believed in Sergius's good faith, wrote him two successive letters in which he expounded the true doctrine; however, for the sake of peace, he thought it best to refrain from speaking of one or two operations in Jesus Christ.

From this, the grave accusation of heresy was brought against him by the Gallicans, Protestants, and others; from this, the censures with which the Sixth Council struck him as well as all Monothelites; from this, the arguments made against the infallibility of the Sovereign Pontiffs.

Today we will examine whether Pope Honorius took sides with the Monothelites.

First, what are the different opinions on this question? There are Catholics who claim that the documents on which rest the accusation brought against Honorius, and especially the acts of the Sixth Council, were interpolated by the Monothelites. Such persons include Archbishop Tizzani,¹ Abbé Corgne,² Mamachi,³ Bellarmine,⁴ Baronius,⁵ etc.

On another side, the opponents of infallibility admit the authenticity of the documents and support the idea that Honorius fell into the heresy of Monothelism. Such persons are the Centuriators of Magdeburg, Spanheim, Basnage, La Luzerne, etc.

The greater part of erudite Catholics, on the contrary, while admitting the authenticity of the documents, claim they do not prove at all the heterodoxy of Honorius. Such are Thomassin,⁶ Jean Garnier,⁷ Alexander Natalis,⁸ Cardinal Orsi,⁹ Muzzarelli,¹⁰ Bottalla, S.J.,¹¹ Palma,¹² Archbishop Dechamps,¹³ Dom Guéranger,¹⁴ the learned editors of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, etc. Although the first opinion is not entirely impossible, it is to this last opinion, however, that I adhere, persuaded that it is the only one which reflects all the characteristics of the historical truth.

I shall begin by showing that the documents in question, that is to say the letter of Sergius to Honorius, the two letters of Honorius to Sergius, and the acts of the Sixth Council, are authentic; then I shall show that Honorius, nevertheless, did not fall into heresy, and that the Sixth Council did not condemn him as a formal heretic, but only as guilty of negligence.

I

We must consider as authentic documents regarded as such by the Fathers of the Sixth Council and by the other ecclesiastic writers of this time period, documents which all the rules of sane criticism require us to consider as the work of those to whom they are attributed. Now, such are the letters of Sergius and Honorius.

Indeed, in the twelfth and thirteenth sessions of the Sixth Council, the letters of Sergius to Cyrus and Honorius were read, as well as those of Honorius to Sergius, and of Pyrrhus, Bishop of Constantinople, to Pope John IV.

The reading of these letters occurred without any objection. From this I conclude that all the Fathers of the council thereby admitted their authenticity.

Moreover, George, Bishop of Constantinople, seeing that an everlasting stain was going to attach itself to the name and memory of his intimate friend Sergius, ordered that the autographed letter of Sergius to Honorius kept in the archives of the Church of Constantinople be brought and compared with the copy brought from Rome by the legate of Pope St. Agatho. They were found to be perfectly identical. It is thus quite evident that at the time of the Sixth Council, that is to say some forty years after Honorius went to the tomb, the letter of Sergius existed in Rome and in Constantinople, and what is more, they were perfectly identical in these two places.

But, some say, this letter could have been forged. By whom? By the Greeks? But how would the Greeks have been able to slip a copy into the archives of the Roman Church without anyone noticing, even in Rome? The idea is hardly admissible. By the Latins? But how could it have appeared in the archives of the Church of Constantinople? Besides, Bishop George did not have the slightest doubt of the existence of the letter of Sergius to Honorius; he was only afraid that it was interpolated, and it was on this account that he asked to compare the copy with the original; and they were found to match.

This letter of Sergius to Honorius, containing Monothelite opinions, could not have had interpolations, if there were any, unless they took their origin from partisans of this sect in Constantinople; and so it is impossible to explain how this letter would have been interpolated, even in the archives of the Roman Church. Thus, during this period of time, the text of this letter was intact.

Add to this that Sergius is regarded as the father of Monotheletism; his letter shows this; what then would have been the purpose of this interpolation? It is impossible to ascribe one which would satisfy.

What reinforces this idea is that the letters of Honorius respond exactly to that of Sergius, and approve the line of conduct he proposes therein. Thus, if the letter of Sergius had been corrected or augmented, the letters of Honorius must have been also. Now, that is not at all proven. I willingly admit that the Monothelites were audacious enough to play the role of forgers and even played the role quite often; but it yet remains to establish they did so in this circumstance. There is an enormous difference between being capable of a crime and committing one.

I believe I am able to prove that the letters of Honorius to Sergius are authentic and not interpolated. The legates of Pope St. Agatho, as a matter of fact, took interest in what calumnies the new sectarians might heap on the Sovereign Pontiffs; they invested so much zeal in this matter, and when spurious writings were produced that the Monothelites attributed to the Fifth Council and to Pope Vigilius, writings which favored the innovators' ideas about the singleness of operation in Jesus Christ, all, legates and bishops, cried out forcefully against the criminal audacity of these forgers. The same protestations were raised against certain testimonies of the Fathers which the Monothelites cited. How then could there not have been any concerns about the interpretation of Honorius's letters? The legates suspected the possibility of fraud, and in order to have more certainty they checked these letters read before the council with the copies they had brought from Rome; and they were found to match perfectly. From this, I conclude these letters are authentic.

The writers of the time confirm the same thing. Pope John IV (640-642), in *The Apology of Honorius*, addressed to Emperor Constantine, the son of Heraclius, mentions the letter of Sergius as well as Honorius's response, in which Honorius maintains that there cannot be in Jesus Christ two contrary wills. Thus, John IV admits the authenticity of these documents; otherwise, he certainly would not have used this means to defend Honorius.

This is also what we find recorded in the writings of the martyr St. Maximus¹⁵ and in the acts of the Sixth Council, Session VIII.

Another important question presents itself here: Are the acts of the Sixth Council, as we have them now, authentic?

Some individuals, and they are a small number, respond in the negative and thereby dismiss at once all the difficulties regarding Honorius's orthodoxy.

This opinion, however, is generally rejected by the critics. The contrary sentiment appears to be prevalent everywhere, and I subscribe to this sentiment for reasons I am going to lay out.

First of all, it must not be forgotten that the Sixth Council took place around the year 680, about forty-two years after the death of Honorius; consequently, a number of Council Fathers would have had perfect knowledge of the matter between Honorius and the Monothelites.

In the acts of the council, Honorius is often anathematized; we shall see later in what sense; but I ask those who maintain the acts of the council were interpolated and that the name of Honorius was slipped in, I ask them when did this fraud take place? Was it during the council itself? Obviously not, for if there was no question about Honorius, the Fathers would have commented right away upon the reading of the acts that his name was fraudulently put in.

Moreover, the patriarchs and bishops brought with them their notaries, who gathered and copied the decrees of the council in order to bring them back with them. Naturally, the legates of the Pope must have done as much; they procured an exact and authentic copy of these decrees, firstly to keep it in the archives of the Roman Church, and also in order to obtain the approbation and confirmation of Pope Leo II, who succeeded St. Agatho.

Now, Pope Leo II certainly read the acts of this council before approving them. If he found there the name Honorius among those who were anathematized by this council, I conclude from this the truth of my thesis, that is to say, the authenticity of these acts. If Honorius's name was not found there, then the question arises of knowing how this name could have been inserted later. Does it not seem unbelievable to you that the hand of a forger would have penetrated even the archives of the Roman Church? Does it seem probable to you that someone could have inserted the name Honorius in twelve different places in these acts without someone noticing it? That is not all; it would not suffice to interpolate one manuscript, it would be necessary to interpolate all of them; for otherwise, the variants would betray a shameful fraud and would not serve the author's purpose. Now, it seems incredible that this general interpolation could have taken place; and, if it was not general, it is impossible to admit that the only manuscripts interpolated are the ones which have come down to us. It is impossible then to prove when and by whom this fraudulent insertion of Honorius's name would have taken place.

Based on what I have just said, I conclude that the letter from Sergius to Honorius, as well as those from Honorius to Sergius and the acts of the Sixth Council, are authentic.

II

We come now to a very serious question, one which touches the very heart of our subject. This is the question: Did Pope Honorius fall into the heresy of Monothelism? I answer, "No!" Here I find myself to have for adversaries a throng of writers hostile to the Catholic Church. On the other hand, I am supported by men who are the most eminent for their knowledge and erudition.

I bring now the evidence for my thesis. Let us look first at the flattering testimonies rendered to Honorius's orthodoxy by the Popes, his successors who governed the Church from the time of his death (638) up until the Sixth Council (680); he occupied the pontifical throne for thirteen years; his name, his doctrine, and his life were not something belonging to ancient history; most of these popes had seen him themselves over the See of Rome.

John IV, who was elevated to the sovereign pontificate only two years after the death of Honorius, seeing that the Monothelites were abusing the letter of his predecessor to Sergius, wanted to conduct a solemn investigation into his doctrine. This is what Abbot John, Honorius's very secretary who wrote to Sergius on behalf of the Pope answered regarding this subject: "Sergius having written that some admit in Jesus Christ two contrary wills, we said that Christ did not have these two contrary wills, that is to say that of the flesh and that of the spirit, as we ourselves have on account of sin, but that with respect to His humanity He had but one natural will." From these testimonies, John IV concluded, and with reason, that the heretics had abused the words of Honorius, which were perfectly orthodox. If Honorius had been a Monothelite heretic, Pope St. Martin I, who governed the Church only eleven years after Honorius's death, could not have affirmed in the middle of a synod that all his predecessors had repelled the error of these sectarians with constancy and firmness. Everyone knew him; everyone had lived with

him. Could Pope St. Martin I have proclaimed an obvious lie in the face of eyewitnesses, in the very face of the Monothelites who still existed, who had tried to convert him to their ideas, and who, having been unable to succeed, banished him to a land of exile? Why did his adversaries not insist upon the example of Honorius to show St. Martin was lying or to bring him to their side?

If Honorius had taught Monothelism, Pope St. Agatho (678-682) could not have written that by the protection of St. Peter, the Holy See had never deviated from the path of truth or given favor to any error.¹⁶ How could he add that everyone recognized his predecessors never ceased to confirm their brothers in the faith? How could he write in particular, on the subject of Monothelism, the following words: “As soon as the bishops of Constantinople tried to introduce into the immaculate Church of Christ this heretical novelty, my predecessors, instructed by the Lord’s teachings, never neglected to entreat and beseech them to abandon this error *at least by being silent?*” These last words can only relate to Honorius because it was he who prescribed silence and who occupied the Holy See when the bishops of Constantinople tried to introduce into the Church this heretical novelty. Moreover, it is hardly believable that St. Agatho would have been audacious enough to utter such a lie to Emperor Constantine Pogonatus if Honorius had truly erred in the faith. The Emperor was, it seems, too inclined to judge the truth of the Pope’s words for the latter to indulge in such effrontery.

When the Monothelite Pyrrhus, in his dialogue with the martyr St. Maximus, appealed to Honorius’s authority to support one will in Jesus Christ, the saint responded that he was distorting the meaning of Honorius’s words. He then called him the *divine* Honorius, he affirmed he had never adhered to the Monothelite heresy and he placed his name among those of the Pontiffs who most valiantly fought against the error. Now, St. Maximus would have certainly kept silent about Honorius had he the least suspicion about his orthodoxy, or at least he would have abstained from bestowing on him such honorable words. It is necessary then to either outright reject the positive testimony of these contemporary writers or to admit Honorius’s orthodoxy.

But, our adversaries say, it is the very letters of Honorius on this question on which we must base our judgment. Very well, I say, it is easy to take you up on this.

To better understand the import of these letters of the Pope, it is fitting to recall the one written to him by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Sergius first told him that a great number of Eutychians and Monophysites had returned to the Catholic faith due to the care and zeal of Cyrus, Patriarch of Alexandria; that the latter had composed a work in which he taught one single operation in Jesus Christ; that the Bishop of Jerusalem, Sophronius, had attacked this teaching, and that he himself (Sergius) had advised Cyrus to refrain from speaking of one or two operations. Then he expressed fear that many Eutychian heretics would not want to return to the Catholic faith if one taught two wills and two operations in Jesus Christ; it would suffice then to hold to the definitions of the preceding councils and to keep silence on this new question. Finally, he ended by asking for the Pope’s opinion on the matter.

It is good to note right away that Sergius did not ask for any definition of faith; he only manifested the desire to know if it would be more advantageous to refrain from speaking of one or two operations in Jesus Christ.

Honorius must have been content to accede to Sergius's request; thus, the assent given to this measure of prudence, suggested to him by the perfidious patriarch in view of a greater good, did not at all require a definition.

Here is what Honorius said about the matter in his first letter to Sergius: "If some say *one* or *two operations*, it is not necessary to make a dogma of the Church out of it; for neither Scripture nor the councils appear to have examined this question." Further, he adds, "We must then reject the new words which scandalize the churches, for fear that the simple, shocked by the phrase 'two operations,' believe us to be Nestorians, and that they think us to be Eutychians if we recognize in Jesus Christ but *one single operation*." He further writes, "We therefore exhort you to avoid the new expression of *one* or *two operations*...."

From these words, I conclude Honorius defined absolutely nothing about the singleness or duality of operations in Jesus Christ and that he only approved the line of conduct that Sergius wished to follow, that is to say, to keep silence on the question. Now, to give the order to be silent on a question is not to teach heresy; it is not to speak *ex cathedra*; it is not to propose for the belief of the faithful an article of faith. Thus, Honorius, having defined nothing, could not have taught *ex cathedra*, and neither then have erred as head of the Church.

The very letters of Honorius to Sergius are a testimony, still living and irrefutable, to the purity of his doctrine in this matter. It is as well in his second letter to Sergius that he says, "We must confess that the two natures operate and act, each with the participation of the other, the divine nature operating that which is of God, the human nature executing that which is of the flesh, without division, without confusion, without the divine nature being changed in the man, neither the human nature being changed in God, but the differences between the natures remaining entirely."

Nothing could be more in conformity with Catholic doctrine, contained in the definitions of the Lateran Council (649), of the Sixth Council, and in the letter of St. Leo to the Fathers of Chalcedon; he confesses two distinct natures in a single hypostasis, both of them operating, one the things which are divine and the other the things which are human; this is quite simply the contrary position of Monothelism. Honorius, therefore, did not teach this heresy.

In his first letter, he repeats several times that "the Scriptures demonstrate clearly that Jesus Christ is the same Who operates in things divine and in things human;" that "Jesus Christ operates in the two natures, divinely and humanly." Nothing could be clearer or more obvious! The heresy is right away knocked down. It is thus evident that Honorius confesses in Jesus Christ not only two natures, but also two wills and two operations. Thus, this Pontiff professes in his letters the *Catholic truth*; he rejects only the *new words* being used to express it, and this for reasons of prudence, in order not to appear to favor Nestorianism or Eutychianism, and also because Sergius astutely portrayed these new expressions as a cause of troubles in the Church and an obstacle to the return of Monophysites to orthodoxy.

Thus, although the Pontiff defined neither the singleness nor the duality of operations in Jesus Christ and he only prescribed silence, it is obvious that the doctrine contained in his two letters is orthodox and is the pure and simple expression of the two wills and two operations in Jesus Christ.

There is, however, an objection which the Gallicans raise against us from these words of Honorius: “We confess one single will in Our Lord Jesus Christ.—*Unam fatemur voluntatem Domini Nostri Jesu Christi.*”

But this objection disappears on its own if one pays a little attention to the context, for after the words I just quoted he adds, “because the divinity took not our sin but rather our nature, such as it was created prior to sin corrupting it.” He proves this point from multiple passages in Holy Scripture and adds, “The Savior, just as we have said, did not vest himself in our tainted nature, which is repugnant to the law of his spirit. For there was not a double law in His members, or a different law, that is to say one contrary to His quality as Savior, for He was born outside of the law of the human condition.” These words do not indicate in the least a *confusion* (in the Monothelite sense) between the human will and the divine will in such a way that the former disappears; they only serve to show in Jesus Christ the existence of a human will so exempt from the ordinary weaknesses of fallen man, so perfect that it could not contradict the divine will. In this sense, there are not two contrary wills in Jesus Christ as we find in ourselves, but one single will.

It is in this sense that St. Maximus, the most learned and valiant defender of the Catholic cause, understood the Pope’s words. “Honorius,” he said “did not fight against the natural and human will, but the corrupt and alien will within it.”

John, secretary to Honorius, who wrote the letter to Sergius and who must have known better than any other the thoughts of the Pontiff, said on this matter: “When we spoke of a single will in the Lord, we did not have in view His double nature, divine and human, but His humanity only.... We meant that Jesus Christ did not have two contrary wills, that is to say one of the flesh and one of the spirit, as we ourselves have on account of sin, but that, with regard to His humanity, He had but one natural will.”

Pope John IV gave to Honorius’s words absolutely the same sense. It is therefore quite evident that the doctrine of Honorius in his letters to Sergius is irreproachable from the point of view of sound theology, because in addition to the divine will, which no one has denied, he confesses the human will in all its perfection.

But, they say, did not Honorius write it was unwise to so insist on the singleness or duality of operations in Jesus Christ?

This is true; but that proves precisely that he did not wish to define anything, neither to make a dogma of one or the other of these two teachings. If one maintains from this that he denied the duality of operations, why could one not conclude with equal justification that he rejected the singleness of operation? He wanted for there to be contentment in teaching that there is a single Jesus Christ operating in two natures; by this, he sanctioned the singleness of person against the Nestorians and the duality of natures against the Eutychians. By contenting himself to

proclaim the existence of two natures, he did not deny the existence of two operations; on the contrary, we have already seen that he inculcated this truth several times in his letters. His unique goal, and certainly a very praiseworthy one, was to maintain peace in the Church by preventing the introduction of new words and removing all obstacles to the return of heretics to the true doctrine.

Let us still add that, in his letter, Sergius gave a purely passive role to the human nature of Jesus Christ, while Honorius, in his response, attributed to it an essentially active role. One sees then that the doctrine of Honorius differs completely from that of Sergius; the only thing on which they agree is the silence to prescribe to Catholics on the question of one or two operations in Jesus Christ.

III

But I hear Father Gratry and all the Gallicans raising a terrible objection to us. This is the objection: he who was condemned among the Monothelites in the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth General Councils must be numbered among the heretics. Now, Honorius was condemned as such in these three councils due to his letters to Sergius. Thus Honorius must certainly be ranked among the Monothelite heretics. Now, it is forbidden under the pain of excommunication to contradict the definitions of the councils. Thus, those who deny Honorius was a heretic incur the penalty of excommunication.

Such was a strange conclusion, not to say more, which Father Gratry drew against Archbishop Manning of Westminster and against those who shared his opinions. It is true that he subsequently withdrew it in the course of the discussion, but he still maintained the heart of his supposed and colossal objection.

That Honorius was condemned by the Sixth Council, that he was anathematized, that this anathema was repeated by the following councils, this is what all admit who support the authenticity of the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. This condemnation is formally expressed in the thirteenth, sixteenth, and eighteenth sessions, as well as in the synod letter addressed by the bishops after the same council to the Sovereign Pontiff, St. Agatho.¹⁷ It is also found expressed in the letter of confirmation which Pope St. Leo II gave to this council, as well as in the words of Adrian II (867-872) at the Council of Rome. It is confirmed by the edict of Emperor Constantine Pogonatus, who ordered the enactment of the decrees of the Sixth Council, at which he was present; by the words of Venerable Bede (731) in his book *Six Ages of the World*, and in those of Anastasius Bibliothecarius (886) in his *Collectanea ad Joannem Diaconum*.

This opinion is not just my own; it is that of almost all of the present critics; it is that supported during the Vatican Council by the Archbishop of Mechelen, by Archbishop Manning, Dom Guéranger, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, and almost everyone else who was occupied with the question; it is that which was still taught last year (1872) at the Roman College by the scholar Father Palmieri.¹⁸ He said on this matter, “We could not share the opinion of those who deny or

doubt that Honorius was condemned as a heretic at the Sixth Council.”¹⁹ The opinion which regards all of these documents as worked by the hand of a forger, even if not devoid of all probability, seems to me, however, much less likely than what I maintain here.

In order to resolve the difficulties proposed to us, it is sufficient to remark that St. Agatho, in his letter to the council, did not intend to enumerate the names of all the Monothelites, but only the principal ones; for otherwise, it would have been necessary to question the condemnation, however certain, of several heretics such as Macarius, Stephen, Polycronius, etc. Let us notice again that the Fathers of the Sixth Council judged Honorius according to the letters he had not retracted, letters in which he prescribed a silence which the heretics so much abused to propagate their error.

But, you tell me, how do you reconcile your two assertions? You maintain that Honorius did not fall into heresy, did not err in the faith, while, on the other hand, you maintain that the acts of the Sixth Council are not apocryphal, and that Honorius was really condemned as a heretic; it seems there is an evident contradiction in these two propositions.

Honorius was condemned, it is true, but not as a *formal heretic*; his entire offense was, as Pope Leo II said, “neglecting the duty of his apostolic authority by not extinguishing the nascent flame of heresy, and fomenting it by his negligence.”²⁰

Thus, amid all the accusations brought against Honorius by the Fathers of the Sixth Council, none of them amounted to formal heresy; all of them were limited to incriminating this pope for having followed the advice of Sergius, who prescribed silence on the doctrine of the two operations in Jesus Christ, by which the error was propagated due to the audacious activity of the Monothelites and the blind obedience of Catholics, by which the heresy was not rejected and condemned in principle with the courage and energy which ought to be found in the supreme pastor; but in none of this do you see the council accuse Honorius of having professed a doctrine contrary to that of the Church. His negligence--this was his entire crime, this is why he was reproached, and this is what brought him condemnation.

Consequently, all the contemporary authors, the most trustworthy and the most informed regarding what transpired at the council, confine the terms of the decrees to the limits I just assigned them.

It is for this reason that Emperor Constantine Pogonatus, who was present at the deliberations of the august assembly, in his edict, divided into two distinct classes those who were condemned: those who were the *authors* and those who were the *abettors* of the heresy. It was among the latter that he placed Honorius.

St. Leo II, writing to King Erwig, also separated Honorius from the authors of Monothelism. These are his words: “All the authors of this impious doctrine, condemned by the sentence of the venerable council, rejected Catholic unity, that is to say: Theodore of Pharan, Cyrus of Alexandria, Sergius, Paul, Pyrrhus, and Peter, the former bishops of Constantinople, and with them, Honorius of Rome, who consented to letting be sullied the immaculate faith which was passed down to him by his predecessors.”

As we can see, the saintly Pope makes a very clear distinction between the authors of the heresy who sullied the faith and Honorius, who consented only to *letting be sullied* this immaculate faith.

In the same manner, in his letter to the bishops of Spain, he distinguishes between those he accuses of *crimes against the purity of the apostolic tradition*, and Honorius, whom he accuses only of *having neglected the responsibilities of his office, and of not having put out the fire of heresy kindled by others*.

Let us look attentively at the words of the same Pope, St. Leo II, in his confirmation letter for the Sixth Council, a letter addressed to the emperor and to the bishops of the East: “We anathematize the *inventors* of the new dogma, Theodore, Bishop of Pharan, Cyrus of Alexandria, Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul, and Peter, intruders rather than bishops of Constantinople, and also Honorius, who did not strive to maintain the purity of this Apostolic Church by teaching the tradition of the Apostles, but who permitted this Church without stain to be sullied by profane treason.” This profane treason was nothing other than the heretical treason of Sergius, the inventor of the new heresy of which St. Leo just spoke.

These words further establish the same distinction between the *authors* of the heresy and Honorius, who *did not strive to maintain the purity of the apostolic tradition*. There is an infinite distance between formal heresy and neglecting to quell heresy; it is not necessary to be a theologian to understand the difference. Now, Pope St. Leo II, to whom it belongs, as it does to all other Sovereign Pontiffs, to confirm, interpret, or disapprove of the decrees of councils, only attributed to Honorius what I myself did; he condemned this Pope for having neglected to extinguish heresy, but not for having taught it. This is the true sense of the anathema, given by the legislator himself.

But Father Gratry returns to the attack, saying, “Can you deny Pope Honorius was a heretic when you see that three councils condemned him as such, when you see popes, successors of St. Leo II, renew in their profession of faith the same anathema against this Pontiff?”

To this I respond that I do not deny the condemnation; on the contrary, I admit it according to what I said moments ago; but I distinguish the word *heretic*, which is quite imprecise and was still more so at the time of the councils in question. It was designated not only to those who professed the heresy knowingly and obstinately, but also to those who benefited it *in any manner whatsoever*, be it by their silence and negligence when their responsibilities obliged them to take action, be it by defending persons or the writings of heretics, be it even due to their communication with these heretics, or that they involuntarily admitted their doctrines. You see that under the same appellation were found comprised a throng of individuals whose culpabilities were very different, or even non-existent when they did not take part.

Do not think I have imagined this distinction in favor of Pope Honorius; I wish to prove right away my assertion.

At the first council of Nicea, the word “heretic” was applied to Theognis and Eusebius of Nicomedia. The same appellation was given to Theodorus and John at the Council of Chalcedon.

What was their crime? They did not openly attack the enemies of the faith; they were given no other reproach.

The Fifth Council anathematized not only the true Nestorians who relied on the writings of Theodore, Theodoret, and Ibas, but also the Catholics who had taken or who were taking their defense.

St. Gregory the Great, writing to Constantine, the orthodox bishop of Milan, ordered him under the pain of anathema to openly condemn the Three Chapters. And Facundus of Hermiane said that to communicate with them (the authors of the Three Chapters) was to take upon themselves their condemnation and to become heretics.

In the Seventh Ecumenical Council, held in 737, the same anathema was struck against those who did not venerate holy images, those who maintained that Christians adored them as gods, and those who communicated with the iconoclasts. The guilt, however, is far from being the same.

The First Lateran Council, held in 649 under Pope St. Martin I, recognized that the intentions of Emperor Heraclius in his *Ecthesis* or profession of faith could have been upright; however, as it was liable to benefit the Monothelite heresy in some way, the Council passed condemnation on the writing and the author, calling them “impious” and “heretical.”

These examples suffice to make you understand that the same qualifications in the councils’ language did not presuppose the same degree of culpability, and that to be called a “heretic,” it was not necessary to formally profess heresy; it sufficed to have taken part in it, even in a far removed and, at times, involuntary manner. From this, I conclude that Honorius could have been condemned as a heretic by these three councils, and that he in fact was, not for having taught error, but solely for not having exerted the necessary vigor in his duties as Head of the Church, for not having vigorously used his authority to repress heresy, for having prescribed silence about the manner of expressing a truth, and having thus contributed to the diffusion of error.

This is the same conclusion which was reached by almost everyone who dealt with this question during the Vatican Council. Dom Guéranger, Abbot of the Solesmes Benedictines, said on the matter, “The real Sixth Council, the one to which the Roman Pontiff gave the necessary and canonical form, the one which requires the respect of the faithful, condemned Honorius only as an unfaithful guardian of the deposit of the faith, but not as having himself been an adherent of heresy. Justice and truth forbid us from going beyond that.”

La Civiltà Cattolica, the scholarly Roman periodical which you already know, also wrote about this issue: “The (Sixth) Council did not judge the writings of Honorius heretical, and did not reject him as teaching error. But it did judge him guilty of prescribing silence, which Sergius advised him to do, and which permitted the error to grow and strengthen. It is in this respect that it condemned Honorius.”

“It is true that in other formulas of condemnation the council joined together all the names of the condemned, portraying them all together as instruments of the demon, as propagators of heresy, as agitators of the Church and enemies of the faith. But did not each one

of them do so according to the mode of his participation in the evil, the Eastern prelates as authors and propagators of heresy, Honorius as seduced by the counsel of Sergius and keeping poor vigilance over the deposit of the faith?—It is certain that the qualification of heretic is given not only to him who professed heresy, but also to whoever benefited it *in any manner*. Father Gratry is indignant at this assertion, but that only proves his ignorance of the practical and ancient maxim of the Church.”

The profession of faith of the Popes says nothing other than the councils on this matter; it condemned the authors of the heresy and “Honorius, who fomented their detestable teaching.” This is the repetition of the words of the Sixth Council, and it suffices to give it the same response. The Seventh and Eighth Councils only confirmed the condemnation brought against the same Pontiff.

Reverend Father Gratry still does not consider himself defeated and issues a plea. He maintains that the antique Roman Breviary bore, from the seventh until the sixteenth century, in indisputable terms, a condemnation of Honorius as a Monothelite heretic, and that during the reform of the Breviary by Clement VIII at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a scribe falsified the passage in this book about the legend of St. Leo II and removed everything concerning Honorius’s condemnation.

I answer, with the learned Abbot of Solesmes, that “one must be a stranger to all knowledge of Church antiquity to begin talking of seventh century breviaries. Everyone knows that what we call the Breviary, that is to say this *abridgement* of the Divine Office, in which, besides the psalms, hymns, antiphons and responses, figure lessons and sermons, does not predate the eleventh century, and that one can barely find a trace of it prior to the twelfth. One reads at Matins Holy Scripture from the Bible, according to the season, the Acts of the Saints, from the Passional, and the writings of the Fathers, from their works or from the Homilies. These short and fixed lessons which we use, even in choir, are a relatively modern thing, and one cannot help but smile when hearing the Reverend Father Gratry speak of them as existing in the seventh century. Good will is not lacking in him, but he is evidently misguided.”

It is quite true that prior to St. Pius V (1568) there existed a book titled *Roman Breviary*, but it had not received the approbation of the Church, nor of any Pope; the first transcriber or the first printer who came along could insert there what seemed good to him. From this can follow a myriad of discrepancies in the legends of the saints, even in that of St. Leo II as Father Gratry pointed out to us. Certain old editions contain the name of Honorius; in others, this name is not found, for example in two copies of the Breviary preserved in Solesmes, one of them dating back to 1511.

There did not exist an *officially recognized* Roman Breviary prior to St. Pius V in 1568. Responding to the desires of the Council of Trent, this holy Pope instituted a commission charged with reviewing and revising the entire body of legends of the Breviary, which had too often been compiled by unskilled hands. This commission, composed of the most learned and upright men of the time, undertook this enormous work, and succeeded in leading it to a happy end, so that most of the churches on which it was not even imposed asked to make use of it. It

was not judged fitting to place Honorius's name in the legend of St. Leo II. What harm is there in that? I do not find even a shadow of deceit or adulteration, as Father Gratry claims, but only testimony rendered to the historical truth. Without doubt, neither the Church nor anyone has ever claimed that the legends of the Breviary were exempt of all historical error; they have never been vested with a character of infallible teaching; they are open to dispute and have only a human authority, but they are, after all, worthy of our respect.

Father Gratry raises another objection against all the Popes from the collection of false decretals; it is this, according to him, which is the source of the Roman Pontiffs' increase in power. We shall speak later of these decretals.

I believe I have gone over all of the objections made against Honorius's orthodoxy, and I do not think I have left any without a satisfactory answer.

Undoubtedly, the condemnation of Honorius was not absolutely necessary, as he was not a formal heretic, and as Pope St. Martin I did not judge it proper to take such action. However, this sentence of the council was not unjust because, firstly, it was sanctioned by the Holy See, and, also, because his negligence, probably involuntary albeit real, benefited Monotheletism and harmed the Church.²¹ This anathema, brought against the deceased Honorius, led to his name being effaced from the holy diptychs, his writings being destroyed, the prevention of his being named in the Church, and the blackening of his memory. This severe line of conduct on the part of the Sixth Ecumenical Council yielded a happy result: it inspired the faithful with a great horror of the new heresy and showed them how much the Church took it to heart to annihilate it. In order to render this sentence, one considered only the unfortunate and extremely deplorable results to which Honorius's manner of acting led.

As for the personal culpability of this Pontiff, I believe there was absolutely none. His desire to see the Monophysites return to the Church was certainly nothing other than most praiseworthy; there was darkness on the horizon; he wanted to avert new storms, and it is very likely that had the sectarians obeyed him, as he had hoped, if they had kept silence on the singleness or duality of operations in Jesus Christ according to the order he had given, the heresy would have suffocated in its crib. But it is not like truth's enemies to be silent, they always scream louder than others; and if you manage to get them to rest a few moments from their scheming, it will only be so they can recommence their noisy clamoring with a new audacity.

The question of Honorius has always been the strongest bulwark of all those who have denied the infallibility of the Popes; it is there that they take refuge as a last resort when they have been hemmed in by their adversaries. We have just seen the weakness of their position. Once again the papacy has not let be extinguished in its hands the divine torch of truth intended to illuminate the peoples on their march towards the homeland. We have scoured the immense catacombs of history, and we cannot exhume the name of one single Pope who erred in his divine mission and made a lie of the divine word which came from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself: "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep; confirm your brothers in the faith; you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church."

I summarize this lesson by saying:

1. That the documents on which the famous question of Honorius rest are authentic;
2. That this Pontiff defined absolutely nothing in his letters, but only prescribed silence on the singleness or duality of operations and wills in Jesus Christ;
3. That his letters to Sergius are irreproachable from the point of view of doctrine because they clearly express, and in multiple instances, the Catholic truth of two operations in Jesus Christ;
4. That he was condemned by the Sixth Council, not for having taught error, nor as a formal heretic, but only for not pitting himself against the propagation of Monotheletism with the zeal and energy which his exalted duties as Head of the Church required;
5. That, in light of the exceptional circumstances in which Honorius found himself, he personally seems most worthy of pardon and even not guilty.

ENDNOTES

1. Hist. des conciles, t. 1., p. 403, etc.
2. Dissert. critique sur le monothélisme.
3. Orig. et antiq. Christ., t. VI.
4. De summo Pontifice.
5. Annales, ad annos 633, 680.
6. Dogmata theologica.
7. Diss II ad Libr. dirinum RR. Pontificum.
8. Hist. eccl. saec. VII, diss. II, de Honorii damnatione in synodo VI œcum., t. X.
9. De R. Pontificis infallibilitate, t. I, part. I, I, I.
10. De auctoritate RR. Pontif, t. II.
11. Pope Honorius before the tribunal of reason and history, London, 1868.
12. Praelect. hist. eccl., t. I, p. 445-485.
13. Lettres au R.P. Gratry, Paris, 1870.
14. La monarchie pontificale, p. 188.
15. Dialogue with Pyrrhus the Monothelite.
16. Ep. Agath. ad Conc. VI, in Coll. conc. Act. IV.
17. *Labbe*, Collect. conc., t. VI.
18. De R. Pontifice, p. 558.
19. “Iis nobis consentire non licet, qui negant vel dubitant quod Honorius in synode VI fuerit damnatus ut haereticus.”
20. Letter to the bishops of Spain.
21. “The letters of Honorius,” says Abbé Constant (*Histoire et infallibilité des Papes*, t. II), “innocent when they were written, were not so when they were discovered. The circumstances had changed; the heretics had succeeded to the patriarchal see of Constantinople, and each, in turn, had extended further the error’s domain. It was necessary to strike a great blow; the council condemned all the writings submitted to it, whatever their date or origin, as soon as they appeared to teach or only benefit the heresy. The letters of Honorius were of this number.”