

Commentariorum in Universam Theologiam Scholasticam, Tomus Tertius (*Commentaries on Universal Scholastic Theology, Volume 3*)

by **R.P. Francisco Bonæ Spei (R.P. Francis of Good Hope), 1661**

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Disputatio 4. De primario Ecclesia Capite. Dubium 6

Whether it is a matter of Faith that this Pope, for example Alexander VII, is the legitimate successor of Peter? And consequently, whether it is also a matter of Faith that this particular Council, for example the Council of Trent, is legitimate and endowed with the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit in treating matters of Faith, once the Pope and Council have been recognized as legitimate?

62. Father Oviedo correctly explains the present difficulty here as follows: Whether by virtue of universal revelations—by which it has been revealed that every man legitimately elected as the lawful Pontiff of the Church is the successor of Peter in office and authority, and the true Pope; likewise, that every Council legitimately assembled possesses infallible authority, and that the Holy Spirit assists it in matters pertaining to the Church—it is consequently revealed that this particular Pope, Alexander VII for example, is the true Pope, and that this particular Council, for example the Council of Trent, is legitimate and has treated the affairs of the Church with the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit and has defined truths pertaining to the faith, it being otherwise acknowledged by the Church that the Pontiff and Council are legitimate. This difficulty is very celebrated and of the highest importance. For the negative opinion, Father Oviedo cites Torquemada, Cajetan, Báñez, Vásquez, Torres, and (following them) Gaspar Hurtado, who for this reason, along with those who had subscribed to this opinion of his, was summoned to Rome by Clement VIII. Puteanus, however, distinguishes, saying that the said proposition is not absolutely a matter of faith, but only hypothetically so.

63. For the affirmative position, however, according to the same Oviedo, there stand Father Suárez, Tanner, Hurtado, Cardinal Lugo, Palao, and many others, whom he follows and with whom he agrees.

RESOLUTION I.

64. I say first: The affirmative opinion regarding the first part is to me most certain.

65. It is proved first thus: It is of the faith that he is the legitimate successor of Peter whom Christ commands us to obey in matters pertaining to faith and morals. But it is established that Christ commands us and the universal Church to obey in these matters the Pope legitimately elected and recognized as such; therefore, etc. The major premise is proved from the Scriptures, by which Christ (Doubt 1, and below) conferred upon Peter and his successors (not in the same way upon others, as is clear from Doubt 3) the power of feeding the sheep in faith and morals. The minor premise is proved because nothing is more certain than that we must obey our Superiors, such as are those legitimately elected as Pope and recognized as such; therefore, etc.

66. It is proved secondly, because otherwise it would not even be a matter of faith that Innocent X was the legitimate successor of Peter, and thus [it would not be a matter of faith] concerning the entire series of Pontiffs going back in time, and in this way all certainty of the true Church would collapse; and heretics would be confirmed in their errors; and the legitimate Vicar of Christ and successor of Saint Peter would not be known to us with certainty in the particular case: whence the way to the Judge of controversies would be closed, but [the way] opened to heretics—indeed, even to Catholics—to deny everything except Scripture, and many similar absurdities would follow. To obviate these [absurdities], Martin V, by a special Bull at the Council of Constance, decreed that heretics returning to the Church should believe that the Pope who shall be for the time being, his name being expressly stated, canonically elected, is the successor of Peter and possesses supreme power in the Church. Therefore, etc.

67. It is confirmed: from the fact that the universal Church receives this Scripture as true and legitimate, it is of the faith that it is such; therefore, similarly, from the fact that the Church acknowledges this particular Pope as legitimate, it is of the faith that he is such—even before he defines anything *ex cathedra*—as is clearly gathered from the Councils. Specifically, the Sixth General Synod, which confesses that Agatho is the true Pontiff; the Council of Chalcedon [confesses] Leo; the Council of Milevis [confesses] that Innocent III is such. See the chapter *De libellis*, distinction 28, and Augustine, tome 6, *Against the Power of Donatianus*, and tome 2, Epistle 155. And note that, according to the testimony of Diana, tome 11, Clement VIII summoned certain doctors of the opposite opinion to Rome and imprisoned them.

68. You will object, however: (1) these propositions—*Alexander VII is baptized; Alexander VII is canonically elected Roman Pontiff*—absolutely and simply are not propositions of the Catholic Faith; therefore, etc. The assumption is proved thus: because their truth is established solely by the testimony of the one baptizing, of the electors, and of others who acknowledge him as Pontiff. And it seems that these propositions must be resolved in the same manner as these: *these species are consecrated; these relics are to be venerated*—which absolutely and simply are not of the faith, but only *ex hypothesi*. Therefore, etc.

69. It is confirmed: because it does not appear why someone incapable of the pontifical dignity—for example, one not baptized, or not ordained, not male but female, etc.—cannot be assumed and presented as a legitimate Pontiff, provided that God does not permit him to define anything *ex cathedra*, or permit him to define only truths; for in this manner sufficient provision would be made for the Church of God.

70. I respond first by distinguishing the assumption: these propositions, etc., are not absolutely and simply matters of Catholic Faith *per se* and directly—I grant the assumption: indirectly and with respect to the special assistance of God, which God has promised to His Church, concerning not permitting His whole Church to err in recognizing someone as the legitimate successor of Peter who is not such, who is not legitimately elected, who is not baptized, etc. (otherwise he would not be the legitimate successor of Peter; whence those propositions, as this one, ought to be certain)—I deny the assumption. Father Francisco Suárez, [Gonzalo de] Oviedo, and some others indeed admit that it is established only by moral evidence that he is baptized, canonically elected, etc., and that this suffices. But on the contrary, I think it follows from this that it is established only by moral evidence that he is the Supreme Pontiff, the legitimate successor of Peter, etc., and that this suffices for the certitude of decrees of Faith; which I do not approve, lest it should consequently be necessary to admit that decrees of Faith are only morally certain by evidence, and consequently that doubt can be raised concerning them, as concerning other things that are morally, and not physically, certain—which I would not dare to assert.

71. You will perhaps say: that just as by Divine Faith we believe ours to be the true Church, although only motives of credibility that are merely morally evident precede [that belief]; so similarly we can believe Alexander VII to be the legitimate successor of Peter, although only motives of this credibility that are merely morally evident precede [that belief]. But

72. On the contrary: from this it is only concluded that, in order for us to believe by divine faith that Alexander VII is the legitimate successor of Peter, legitimately elected, legitimately baptized, etc., it suffices if only motives of this credibility that are merely morally evident precede; not, however, that in order for us to believe by divine faith that he is the legitimate successor of Peter, it suffices that it be only morally evident that he is baptized, legitimately elected, etc., as will be clear to one who considers [the matter]: otherwise, even for some time after Alexander VII had been recognized as the true successor of Peter, it would still be permissible to doubt concerning him, as concerning his baptism and legitimate election.

73. I respond secondly to what is added concerning these consecrated species, these relics to be venerated, etc., that it does not press the case; because the testimony of the whole Church does not concur in the approval of the consecration of those species, the veneration of those relics, etc., as it does in the approval of the Pontiff as the legitimate Successor of Peter: for the one is not as morally evident as the other; nor has a special assistance been promised by God to prevent this consecration, veneration, etc., from being falsely proposed by private persons as true, as assistance has been promised to prevent a pontiff not legitimately elected, not baptized, etc., from being proposed by the whole Church as legitimately elected, truly baptized, and a legitimate pontiff, so that all error may be removed from the whole Church.

But as to the confirmation.

74. I respond by denying the assumption: because either such a person would have the special assistance of the Holy Spirit promised to him in his predecessors in defining matters of Faith and morals, or not? If the first; it would have to be said that a defect of Baptism, of Orders, and of sex renders no one incapable of the Papacy and of legitimate succession to Peter—the opposite of which the argument supposes under “not incapable.” If the second; the entire Church would err concerning the legitimate successor of Peter, the living rule of Faith and morals, etc., which is heretical, as will be shown below. When it is added, however, *provided that God does not*

permit, etc., miracles are being added without necessity, and the dilemma posed retains all its force, and there would always remain doubt about the truthfulness of the one proposing matters of Faith and morals, as well as whether God had promised His assistance to one not baptized, not ordained, not a male but a female, etc. From this it would follow that the truth of matters proposed by the first proposer, or the first living rule, would be doubtful, which is also heretical: whence this inference is valid: *We are bound by certain faith to believe that which the first living rule proposes as to be believed*: therefore also that this particular man is the first living rule; although this inference is not valid: A peasant is bound by certain faith to believe what the parish priest proposes as of the faith; therefore also that he himself is the legitimate Parish Priest: for there is a disparity; because the entire Church is bound to this one (for God promised that the whole Church would not fail, would not err); but the entire Church is not bound to believe a Parish Priest, but only this or that particular parishioner, who can err; not so the entire Church, as is evident, nor did Christ promise that he [the parish priest] would not fail or err.

75. You will object secondly: The entire reason why we are bound to believe that this particular Pontiff is the legitimate successor of Peter is so that the whole Church would not otherwise err in believing; but for this purpose it suffices that God prevent him from defining something false from the Chair [*ex Cathedra*]: therefore, etc.

76. I respond by denying the minor [premise]; because, as is evident from what was set forth a little earlier in confirmation, this does not remove the fallibility of the whole Church concerning the first rule of faith and morals, or concerning the legitimate successor of Peter himself, whatever may be the case regarding those things which he might propose.

RESOLUTION II.

77. I say secondly that the affirmative opinion concerning the second part is also most certain to me.

78. Proof: because there is no legitimate Council unless it be confirmed by the Pontiff; but the Pontiff's confirmation in matters of faith and morals is certain by divine faith: therefore, etc. The minor [premise] will be proved in the following doubt; the consequence is evident, because otherwise nothing defined in Trent and other Councils would have to be believed by Divine Faith.