

Theologia dogmatica, moralis et scholastica, Tomus II (*Dogmatic, Moral, and Scholastic Theology, Volume II*)

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Tractatus II, Disp. II, Quaes. IV, Art. III

Whether it is a matter of faith that Pius VI, currently seated, is the Pastor of the universal Church?

Some deny this, willing to accept as a matter of faith that the legitimate Successor of Peter is the Pope, but unwilling to accept as a matter of faith that this particular man, e.g., Pius VI, is the Supreme Pontiff; because it is not a matter of faith that he was canonically elected, since this has not been revealed.

SOLE CONCLUSION. It is a matter of faith that Pius VI was legitimately elected, and as such, having been accepted by the Church, is the true Pope. This is the most common opinion among Theologians.

Proof I. From the Council of Constance, final session, where Martin V decrees that those who return to the faith from heresy should be asked among other things: *“Whether they believe that the canonically elected Pope, whoever he may be at the time, with his proper name expressed, is the successor of Blessed Peter having supreme authority in the Church of God?”* Therefore, it is presumed to be an article of faith: since those abjuring heresy are questioned only about truths of the faith.

Problem 2. That conclusion is of faith whose two premises are of faith; but this conclusion: *Pius VI is the true Pope*, follows from two premises of faith: therefore it is of faith. The major premise is certain. The minor is proven, because these two premises, from which the said conclusion follows, *everyone legitimately elected as Pope and received as such by the Church is the true Pope; but Pius VI is such*, are of faith; The major premise indeed, which no Catholics doubt; otherwise it would not be of faith that the legitimate successor of Peter is the true Pope: The minor premise, however, because by the very fact that the Church receives him as legitimately elected, God reveals that his election is legitimate, since Christ promised that His Church would never err in matters of faith: but it

would err in such a matter if the conclusion did not stand, since by recognizing the elected person as Pope, it recognizes him as an infallible rule of faith, who would then be fallible.

Confirm. This minor premise: by the very fact that God performs an evident miracle through the invocation of some Confessor or Martyr, or through the veneration of his relics, such that it can in no way be doubted, He implicitly reveals that this deceased person was in a state of grace, because it is repugnant to divine holiness to perform miracles at the invocation of one who is damned. Therefore, by the very fact that the Church, which God called the *pillar and foundation of truth* (1 Timothy 3), accepts the elected person as Pontiff, and thus as an infallible rule of faith, God implicitly reveals that his election is legitimate; because it is repugnant to divine fidelity to permit the Church to err, which He promised would not err.

Proof 3. If it were not a matter of faith that the reigning Pope is the Supreme Pontiff, we could doubt whether he is the successor of Peter, whether he is the infallible rule of faith, and consequently whether all definitions of faith are legitimate, and thus we would not be bound to believe anything as revealed on the Church's proposition; but this is absurd: therefore, so is the former.

You will say: When a legitimately delegated person announces to us truths of faith, we are bound to believe them as matters of faith, although we believe only with human faith that he is legitimately delegated. Therefore, although we might believe only with human faith that Pius VI is Pope, we would be bound to believe with divine faith the revealed truths proposed by him.

Response: There is a disparity, for we do not believe the truths proposed by a delegate on his own authority, but because he presents sufficient motives of credibility; whereas we believe the Pope when he defines, on his own authority; and consequently we should believe the Pope differently than we believe a delegate; we believe the Pope because of his authority, and a delegate because of the motives of credibility.

Proof 4: The Church cannot receive something as a matter of faith that is not such, otherwise it would err in matters of faith; but the Church receives the Pope's definitions in this matter as articles of faith: therefore they are of faith. I further argue: But the Church cannot believe these to be of faith, on the authority of the Pope who proposes them, if it is permitted to doubt the Pope's authority: therefore.

Objection 1: This proposition: "Pius VI is the true Pope," is not explicitly or implicitly in Scripture: therefore it is not a matter of faith.

Response: I deny the antecedent. Because it is contained in this, that the Church will never err in matters of faith, nor consequently when it believes Pius VI to be the infallible rule of faith, and therefore the legitimate Pope, since he would not be such a rule unless he were the true Pope. Furthermore, even if it were in no way contained in Scripture, it would nevertheless be considered revealed by the very fact that the indefectible Church acknowledges the one elected as the Supreme Pontiff.

Objection 2: It is not a matter of faith that the election of Pius VI is legitimate: therefore it is not a matter of faith that he is the Supreme Pontiff.

Reply of N. Ant. Since one is not a legitimate Pontiff except through legitimate election, by the very fact that it is revealed that someone is a legitimate Pontiff, it is also revealed that his election is legitimate, when he is created through the way of election. Nevertheless, it is not a matter of faith that the Cardinals who elected him are true Cardinals, or that they had the intention of electing, or that they observed the form of law, etc., because these things, insofar as they are remote and only prerequisite, do not seem to be objects of faith.

Objection 3. It is not revealed that the reigning Pope is validly baptized; therefore, neither is it revealed that he is truly Pope, since only a baptized person is capable of that supreme dignity.

Some respond by denying the antecedent. Because by the very fact that God reveals someone to be a legitimate Pope, He also implicitly reveals that he has all the necessary prerequisites for the Papacy. But

I respond by conceding the antecedent (if at least it is understood concerning immediate revelation), but deny the consequent. Because for it to be a matter of faith that Pius is Pope, it suffices that it is theologically certain that he is baptized; now, although God, by revealing that the modern Pope is legitimate, does not properly reveal that he is baptized, He nevertheless gives us ground to infer this through theological conclusion, since it is a necessary prerequisite.

Objection 4. One who would say, “Pius VI is not a legitimate Pope,” would not be a heretic; therefore, it is not a matter of faith that he is such.

Response, I distinguish the antecedent. One who would say this before the Church’s acceptance would not be a heretic: I concede. After acceptance, I further distinguish: if he held our position: I deny. If he held the opposite view: I concede, because in good faith, due to reasons that seemed sufficient to him, he would believe it not to be an article of faith. But this proves nothing against our position.

Objection 5. Although it is a matter of faith that Christ is present in the Eucharist, it is nevertheless not a matter of faith that He is present in this particular host. Therefore, although it is a matter of faith that the true successor of Peter is the Pope, it is not a matter of faith that this particular man is the Pope.

Response, I deny the consequence. The disparity lies in the fact that it is in no way revealed that Christ is present in this host, even though it is believed to be consecrated; however, it is revealed that this man is the Pope, by the very fact that he is acknowledged and received as such by the indefectible Church, as we have shown previously.