

Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi, Volume 3A (*Treatise on the Church of Christ, Volume 3A*)

by **Patricio Murray (Patrick Murray)**, 1866

[Online Location of Text Here](#)

- OCR of the original text by AI (*claude-sonnet-4-5-20250929*).

- Translation of the original text performed by AI (*claude-sonnet-4-5-20250929*).

- Last Edit: November 18, 2025.

- Version: 1.0

- Selection pages: 258–261

Disputatio XVII, Sectio V, § 2: De Vero Pontifice Statuendo

§ 2. ON ESTABLISHING THE TRUE PONTIFF.

93. Among the scholastics it was once disputed whether it is a matter of divine faith that this particular Pontiff, as acknowledged by the universal Church as such, is truly the successor of Blessed Peter; some affirming, others denying: D. 1, n. 43. See SUÁREZ, *On Faith*, D. 5, S. 8, n. 12; D. 10, S. 5. Whatever may be said about this question, nearly all theologians hold that it is at least certain. For although BAÑEZ (somewhat plainly captivated by certain fables not sufficiently refuted and exploded in his age) seemed to concede that a case was absolutely possible in which a Pontiff acknowledged by the Church would not be the true Pope, he nevertheless says (page 63) that “it would be very rash and scandalous if, after the Church has accepted someone as Supreme Pontiff, anyone should deny that he is the true Supreme Pontiff, unless he could show that he was not baptized, or was not a man... Nor should it be judged a moral case that someone might ascend to the summit of the Pontificate without being baptized, especially since it is believed to pertain to divine providence that it does not permit an unbaptized man to ascend to the priesthood, and much less to the Supreme Pontificate.” In perhaps the same way should be understood certain ancient authors whom SUÁREZ cites, D. 10, S. 5, n. 2.

94. It is absolutely certain that the Church, by defining or (which is the same thing) by openly acknowledging that this man, for example, PIUS IX, is truly Pope, is infallible. The argument that LUGO presents (D. 1, n. 327) to prove that the proposition affirming this man to be the true Pontiff is *de fide*, proves at least that it is infallibly true. “From divine revelation it is established that the Church cannot be deceived in universally believing any error, since she is the ‘pillar and foundation of truth’ (1 Tim. ii.): in which infallibility of the universal Church it seems no less contained that the Church cannot err in recognizing the true visible rule of her faith, than in other matters to be believed by faith: for an error concerning the very rule of truth and faith would harm the Church more than concerning other particular objects, since it would be an error in the

very foundation of faith. Since therefore the visible rule which the Church follows in her faith, and must absolutely follow, is her visible head, namely the Supreme Pontiff, whose teaching and definitions she must embrace, the Church cannot be deceived by accepting as Pontiff and rule of faith one who would not truly be Pontiff nor rule of faith, but a pseudo-pope and private man.” To this argument, which seems sufficiently solid, he adds two confirmations that are not so solid.

95. Against these points, if it should be *objected* I. that what is affirmed at the beginning of the argument is false, namely, that the universal Church cannot believe any error: for she can, and in fact has often believed such.

96. *Response. I distinguish:* All the faithful individually and collectively can believe some error in matters that in no way pertain to religion—in history, geography, astronomy, etc.: *I concede:* In matters pertaining to religion: *I subdivide:* They can believe errors as conjectures or mere free opinions: *Let it pass:* As certain truths to be believed obligatorily, on the authority of the Church defining them: *I deny.* See above, n. 60, and D. 11, n. 29. What we have taught and briefly proved in those places is entirely consonant with the doctrine of theologians both ancient and recent. “The Church cannot err in matters of faith... by holding something as of faith which is not, or by holding something not to be of faith which truly is.” BÁÑEZ, loc. cit. D. 3, Concl. 2, p. 130. What BÁÑEZ says here about those things which immediately regard faith must be said for the same reason about those things which regard it only mediately. “MELCHIOR CANO demonstrates, C. 4 de locis, c. 4 [Concl. 2], that such also is the force of the aforesaid promises, that the whole Church cannot persuade itself of some erroneous opinion, even in a matter which does not pertain to faith [as if, namely, it pertained to faith]. For this indeed would be alien to that Spirit of truth by which the Church is always governed.” VALENCIA, Q. 1, D. 7, § 16, p. 190. “It is no less repugnant for the Church to deceive or be deceived while proposing something to be believed by all the faithful with the intention of obligating them, than for a Prophet or Evangelist who writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to deceive or be deceived.” GONZÁLEZ, de infallibilitate R. Pontificis, S. 1, § 2, n. 7, in MUZZARELLI, Œuvres Choiesies, vol. 2, p. 396 (Brussels edit. 1846). So also TANNER, D. 1, Q. 4, n. 292; BAILLY, P. 1, C. 19, S. 1, vol. 2, p. 42. See also BOUIX de Curia Romana, p. 400; BOUVIER, p. 389; TOURNELY, vol. 2, p. 535.

97. If it should be objected (II): God, in the case of a pseudo-pope being held as the true pope, just as in any case whatsoever, will infallibly provide for His Church.

98. *Response:* God always provides for the Church, but through that means which He Himself has established as perpetual and unshakeable for this purpose. From whence, indeed, does the Church have its complete and perpetual indefectibility (D. 4, n. 6)? From the fact that it is built upon the rock, that is, upon Peter and his successors (D. 6, n. 136, etc.). Therefore, it will never be built upon any other foundation.

99. If it should be pressed: in the case of a doubtful pope or no pope, God provides for the Church in an extraordinary manner.

100. *Response:* In the case of a pseudo-pope being held by all as the true and undoubted Pope, there would be present a positive error of the universal Church, believing as obligatory and openly professing as sacred truth what would be entirely false: indeed, there would be present a definition of the Church that this one is the true Pope; for this universal recognition would truly be such a definition. In the case, however, of a doubtful pope or no pope, by the very terms there

would be no such definition, no universal error, but pure doubt or ignorance. Only in this case would the provision to be made by God consist in this: that in due time a certain Pope would be elected. D. 6, n. 295; D. 16, n. 38. To these could be added other points of difference.