

Regale Sacerdotium Romano Pontifici Assertum et Quatuor Propositionibus Explicatum (*The Royal Priesthood Asserted for the Roman Pontiff and Explained in Four Propositions*)

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XVII. *Objection 17.* It is established by merely human faith that this particular individual, e.g., Innocent XI, is the legitimate and true Pontiff, and the Vicar of Christ on earth; but human faith is subject to error, and it is possible that he might not be the legitimate Pontiff. What if he was invalidly elected? What if he was not properly baptized? Or how is it established for us that he was properly baptized and elected, except by human faith, which can be deceived? Thus John VIII and Formosus were believed to be true Pontiffs, and yet events taught that the former was a woman, and the latter not a true but an imaginary Pope, whose acts were all rescinded by Stephen VI. If, therefore, it is not established by divine and certain faith that Innocent is Pontiff, it will also not be established by certain and divine faith that what is decreed by him is certain and pertains to dogma, should he declare this.

I respond. This objection assumes too much, and if it proves anything, it attacks not only the Popes, but all Councils, the entire Church, and the very core of the Catholic faith. For if it cannot be established with certain and undoubted faith that Innocent XI is the legitimate Pope, then neither can it be established for Innocent X, nor Clement IX, nor Alexander VII, nor Leo, nor Agatho, nor Sylvester: for in all cases either there is no reason for doubt, or the same reason applies. If, therefore, the Popes and what they have defined are doubtful, then so too are the decrees of Councils, for these are confirmed by the Pope, and without the Pope they are as complete as a body severed from its head. Indeed, from the same causes that make the Popes and their elections doubtful for you, the Councils themselves are called into question, which to be legitimate require many more conditions than Popes do. But with a doubtful Pope, doubtful Councils, and doubtful decrees established by them, what certainty remains in the faith? In vain was the Arian heresy condemned, in vain

the Nestorian, Eutychian, Lutheran, and Calvinist heresies, in vain all heresies were condemned, for as you say, the Popes were uncertain, the Councils uncertain, and uncertain were their decisions; and what is uncertain belongs neither to heresy nor to faith, such that they must necessarily be believed or denied. But if no one dares to call into question the Councils that have been received by the Church—indeed, according to St. Gregory *in c. sicut. d. 15*, whoever does this is a heretic just as one who does not accept the Gospels—the same must be said of the Roman Pontiff, for as we noted a little earlier, the reasoning is the same for both. And just as it is not sufficient for faith to believe in some Church in general but not this specific one, or in some sacred scriptures but not these that we hold in our hands, so too it is not sufficient to believe in some Vicar of Christ in the Church, some visible head, some Judge of Controversies, but not this one whom the Church has elected, whom the Church venerates, from whom laws and decrees and judgments in controversial matters proceed. When will you sail, when will you resolve a lawsuit, when will you put an end to a disease, if you indeed want some ship, some judge, some physician, but none certain, and none that you can point to with your finger, accepting neither this one nor that one? Similarly, the Church would be very poorly provided for, and the faithful very poorly served, if Christ had given them no Pope to whom they would owe certain faith and certain obedience, both in matters of morals and of faith. Nor has it ever been heard in the Church through so many centuries past, even with heretics so often armed against the Roman See, that this objection was raised against the Popes and their Decrees—namely, that it was not certainly established that Leo, Sylvester, or Damasus were legitimate Popes. How eagerly would the Arians have seized upon this invention, as you think it to be, to attack the Nicene Council and render void what the Fathers decided there! But in our age, in which there is such a great desire for novelty, we have surpassed antiquity, having discovered a new artifice by which we might have a Pope without a Pope, a law without a law, a judgment without a judgment—that is, some Pope, but not this one; some Lawgiver, but not this one; some Judge, but not this one; and none certain—meanwhile seizing the liberty to believe and do whatever we please. Finally, after the Council of Constance, we can scarcely understand how anyone could deny with certain faith that this individual Pope should be considered true and legitimate, for in the *final session*, Pope Martin, with the approval of the sacred Council, declares that from heretics who wish to be joined to the Catholic Church, it must be demanded before all else: *That they believe that the canonically elected Pope, whoever he may be at the time, with his name explicitly stated, is the successor of Peter, and holds supreme power in the Church.* The Council therefore supposes that one can believe with divine faith (for heretics are not to be questioned about any faith other than divine faith) that this specific and determined Pontiff is the legitimate Vicar of Christ—indeed, that one must believe it, for those things that cannot or should not be believed are not necessarily to be believed.

You will say: The Council speaks of a canonically elected Pontiff, but it is not established that he has been canonically elected.

We respond: If it cannot be established with certain faith that the Pope has been canonically elected, why then does the Council so carefully want heretics to be questioned about this? For the interrogation would be idle and wholly unnecessary, since

just as it cannot be established that he was canonically and validly elected, so too he cannot be established as a legitimate Pontiff and Vicar of Christ. But God has never revealed that the Pope was legitimately baptized, ordained, and elected, so how can it be believed? Indeed, He revealed it when the whole Church accepted and received the Pontiff as legitimate; for the voice and testimony of the Church, which cannot be deceived, is the voice and testimony of God: just as God speaks now by word, now by letter, now by miracles, so He speaks through the voices and assent of the Church, according to that promise of Christ the Lord: *“For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you; the Spirit himself will teach you all truth.”*

It pertains, therefore, to God’s Providence and care that He not permit the Church, which He willed to be the pillar and foundation of truth, to err in a matter of such great importance by venerating as Pontiff one who is not the Pontiff. Or if He permits error regarding the person of the Pontiff himself, He nevertheless does not permit error regarding his authority—that is, that the same authority and power be attributed to a putative Pontiff as would be accorded to a true one, just as human laws establish the same principle in the case of a putative judge, witness, and marriage, as attested in *l. Barbarinus. de off. Praet. l. 3. in fine ff. de suppellect. legat. l. 3. ff. ad S.C.M. §. 7. Instit. de Testam. ordin. c. infamus 3. q. 7. c. penult. & ult. qui filii sint legitimi.*

XVIII. *Non obstat 18.* The opinion of those who affirm that the Pontiff can err outside of a Council is probable; therefore we can safely embrace, teach, and if the situation requires, even put this opinion into practice.

I respond. The probability of any opinion is evaluated from two sources: namely, from the weight and importance of the reasons; and from the authority of those who teach it. Concerning the reasons, either none are produced for the contrary opinion, or they are so weak and fragile, and so easy to refute, that they have little weight in bending the intellect to one side, and in not only—I say—extorting its assent, but inviting it; indeed, they have no weight at all when compared with those reasons that press toward the opposite conclusion. Compare scriptures with scriptures, Councils with Councils, Fathers with Fathers, the usage of the Church with usage, reasons with reasons, and only then will you see what power to move and bend the intellect the arguments of our Adversaries possess. Recall also the censures of the Fathers and Doctors with which they refute that opinion, and consider with yourself whether they acknowledge any appearance of probability: and not the censures of just any Fathers, but of those flourishing in sanctity and doctrine, whom all the schools venerate not only as Doctors but as the heights and peaks of Doctors. You will scarcely number eighteen authors for the opinion which we oppose, whereas our position has all who have written anywhere throughout the world. For who are Gerson, Almain, and Adrian, that you should oppose them to Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Antoninus, Bernard, and nearly all others? Indeed, in the presence of these suns those stars grow pale and disappear, and it is as impossible for one who beholds the authority and reasons of these men to see any basis for probability in the contrary opinion, as it is to observe any rays or light in the stars when the sun shines at

midday: indeed, much less so; since in the sky there are many stars but only one sun, whereas on our side there are many suns, and on the opposing side very few stars.