

**Ecclesia Christi In Terris Militans: Seu Catholica Religio, Cum Fide, Spe Et Charitate Theologica, Gratia Habituali, Iustificatione, Et Merito: Tractatus de Ecclesia Militante**  
*(The Church of Christ Militant on Earth: That is, the Catholic Religion, with Faith, Hope, and Theological Charity, Habitual Grace, Justification, and Merit: Treatise on the Church Militant)*

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## Exercitatio II, Question XX

*Is it a matter of faith that Clement XII, having been legitimately elected, is the true Pope, or Vicar of Christ?*

**408.** I premise from the Scholastic Theology of Salzburg, treatise on faith, disputation 11, article 3, that not only those things which are revealed either formally or explicitly, or implicitly or confusedly (an example of which is in this proposition: “Christ is man,” in which it is confusedly revealed that He consists of body and soul), but also things virtually revealed, that is, contained in something formally revealed as in its power and root (e.g., that Christ has a created will is contained in this revealed truth that Christ is man), can be the object of an act of theological faith, such that virtual revelation is a sufficient motive for supernatural assent, and is given purely on account of Divine revelation. And therefore the discursive and artful connection of extremes is then nothing other than a pure condition applying Divine revelation, manifested through syllogistic discourse, as in the example given: *Christ is man*; every man has a created will; therefore Christ has a created will. The second premise merely applies more specifically and explicates, so that it may be established that the particular is contained under the universal. For it would have sufficed to say that a created will is necessarily contained in Christ as man. Furthermore, the

aforementioned Theology concludes in the cited passage that to elicit an assent of faith concerning an object virtually revealed, it is not necessary that both premises be of faith, but it suffices that one of them be physically or morally evident. Hence, if someone receives a special revelation that all the cities of Italy are to be razed to the ground, that person would believe by Divine faith (if not Theological, at least commonly so called) that Rome too will be destroyed, even though he would have only moral evidence or certainty about the existence of Rome. With these premises established,

**409.** The assertion is established in the affirmative. I do not, therefore, agree with those who formerly held that this proposition, *the current Pontiff is the Vicar of Christ*, is certain only with moral certainty. This is proven first by the authority of Martin V, who in the Council of Constance, after the condemnation of the errors of Wycliffe, decreed that those suspected of heresy should be asked whether they believe that the canonically elected Pope, whoever he may be at the time, his proper name being expressly stated, is the Successor of Blessed Peter, having supreme authority in the Church of GOD. Secondly: This proposition: *Clement XI, legitimately elected, is the true Pontiff, or Vicar of Christ*, is contained directly under this universal revealed truth: Every Pontiff or Roman Bishop legitimately elected is the true Pontiff and Vicar of Christ. Now, when a universal proposition is revealed and immediately of faith, the particular proposition contained under the universal is also immediately of faith. This is proven thus: because the subject of the universal proposition and the subject of the particular proposition are the same, such that the subject of the particular proposition constitutes inadequately the subject of the universal proposition, and the subjects of all particular propositions collectively taken are adequately identical with the subject of the universal. For example: every human descending from Adam through seminal propagation is redeemed by Christ. The meaning is: this one, and that one, and another, and all other particular individuals whatsoever descending from Adam. Similarly, in the former case, the collective syncategoreme “every Roman Bishop” includes each particular legitimately elected bishop, consequently including the recently elected current one. Therefore, just as the universal proposition is of faith because it is revealed in itself, so likewise is the particular proposition because it is revealed and contained under the former as a particular instance.

Nor should you object that it has not been revealed that Clement XII was legitimately elected. For against this stands, firstly, that it has been virtually and effectively revealed that this particular man was canonically elected, insofar as he is peacefully recognized, accepted, and honored as the legitimate Vicar of Christ by the Church (whose authority is represented in the Cardinal Electors, who handle the matter of Pontifical election in the name of the entire Church); since Divine Providence does not permit the whole Church to err in matters concerning faith and morals, as does the legitimate election of the Supreme Pontiff. Against this stands, secondly, that for an assent of supernatural faith, it is sufficient if one proposition is revealed, and another is morally certain or evident, as was premised above.

**411.** Thirdly, John of St. Thomas proves the assertion thus. There are two things which the Church accepts in a Pontiff: first, that here and now he is the rule of faith, namely an

animated one; second, that the Church accepts him as the Head to whom the universal Church is united, and thus by accepting him makes that proposition a matter of faith, namely, that this particular person duly elected is the true Pontiff. For it is impossible that the Church should err in accepting any Rule of faith, whether it be the definition of a Council, or some Canonical book, or some tradition; and similarly it is impossible that in accepting such a rule as the rule of faith, it should not be a matter of faith that this is a true and legitimate rule. Therefore, it is likewise impossible that the Church should err in accepting the Holy Pontiff in particular, since it accepts him as the supreme and animated rule in proposing matters of faith. This is confirmed as follows: If it were not certain according to faith that this particular book is Canonical, or that this definition is a legitimate definition, we could not be certain about matters defined or handed down in a Canonical Book. Therefore, in a similar manner, it would not be certain according to faith that this particular person truly defines or declares something concerning what must be believed, when we could prudently doubt his legitimate election, power, and authority. Finally, all the arguments by which the Primacy, superiority, and infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff are proven apply here. For they do not only proceed regarding the Supreme Pontiff in the abstract or in an intentional state, but concerning any individual who has been raised to the Apostolic Throne through legitimate election. What is required for this legitimate election, I explain at length with the Canonists in my Treatise on the Roman Pontiff, part I, dissertation 2.

*On the Contrary*

**412.** You argue first: If it is a matter of faith that this particular elected individual is the true Pontiff, then it is also a matter of faith that the electors observed the prescribed form for Pontifical election, e.g., that at least two-thirds agreed upon this person, that they cast their votes without the intervention of simony, etc. But this is not a matter of faith: for who has proposed this to us as something to be held by faith? Therefore, etc.

**413.** Second: It is not a matter of faith, at least not immediately, that this general Council, e.g., the Council of Trent, is legitimate, although it is a matter of faith that every legitimately convened Council is a true Council. Therefore, it is not a matter of faith that this particular Clement is the true Pontiff, although it is a matter of faith that every Bishop of Rome legitimately elected and peacefully accepted is the true Pontiff. The antecedent is founded on the fact that it is not established as a matter of faith that the Bishops gathered in the Council were truly Bishops.

**414.** Third: It is not a matter of faith that this particular man is alive, or is baptized; therefore, neither is it a matter of faith that he is the true Pontiff and Vicar of Christ. The antecedent is proven thus: Before his election, it was not a matter of faith that he was a man or baptized; therefore, neither after his election will it be a matter of faith, since no revelation or definition has subsequently occurred on this matter. The inference is also proven: If the consequent is contingent or non-necessary, the antecedent likewise cannot be necessary. For example, consider this antecedent proposition: "This man, Clement XII,

is the Supreme Pontiff.” Its consequent is that he is baptized, since without baptism, the Pontificate in Clement, according to God’s present Providence, would be impossible.

**415.** Fourth: The Church accepts this particular Saint, e.g., John Nepomucene, duly canonized by the Apostolic See, no less than it accepts this particular Clement as duly elected by the Cardinals who represent the universal Church. And yet this proposition: *“This particular canonized person is in glory”* is not a matter of faith, as St. Thomas teaches in Quodlibet 9, article 16. Therefore, etc.

**416.** Fifth: In this syllogism (Every properly consecrated host contains under the species of bread the true Body of Christ; but this particular host is properly consecrated; Therefore this particular host contains under the species of bread the true Body of Christ), the conclusion is not of absolute faith, even though through the minor proposition it is made manifest that the aforementioned conclusion is a particular proposition immediately contained under a universal revealed truth. Therefore, neither will the conclusion in this syllogism be of faith: Every Pontiff legitimately elected and accepted by the Church is the true Pontiff. Clement XII is legitimately elected and accepted by the Church; therefore Clement is the true Pontiff.

**417.** Sixth: What is of faith, we are bound to believe; likewise, it ought to be not merely probable, but necessary, certain, and infallible. But we are not bound to believe that Clement XII is the true Pontiff. For although it is of faith that it is of faith that anyone duly elected as the Head of the Roman Church is the true Pontiff, it is not, however, of faith that it is of faith that this particular Clement XII is the true Pontiff, since nowhere has this been sufficiently declared. Moreover, the opposing opinion has not been condemned; therefore our opinion is not certain, but remains within the bounds of probability.

**418.** In response to the first, second, and third points, something can be of faith in two ways: namely, either primarily, immediately, and formally; or secondarily, mediately, illatively, or virtually. In the first way, something is of faith when it is directly comprehended through God’s light and when, as something immediately revealed, it terminates in the assent of faith. In the second way, something is of faith when it is understood as contained within an immediately revealed proposition, like a conclusion in its principle—namely, through theological reasoning, which derives conclusions from matters of faith. With these distinctions established, we must first state that it is immediately and primarily of faith that this person, legitimately elected and accepted as the rule and judge of faith, is the true Pontiff. Indeed, Martin V defined this regarding anyone legitimately elected, and it is contained in the promise made to Peter, in the Symbol of the Profession of Faith, and is declared in practice through the Church’s acceptance. Secondly, we must state that it is at least mediately of faith, through theological inference, that in the election of this Pontiff, the prescribed form was observed by the electors without any substantial defect. Similarly, on the part of the one elected, nothing was lacking from the necessary requirements—for example, that he is baptized, male, Catholic, and free from any impediment of natural or Divine law that would render him incapable of the Pontifical Dignity. For all these requirements have a necessary connection and consequence with the aforementioned

proposition of faith, since it could not subsist without the truth and existence of such requirements. The same response resolves what is brought up concerning the convocation of a general Council: indeed, if the conclusions and definitions of a Council have once been accepted and approved by the Holy Pontiff, it can be deduced through theological reasoning that the Council was legitimately convened and composed of true Bishops. Nor is it necessary that all those summoned for making definitions be true Bishops. Furthermore, it is not established as certain through any revelation in Scripture or through any definition of faith that this particular Bishop, legitimately elected and peacefully accepted, is a true Bishop, or that this particular case is immediately contained under a universal proposition that would be of faith, such as: *every prelate legitimately elected to an Episcopal Church and peacefully accepted is a true Bishop*. For such a Divine revelation and promise would not be sought or conducive to the infallible rule of the universal Church, but only to the useful governance of a particular Church or Province.

**419.** To the fourth [question]. The Thomists, in order to preserve the mind of the Angelic Doctor, respond that it is not established that this universal proposition, *every person legitimately or duly canonized is a saint and in glory*, has been formally and immediately revealed anywhere: therefore, neither is the particular proposition (*this duly canonized person is a saint and exists in glory*) immediately and formally revealed. For this reason, St. Thomas, in the cited *Quodlibet 9, article 16*, says that the canonization of Saints is something intermediate between the Pope's judgment when defining matters of faith, and his judgment when pronouncing on particular facts, such as when dealing with crimes or possessions. He adds however: *because the honor which we show to the Saints is a certain profession of faith by which we believe in the glory of the Saints, it should be piously believed that the Pope's judgment cannot err in these matters*. If anyone agrees with others who assert the revelation of the universal proposition concerning the canonization of Saints, they will consequently hold that it is immediately of faith that John Nepomucene is a Saint and in glory.

**420.** In response to the fifth [question], the Magnificent Father Benedict Petschach in his *treatise on faith, thesis 7* [states that] it is not morally evident to the degree that evidence of credibility is required for an act of faith, that this particular host has been duly consecrated by a legitimate Minister: for there is no testimony of the universal Church which persuades us of this, as there is to persuade us that this particular Pontiff has been legitimately elected. Thus he says. The Magnificent Doctor and Rector, Celestine Mayr, in his *treatise on Divine Faith, disputation 1, question 3, article 3, §2*, responds that this particular proposition, *"This host is consecrated,"* is not applied to us with any evidence, which nevertheless must necessarily concur for an assent of faith, etc. I add that the said particular proposition and its certainty do not pertain to the infallible rule of the universal Church.

**421.** In response to the sixth [question], Paul of the Conception [states] that this proposition, that Clement is the true Pontiff, is not credible by Divine and supernatural faith until the Church declares that the universal revelation is an immediate revelation of the particular: for he says this must be established with certainty, and mere probability is

not sufficient. Nevertheless, it is consistent with this that the aforementioned proposition in itself and speculatively is immediately of faith: and he defends this, but only as probable. And if we insist on what kind of assent is practically given to the aforesaid proposition, he replies [that it is] an assent of human faith, or Theological [assent], similar to that which we give to this proposition: "*Christ is visible.*"

**422.** However, adhering to the connection of doctrine, it is better defended that it is a matter of faith—that it is a matter of faith—that this particular Clement, after his peaceful acceptance, is the true Pontiff, and that this can be believed with Divine faith. Indeed, as John of St. Thomas maintains among other theologians, one who denies this proposition would be not only schismatic but also heretical: because he would not only rend the unity of the Church, but also foster a perverse dogma by denying that the newly elected and accepted Head of the Church must be regarded as the Pontiff and as the Rule of faith.