

Clypeus theologiae Thomisticae, Tomus IV (*Shield of Thomistic Theology, Volume 4*)

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Tractatus Decimus, Disputatio Quarta, Articulus IV

Whether, once a legitimate election of the Supreme Pontiff has been made, it is immediately and per se primarily a matter of faith that this person in particular, for example Innocent XI, is truly the Pontiff?

§. I. *With certain premises having been set forth, the opinions are reported.*

I suppose first that something can be said to be of divine faith in two ways, namely either immediately, or formally, or only mediately, or virtually. That is said to be of divine faith immediately which is immediately revealed by God; mediately, however, that which is evidently inferred from one proposition immediately revealed by God, and from another known by natural light. An example of a truth of the first kind is that Christ is man; of the second, that he is capable of laughter.

I suppose second that the difficulty proposed in the title is not about a Supreme Pontiff whose election the Church has declared to be null, nor about one whose election is doubtful and not yet determined, but about a Supreme Pontiff whom the Church has declared to have been legitimately elected, by accepting him as Supreme Pontiff. Therefore in the title we have placed, *once a legitimate election of the Supreme Pontiff has been made*. Concerning that Pontiff therefore who has been legitimately elected and accepted by the Church, such as now is Innocent XI happily governing the Church, we inquire whether it is immediately and per se primarily a matter of faith that he is truly the Pontiff and head of the Church?

Among the Thomists, Torquemada, Cano, and Báñez appear to hold the negative position: but outside the School of Saint Thomas, Alfonso de Castro expressly teaches this in book 1 against heresies chapter 9, where he writes these things: *Although we are bound to believe by faith that the true successor of Christ is the supreme Pastor of the entire Church, nevertheless we are not bound by the same faith to believe that Leo or Clement is the true successor of Peter, because we*

are not bound by Catholic faith to believe that any one of them was rightly and canonically elected. Whence he concludes that one who would deny this ought not to be called a heretic, but a schismatic.

The affirmative opinion is nevertheless more common among Theologians, and among the Thomists it is expressly taught by John of St. Thomas in 2. 2. Treatise on the Supreme Pontiff disp. 2. art. 2. and Dominic of the Holy Trinity in tome 3. of the Theological Library book 3. sect. 4. cap. 10. where he learnedly treats this question. There is nevertheless some difference among the Authors of this opinion, because some say that not immediately when someone is accepted by the Church as Supreme Pontiff is it a matter of faith that he is the true Pope, but only from the time when he begins to exercise some acts proper to the Supreme Pontiff, such as definitions of propositions pertaining to faith; for then (they say) he simultaneously defines and determines himself to be the Supreme Pontiff. Others however say that immediately when he is accepted by the Church as Supreme Pontiff, it is immediately a matter of faith that he is the true Pope.

§. II. *The true opinion is established by a twofold conclusion.*

I say first: It is established by divine faith that the Roman Pontiff existing for the time being is the legitimate successor of Peter and the true Vicar of Christ, when he defines something to be believed by divine faith.

It is proven: When the Pontiff defines something to be believed by divine faith, it is of faith that he then has the power of defining, and the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit: Therefore it is also then established by divine faith that he is the true Pontiff. The consequence is evident, because such power and assistance is given only to the true Pontiff, to whom alone it is promised in the person of Peter, whose successor he is: for Christ said not to anyone, but to Peter alone and to his legitimate successors: *You are Peter, etc. I have prayed for you etc. Feed my sheep etc.* Matt. 16. Luke 22. John 21. The antecedent also seems manifest, for when the Pontiff defines something as to be held of faith, it is impossible that we should believe by faith that object as defined, and not believe that the definition itself is legitimate, and consequently that the one defining has here and now infallible authority and assistance of the Holy Spirit.

This reasoning is confirmed and more clearly illustrated: When the Pontiff defines something to be believed by divine faith, by that very act he proposes himself as the rule of our faith: Therefore it is then established by divine faith that he is the true Pontiff. The antecedent is manifest, for the Pontiff, by defining something pertaining to faith, proposes himself as the legitimate judge of controversies of faith, and consequently as the true rule of the doctrine of our faith. The consequent, moreover, is proved thus: When something is a rule of faith, it must be no less credible through faith that it is a rule than that what is determined and regulated through it is of the faith: just as when some book of Scripture is proposed as canonical, just as everything contained in it is of the faith, so also it is of the faith that such a book is canonical and received through God's revelation; otherwise we could never be certain about the things defined and handed down in Sacred Scripture, as is evident in itself: Therefore if when the Pontiff defines something to be believed by divine faith, by that very act he proposes himself as the rule of our faith, it must also pertain to the same faith as something credible through it, that he is the true Pontiff. For this is required no less in a living rule of faith than in a dead rule.

You say: Although the Preachers of the Gospel propose to us things of faith to be believed, nevertheless we are not bound by faith to believe that they are legitimate Preachers of the Gospel: Therefore likewise, although the Pontiff proposes to us something of faith to be believed, we are not bound by divine faith to believe that he is the true Pontiff and legitimate Vicar of Christ and successor of Peter, but it suffices that we have human faith and moral certitude concerning this.

But on the contrary: This distinction exists between the Supreme Pontiff proposing things of faith to be believed by his definition, and the evangelical minister preaching them, that the latter does not conduct himself as a determinative rule of things of faith, but only as a minister announcing and declaring to others what things are to be believed: whence neither are we bound to believe that he is a true and legitimate minister, nor are those who believe in the things proposed by him moved to this by his authority, but by the credibility of those things which are proposed; so that unless they are sufficiently proposed, and such credibility becomes known to them, they are not bound to believe. But truly the Supreme Pontiff proposes things to be believed as the animate rule of faith, or supreme judge determining what things are to be believed, so that by his authority the faithful are obliged to believe them: whence it is necessary that they believe, not with moral certitude alone, under which something absolutely false can lie, but truly also with the certitude of faith, that this particular Pontiff existing for the time and ruling the Church is the true Pontiff of that same [Church], and legitimate Vicar of Christ and successor of Peter.

I say secondly; it is of faith, even immediately, that this man in particular, for example Innocent XI, is the true Pope, not only from that time when he determined something concerning faith and proposed it to the Church for belief, but also from that time when the Church declared his election to have been valid.

It is proved firstly: From that time it is immediately of faith that this man in particular is the true rule of our faith, and consequently the true Pope, from which time he has been accepted by the Church as such a rule: But from the time when his election is declared valid by the Church, he is accepted by it as the rule of our faith: Therefore from that time it is immediately of faith that he is the true Pope. The minor premise is evident, but the major premise is proved. It is also immediately of faith that the Church cannot err in accepting the rule of our faith, for otherwise it would not be immediately of faith that it would be consequently indefectible in accepting matters of faith regulated through such a rule: Therefore from that time when the Church accepts this particular man as the rule of our faith, it is also immediately of faith that he is truly such a rule.

It is proven secondly: We believe by faith that this Church in which we now are is the true and perfect Church: but once a peaceful election has been made and accepted, that [church] which has not been united with its visible head and subject to him cannot be held to be the true and perfect Church: Therefore it is fitting that just as it is a matter of faith that this Church is the true and perfect Church, so it should be a matter of faith, once a legitimate election has been made, that this man to whom [the Church] is united as to its head, is truly the head of the Church and the Supreme Pontiff.

Nor can it be said that it is only a matter of faith that there be some visible head in the Church, but not this one determinately and in particular; rather this one or that one, confusedly and indeterminately. For just as the Church in general cannot be understood without some head in general, so neither can this determinate Church exist without a determinate head: for this

determinate Church thus includes this determinate moral head, just as this determinate physical body includes this determinate physical head. Therefore, just as one who believes that Christ has a determinate physical body cannot but simultaneously believe that Christ has a determinate physical head, so one who believes this to be a determinate Church must simultaneously believe that this Church has a determinate moral head, by which it mystically consists. Hence in the *Bull of Martin V*, which is found in the Council of Constance, among those interrogations which are to be made of those suspect in faith, to investigate whether they are heretics or not, this one is placed: *Whether they believe that the Pope canonically elected, whoever he may be for the time being, with his proper name expressed, is the successor of Blessed Peter, having supreme authority in the Church of God?* These words cannot be understood concerning the truth of that proposition in general, that everyone rightly elected is Supreme Pontiff, or that the Church ought to have some visible head, but in particular concerning him who for the time being is Pontiff, expressing the proper name, for example, Innocent XI. Therefore the Pontiff supposes that it is to be believed by divine faith that this man in particular, whom the whole Church recognizes and receives as legitimately elected, is the Supreme Pontiff: inasmuch as through the negation or affirmation of that which is only a matter of human faith, a heretic cannot be discerned from a Catholic, and since to admit that which is inferred by reasoning from principles believed by divine faith is not to believe, but to give assent to a theological conclusion, as we have declared in the prooemial disputation to all Theology.

§. III. *Objections are resolved.*

YOU will object first: For something to be immediately of faith, it is necessary that it be immediately revealed by God. But it is not immediately revealed by God that Innocent XI is the true Pope: Therefore this is not immediately of faith. The major premise is established, but the minor is proved thus. Those things which are immediately revealed by God are contained either in Scripture or in tradition: But no place in Scripture, nor any divine tradition can be assigned, which makes mention of this proposition: *Innocent XI is the true Pope:* Therefore that is not immediately revealed by God.

I RESPOND, the Major being conceded, by denying the Minor, and to its proof I say that this truth was immediately revealed by God by that universal revelation, which on one part God revealed that the supreme power conferred upon Peter would pass to legitimate successors, and on the other that the universal Church would never err in matters of faith, since it is the pillar and foundation of truth: for in those universal propositions related by God, there is contained formally, and as a part in its whole, this: This particular Pontiff, whom the Church accepts as duly elected, is the true Pontiff.

In order that this may be more clearly declared, and that the objection which could be made against this solution may be resolved: It must be noted with Father Dominic of the Holy Trinity, cited above: that some things have been revealed by God in general, so that they might be believed in general, of which sort are these: that God can do all things which do not involve contradiction, and similar matters: for the faithful are not bound to believe these in particular, e.g. no one is bound to believe that God can produce this or that particular creature; but it suffices that one believe in common and generally that the power of God is infinite, and that it can extend to everything that is feasible. But other things God has revealed in general, so that they might be believed in species and in particular, of which sort are these: Any universal Council legitimately assembled, and representing the whole Church, is true, and obliges the

faithful to receive its definitions. Any Pontiff rightly elected, and accepted by the Church, is the true Pontiff, successor of Peter, and Vicar of Christ. For these general revelations oblige the faithful to individual assent concerning such a Council in particular received by the Church, e.g. Nicaea, or Trent; and to believing that this particular Pontiff rightly elected, and accepted by the Church, e.g. Innocent XI, is the true Pontiff; because the acceptance of the universal Church substitutes for the collection of all individual revelations, which it was not expedient for God to make: or as the aforesaid Author says, the voice of the Church is as it were a certain new speaking of God, or rather an explication and complement of the divine speaking, through which it is understood that God himself reveals this object in particular, namely that this particular Pontiff rightly elected, is the true Pontiff.

You will object secondly: In order that it be immediately a matter of faith that this particular man is the true Pope, it must be certain that he is capable of such dignity: But it is not certain that such a man is a subject capable of Pontifical dignity: Therefore it is not a matter of faith, at least not immediately, that he is the true Pope. The major premise is established, but the minor is proved thus. In order that one elected to the Supreme Pontificate be capable of this dignity, he must be validly baptized: But it is not certain with such certitude to which falsehood cannot underlie, that he was validly baptized, especially since there is no certitude concerning the intention of the minister who baptized him: Therefore it is not certain with such certitude to which falsehood cannot underlie, that such a man is a subject capable of Pontifical dignity.

This is confirmed: If someone who is not a Bishop is elected Pope, consequently upon his election he is consecrated as Bishop: but it is no more certain that he receives the Episcopal character in such consecration than other Bishops do: Therefore just as this is not certain with such certitude to which falsehood cannot underlie concerning other Bishops, so neither is it concerning him who is elected to the Supreme Pontificate and accepted by the Church.

I respond to the objection, distinguishing the Major premise: That it be certain by faith immediately that this particular man is the true Pope, it must be certain that he is capable of such dignity, with the certitude of faith, I deny: for this pertains only by way of prerequisite and disposition so that someone may be accepted as Supreme Pontiff by the Church. With the certitude of theological consequence, I make a subdistinction: Consequently to the very acceptance by the Church, it is granted. Antecedently to that, it is denied: for then this is certain only with moral certitude.

The solution is explained. Before anyone is accepted by the Church as Supreme Pontiff, it is established to the Church only with moral certainty that he is a subject capable of such dignity, that he is validly baptized, etc.; however, since this condition has a necessary connection with this proposition: *One accepted by the Church as Supreme Pontiff is the true Pope*, it follows that consequently to the Church's acceptance it is certain, with certainty not indeed of faith immediately, but of theological conclusion, that the one accepted is truly baptized and a subject capable of pontifical dignity: for those things which have necessary connection with a truth of faith are not indeed immediately of faith, as is evident regarding the risibility of Christ, necessarily connected with his humanity; but nevertheless they are correctly inferred from it by theological consequence. And through this the response to the confirmation is evident, for the consequence and parity are denied. The reason for the disparity is that since other bishops are not the supreme rule of faith, and consequently are not accepted by the Church as such, that they be validly consecrated is not something having necessary connection with a truth of faith, as it has

necessary connection with a truth of faith that one accepted by the Church as the supreme rule of faith is or was validly consecrated as bishop.

You will object thirdly: One who would deny that this particular Roman Pontiff is Peter's successor, provided he did not deny that a legitimately elected one is Peter's successor, would not be a heretic, but only a schismatic: Therefore it is not of faith that this particular Roman Pontiff, e.g. Innocent XI, is the true Pope and legitimate successor of Peter.

Some respond by denying the antecedent: Since indeed he who would deny that Innocent XI is the true Pontiff and legitimate successor of Peter would not only rend the unity of the Church by dividing it from its visible head, but would also deny that he whom the Church has accepted as such a rule should be held as a rule of faith, he would add to schism a dogma contrary to the faith, namely that the Church can err in matters pertaining to faith. Whence then would most especially take place what Saint Jerome teaches on chapter 3 to Titus, and after him Saint Thomas 2. 2. question 39. article 1. ad 3: *There is no schism which does not devise for itself some heresy, so that it may seem to have rightly withdrawn from the Church.* This solution is not without probability. Generally, however, others respond that he who would deny that this particular Roman Pontiff is the true Pope would not be held as a heretic, but only as a schismatic; because it is not established among all Catholics that this is a matter of faith, but many deny this, judging that it is established only with moral certitude.

You will object fourthly: If there were any reason why it would be true by divine faith, even immediately, that this man in particular is the true Pope, it would be especially the certainty which is necessary to the Church concerning that truth: But the certainty which is necessary to the Church concerning such truth does not require that it be immediately of faith: Therefore etc. The major premise is evident. The minor premise is proved thus: The certainty of the validity of the Sacraments in particular is no less necessary to the Church, for example, of this particular Baptism, of this particular Eucharist, than the certainty of this particular Pope; for the former appears equally necessary for salvation as the latter: But it is not of faith that this particular Baptism is valid, that this particular Eucharist or host is consecrated. Therefore the same must be said concerning this particular Pontiff.

This is confirmed: Just as it is necessary for the good government of the Church that there be a Supreme Pontiff, so it is necessary that there be other true Prelates, Bishops, and Archbishops: But for the good government of the Church it suffices that we have moral certainty concerning these in particular, which is according to human prudence: Therefore also concerning the Supreme Pontiff in particular.

I respond by denying the Minor [premise], for the proof of which I say first, that if there were given only a single host properly consecrated successively, which ought to be adored by the universal Church, just as there is given successively a single Pontiff legitimately elected, to whom as head [the Church] ought to be united; by the authority of the Church it would be established for us as a matter of faith, not only that under every host properly consecrated, but also that under this one in particular is contained the true body of Christ; just as by the same authority it is established for us, not only in general that every Pontiff properly elected is the true Pontiff, but also that this one existing numerically for the time being [is the true Pontiff], where once [the Church] has accepted him as legitimately and canonically elected.

I respond again by denying the parity contained in the Major [premise]: The reason for the disparity is this, because this particular Baptism, or this particular host, is not a rule of faith, as is this man in particular, whose election to the Supreme Pontificate is validly accepted and declared by the Church: hence it follows that there ought to be greater certitude of this proposition: *Innocent XI is the true Pope*, than of that one: *This particular host is truly consecrated*; indeed, that there ought to be the certitude of faith, otherwise it would be impossible to conceive that those things which are defined through such a rule should be certain with the certitude of faith. And through this the answer to the confirmation is evident, for other Prelates are not, as is the Supreme Pontiff, an infallible rule of our faith.

You say that this particular General Council, for example the Nicene, is an infallible rule of faith, inasmuch as all things pertaining to faith which are determined in it are immediately matters of faith, and yet the fact that it was a true Council does not pertain, at least immediately, to faith; because this depends upon historical accounts stating that this Council actually existed at some time and was legitimately assembled: which historical accounts, since they are purely human, cannot cause assent of divine faith, but only of human faith: Therefore similarly, although this particular Pontiff is an infallible rule of our faith, it does not follow that it is immediately a matter of faith that he is the true Pope.

I respond by denying the second part of the Antecedent, for in order that the truths defined in the Council of Nicaea may be immediately of faith, it is necessary that the faithful be certain with the certitude of faith concerning their revelation; and consequently also concerning their legitimate definition, since we are certain of the revelation of any truth only for this reason, that the Church, or the *general Council*, legitimately declares and determines that it is revealed: but it is altogether impossible that we should have the certitude of divine faith concerning the legitimate definition of any truth, unless we have the same certitude concerning the existence and authority of the Council by which it was determined. Therefore it is also immediately of faith that the Council of Nicaea was a true Council. To the proof to the contrary, I deny that the truth of the Council of Nicaea depends upon purely human histories, for it depends upon the successive and continuous tradition of the Church itself, which, although it is historical, is nevertheless not purely human; because the Church in such tradition is specially and infallibly directed by the Holy Spirit, just as in other matters pertaining to faith.

You will object finally: It is not of faith, at least not immediately, that the election of this particular Pope was valid: Therefore neither that he himself is the true Pope. The consequence is evident, for since he is not the true Pope unless he is legitimately elected, in order that it be immediately of faith that he is the true Pope, it must be immediately of faith that he was legitimately elected. But the antecedent is proved: It is not of faith, at least not immediately, that these particular electors of such a Pope are legitimate and true Cardinals, that they had valid intention of electing, that the juridical form of election was observed, consisting in this, that by two parts of the Cardinals, he who is called Pope was elected: these circumstances, I say, and others, without which the election is null, that they were observed, is not of faith; since this is not established to the Church from some special revelation, from Scripture, or divine tradition, but only from the testimony of the electors themselves promulgating the election.

I respond, having conceded the Antecedent, by denying the Consequent, for although one is not a true Pope unless he is legitimately elected, because nevertheless legitimate election is something prerequisite to that definition by which the Church declares this particular man to be the true

Pope, and faith does not concern those things which are prerequisite to definition, but only the definition itself: that proposition, *Innocent XI was duly elected Supreme Pontiff*, is not immediately of faith, but only this: *Innocent XI is the true Supreme Pontiff*. This is explained by analogy: just as in the definitions of the Supreme Pontiff, faith is not concerning those things which are prerequisite to such definitions, namely that there preceded diligent inquiry or disputation concerning the propositions defined, but only once the definition is made, it is correctly inferred by theological consequence that all the prerequisites for definition have been established, and therefore that disputation and diligent inquiry preceded it; but faith itself is only concerning the definitions themselves. Thus in the definition or declaration *of Innocent XI as Supreme Pontiff*, made by the Church, that which is immediately of faith is not something from among the prerequisites to it, such as that he was legitimately elected, but only the definition itself, or declaration, and that which is declared through it, namely that *Innocent XI is the true Pontiff*, although from this it is correctly inferred by theological discourse that the election of such a Pontiff was valid; and consequently this proposition, *Innocent XI was duly elected Supreme Pontiff*, is certain with theological certainty, under which no falsehood can lie.