

Assertiones Theologicae. De Fide (*Theological Assertions. On Faith*)

by Sforza Pallavicino, 1649

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CHAPTER VII.

On the Evidence of credibility, which our faith has, above all other sects: on the certainty that the scripture which we believe, is authentic, and that the councils, and Pontiffs, whose definitions guide us, were legitimate.

132. Indeed, this evidence of credibility is, for many reasons, most substantial and clearest in the Catholic faith, which reasons we shall only briefly indicate here. First, it is certain from natural moral sense, which all experience, and from the consensus of almost all peoples, and from other reasons indicated in the book *on human acts*, that there exists some supreme deity, benevolent toward rational creatures, to whom some of our works are pleasing, others displeasing, and therefore that deity is to be worshipped and loved. The frequent experience of calamity among the upright and prosperity among the wicked does not oppose this reasoning, as if contrary to providence: For this itself is the highest providence, that we might exercise virtue and merit another more solid happiness. For what virtue would there be in pursuing those things which, even in this life, always or almost always bring delight and prosperity? Indeed, if this were to happen, there would be no distinction between lovers of virtue and lovers of pleasure.

133. It is therefore certain that there exists some provident deity who is to be worshipped. Since there are various cults and religions directed toward this deity, of which religions one condemns others as impious and hateful to this deity, there cannot be among such mutually conflicting sects more than one that is true and acceptable to this deity; although it may happen that some people, on account of invincible ignorance, might follow other religions without offending the deity.

134. This being established, it seems unworthy of this deity to allow a false religion to have arguments in its favor that are without any comparison greater and weightier than any

other religion, and consequently than the one which is true. For what prudent and good being would do this? But our religion has in its favor numerous and most weighty arguments by which it excels all other religions. Therefore it alone is the true religion.

135. The final minor premise, which alone is denied by our adversaries, is proven through the following enumeration of arguments: first, no religion has had, or has, as many wise adherents as our own; and I call wise those who, setting aside the controversial matter (that is, the truth of religion), undoubtedly excel others in intellect, erudition, and learning by universal consensus. For sects distinct from Christianity can hardly name any wise person comparable to our Fathers, Theologians, and Philosophers, who has actually and sincerely followed them, as far as can be established from their life and writings. Indeed, it is evident from their books that Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and other ancient Philosophers were most averse to believing in the fabrications of the Gentiles.

136. Second, no religion has had so many followers endowed with exceptional and almost superhuman virtue. Third, no religion has had so many thousands upon thousands of every sex, age, and fortune who have not only bravely but eagerly shed their blood and given their lives in its defense. Fourth, no religion has had so many who have contemned all sensible and human goods solely from hope in what such religion promises. Fifth, no religion has had so many most fervent lovers of God, who have dedicated all their thoughts, affections, and cares to Him throughout their entire life, surpassing all love with which a mother has ever loved her son, or a husband his wife, or any person any object most dear to him.

137. Sixth, there is no religion in the explanation of which so many wise men have devoted their lives and studies with such fruitful results of admirable contemplations: indeed, no human science, however evident, can display to minds as much harmony and admirability as Christian Theology. Seventh, there is none whose truth is attested by so many wonders performed beyond all natural powers, and confirmed by innumerable and most weighty authorities of histories and witnesses: that all these testimonies should be false seems as incredible as if someone were to contend that Julius Caesar never existed, and that all traditions concerning his existence are lying.

138. Eighth, there is none whose precepts better accord with the light of reason divinely impressed upon us, as is evident if we compare the precepts of the Gospel with the Ethics of Aristotle, and with the precepts of other Philosophers which pertain to morals. Ninth, no propagation was so admirable and with more evident divine patronage: since without the violence of arms, without the allurements of the senses, a few men who were ignoble and weak, preaching contempt for all those things toward which human appetite is drawn; which men to follow was a crime punishable by infamous death, in a short time conquered the city that ruled the world, and the better part of the world. Now all these things, especially when joined together, render one of these three things certain: either the heavenly powers have no care for our affairs, or it pleases the heavenly powers that we be deceived in their worship; or this religion which we practice is true. Since the first two are impious and contrary to the light of reason, it remains that the third is evidently credible.

139. It is commonly objected that the infallibility of faith depends on a twofold foundation, both fallible, and therefore cannot provide evidence of credibility above all else. These two foundations are the authority of Scripture and that of the Roman Pontiff, or of a Council confirmed by the Pontiff. Yet in any codex of Scripture, there are typically many errors due to the failings of typographers or scribes; hence, in each passage we read, we have reasonable grounds for apprehension. Similarly, since there are factors—whether by divine law or positive law—that would render the election of a Roman Pontiff invalid, one can always fear whether this man is or was a legitimate Pontiff. But both objections can be resolved, for regarding the first, something is not made credible above all else merely because it is read in a single scriptural codex, but because it is read in many, and is commonly cited thus by Catholic authors. So much so that one could complain against God as a deceiver if, through His providence, He had not prevented falsehoods from being presented with such apparent and moral certainty that human reasoning could not distinguish His speech from what is not His speech. However, in matters where such appearance and moral certainty have not preceded, one cannot, by reading a single scriptural codex, perform a true act of faith, unless God supplies for the defect of external appearance through internal illumination.

140. As far as the second point is concerned, we state that it is certain by faith that the man whom the multitude of Catholics peacefully and unanimously venerates or has once venerated as the true Pontiff is indeed the true Pontiff. Otherwise, everything would be uncertain, and we would not have an infallible rule of faith. It therefore pertains to God's faithfulness not to permit someone to be elected and accepted by the entire Catholic Church if he has some hidden invalidating impediment, such as the lack of baptism; just as it pertains to God's providence not to allow any falsehood to creep into all copies of Scripture, nor to permit some magician, through demonic illusions, to present such convincing appearances in support of an error as the Catholic faith possesses through true miracles.

141. The impediments established by positive law that render a Papal election invalid arise from laws which never speak of, nor are understood to apply to, nor can have any place except in relation to that first election conducted by the Cardinals, through which it is not yet made certain by faith that the elected person is the true Pontiff. However, even if that election had been invalid due to some such hidden impediment, there would still follow another election that cannot be invalidated by any positive law—namely, the election made by the whole Church in accepting that man as the true Pontiff. For this acceptance, although motivated by a preceding error, is not conditional but absolute. It is indeed better for the Church to have as Pontiff someone who was invalidly elected than to unknowingly lack a true Pontiff and to venerate as such one who in reality is not.

142. Indeed, if it is expedient that ownership of things not remain uncertain, and therefore prescriptions have been introduced not only by civil law, but also some of very long duration by the law of nations and natural law, through which one who previously was not the owner becomes, as a consequence of error, the owner of things; it is much more expedient that the authority of the Divine Vicar not remain uncertain, and thus it is by divine

and natural law that whoever is accepted in good faith by the Church as such, becomes such even if previously he was not.

143. And this pertains to the principle that is presented in the *law of Barbarius in the Digest on the Office of Praetor*, in which it is declared that a slave unknowingly elected as Praetor and regarded as such not only performed valid acts but was a true Praetor, because the Roman People, who regarded him as such, had the power to dispense with the impediment and is presumed to have willed to do so. Furthermore, the aforementioned law should not be considered as an arbitrary constitution originating from the power of civil law (otherwise it would have addressed future rather than past cases, upon which that law makes its determination), but rather as a prudent and philosophical interpretation of natural law. For independently of any positive constitution, the Roman People is presumed to have had in the said case that intention which it was expedient for them to have. Thus, in our case, the power of providing itself with a legitimate Head, lest it remain headless, resides with the entire Church whenever the ordinary electors, whether culpably or inculpably, neither provide nor have concern for providing in the future; as happens when their election was invalid but is nevertheless held to be ratified. In this case, therefore, the Church is deemed to elect the one whom it accepts, notwithstanding any defects whatsoever he may have, because it is expedient.

144. And although a headless Church cannot dispense with the constitutions of a previous Pontiff; nevertheless, as we have said, no constitution that introduces an impediment extends, either by the intention or by the power of its author, to such a case; because it is of the essence of a valid law that it be for the good of the community. From this doctrine it follows that those first acts by which the faithful recognize a newly elected person as Pontiff are not, with respect to this matter, acts of divine faith, but rather of human and fallible faith and prudence; but from their collective agreement there subsequently arises in individuals an obligation of divine faith to believe that he is the true Pontiff. For if the faith of others were prerequisite to my faith in this matter, in the same way my faith would be prerequisite to the faith of others, and thus a circularity would be committed in the first foundation of credibility.

145. For the same reason, it is a matter of faith that a Council unanimously accepted by the Church was a true Council; nor should you say that it suffices for the infallibility of faith if we declare infallible in defining not only the Pope and a true Council, but also one merely presumed to be so. For although those authors who denied that it is a matter of faith that this particular man is the true Pope would be obliged to maintain this in order to somehow defend the visible and infallible rule of Catholic truth; yet from this very fact their opinion is implausible. For Christ promised only that the faith of the true Peter would not fail, not of one merely presumed to be Peter; and to the true Peter He gave the power of feeding the sheep, and upon the true Peter He built His Church, and to him alone He gave the keys of knowledge and power. Therefore, no one except the true successor of Peter possesses these rights by the promise of Christ.