

De Infallibilitate Romani Pontificis in Definiendis Fidei et Morum Controversiis (*On the Infallibility of the Roman Pontiff in Defining Faith and Moral Controversies*)

by Thyrso Gonzalez de Santall S.J., 1689

[Online Location of Text Here](#)

- OCR of the original text by AI (*claude-3-7-sonnet-20250219*).
- Translation of the original text performed by AI (*claude-3-7-sonnet-20250219*).
- Last Edit: March 29, 2025.
- Version: 1.0
- Selection pages: 123-127

Disp. I, Sect IX, Num. XII

An objection is resolved which contends that it is not absurd that the consent of the Church is required in order that the definition of the Pontiff may be absolutely infallible.

1. The objection is derived from a doctrine now quite common among Theologians, namely that it is a matter of faith that *this particular man*, for example, INNOCENT XI, who currently governs the Church, is the true Vicar of Christ and Successor of Peter. I extensively defended this doctrine in selected Disputations on Faith, which I dictated at Salamanca in the year 1684, and I will add that disputation to the end of this treatise as the crowning conclusion of this work on the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff in defining matters. For some Doctors, in order to defend this conclusion, require as a condition that this man must first be received by the common consensus of the whole Church as the true Pontiff. Among the first, if not the first of the Scholastic Theologians who taught this, was the Reverend Father Francisco Suárez, who in disputation 5 on faith, section 8, number 12, testifies that in his time it was a highly controversial question whether it is a matter of faith that *this Pontiff* is the true Pontiff; and he adds: *Many hold that it is not a matter of faith; but they will scarcely be able to maintain the certainty of faith in matters defined by the Pontiff, unless they consequently say that not only the true Pontiff, but not even one reputed by the Church can err in defining, which Bellarmine considers to be the case. Nevertheless, I myself, almost thirty years ago, that is, in the year 1584, taught in Rome that it is a matter of faith that this Pontiff is the true Pontiff, after he has been received by the sufficient consensus of the whole Church and so approved that all are bound to obey him, even in definitions of faith; because this obligation necessarily presupposes that certain faith, and that particular truth is sufficiently contained in the universal dogma that the Successor of*

Peter is the true Pontiff, and then it is sufficiently applied and proposed to the faithful. Which opinion afterward our own have committed either to public disputations or even some to print. Thus far Father Suárez, who later in disputation 10, section 5, number 2, after relating the opinions of other Theologians, adds: *it is a matter of faith that this man, who by the common consensus of the Church is accepted as the head of the Church, whom the Church itself is bound to obey, is the true Pontiff of the Church and Successor of Peter.*

2. Hence it seems a valid argument can be made to prove that, without absurdity, it may be said that the consent of the Church is required for a definition of the Pontiff to be absolutely infallible and to make a matter certainly of faith, just as the peaceful acceptance of this particular man elected as Pope is required for it to be certain as a matter of faith that he is the true Vicar of Christ and legitimate Successor of Peter; and it does not suffice that he was in fact legitimately elected.

3. I respond, however, that the reasoning is different. For the peaceful acceptance of this man as Pope is not necessary for this particular man to be the true Pope, but it is a necessary application so that it may be certainly established for all that his election was legitimate. If, independently of peaceful acceptance, it were sufficiently and certainly established for all that his election was properly and canonically conducted, then all would be bound to believe, independently of peaceful acceptance, that this particular man is the true Pope.

For as Fr. Suárez explains in that disputation 10, section 5, number 6, when Christ revealed that Peter was the head of the Church, He equally revealed this generally about all his Successors, and only, says Suárez, a sufficient proposition is lacking regarding this or that person contained under that revelation: but such a proposition is obtained through the universal testimony and approval of the Church. This is clearly explained and confirmed by a similar case: for God never seems to have revealed that the Bishop of Rome, rather than the Bishop of Alexandria, is the Supreme Pontiff, because God never explicitly stated this, but only said it in an indistinct manner when He revealed to Peter his dignity and succession, because such a revelation manifests itself and falls upon those Bishops, or upon their Episcopate, in which one succeeds Peter, after that succession has been sufficiently proposed to the Church through tradition or universal consensus. When, however, it should be understood that a sufficient proposition is given so that it obligates all, it seems to some that this occurs when one who is rightly and truly elected, and therefore the true Pontiff, is proposed: and this indeed is sufficient that we are bound by the precept of obedience and charity to obey such a Pontiff, and that no one can rightfully separate from him without schism; nevertheless, speaking, as we are in fact speaking, of assent through faith, perhaps the proposition will not be sufficient until it is morally certain that he has been accepted by the whole Church and peacefully possesses his primacy, and thus can obligate all the faithful to believe whatever he has defined: for then it must be most certainly believed that an error cannot

occur in the universal Church in a matter so grave as would be a deception in the living rule of faith itself that must be believed, for such an error would be equivalent to an error in faith. For if the rule could be false, so also could that which is ruled; and if it would be an intolerable error in the Church when the whole Church believed some book to be canonical which truly was not, since that is a certain inanimate rule of faith, much more intolerable would it be to err regarding the living rule; indeed, if concerning this an error could ever exist in the universal Church, it would never be true that it has a certain and infallible living rule of faith speaking to it in the name of Christ.

4. Therefore, this distinguished Doctor asserts, not firmly but doubtfully and with hesitation (as indicated by the particle *fortasse* [perhaps]), that the peaceful acceptance of a Pontiff is necessary in order for it to be a matter of faith that this particular man is the legitimate Successor of Peter and the true Vicar of Christ, and for all to be bound by divine faith to believe what is determined and defined by him in matters of faith and morals. This is because such acceptance seems necessary to establish authentically the legitimacy of the election; for as long as he has not been peacefully accepted, the legitimacy of the election does not seem to be sufficiently established. Indeed, as long as some part of the world, or some Catholic Kings refuse to acknowledge him as the legitimate Pontiff, there remains some reason to doubt whether his election was legitimate and Canonical. For such an enormous sin cannot be presumed of Catholic Princes—namely, that they would refuse to accept as legitimate Pontiff that man who is clearly rightly and legitimately elected. Therefore, if independently of acceptance it were morally completely certain that the election was rightly and legitimately conducted, there would be an obligation to believe him to be the true Pontiff independently of acceptance. For in the Council of Constance, in the Bull of Martin V, it is stipulated *that from heretics who wish to be reconciled to the Catholic Church, it should first of all be demanded whether they believe that the canonically elected Pope, whoever he may be at the time (with his name expressly stated), is the Successor of Peter and has supreme authority in the Church of God.* This is therefore, as the Council with the Pontiff, or the Pontiff with the Council supposes, to be believed as a matter of faith, as Father Suarez correctly notes *in disputation 10, section 5, number 2*, “*Whatever is proposed or to be believed by Pontiffs for the certainty of faith,*” as he says. Therefore, anyone who knows with certainty that this man, for example INNOCENT XI, was canonically elected, is bound to believe that he is the Successor of Peter and has supreme authority in the Church of God.

5. Therefore, if anyone, prior to the peaceful acceptance by nations and kingdoms, is morally certain that this man has been canonically elected as Pope, he is bound to believe that he is the Successor of Peter and possesses supreme authority in the Church of God. Thus, the Most Eminent Cardinals who conduct the election, when they are certain that such a man has been canonically elected, are bound to believe he is the Successor of Peter, without needing to wait to see whether he is peacefully received or not: for God has not bound the validity of the election to the acceptance by Kings and Nations. The reason is that, by the very fact that a universal proposition is revealed, one can believe by divine faith an individual contained under that proposition, precisely because one is certain that

individual is contained under that universal. Thus a Christian who believes by divine faith this universal proposition, *Every infant rightly baptized is in a state of grace*, can believe by divine faith that an infant whom he himself has baptized is in a state of grace, provided he can be certain that he has applied the true matter of baptism under the form instituted by Christ, and with the intention of administering true Baptism. Therefore, since this universal proposition is revealed, *Every man rightly elected as Supreme Pontiff is the Successor of Peter and the true Vicar of Christ*: whoever is certain that INNOCENT XI was rightly elected, is certain that INNOCENT is formally contained under that universal proposition, and consequently can and must believe that INNOCENT is the Successor of Peter and the true Vicar of Christ.

6. However, since those who were not present at the election cannot have this certainty, except insofar as they know that the Pontiff has been peacefully venerated and accepted, therefore Fr. Suarez says that perhaps this acceptance is required for it to be a matter of faith that this particular man is the Pontiff—that is, for it to be a matter of faith such that all are bound to believe it. And thus, that peaceful acceptance is required by way of application, by the force of which it becomes sufficiently known to the whole Church that this specific man has been rightly elected. However, this acceptance, which is required by way of application, is not an acceptance that must be sought from the community of all the faithful, or from individual faithful, nor from the community of all Bishops, or from individual Bishops. For it would be most absurd to say that no one can believe that this particular man is the true Pontiff unless one is certain that his election has been accepted by each individual among the faithful, or at least by each individual Bishop. Rather, for those who are in Rome, it is sufficient that they see the elected Pope peacefully venerated by the College of Cardinals, which represents the Church in the matter of electing the Pontiff and makes the election in the name of the Church; and that they see no objection raised that could engender doubt about the validity of the election. For those, however, who are outside Rome, or outside Italy, it is sufficient that certain knowledge of the election and peaceful veneration made in the person of this particular man reaches them, and that they know no reason is adduced which could cause prudent doubt about the legitimacy of the election.

7. From this, however, it cannot be argued that the consent of the Church is similarly necessary for a definition of the Pontiff to be infallible; because independently of the Church's consent, we know with certainty that the Roman Pontiff is the Vicar of Christ, and as such has determined a controversy of faith and morals; and moreover, we know with certainty from the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the Councils that a definition proceeding from him is an infallible rule of faith. Therefore, that consent of the Church is neither necessary for infallibility to exist in the definition, nor for us to be certified that the Pope has defined something. This is just as the peaceful acceptance of a particular man as Pope is commonly considered necessary for the Christian world to be certified that his election was legitimately conducted, although this acceptance in no way enters into constituting the validity of the election itself.