

Summa S. Thomae Hodiernis Academiarum Moribus Accommodata, sive Cursus Theologiae Juxta mentem D. Thomae II-IIae (*Summary of St. Thomas Adapted to the Customs of Modern Academies, or Course of Theology According to the Mind of St. Thomas Secunda Secundae (II-IIae)*)

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Tractatus De Regulis Fidei, Diss. 4, Art. 9

Whether it is a matter of faith that Benedict XIV is the Supreme Pontiff.

This question arose and became notable at the beginning of the previous century, when certain individuals in Spain, anticipating that the judgment of Clement VIII would be contrary to their opinions, which were then being examined in Rome, sought to prepare a way to evade it. They proposed and defended in public theses that it was not a matter of faith that Clement VIII was Peter's Successor. The Supreme Pontiff ordered the authors of these theses to be imprisoned, and subsequently the contrary position began to be defended in public theses in Rome. There is no one among Catholics who does not hold with certainty that Benedict XIV, or whoever is currently occupying the See, is the Supreme Pontiff; but they hold this with different degrees of certainty. Some maintain it with moral certainty only, others with theological certainty; still others, and more commonly—to which position we subscribe—with the certainty of faith.

For the understanding of this last opinion, we must recall what we wrote in the Dissertation on the Church, article 7, §3, in the second response to Objection 1. That is said to be of faith which is revealed. Now, truth is revealed by God in two ways: 1. immediately in itself, such as: *God is one and triune; Christ is human*. 2. mediately in another; and this occurs in two ways: either as an effect in a cause, or as a property in an essence, such as: *Christ has*

the capacity to laugh, which is revealed in this: *Christ is human*, as a property in an essence, or as an effect in a cause. Or as a part in its whole, such as: *Peter is mortal*, in this: *all men are mortal*; or, *David sinned in Adam*, in this: *all have sinned in Adam*; or likewise: *Christ died for me*, in this: *Christ died for all*. Those things which are revealed mediately as an effect in a cause, or as a property in an essence, are not objects of faith, but only of theological reasoning, because an effect is not contained formally in its cause, but only virtually. However, those things which are revealed as parts in a whole are objects of faith, because parts are not only virtually in the whole, but formally, and the truth of a universal proposition is constituted per se from the truth of particular propositions, which are formally contained in it; for a universal proposition is true only insofar as the particular propositions it contains are true. For example, it is true that all men are mortal because it is true that this man and that man are mortal. Hence, by the very fact that a universal proposition is revealed, all particular propositions that pertain to the same light of faith, or are apprehended by the same habit of faith, are also revealed. These things having been noted...

I say: It seems more probable to be a matter of faith that Benedict XIV is the Supreme Pontiff. This is proved, firstly, from the premises: this universal proposition: *Every man accepted by the universal Church as Peter's successor is the Supreme Pontiff* is a matter of faith. But this particular proposition: *This man Benedict XIV, accepted by the universal Church as Peter's successor, is the Supreme Pontiff*, is contained in the former universal proposition as a part in the whole. Therefore, it is also a matter of faith. The major premise is denied by no Catholic; for it is revealed, and a matter of faith, that Christ instituted the Church to endure until the consummation of the world, and likewise it is revealed, and a matter of faith, that the successor of Peter, whom Christ instituted as the foundation, head, and supreme Pastor, enjoys the same privileges. The minor premise is evident; for the particular instances of this universal proposition: *Every man accepted by the universal Church as Peter's successor is the Supreme Pontiff*, include: *and this man accepted by the Church as Peter's successor is the Pontiff*. The conclusion finally follows from the premises; because, as has been said, particulars formally contained in a universal proposition of faith are also matters of faith. This is confirmed: this proposition *This Council of Trent is accepted by the Church as Ecumenical* is a Rule of faith; it is a matter of faith; because it is contained as a part in the whole in this universal proposition of faith: *Every Council accepted by the Church as Ecumenical is a rule of faith*. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, the same applies to the Pontiff.

You will say: This particular proposition: *"This man Benedict XIV, accepted by the Church as the successor of Peter, is the Supreme Pontiff,"* is not contained in this universal proposition: *"Every man accepted by the universal Church as the successor of Peter is the Supreme Pontiff,"* unless one presupposes that Benedict XIV was rightly elected. However, it is neither revealed nor a matter of faith that he was rightly elected, but this is known only from human testimony. The comparison is similar: it is a matter of faith that every properly consecrated host should be adored; yet it is not a matter of faith that this particular host should be adored, because it is not a matter of faith that it has been consecrated. I respond by denying the major premise. For this supposition has no place in our case,

neither for the universal proposition nor for the particular one; because since the Church is infallible in accepting the rule of faith, as I will soon explain, whether the Pontiff was properly made or not properly elected, by the very fact that the Church accepts him, he is the true Pontiff and the rule of faith, and the Church's acceptance supplies for any defect that might have crept into the election. And if indeed the Canons seem to say the opposite, they are to be understood as referring to an election prior to the Church's acceptance. Hence the disparity regarding the host: for the Church does not declare this host to be consecrated, and therefore contained under the universal proposition; just as it declares in actual practice that Benedict XIV is accepted by the Church as the Successor of Peter and therefore contained under the universal proposition. Moreover, since the consecration of this host is a particular matter not pertaining to the universal governance of the Church, the Church would not be infallible in declaring this, nor could its declaration supply for a defect in consecration. However, for a particular proposition contained in a universal proposition of faith to be a matter of faith for us, it must be certainly established for us that it is contained in the universal proposition of faith.

You may object: At least it is not established that this man Benedict XIV is the Successor of Peter and Pontiff, except through human reasoning: *Every man accepted by the Church as the Successor of Peter is the Supreme Pontiff. But Benedict XIV has been accepted by the Church as the Successor of Peter. Therefore, he is the Supreme Pontiff.* However, assent or knowledge of truth that relies on human reasoning is not of faith. Therefore, etc. I respond: The minor premise of this syllogism is not of faith. Therefore, neither is the Conclusion; because according to the Dialecticians, the conclusion follows the weaker part. I distinguish the minor premise: assent to truth which relies on human reasoning as the moving cause for assenting is not of faith, I concede. That which relies on human reasoning as the cause applying the motive for assenting, or the revelation itself, is not of faith, I deny. Therefore, it is not incompatible with knowledge or assent of faith that it presupposes some reasoning, not as the motive for which assent is given, but through which universal revelation is applied to this particular subject, as is evident in this proposition: "David sinned in Adam," which, although it is of faith, is believed through this reasoning: All descendants of Adam sinned in him; But David is among the descendants of Adam; Therefore, he sinned in Adam. This reasoning is not the cause or motive for which I believe David sinned in Adam, but is merely the application of this universal revelation—"All have sinned in Adam"—to this particular subject, namely David: and that revelation is the motive why I believe David sinned. So it is in our case. To that which is added concerning the Rule of Dialectic, I respond: this Rule does not apply in purely applicative reasoning; because the universal proposition placed in the Major is not the cause of the particular proposition placed in the conclusion; since, as has been said, the universal proposition is nothing other than all the particular ones; the natural minor premise—"David is among the descendants of Adam"—is merely an explanation of the universal major and its application to this determined subject. Hence, if the universal proposition is of faith, notwithstanding the natural Minor, the particular conclusion contained in the Major as a part in the whole will also be of faith.

Proof 2. Conclusion. It is a matter of faith that the Church cannot err in accepting the Rule of faith. But in accepting this man as Supreme Pontiff, she accepts him as the Rule of faith. Therefore, it is a matter of faith that this man, whom she accepts as Pontiff, is the true Pontiff. The minor premise is certain. The major premise is proven thus: If the Church could err in accepting the Rule of faith, she could err in accepting the definitions emanating from this uncertain Rule; just as if she could err in declaring a book to be Canonical, or in accepting an Ecumenical Council, she could err in adhering to the contents of that book or to the matters defined by that council, and thus the Gates of hell could prevail against her. Therefore, etc. Confirmation: It is a matter of faith that the Church in which we are is the true and Catholic Church. But it is not a true and Catholic Church that is not united to its legitimate head. Therefore, by the very fact that the Church accepts this man as Pontiff and head to whom she is united, it is a matter of faith that he is the Pontiff and head of the Church. Nor should you say that the Church can exist without a head; for there is a ready remedy in the Election of a new head. But if she has a fictitious head, which she is unaware of, no remedy remains; for she cannot provide herself with another, and she is bound to obey the fictitious one when he commands and defines.

Besides the objections already resolved, an Objection is raised: It is not revealed in Scripture, nor in Tradition, that Benedict XIV is the Supreme Pontiff. Therefore [he is not the legitimate Pope]. Response: I distinguish the antecedent. It is not revealed immediately in itself, I concede; Mediatly in its totality, I deny. The solution is evident from the proof of the Conclusion. The same argument applies by parity to the Council of Trent.

Objection 1. It is neither revealed nor a matter of faith that Benedict XIV is baptized and male; therefore, it is not a matter of faith that he is the Supreme Pontiff. The consequence is proven thus: Benedict XIV cannot be the Supreme Pontiff unless he is baptized and male. Therefore, if it is not revealed that he is baptized and male, it is not revealed that he is the Pontiff. Response: I deny the consequence. To the proof, I deny the consequence. From the fact that something is revealed, it does not follow that everything necessarily connected with what is revealed must also be revealed; rather, theological discourse consists precisely in addressing those things which are necessarily connected with revealed matters. For example, that Christ is man is revealed, and since risibility is necessarily connected with being human, it is inferred that Christ is capable of laughter with theological certainty, but not with the certainty of faith. Now there is a special revelation only regarding the person accepted as Pontiff, not regarding the conditions required for this office, but these are inferred from revelation with theological consequence and certainty. Thus, whereas before Benedict XIV's acceptance as Pontiff, it was only morally certain that he was baptized, now after his acceptance, it is certain with theological certainty. Similarly: A definition promulgated by a Council that the Church accepts as ecumenical is revealed and pertains to faith; for this, it is necessarily presupposed that the matter defined was previously discussed with diligent and mature examination, and that the judges seated were true Bishops. Neither of these, however, is revealed nor a matter of faith; but because it is a matter of faith that the Church cannot err in accepting an Ecumenical Council, and that its definition cannot be false, it is inferred as certain with theological certainty that all necessities were present, that sufficient

discussion was conducted, and that the judges seated, at least in a competent number, were true Bishops.

Objection 2. One who would deny that Benedict XIV is Pontiff would not be a heretic: therefore it is not a matter of faith. Response: I distinguish the consequent. It is not certainly a matter of faith, I concede. It is not more probably a matter of faith, I deny. Or as others say: it is a matter of faith, but it is not a matter of faith that it is a matter of faith, and thus it is not a matter of Catholic faith that obliges, which nonetheless is required for someone to be a heretic by denying it. For heresy consists in pertinacity in denying that which is certainly a matter of faith in the Church, which pertains to the faith.

Objection 3: What is once a matter of faith is always a matter of faith. But within a hundred years, it will not be a matter of faith that Benedict XIV was the Supreme Pontiff, just as it is not certain now that deceased Pontiffs were Supreme Pontiffs. Therefore, it is not now a matter of faith that Benedict XIV is the Pontiff. Response: I distinguish the major premise. What is once a matter of faith is always a matter of faith in itself: I concede. With respect to us: I deny. For many things during the time of Christ were matters of faith with respect to us that are not so now. The reason is that nothing is a matter of faith with respect to us unless it is proposed by the Church as pertaining to faith. Although the Church now proposes Benedict XIV as the Supreme Pontiff and head of the Church as pertaining to faith, it does not follow that within a hundred years it will propose as pertaining to faith that he was the Supreme Pontiff, just as now it does not propose other deceased Pontiffs [as matters of faith], because that is not necessary for the common governance of the Church. For how does it contribute to the present governance and common good of the Church to know how many and which Pontiffs there were in the past? We know this only from human testimony, which can be subject to falsehood. Some except the case in which the Church would propose for belief some dogma defined by such a deceased Pontiff; for it seems that by this very fact it would propose that he had been a Pontiff and a Rule of faith, without which the dogma defined by him would not be believed by divine faith.

Institution 4. It will always be true that the Church has proposed Benedict XIV as Pontiff: therefore, if from the present proposition it is now a matter of faith for us that he is Pontiff, it will always be a matter of faith that he was the Supreme Pontiff. Response. I distinguish the antecedent. It will always be true that the Church has proposed Benedict XIV as Pontiff, and this will always be established from the principles of faith which are Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's determination or proposition. I deny the antecedent. And it will not always be established in this way, I concede the antecedent and deny the consequence. Because, as we have said, for something to be a matter of faith for us, it must be established for us from the Church determining and proposing it as revealed in Scripture or Tradition.

As for what might be objected concerning the fable of the Popess, it has been extensively explained and resolved in the Treatise on Order, Digression 2 to Dissertation 3.