

Lamindi Pritanii de Ingeniorum Moderatione in Religionis Negotio (*On the Moderation of Reason in Religious Matters*)

by Ludovico Antonio Muratori (Pseudonym “Lamindi Pritanii”) (Louis Anthony Muratori), 1714

[Online Location of Text Here](#)

- OCR of the original text by AI (claude-sonnet-4-5-20250929).
- Translation of the original text performed by AI (claude-sonnet-4-5-20250929).
- Last Edit: November 17, 2025.
- Version: 1.0
- Selection pages: 134-142

Caput Decimum Octavum

Whether it is to be referred to Faith immediately, or rather mediately, to believe that this or that person is the Roman Pontiff. Even if you posit that this, and other Facts of this kind, are not to be believed by supernatural Faith, nevertheless this faith is owed to the decrees of Councils, and of the Apostolic See in matters of Faith and morals received by the Church. Natural and Moral Evidence in these cases suffices, and compels us to believe and to obey: How rash, and worthy of punishment, to call into doubt its established positions.

For not a few years now, a certain Question has exercised the minds of more recent Theologians, namely whether this proposition pertains to Faith: *This or that person is the true Roman Pontiff*. Concerning this matter there is profound silence among the Fathers and the more ancient Theologians. There are those who judge that it should be believed by assent of divine Faith immediately, and there are also those who hold that it should be believed only mediately. Neither opinion has the Church or the Apostolic See thus far confirmed by its approval. Wherefore it will be permissible for us to treat a question still uncertain, which however we shall accomplish with that reverence of mind which is owed to such arduous and delicate matters, such that we submit not only this but all our writings to the Apostolic See in humble obedience, prepared to defend no other opinion than that which shall please it, and therefore we have dared to treat this argument in a somewhat freer style, because Rome has not yet here disclosed its mind; and otherwise we know it to be the mind of the Supreme Pontiffs that in all things Truth may prevail.

We say therefore that it seems to many of the more recent authorities to pertain immediately to the Faith this proposition: *This or that man (for example, Clement XI) is the true Roman Pontiff*. And this principal reason is customarily adduced: namely, that a particular proposition is contained in a universal one; and since God has revealed the universal, the particular has also been revealed by God. For just as Faith teaches us that all have sinned in Adam, and in this

proposition it was also revealed, for example, that Solomon sinned in Adam; so also in that universal proposition revealed to the whole Church, *Every man rightly elected by the Church as Successor of Peter is the true Roman Pontiff*, it must be held that this particular proposition is also revealed: *This or that man is the true Roman Pontiff*. In which matter everyone sees how great a concern it is to all that some new revelation of God be excluded from this; for indeed, any Catholic who has well considered the matter recognizes the intolerable inconveniences that would follow if it were believed that anything could ever be added to the ancient deposit of Doctrine which God did not reveal before the Books of both Testaments were closed by the death of the Apostles.

Yet certain considerations may prevent us from assenting to this opinion. For in the first place, it ought to be established more clearly that it pertains to the Faith—that is, that it has been revealed by God—the complete universal proposition: *Every man duly elected by the Church as the Successor of Peter is the true Roman Pontiff*. Such a statement as is read here certainly cannot be beyond controversy. For when indeed has it ever been revealed, either in the Sacred Scriptures or through Tradition, that the Successors of Peter are elected by the Church, or ought to be elected by her? Rather, the Electors, and most of the rites of this election, have been established by the Roman Pontiffs themselves according to their own prudence and judgment, and according to the opportuneness of the times, exercising their own right and their own authority. When these rites are not observed, and certain conditions prescribed by positive law are found wanting, the election sometimes becomes null and void.

Secondly, it ought to be more evidently established how in that universal proposition, which God is said to have revealed, *Every man rightly elected as Peter's successor is the true Roman Pontiff*, there can also be said to be revealed that particular proposition, *This man or that man is the true Roman Pontiff*. For since this conclusion cannot be most firmly deduced except from another proposition as well, by which a complete syllogism is formed, namely if it be said: *But this man or that man was rightly elected*; which proposition no one says pertains to the Faith: how will that which follows from it pertain to the Faith? Certainly it was not revealed that this man or that man was first regenerated by holy Baptism, rightly initiated into the sacred Orders, and elected without force, without simony, without iniquitous conspiracy of the electors.

Thirdly, it would have to be shown more clearly how no new revelation of Dogmas is admitted, if that proposition is to be believed as revealed by God: *This man or that man is the true Pontiff*. For indeed only a twofold Revelation can be conceived; one, which concerns eternal truths, and the deeds of God and of men already consummated, before the Apostles departed; the other concerning certain deeds to be consummated in the Church of God, which without doubt could be foretold by the Holy Spirit. Let that assertion not be referred in any way to the former species of Revelation. If to the latter, it is necessary that the Holy Spirit should have foretold, and revealed, that this man rather than another is to be elected by the sacred Electors, rightly, and without error, without any defect; and then from Revelation it will be established that this man, and no other, is the true Roman Pontiff. But since it is established that the Holy Spirit neither revealed formerly by prophecy, nor now discloses by particular revelation, that this man rather than another has been elected, or is to be elected, as the successor of Peter: therefore neither does that enunciation (*This man is the true Roman Pontiff*) appear to be immediately revealed, nor as certain to be immediately believed through the assent of divine Faith. Moreover, if that assertion immediately pertains to Faith for this reason, that it was revealed in a universal assertion: the number of those things which hereafter will have to be believed as immediately pertaining to

Faith will go to infinity. For why should it not also be said to be revealed that this or that holy man inscribed in the Canon of the Blessed truly reigns in heaven? why not also that the Archbishop of Paris is a true Bishop? why not also that individual Hosts proposed for the adoration of peoples contain the true *Body* of Christ? why not also that this or that King legitimately elected is to be obeyed by subject peoples? And innumerable other things. Certainly assertions of this kind rest upon some universal assertion which God has revealed, and upon a morally evident fact, as anyone may understand without difficulty. Certainly many of these things also must be believed by the peoples, lest they deny due duties, and lest they sin gravely. Nevertheless, who would pronounce that these and other things of this kind are to be immediately believed by Faith, although to the universal assertion upon which they rest a supranatural assent must be immediately joined? Since, therefore, these things necessarily follow and depend upon a fact, the truth of which we are by no means taught from heaven, they themselves do not seem to be regarded as so certain as the Evangelical Dogmas will be certain to us.

Moreover, the infamous deed of Stephen VI, Roman Pontiff, is well known: he expunged Formosus, legitimate Prelate of the Roman Church and accepted by the universal Church, from the catalogue of Roman Bishops (after subjecting his corpse to ignominy and scourging); and he further commanded that those who had been initiated into Sacred Orders by him be initiated anew: and all these things he confirmed by the solemn votes of a Roman Synod. Yet there is no one who does not read here that the proposition summoned forth and pronounced by Stephen—*Formosus is, or was, a true Roman Pontiff*—was mistaken and empty. Therefore, either Stephen fell away from the Faith and proposed heresy from the Chair, or that statement did not pertain immediately to the Faith. No one who loves truth and is zealous for the dignity of the Pontificate would say the former; for indeed Stephen defiled the See of Peter with nefarious and unheard-of sacrilege, but he erred in a question of *Fact*, not of *Law*, and by bad example, not by false doctrine, as the great Cardinal Bellarmine says. It remains, therefore, that this utterance be excluded from the Dogmas of the Faith, and must also be excluded in the future. However one may interpret the example of Stephen, this much is certain: by other Roman Pontiffs and by the Church itself, no one has hitherto been condemned as a heretic for this sole reason—that he was unwilling to believe, or dared to deny, that some particular man elected as Successor of Peter was the true Roman Pontiff. This may be seen in the history of so many Schisms by which the Church and the Roman Chair were afflicted. But what, I ask, could have been the reason why no one ever determined that a crime or error of this kind pertained to the Faith, and why no one was ever for this reason alone numbered among heretics—even though that controversy stirred up so many disturbances of mind and was so often debated in the speech and judgments both of the universal Church and of the Roman Pontiffs; and when he who denies that someone was rightly elected as Successor of Peter also denies that he is the true Roman Pontiff? No other reason, surely, seems to have existed than that this question was believed to pertain to Fact, not to Dogma, and could not be referred immediately to the Faith.

If you should say that [the pope] refrained from this censure solely because, though rightly elected, he had not yet been received as such by the universal Church: you could not easily persuade us of this, we who know that so many others have been seized by curses, so many condemned with penalties by canonically elected Supreme Pontiffs for denying or attacking the legitimacy of their election. But that I may spare other arguments and examples in this matter, the sentence of Pope Paul IV seems sufficient. *If at any time whatsoever it shall appear* (he

decrees in Bull XIX in the Roman Bullarium, and these opening words are to be carefully noted) *that anyone before his assumption to the Roman Pontificate deviated from the Catholic Faith, or fell into any heresy, etc., the promotion or assumption concerning him, even if made in concord and with the unanimous consent of all the Cardinals, shall be null, void, and empty, nor can it be said to have become valid, or be able to become valid, through the enthronement of that Roman Pontiff himself, or his adoration, or the obedience rendered to him by all, or the passage of any amount of time in the aforesaid matters.* Therefore it can happen that someone may at some point appear not to be the true Pontiff, although he has occupied Peter's See and has had everyone obedient to him, when he is discovered to have been formerly addicted to heresy. Therefore a supernatural assent of Faith cannot be required by which someone is to be believed to be the true Roman Pontiff, even if he has been received by the universal Church, since Pope Paul IV himself in no way judges that the Church herself is immune from all error in this matter. And the earlier theologians held this same opinion, although they treated it only in passing. Let us proceed.

But which decrees of the Roman Pontiffs pertaining to Dogma will be certain matters to be believed through Faith? How will it be unlawful to despise their pronouncements and to call their election into doubt at one's pleasure, how will six hundred other inconveniences be able to be avoided, if we are never commanded to believe some certain man to be the true Successor of Peter? And these things, I confess, were the reason why, in the immediately preceding century, certain Scholastic Theologians began to demand an immediate assent of divine Faith in this question, having repudiated the opinion of less recent authorities. Unless it were believed thus, the Church itself and Catholic doctrine seemed to them to waver, which nevertheless the more ancient authorities did not fear. Yet perhaps timid minds ought to have feared nothing for themselves and for the Church on this account, nor should rash minds flatter themselves on this account. For although these matters are not to be referred immediately to Faith, nevertheless we say that they are to be believed as true and certain, and the strength of Dogmas and decrees can stand nonetheless, nor is it permitted to dare anything against legitimate Pontiffs.

In order that this may be clear, we establish first as evident that God once revealed, besides certain particular Facts and Dogmas, also certain universal Rules and Judgments by which the Church and individual men would be governed in the future, both so that they might believe what ought to be believed, and so that they might do what ought to be done and avoid what ought not to be done. Moreover, those universal Rules and Judgments revealed by God, in order that they may be of use, must be applied to certain particular Facts not revealed, and this is done either by the Roman Pontiffs, or by Councils, or by individual men. We know that the application must be made when Evidence, either natural or moral, moves us; and such Evidence is a sufficient cause for us rightly to do or believe something—indeed, it often compels us so to believe or to act that those who do otherwise are to be punished not only with temporal penalties, but also with eternal ones. Faith teaches and commands that legitimate parents and Kings are to be honored; but at the same time it does not teach that this or that man is our certain parent and legitimate King. Nevertheless, because from moral evidence we know who these parents and Kings are, we are compelled to apply the universal decree of Faith to this particular fact, and to honor this or that man. For those who do not honor them, a just punishment awaits both on earth and after death. Therefore, this proposition cannot immediately pertain to Faith: *This or that man is to be honored by me as a father, as a King.* But is it therefore permissible to refuse obedience to them? Away with the thought! Moral evidence makes me so certain of this particular fact that

I cannot withdraw the reverence owed to him without grave fault and dishonor, even though divine revelation concerning such a Fact may be lacking.

Thus both to our Bishops, and especially to the Successors of Peter, obedience must be rendered by the Christian flock according to divine commands; and belief must be given to them, and most especially when they are assembled in some legitimate Universal Council, or when the Roman Pontiff is determining some Dogma. Divine Faith's assent must be accommodated to this Dogma, as the ordinances of the most holy Law command. For even if it has not been revealed to me by God that this man or that has been legitimately elected and is the true Pastor, or that all those assembled in this or that Council are true Pastors: nevertheless, given the preceding moral Evidence, and given that the Church herself and the multitude of the faithful produce faith in us concerning this Evidence by their own assent, I cannot deny that these are the legitimate Pastors of the Catholic Church, and that they propose to me something to be believed in the doctrine of Religion. God did not will to predict so many particular facts, or to disclose them repeatedly through His revelation. He left to our reason and conscience the use of universals revealed by Him, which, when Evidence requires, we would apply to particular facts. Therefore these facts become sufficiently known and certain to our conscience through Evidence, so that there is no excuse for sin if on that account we refuse to obey and believe our Pastors. Otherwise, if we think divine revelation necessary everywhere; and when it is lacking, it is permissible to deny faith to saving doctrine, obedience to precepts, submission to Superiors: then not only the Church, but the commonwealths of the entire world will be overthrown; indeed, we shall be compelled to believe nothing, and we shall be worse than the Academics and Sceptics. For there is nothing which does not in some measure depend upon some fact that has not been revealed, and which is not connected to it: and this can be observed even in the economy of the Catholic Religion. But on that account men are not excused from believing and acting.

For example, neither revelation nor the Church makes us certain that so many editions of the Sacred Scriptures produced in print by individual Bishops, or by orthodox Doctors, contain the pure and unalloyed word of God, and are free from all errors: yet these errors can create doubt and even alter the meaning of the divine Books. Does it therefore become lawful for us to deny faith to the documents proposed therein? By no means. The documents of divine Scripture themselves are not customarily proposed to us immediately by God, or by universal Councils, that is, either by Truth itself, or by the guardians of truth who cannot err, whom we have never heard with our own ears, but rather by individual Bishops, Parish priests, and other men subject to error. Is this sufficient reason for anyone to deny the assent of supernatural Faith to doctrine proposed through this class of men, when we cannot hear the doctrine itself immediately from God, or from Councils of Pastors endowed with the prerogative of not erring? Certainly not. Nor is it certain with divine certitude that this or that Book is the genuine offspring either of the Holy Fathers or of Bishops, not fabricated, not interpolated: and the Church itself cannot so establish this that it pertains to Faith. Yet when it happens that the Tradition of Christian Doctrine is drawn from these sources, who would dare to allege this fact as by no means certain, lest he give assent with the full obedience of his intellect to the Tradition itself which is derived therefrom? Certainly whoever examines the matter carefully will find that not only Tradition and its monuments, but also the Codices of divine Scripture which we now possess, and of which we are most certain that they are the genuine Books of the Prophets and Apostles, depend upon a series of certain facts which are not certain to us through divine Faith. Moreover, it can never pertain to Faith that the Bishops of whom a general Council was composed were rightly initiated by holy

Baptism and holy Orders, and did not harbor heresy in their hearts. Who nevertheless would tolerate him who would refuse to submit to the decrees of the Council of Nicaea or of Trent, and to accommodate supernatural Faith to their Canons, once so slight an excuse has been brought forward? I have no desire to pursue other matters of this kind.

If, therefore, these Facts when not revealed do not in the least impede, nor can impede, our giving the firmest assent of Faith to Christian Doctrine, to Councils, and to Tradition: why should we think it necessary to refer to Faith that declaration, *this man or that man is the true Roman Pontiff*, as though it were permissible to deny obedience to the Roman Pontiffs and submission to definitions concerning Dogma received by the universal Church, if such a statement does not immediately pertain to Faith? But, they say, for those who think otherwise, how can the decrees of the Roman Pontiff be most certainly divine, as the opinion of nearly all Catholics holds, unless it must also be believed with divine certainty that this man or that man is the true Roman Pontiff? How (we too can reply) must it be believed through divine Faith that this man or that man is the true Supreme Pontiff, unless through the same faith it be believed that this man or that man was rightly elected as the successor of Peter, and was once rightly endowed with Baptism and sacred Orders, and never held views in common with Heretics, or even after having attained the supreme office did not decline into Heresy—which most likewise affirm can happen? But leaving these matters aside, let them have this answer. It is necessary to believe the Dogmas of the Faith with the greatest certainty, and to obey the Supreme Pontiffs, although it is not necessary with the same assent to believe them to be true Supreme Pontiffs, and to believe as certain so many other facts about which we have recently treated. For in order that we may embrace Dogmas through Faith and believe them as certain, it suffices that those facts, and the legitimate election of the Roman Pontiff, be made known to us through moral evidence. Now this argument is constructed thus: Whatever has been revealed by God is true and certain; and whatever is established to us through Evidence to have been received or decreed by the Church or by the Roman Pontiff as revealed by God will also be certain to us through divine Faith. But it is established to us through Evidence that the Church or the Roman Pontiff has received or decreed this or that dogma as revealed by God: Therefore it ought to be certain to us through divine faith. And indeed, since we are commanded by God to believe the Christian Doctrine which was revealed by Him and asserted by the Church or by the Roman Pontiffs: why, after such great Evidence of this assertion, should we be unwilling to believe those Dogmas? why should we still wish to doubt? why should we bring our salvation into danger by not believing? Let our conscience deny, if it can, that the Church or the Roman Pontiff has received or decreed these things. Let it deny that this is the true Roman Pontiff, rightly elected, rightly cleansed by the washing of baptism, never devoted to heresy; that these or those Books are the genuine offspring of the Holy Fathers; that this or that Council was legitimately convoked from Catholic Bishops. These things are so evidently established (although they are not established through divine revelation) that no one can or will rightly wish to deny them. And he who thinks it lawful to deny or call into doubt these things has no reason why he cannot also deny and will not deny very many other most certain and evident things in this temporal state of men and affairs: which, however, how much it is repugnant to right Reason and to divine and human Laws, it is not mine to demonstrate to men who use reason. The life of men is governed by various kinds of Evidence. He who opposes them is either mad or reckless, and deserving of punishment, if he stumbles in a matter that tends toward public harm, or toward the ruin of Religion or of his own private salvation. Hence cavils and evasions sought through malicious deceit and without reason

must be cast aside. What God teaches us through the Church to believe, to do, and to flee must be believed, done, and fled, if eternal life and peace of conscience are dear to us.

Evidence, however, as I have said, is of one kind Natural, of another Moral. To each there is at times such strength that if we should deny some statement which is established not from divine Revelation but from Evidence alone, we simultaneously deny some statement and dogma revealed by God. After, for example, Natural Evidence has made me certain that this person or that is a man: if I should wish to deny that he himself sinned in Adam, I cannot do so without simultaneously denying a statement pertaining to the faith, that is, that all men sinned in Adam. Therefore I shall prove myself either deranged or impious if I persist in affirming this while denying that. This can be evident in six hundred other examples; both as to what must be done licitly, and as to what must be believed necessarily. Therefore whoever dares to deny these evident statements, even if not immediately, yet mediately injures the Dogmas of the Faith; and especially that [dogma] which [holds] that Christ governs His Church with special providence, and does not fail it in necessary matters.

That which at least all may judge with me to be beyond every hazard of doubt is this: If anyone should not believe that a Roman Pontiff peacefully elected, peacefully reigning, and received by the universal Church is the true Roman Pontiff, and should therefore be unwilling to obey and submit to him when he commands just things, relying on this one excuse—that it is not certain, as they say, *of Faith* that he is the true Bishop of the Roman Church—such a rash man, inasmuch as he is bound by grave crime, will deservedly be restrained by the most severe penalties and deprived of ecclesiastical communion. You would say the same concerning a legitimately held Council: For indeed, although we are not compelled by any decree of the Church to believe immediately with the assent of faith that this is a legitimate Council, nevertheless we are compelled on account of manifest rules of the Faith to give deference to a general Council received by the Church, and to believe with divine Faith the Dogmas defined by it, since Evidence likewise prescribes that we must so act, and sufficiently protects our conscience from error and impels us to believe. Hence certain petty theologians were formerly repressed by just chastisements, who, when they foresaw that certain of their absurd opinions alien to the doctrine of Christ would be condemned by the Apostolic See, hoped either to strike terror into the Roman Pontiff or to frustrate the condemnation, if they should publish and defend this Thesis abroad: *It is not certain of faith that this present Pope is the true Roman Pontiff*. A plainly laughable and exceedingly rash plan, by which Schism is preludes and all the tribunals of the Church are evaded; as if it were not evidently established from elsewhere who are the true Roman Pontiffs, and as if they themselves ought not to have admitted that this one Evidence suffices, that they should obey the decrees and authority of the Roman Pontiff and of Councils, if they wished to be and to be called Catholics.

There are other facts which have been established in the Church of God as certain, and can still be established; to these, although supernatural assent of Faith need not be joined (for it is not permitted to count them among dogmas), nevertheless it would be wrong not to embrace them and not to believe them true; and whoever refuses to believe or embrace them will stir up against himself no slight suspicion of a heretical heart, or at least ought to be drawn by the severity of the laws to a better opinion. Of this kind are all those things upon which the unity and preservation of Dogmas appear to depend. For example, the Church can never constitute, as a Dogma of Faith, that such and such Books are to be ascribed to Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, and other Fathers. We nevertheless know and believe this, taught by Evidence which also

declares that Books are to be attributed to Aristotle, and Cicero, and Virgil, and others. With this Evidence removed, it is not wrong to doubt concerning the genuine Authors of such Books. But whoever, contrary to Evidence and the testimony of antiquity, should refuse to receive and reverence the Books written by the Fathers, would have to be compelled, even by grave penalties, to cast off this opinion. For indeed those Books are the repositories of Divine and Ecclesiastical Tradition, and their truth and preservation wondrously serves to preserve and explain the Evangelical doctrine.

Similarly, it will never be most certain by Faith, as they say, for any private individual whatsoever, that he understands the words and Books of the Councils and the Holy Fathers entirely without any danger of error. Nevertheless, where such a person clearly recognizes that he has understood their meaning, until he is taught otherwise by the Church, he ought to believe with certainty the doctrine which he has recognized to be contained in those words and Books, asserted by common and constant judgment. Finally, among the Dogmas of Faith it will never be permissible to include that this or that man is or was a Heretic, for example Arius, Luther, Calvin. Yet no one among Catholics is so mad as to wish to deny that men of this kind, condemned by their Books and by the agreement of the entire Church, were or are deviant from the true Faith, on the grounds that it is not established to him by divine Revelation that they were in fact opposed to Catholic Doctrine. That is most clearly established from another source, that is, from the very Evidence of the facts. Moreover, facts of this kind pertain to the judgment of the Church, of the Supreme Pontiffs, and also of other Bishops; and there is no doubt that the greatest reverence is owed to them in judging. The greatest reverence, I say, and humble assent, but not divine Faith. For even these judgments regard nothing other than facts by no means revealed by God; wherefore they are neither immutable in themselves, nor immune from all danger of error whatsoever.