

**Can a Pope  
Become a Heretic?**

**Rev. Joseph L. Iannuzzi, STD, Ph.D.**







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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

In recent months the Roman Pontiff's teaching authority has been openly challenged and his *supreme, full and immediate authority* questioned. Particular exception has been taken to his *non ex cathedra* pronouncements in light of modern prophecies which, according to some, have troubled not a few Catholics. As a result, many Catholics have written yours truly asking for clarification in this regard. In response, I offer the following article to help dispel any confusion surrounding the Roman Pontiff's teaching authority, and herewith, a clear answer from Church Tradition and Magisterial documents pertaining to the type of assent required from all the faithful to the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*.

My point of departure is the small movement within the Church that contends that *validly elected* Roman Pontiffs of the past have made heretical statements and, for this reason, are heretics. By virtue of this contention, they consider it "permissible" to question the teaching authority of our present-day Roman Pontiff Francis. Before elucidating the three major groups associated with this movement, it is noteworthy that among the adherents of this movement, many acknowledge that the Church dogmas of Papal Infallibility, the Immaculate Conception (of Pope Pius IX) and the Assumption (of Pope Pius XII) are an exercise of the charism of papal infallibility ("ex cathedra" pronouncements),

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and are therefore immune from error. Nevertheless, said adherents contend that “*non ex cathedra*” papal statements, even on issues of faith and morals, are not immune from heresy. The three main groups associated with this movement are the “*sede-vacantists*”, “*sede-privationists*” and “*sede-impeditists*”.

Noteworthy is a small movement that assert that Catholics may “recognize” the pope’s authority while simultaneously “resisting” it, as the Pope’s teaching office is *defective*. This resistant movement argues that past Pontiffs were infallible heretics and nothing impedes their resurgence. Therefore, one may openly refuse the Pope “religious assent of the will and intellect” when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*,<sup>1</sup> and one is not “bound to submit to his authority” or lend him “hierarchical subordination and true obedience... in matters concerning faith and morals [and]... in those which regard the discipline and government of the Church.”<sup>2</sup> I refer to the adherents of this movement as “*sede-defectives*”.

### **The *Sedeist* movement**

The “*sedevacantists*” reject the reforms of the Second Vatican Council – in some cases this rejection extends to the

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<sup>1</sup> See footnote 57: Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council I, vol. II, Washington DC [1990], *De perpetuitate primatus beati Petri in Romanis pontificibus*, cap. III, art. 25, p. 869.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 55: Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 5<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council, vol. I, op. cit., session 11 (*circa modum praedicandi*), p. 640.

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validity of all post-Council papal elections, thereby professing that the papal seat (*sede*) is empty (*vacante*); the “*sedeprivationists*” contend that the papal seat is occupied, but by a Pope whose pontificate is defective, as he has embraced the heresy of modernism and unless he returns to traditional Catholicism he remains deprived of the fullness of the papacy; the “*sedeimpeditists*” do not believe that the papal seat is empty (like the *sedevacantists*), or that the Pope is in heresy (like the *sedeprivationists*), but rather that the truly legitimate Pope exists but was impeded by certain forces from taking office. Lastly, the “*sededefectives*” assert that although the papal seat is occupied and the Pope enjoys the fullness of the papacy, his teaching authority is “defective” and therefore may be openly disobeyed. For purposes of brevity, throughout this article I collectively refer to the adherents of these groups and movement as “*sedeists*”.

While these groups and movements constitute small traditional groupings among Catholics, they agree in large part that the Church is guided by the “people” who determine whether or not the Pope’s teachings are heretical and, if so, the same people, by a majority decision, have the power to declare him a notorious heretic. Despite their laudable effort to safeguard the purity of doctrine, the *sedeists*’ position appears at variance with the teachings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Vatican Council:

*“He (the Roman Pontiff) proclaims in a definitive act a doctrine on faith and morals. Therefore, his definitions are rightly said to be irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, for they are delivered with the assistance of the Holy*

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*Spirit... therefore they have no need of approval from others nor do they admit any appeal to any other judgment*"<sup>3</sup>

*"The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ..."<sup>4</sup> It is for the bishops, 'with whom the apostolic doctrine resides', suitably to instruct the faithful entrusted to them..."<sup>5</sup>*

On a more practical note, the *sedeists'* approach appears significantly flawed for two fundamental reasons. One, while their *strength-in-numbers-by-the-people* approach may work for the state (whose competency is limited to ethics, i.e., right and wrong), the same may not be said in the ecclesiastical forum (whose competency is grounded in morals, i.e., good and bad). So, one wonders how exactly do the *sedeists* justify their position when faced with the unpopular unchanging teachings contained in *Humanae Vitae*, or those regarding male ordination, or on any other unchanging moral teaching that the majority of the people may not agree with?

Second, most of the 'people' nowadays are virtually uncatechized and less than ¼ of them across the globe attend the Sacraments weekly. So one who adopts the *sedeists'* approach is left with the daunting task of seeking ways to answer the following questions:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, Vatican Council II, vol. I, New York [1987] *Dei Verbum*, ch. 2, art. 10, p. 755-756.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., ch. 6, art. 25, p. 764.

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- 1) By what criteria are the uncatechized people to determine what constitutes a heresy and a doctrinal truth that must be adhered to with “divine and catholic faith”<sup>6</sup>, when most of them are not conversant in Catholic theology?
- 2) How many of the ‘people’ have effectively grasped the rich patrimony of doctrines accumulated over the course of 2,000 years, which requires conversancy in the original manuscripts of Sacred Scripture (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), of the Early Church Fathers and Doctors (Greek and Latin), the official pronouncements of Church Councils (Greek and Latin), Magisterial documents (Latin), Canon Laws (Latin), the Catholic Catechism (Latin), etc.? The answer to this question is put forth by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council:

*“When the Roman Pontiff or the body of bishops together with him define a decision, they do so in accordance with revelation itself, by which all are obliged to abide and to which all must conform. This revelation, as written or as handed down in tradition, is transmitted in its entirety through the lawful succession of the bishops and in the first place through the care of the Roman Pontiff himself; and in light of the Holy Spirit of truth, this revelation is sacredly preserved in the Church and faithfully expounded. The Roman Pontiff and the bishops, in virtue of their office and the seriousness of the matter, work sedulously through*

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<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City 1994, 2089.

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*the appropriate means duly to investigate this revelation and give it suitable expression*".<sup>7</sup>

Concerning papal infallibility, the Council relates that the Roman Pontiff's "*definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly held irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as assistance promised to him in the person of blessed Peter himself*".<sup>8</sup>

Much like the 1<sup>st</sup> Vatican Council, this 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council statement reveals that the Roman Pontiff and the successors of the Apostles in union with him,<sup>9</sup> and not the people, transmit the entirety of Christ's divine revelation. Certainly the Christian faithful enjoy a supernatural appreciation of faith as a whole when, "*from the bishops to the last of the faithful*", they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals,<sup>10</sup> but such an appreciation is not authentic when divorced from the hierarchy. Only when guided by the hierarchy does "the whole body" of the

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<sup>7</sup> Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council II, vol. II, op. cit., *De ecclesia (Lumen Gentium)*, cap. III, art. 25, p. 870.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. III, art. 25, op. cit., p. 869.

<sup>9</sup> CCC, op. cit., 895: "*Their authority (that of the bishops) must be exercised in communion with the whole Church under the guidance of the Pope*"; *Lumen Gentium*, 22: "*The college of bishops has... no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff... Together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him, they have supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff*".

<sup>10</sup> CCC, op. cit., 92.



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faithful – not a small movement – enjoy immunity from error on matters of belief.<sup>11</sup>

### **The *Sedeist* Position**

Among the adherents of the *sedeist* movement is the core belief that Roman Pontiffs have made heretical statements and such statements have either automatically nullified their papal office (*sedevacantism*), impaired the fullness of their papal office (*sedepriuationism*), or rendered defective their teaching office (*sededefectionism*).

These contend that among the Pontiffs who preached heresy, noteworthy are Pope Liberius for his heretical complicity with the Arians; Pope Honorius for his heretical teachings on the monothelite heresy; Pope John XXII for his heretical sermons in which he affirmed that the souls of the blessed departed do not enjoy the Beatific Vision until the Last Judgment; St. Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis for their heretical statements on the Jewish covenant not being revoked, and for having espoused various forms modernism.

To support their argument the *sedeists* cite documents that, they maintain, affirm that a Pope can and has become a heretic *while in office*.

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<sup>11</sup> Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, Vatican II, vol. I, *Lumen Gentium*, op. cit., ch. 2, art. 12, p. 363.

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## **Rebuttal to the *Sedeist* Position**

In contrast to the *sedeists* position, my theological response demonstrates, through the founts of Sacred Scripture, Church Tradition and Magisterial documents, that no Roman Pontiffs of the past have made heretical statements and to them the title heretic may nowise be imputed.

Drawing from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, one sobering truth emerges: the heretical statements the *sedeists* attribute to Roman Pontiffs are cited out of context and/or were uttered *before* the Church made any official doctrinal pronouncement on the doctrinal issues the Pontiffs addressed. In point of fact, throughout 2,000 years of Church history not one validly elected Roman Pontiff has ever contradicted one official doctrinal pronouncement of the Church.

## CHAPTER II

### What Constitutes a Heretic?

To better illustrate this point consider the Catholic Catechism's definition of heresy: *Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same*".<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, when defining the "deposit of faith" as "the sum total of truths revealed in Scripture and Tradition as proposed to belief by our Church",<sup>13</sup> the Catholic Encyclopedia defines heresy as an "*imperfect apprehension and comprehension of dogmas*".<sup>14</sup> "Dogma" is here intended as those Church pronouncements that are said to be of "Divine faith" and "Catholic faith" – the former are formally revealed by God and the latter are also definitively proposed by the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas relates that "*heresy is a species of unbelief, belonging to those who profess the Christian faith, but corrupt its dogmas*".<sup>15</sup>

The meaning of "heretic" was subjected to various interpretations throughout the centuries. It is noteworthy that the

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<sup>12</sup> CCC, op. cit., 2089.

<sup>13</sup> CCC, op. cit., 88.

<sup>14</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, *Heresy: Connotation and Definition*, Vol. 7, New York, 1910, *Imprimatur*: John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York, *Nihil Obstat*: Remy Lafort, STD, Censor.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Opera Omnia*, Ed. Leonina, Typographia Polygotia Vaticana, Rome 1882, 2/2.11,1).

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Greek word for “heresy” (*αἵρεσις*) that originally meant “choice” or “thing chosen”, was employed at the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) to signify a deviation on the part of anyone from the *established* religious beliefs<sup>16</sup> that were revealed by God (which elicits a *Divine faith*) and proposed by his Church (which elicits a *Catholic faith*). Those established beliefs that Nicea maintained all were to uphold, the Church defines as, “the sum total of truths revealed in Scripture and Tradition as proposed to our belief by the Church”,<sup>17</sup> i.e., the “deposit of the faith” (*depositum fidei*), which all Christians are obliged to uphold. Consequently, the assent of a Christian to Christ’s teachings and to his Church requires the type of faith that is respectively *divine and Catholic*, and to those Christians who refuse such an assent the title ‘heretic’ may be imputed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The expression “established” religious beliefs, is often used to define the Deposit of the Faith, that is, the sum total of truths revealed in Scripture and Tradition as proposed to our belief by the Church.

<sup>17</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> In distinguishing the various types of religious dissent, the Catechism states, “*Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same; apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith; schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him*” (CCC, 2089; cf. CIC, can. 751). The commentary of canon 751 adds, “*Heresy refers only to doubt or denial of those things which ‘must be believed with divine and catholic faith’, that is, contained in divine revelation and proposed as such by the Church’s teaching authority.*” It also states, “*Those matters to be believed with ‘divine and catholic faith’ are (1) contained in the word of God written or handed down, and (2) proposed as divinely revealed by the teaching authority of the Church, either by solemn judgement or by the ordinary and universal magisterium*” (CIC, commentary on can. 750).

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In Paul's Epistle to Titus 3:10, a heretic (*αἵρετικὸν*) signifies "a divisive person" whom Paul asks Titus to warn two times before separating himself from the dissenter. The Greek word for the phrase, 'divisive person', became a technical term in the early Church, e.g., Irenaeus used it for a type of "heretic" who promoted dissension from established religious beliefs.

Through the progressive systematization of theology by St. John Damascene, Peter Lombard, St. Thomas Aquinas and other theologians, a renewed approach to expounding doctrine was expressed through the fields of speculative theology, dogmatic theology, etc. As a result, in addition to preserving the unchanging purity of doctrine, growing emphasis was placed on the importance of its explication<sup>19</sup> without departing from its point of origin, namely the message of Christ and his Apostles. Subsequently, one may freely engage in speculative theological discussions pertaining to matters on which the Church has not yet made any official pronouncement.

This may shed light on Thomas Aquinas' position regarding the Immaculate Conception. Although Aquinas denied the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary,<sup>20</sup> he did so *before*

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<sup>19</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, op. cit., 66.

<sup>20</sup> In his *Summa Theologica*. III, q.27, a.1-2, Aquinas affirms that the Virgin Mary was cleansed from sin *after* her conception and while in the womb. Because Aquinas had mistakenly held that the body was conceived before the rational soul was created, he concluded that Mary was without sin from the first moment of her rational existence – not conception. As a young theologian Aquinas held to this erroneous idea regarding Mary's conception, as well as to the teaching of semi-pelagianism. However, in 16 out of 19 manuscripts some authors maintain that later in life he would change his position on these matters. According to said authors, sometime between 1272-around 1273 Aquinas

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the Church had made any official pronouncement in this regard and before she declared it dogma (which then elicits on the part of all believers a divine *and* catholic faith). Therefore one may not contend that since Aquinas opposed the Immaculate Conception he was a heretic, as a heretic is one who opposes both Divine faith *and* Catholic faith.

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expressed his final thought on Mary's conception when commenting on the Angel Gabriel's salutation as follows: "*For she (the Blessed Virgin) was most pure in the matter of fault and incurred neither Original nor mental nor venial sin*" (Cf. Mandonnet, S. Th. Aquinas, *Opuscula Omnia*, Parisiis 1927, tomus I, Introduction, pp. 19-22).

## CHAPTER III

### Speculative and Dogmatic Theology

In light of the aforementioned systematization of theology, until a teaching is officially pronounced by the Church it is considered a matter of speculative theology (not dogmatic theology) and is therefore open to discussion. Should one's position in this discussion prove erroneous *after* the Church has made an official pronouncement on the matter, one may consider this individual no more a heretic than Aquinas. However, if the individual persists in his erroneous views *after* said pronouncement – something no Pope has ever done – to him the title heretic may be imputed. To emphasize the distinction between speculative and dogmatic theology, I recall the words of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger concerning the possibility of a future “era of peace”, mentioned by Our Lady of Fatima and that precedes the final coming of the Lord:

*“The question is still open to free discussion, as the Holy See has not made any definitive pronouncement in this regard.”*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Padre Martino Penasa, *È imminente una nuova era di vita cristiana?*, Il Segno del Soprannaturale, Udine, Italia, 1990. The statement came in response to the question put before him by the biblical scholar Fr. Martino Penasa. Fr. Penasa visited the Msgr. S. Girofalo, a consultant to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, and spoke to him on the scriptural foundation of an historic and universal era of peace, as opposed to millenarianism. Msgr. Girofalo, convinced by the force of Fr. Penasa's presentation, encouraged him to discuss the matter directly with the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. The cardinal responded to Fr. Penasa's question stating, “*the*

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Therefore, until the Church makes an official pronouncement, the matter remains open to theological discussion.

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*question is still open to free discussion, as the Holy See has not made any definitive pronouncement in this regard” (the original Italian: “La questione è ancora aperta alla libera discussione, giacchè la Santa Sede non si è ancora pronunciata in modo definitivo”).*



## CHAPTER IV

### Unsustainable Theological Argument

#### Pope John XXII (1316-1334)

In referring to documents to support their argument that the Church has been tainted with heretical popes, the *sedeists* fail to note that said documents are hypothetical in nature, have been taken out of context and, subsequently, became the subject of much useless debate.

In support of their argument, they cite the text of Pope Adrian VI (1522-1523), which was ostensibly altered before it was published, as it was published in 1512 from a manuscript not in the Pope's handwriting, but from the handwritten notes of an alleged student who claims to have known him. The text asserts that a Pope *can* err on matters touching the faith, and that there were heretical Popes of the past, such as Pope John XXII (1316 - 1334) who denied that souls enjoy the Beatific Vision until the Last Judgment. What such claimants fail to acknowledge is that Pope John XXII never lived to witness the formal doctrinal pronouncement of the Church on the Beatific Vision which came at the hands of his successor Benedict XII on January 29, 1336 – 13 months after Pope John XXII's death on December 4, 1334. Otherwise put, Pope John XXII did not contradict any official doctrinal pronouncement of the Church, as he was addressing in his sermons a matter speculatively theological in nature. The

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adherents of the *sedeist* movement moreover fail to note the following *context* of Pope John XXII's statement, which reveals the intended meaning (substance) underlying the words of his statement (form).

In his 2<sup>nd</sup> sermon delivered on December 15, 1331, Pope John XXII advanced the teaching that the souls of the blessed departed did not see the divine essence of God,<sup>22</sup> and he based this teaching on Mt. 25 and the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux. He maintained that the souls in purgatory do not enjoy the beatific vision (*pars negativa*), and questioned whether souls cleansed of their sins (in heaven) can “see the divine essence” (*pars positiva*). He had his ideas sent to various theologians for comment, and twice the Pope offered to revoke his teaching if it was not correct.<sup>23</sup> He emphasized that as long as the Holy See has not made a decision on the matter, the theologians enjoyed perfect freedom in discussing their theological positions in this regard. Theologically, the Pope was indeed correct, as the matter was yet undefined and therefore “open to free discussion”.<sup>24</sup>

The theologians who received the Pope's comments commonly pointed out that the Pope had given no decision on this question, but only advanced his personal opinion, and they, in turn, eventually petitioned the Pope to make an official pronouncement

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<sup>22</sup> The scholastics relate that these saints see God's essence *not in such a way that they comprehend it completely* (T. Aquinas, *Summa Theol*, op. cit., 1.12,7 ad 3).

<sup>23</sup> The works containing the teachings of the Pope's sermons that were sent to others requesting theological feedback were a “*Libellus partis negative*” and a work entitled, “*Queritur utrum anime sanctorum ab omnibus peccatis purgate videant divinam essentiam*”.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's response in footnote 21.

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on the matter. In response, the Pope appointed a commission at Avignon to study the writings of the Church Fathers regarding the matter of the *pars positiva*. After having consulted with theologians, in a consistory of January 3, 1334 the Pope explicitly declared that in his sermons he never meant to teach anything contrary to Sacred Scripture or to the faith, and he never intended to pronounce any decision on the matter whatsoever. All participants of the consistory, including the Pope, agreed on two points: the saints already enjoy “*beatitudo*” in heaven, and after the General Judgement they will enjoy “*a beatitudo that is in some way more perfect*”. Simply put, the conclusion all arrived at was that the saints in heaven do not enjoy the beatific vision before the General Judgment with the same perfection as after the General Judgment, but the beatific vision they nevertheless enjoy.

From this one may deduce that when properly qualified, Pope John XXII’s sermons emerge as teachings that lacked qualification in a developing doctrinal age where such matters were not yet officially defined by the Church, wherefore they were nowise heretical.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> While Pope Benedict XII (1336) would later affirm that the saints in heaven see the divine essence by intuitive vision, and even face to face (H. Denzinger, ed., *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, trans. [from *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 30<sup>th</sup> edition, revised by K. Rahner], Fitzwilliam, NH 2004, 530), the scholastics specify that these saints see God’s essence *not in such a way that they comprehend it completely* (T. Aquinas, *Summa Theol.* 1.12,7 *ad* 3, p. cit.), as knowledge of God is poured out on the creature, but can only be received according to its own limited capacity. Furthermore, several Orthodox spiritual writers, following the theology of Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas, prefer to affirm that the essence of God is *unknowable*, as the “divinization” of the human creature takes place only through the divine energy

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## Pope Honorius (1216-1227)

The *sedeists* cite Pope Agatho (678-681) who condemned Pope Honorius' affirmation of Christ have "one will" (*hen thelema*).<sup>26</sup> However, when read within the context of Pope Agatho's entire text, one discovers the intended meaning behind his words. Pope Agatho stated as follows:

*"This is the true and undefiled profession of the Christian religion, which no human cleverness invented, but which the Holy Spirit taught by the Prince of the Apostles. This is the firm and irreprehensible doctrine of the Apostles.... which Peter the Apostle has handed down... because Peter's true confession was revealed*

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(*"θεῖα ἐνέργεια"*) of God. The Oxford University Professor Metr. Kallistos (Timothy) Ware of Diokleia reveals in M. Eckhart's writings a distinction of God "in himself" from God "present in his creatures" (K. Ware, "The Nearness Yet Otherness of the Eternal in Meister Eckhart and St. Gregory Palamas", in *Eckhart Review* 9.157-167). K. Ware distinguishes between God's "far off essence" (*"ousia"*), his unknowable nature (*"physis"*), and his "acts of power" or energy (*"dynameis"*) that "are very near to us" and "that embrace all things" (*Ibid.*, 60).

<sup>26</sup> *"...the contriver of evil... has found instruments suited to his own purpose – namely Theodore, who was bishop of Pharan... and further Honorius, who was pope of old Rome... sowing with novel speech among the orthodox people the heresy of a single will and a single principle of action in the two natures of the one member of the Holy Trinity, Christ our true God..."* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ecumenical Council of Constantinople [680-681], *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II, Washington DC [1990] p. 126).

The thirteenth session of the Council of Constantinople III (680-681) stated, *"... we define that there shall be expelled from the Holy Church of God and anathematized Honorius who was for a time the Pope of old Rome, because of what we found written by him to Sergius, that is in all respects he followed his view and confirmed his impious doctrines..."* (Labbe and Cossart, *Sacrosacnta concilia ad regiam editionem exacta*, vol. VI, col. 943, Madrid 1729).

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*from heaven by the Father, and for it Peter was pronounced blessed by the Lord of all; and he received also, from the Redeemer of us all, by a threefold commendation, the spiritual sheep of the Church that he might feed them.*

*Resting on his protection, this Apostolic Church of his has never turned aside from the way of truth to any part of error, and her authority has always been faithfully followed and embraced as that of the Prince of the Apostles, by the whole Catholic Church and all Councils, and by all the venerable Fathers who embraced her doctrine, by which they have shone as most approved lights of the Church of Christ, and has been venerated and followed by all orthodox doctors, while the heretics have attacked it with false accusations and hatred. This is the living tradition of the Apostles of Christ, which His Church holds everywhere, which is to be loved and cherished above all things and faithfully preached....*

*Let your clemency therefore consider that the Lord and Saviour of all, to whom faith belongs, who promised that the faith of Peter should not fail, admonished him to strengthen his brethren; and it is known to all men that the apostolic pontiffs, the predecessors of my littleness, have always done this with confidence....”*

If, on the one hand, Pope Agatho condemned Pope Honorius’s affirmation of “one will” in Christ, on the other hand, he confesses that the Apostolic Church’s “authority has *always* been faithfully followed and embraced, and that the *Roman Pontiffs who preceded him* have “*always*” and with confidence strengthened their brothers in the faith.

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To properly understand these two affirmations, consider that the monothelite question was raised in 634 in a letter of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Sergius to Pope Honorius. While Pope Honorius' response to Sergius was unofficial and did not decide the question, his use of the expression, "one will" in 638, which correctly referred only to Christ's human nature, did not contradict any official doctrinal pronouncement of the Church. In point of fact, St. Maximus the Confessor, the leading exponent of the "two wills" in Christ, affirmed in his *Disputation with Pyrrhus* that Pope Honorius was not a monothelite.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it was not until 9 years after Pope Honorius's response to Sergius that the Lateran Council of 649 under Pope Martin officially pronounced the doctrine of the "two wills" in Christ.

In light of the preceding, Pope Agatho's statements may be summarized as follows. Insofar as Pope Honorius did not

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<sup>27</sup> "Pyrrhus: 'What dost thou say of Honorius, who clearly taught one will of Our Lord Jesus Christ in his letter my predecessor?'

Maximus: 'Who is a more trustworthy interpreter of such an epistle? The one that actually wrote it for Honorius – the one who at the time was still alive, and who, in addition to all his other virtues, illumined the whole west with godly dogmas – or is it those in Constantinople who interpret it accordance to the whim of their own hearts?'

Pyrrhus: 'The one who actually composed the letter.'

Maximus: 'This same person afterwards wrote for Pope John (who is among the saints) to Constantine, just after he had become emperor regarding the very same letter of Honorius. He explained that: 'We say one will of the Lord, not of the Godhead and humanity, but only of the humanity... Christ did not have two opposing wills, as of flesh and of spirit, as we ourselves have since the fall, but one only that characterized his humanity by virtue of [his human] nature.'' (The *Disputation with Pyrrhus of our Father among the Saints*, Maximus the Confessor, trans. Joseph P. Farrell, South Canaan, 1990, pp. 49-50).

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contradict any official doctrinal pronouncement of the Church, Pope Agatho correctly affirms that the *Roman Pontiffs who preceded him* have “always” and with confidence strengthened their brothers in the faith of the Apostolic Church’s “authority” that has “always” been faithfully followed and embraced. This notwithstanding, at the time of Pope Agatho, the definition of heresy – not yet explicated as in the 1992 Catechism, which defines it as, “*the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith*” – was more broadly interpreted as a deviation from *any nonorthodox belief* committed by a person who considers himself a Christian – at the time of Pope Agatho no distinction of *Divine faith* and *Catholic faith* had yet been explicated.

The *sedeists* cite Pope Adrian II (867-872) who condemned the writings of the monothelites, including those of Honorius who self-expressedly was not a monothelite, but had used an expression that would be taken out of context and the subject of much useless debate. It would be a tremendous disservice to the Chair of Peter to overlook this context of Pope Honorius’ “one will” expression, which I now expound on.

Cyrus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, was the first to formulate the heresy of monothelitism when he solemnly declared that Christ had “*one, sole, theandric operation.*” Sophronius, a monk, fought against this heresy and tried to change Cyrus’ mind, but Cyrus remained intransigent. Sophronius then had recourse to Sergius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, to help him dissuade Cyrus. However, Sergius himself was a monothelite like Cyrus, and in response he asked Sophronius to refrain from using the expression, “one will” or “two wills”, perhaps to appeal to him, a

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brother patriarch, ever so delicate a manner or, perhaps less likely, to cunningly allow what he believed to be the truth (but which would later be revealed as a heresy) to spread in silence.

Sophronius was then consecrated Patriarch of Jerusalem and this worried Sergius, who began to write Pope Honorius to defend the formula of Cyrus that Sergius himself embraced. Sergius' monothelite argument was as follows: If we admit that Christ has two wills, we must then admit that the two wills are opposed, as Christ's divine nature can do only good, but his human nature can also do bad.

Pope Honorius responded to Sergius by drawing a clear distinction between the *substance* of the two wills in Christ and the *formula* by which this reality is expressed. Regarding the "substance", Honorius affirmed that in the one Person of Christ who operated in two natures, the divine nature operated divine actions, and the human nature operated human actions – a teaching consistent with the Catholic faith. With respect to the "formula" that expresses this substance, Honorius affirmed, "*You (Sergius) must confess with us one Christ our Lord, operating in either nature, divine or human actions*" ("*in utrisque naturis divina vel humana operantem*"). Was Pope Honorius perhaps offering Sergius a way out? Was he, in appealing to a brother bishop re. a matter upon which the Church had not made any official pronouncement, asking him to profess *either* one of the two doctrinal truths, both of which he himself held to? Such a possibility would certainly seem possible. After all, this formula of Honorius does not contradict the Catholic faith, and may be interpreted as opposing the monothelite heresy of Sergius while affirming that Christ has only "one operation" or "one will".



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Honorius affirmed that the Church had always spoken thus, and so ought we, and explicitly adds that he does “not wish to give a definition upon it”, ultimately leaving the formulaic expression up to the grammaticians. He therefore acknowledged Sergius’ counsel to retain silence on the matter until it is grammatically resolved and confirmed his decision with exhortations. Honorius then informed Sergius in writing that in wounded human nature of all the redeemed there is a *bad* and *good* will, but in Christ whose nature was not impaired by Original Sin, there was no *bad* will at all, but only a *good* will. Noteworthy is the theological grammar required to properly formulate the two wills in Christ and that were not clearly defined at the time of Honorius. It was not until Maximus the Confessor (+ 662) brilliantly articulated the proper theological grammar on the operations of the two wills in Christ by distinguishing between *gnome*, *tropos* and *logos* that the grammar Honorius humbly refrained from presuming to proclaim and that was required for a doctrinal definition was brought to bear.

Now, the *sedeists*, who are fond of interpreting Honorius’ aforementioned expression without any reference to St. Maximus’ affirmation that it refers “only of the humanity” of Christ “that characterized his humanity by virtue of [his human] nature”,<sup>28</sup> reduce it a heresy. But when interpreted within its proper context (grasping its *substance*), Honorius’ “one will” expression emerges as an expression consonant with the Catholic faith.

To further illustrate this point, consider the doctrinal pronouncement of the Council of Florence, which declared that souls who die “*in Original Sin alone go straight to hell*” (Council of Florence, 6<sup>th</sup> session, July 6, 1439). If taken literally (only as a

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. footnote 27.

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*formula*) this statement is false, as there are millions of aborted babies who died without Sacramental Baptism and in Original Sin who, according to the Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, do not go to hell<sup>29</sup> or to limbo.<sup>30</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger stated, “*Children who die in this way (through abortion) are indeed without any personal sin, so they cannot be sent to hell.*”<sup>31</sup> Now, if one were to interpret this statement of the Council of Florence as a *formula* bereft of its underlying *substance*, it would lend to misinterpretation – an approach reminiscent of the *sedeist* movement in their interpretation of the aforementioned papal pronouncement.

### Hermeneutics

The *sedeists*’ approach of the *ad litteram* formulaic interpretation of texts ignores the hermeneutical principles set forth by Benedict XV<sup>32</sup> and Pope Pius XII, who exhorted those entrusted with extrapolating the meaning of inspired texts to acknowledge the inspired writer as “the living and reasonable instrument of the Holy Spirit” who uses the writer’s “faculties and powers”, so as to “*better understand what the inspired author wishes to express*”.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the very books of Sacred Scripture, although guaranteed as

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<sup>29</sup> J. Ratzinger, *God and the World*, Ignatius Press, 2002, pp. 401-402.

<sup>30</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, Ignatius Press, 1985 pp. 147-148.

<sup>31</sup> *God and the World*, op. cit., pp. 401-402.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*, Vatican City, 1920, 50ff.

<sup>33</sup> Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, Vatican City, 1943, 33-34.

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divinely inspired, contain many formulaic and literary forms that are properly seen and interpreted only through the author's setting in life.

Some examples may be found in the author of the Book of Genesis who reveals that "*the sky is a dome*" (Gen. 1:8.15); in the author of the Book of Samuel who relates that "*the earth has pillars*" (1 Sam. 2:8.); in the Psalmist who affirms that the earth has "*ends*" (Ps. 47:11); in the Gospel of John who appears to confound the Father with the Son: "*The Father and I are one*" (Jn. 10:30). Moreover, one discovers passages in the writings of the saints that may appear monotheistic, but, when interpreted within the context of the author's setting in life, their proper meaning is disclosed. St. John of the Cross affirms: "*The soul loves in no other way than divinely, united and made one with the divine will and love*".<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, when interpreting the writings and pronouncements of the Roman Pontiffs, one must refrain from interpreting the pure letter (*ad litteram*) and peer into the meaning and the intention behind their written word.

### **Pope Innocent III (1198-1216)**

The *sedeists* also cite Pope Innocent III who affirmed, "*The Pope should not flatter himself about his power, nor should he rashly glory in his honor and high estate... Still less can the Roman Pontiff glory because he can be judged by men, or rather, can be*

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<sup>34</sup> *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Dark Night, bk. II, 13, 11, Washington DC 1991.

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*shown to be already judged, if for example he should wither away into heresy; because 'he who does not believe is already judged'.*

In citing this passage only, the *sedeists* interpret it apart from the context of Pope Innocent III's affirmation, which is as follows:

*"...Unless I am grounded in faith, how can I make others firm in faith? It is certain that faith belongs especially to my office. The Lord publicly proclaimed it: 'I', he said, 'have prayed for you Peter that your faith may not fail, and you, once being converted, must confirm your brothers'... For this reason the Faith of the Apostolic seat has never failed even during turbulent times,<sup>35</sup> but has remained whole and unharmed, so that the privilege of Peter continues to be unshaken. So necessary is faith for me as Pope that, while I have God alone as the judge of my other sins, I can be judged by the Church only for any sin committed against the faith, for 'he who does not believe is already judged'... but without faith works are dead".<sup>36</sup>*

As in the case of Pope Agatho, so in the case of Pope Innocent III, it is only when understood within the proper context that the Roman Pontiffs' words assume their intended meaning. In his above statement Pope Innocent III is speaking of the prerogative of his divine office ("Apostolic seat") that Christ

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<sup>35</sup> In this statement Pope Innocent II roundly debunks those who claim that such Popes before him were heretics whom many *sedeists* identify as Peter (64-67), Victor (189-199), Marcellinus (296-304), Liberius (352-366), Virgilius (537-555), Honorius (625-638), Gregory VII (1073-1085) and Blessed Urban II (1088-1099).

<sup>36</sup> Pope Innocent III, Sermo 4, *De diversis sermonis*, in *Patrologia Latina*, Paris 1958-1974, 217.

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himself instituted for all times and *that “has never failed even during turbulent times, but has remained whole and unharmed, so that the privilege of Peter continues to be unshaken.* Indeed, the Roman Pontiff’s expression, “*continues to be unshaken,*” is indicative of the Roman Pontiff’s teaching authority<sup>37</sup> that “*has remained whole and unharmed*”.

### **Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) and Pope Francis (2013-present)**

Some *sedeists* further contend that Pope John Paul and Pope Francis are heretics because they erroneously affirmed that the Jewish covenant was never revoked. However, such a claim is hardly sustainable when confronted with Sacred Scripture and its articulation in the Catholic Catechism. The Catholic Catechism affirms, “*The Old testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value, for the Old Covenant has never been revoked.*”<sup>38</sup> Moreover God in Sacred Scripture reveals that while he does not go back on his covenant, he nevertheless makes another that transcends the previous: “*The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I*

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<sup>37</sup> For the conciliar statement of the Roman Pontiff’s teaching authority cf. “Conclusion”.

<sup>38</sup> CCC, op. cit., 121.

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*took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt”* (Jer. 31:31). In short the old covenant foreshadows the new (Col. 2:16-17), which Jesus declared he did not come to do away with (Mt. 5:17).

Others have expressed disapproval specifically toward several of Pope Francis’ unqualified statements, with particular emphasis on his comments of certain bishops and priests possibly becoming “wolves and not shepherds”; his apparent de-emphasis of Church teaching on homosexuality and cohabitation, and the danger of a relaxation of the moral law prohibiting divorcees from receiving the Sacraments; his demotion of conservative bishops and/or cardinals and their replacement with what appear to be progressive ones.

In response to such concerns, Pope Francis has not changed or contradicted one article of Church doctrine, though some fear he may, especially in light of his having permitted Cardinal Erdö to distribute at the October 2014 Roman synod what some cardinals refer to as a novel and morally questionable midterm synodal report. More specifically, Raymond Cardinal Burke voiced concern of the harmful direction the synod was taking, in particular, the application of the ambiguous expression, “the law of graduality” and its apparent tolerant application to homosexuals and divorcees. Despite said concerns, the good cardinal publicly affirmed his support for Pope Francis’ and his guidance of the Church.

In light of this last matter re. the synod, it is noteworthy that synods are convened to discuss issues of doctrine, administration and application upon a platform where bishops

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voice their opinions, sometimes resulting in heated polemics and prolonged debates. I here recall the gathering of bishops at the May 553 Council of Constantinople II in which Pope Vigilius, after having issued a *Judicatum* condemning the “three chapters” of the writings of the Antiochean theologians Theodore of Mopsuestia, Iba of Edessa and Theodoric of Cyrus, refused to condemn them to the dissatisfaction of the gathered bishops and Emperor Justinian. Conflict ensued as the emperor and bishops condemned the Pope’s actions, whereby the council began to assume the lineaments of an “imperial court”. Only after many months did the Pope concede their request by condemning not only the writings but their authors of the infamous ‘three chapters’.

In sum, heated theological debates are not foreign to Church synods or councils. More interestingly, God, who alone knows how to write straight with crooked lines, avails himself of such debates to forge on the anvil of religious passion and fidelity, the plans for which Church synods and councils are convened. As for the purpose of the October 2014 Roman synod, the midterm synodal report suggests a pastoral approach to dialogue and inclusivity of those who have become estranged from the Church. By virtue of the “supreme authority” the Pope alone enjoys, one may see in Pope Francis’ approach a genuine desire to “put out into the deep” waters in search of those who need a physician, and which appears to be motivated by Scripture:

*“As he passed by, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the customs post. He said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners sat with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. Some scribes who were Pharisees*

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*saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' Jesus heard this and said to them (that), 'Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners'" (Mk. 2.14-17).*

With respect to the above criticism of Pope Francis calling those in the Church “wolves”, it is not novel. Indeed, Jesus spoke of “ravenous wolves” entering the Church (Mt. 7.15), of those leaders of the Church of his day as “a brood of vipers” (Mt. 23.33), and Blessed Pope Paul VI spoke of the “smoke of Satan” entering the Church. As to what these expressions may refer to, one cannot ignore the secret society known as the Freemasons whose purpose is to eviscerate the morale, doctrine, customs and tradition of veteran churches and religious based organizations. It would appear unlikely that Pope Francis is unaware of his eight predecessors who have formally condemned the Freemasons,<sup>39</sup> in particular, of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI who have referred to a

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<sup>39</sup> Eight popes have issued pronouncements condemning Freemasons or those activities and principles identified with Freemasonry: Popes Clement XII, Benedict XIV, Pius VII, Leo XII, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI, Pius IX and Leo XIII have condemned Freemasonry and its principles. Both the 1917 (art. 2335) and 1983 (art. 1374) Code of Canon Law have imposed the penalties of excommunication and interdict on Catholics who become Freemasons. One must bear in mind that most newcomers to Freemasonry are for the most part oblivious to the ultimate goal of the society. In his encyclical *Humanum Genus* Pope Leo XII stated that the unsuspecting newcomers to the secret society are most likely unaware of their ultimate goals and should not be considered partners in the criminal acts perpetrated by Freemasonry.

*Nota bene:* Throughout her visions Blessed Emmerich specifically mentions the “Illuminati” and the “Freemasons” as secret societies most dangerous to the Catholic Church.



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“secret society” that is “directed from one common center” whose aim it is to undermine the Church.

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## CHAPTER V

### Usurper of the Apostolic Seat

Several mystics whose writings are approved have foretold the emergence of an “invalidly” elected Pope (*nota bene*: not a “validly” elected Pope such as Francis whose election met all the requirements for a valid papal election<sup>40</sup>) whose Freemasonic affiliation wishes to subversively overthrow the tradition and teachings of the Catholic Church.

More significantly, not one Church-approved prophet or mystic who has foretold the rise of an antipope (the Catholic Church has already witnessed over 30 antipopes and emerged unscathed) has ever attributed this title to a “validly” elected Pope, but rather to a usurper of the papal throne whose election is clearly “invalid”. This point is pivotal as it reveals the enduring importance of a valid papal election, and the papal office that serves to safeguard the faith.

Case and point. It is claimed that shortly before his death in 1226, St. Francis of Assisi spoke to his friars of a period of future turmoil in which an invalid papal election would ensue. Francis’ use of the expression of a pope who is “*not canonically elected*” suggests a papal election that does not meet the canonical requirements for a valid papal election. The text alleges Francis as having stated, “*The devils will have unusual power, the*

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<sup>40</sup> For the conditions pertaining to a valid papal election see p. 34ff.

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*immaculate purity of our Order, and of others, will be so much obscured that there will be very few Christians who will obey the true Sovereign Pontiff and the Roman Church with loyal hearts and perfect charity. At the time of this tribulation a man, not canonically elected, will be raised to the Pontificate, who, by his cunning, will endeavour to draw many into error and death.*<sup>41</sup>

What is certain is that God's prophets never impugn papal authority, although they alert the faithful to an immanent period in which the true and "validly" elected Pope will be exiled and possibly martyred, and during his exile, an "invalid" papal election will occur. Blessed Anne-Maria Taigi (1769-1837) prophesied the exile of the true Roman Pontiff when she affirmed, "*Religion shall be persecuted, and priests massacred. Churches shall be closed, but only for a short time. The Holy Father shall be obliged to leave Rome*".<sup>42</sup>

St. Pope Pius X (1835-1914) reaffirms Blessed Anna-Maria's vision:

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<sup>41</sup> *Works of the Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi*, London: R. Washbourne, 1882, pp. 248-250.

<sup>42</sup> Blessed Anna-Maria Taigi, in *Catholic Prophecy*, Yves Dupont, *The Coming Chastisement*, Tan Books and Pub., Inc., IL, 1973, p.45. Although the Pope may have to flee Rome and remain in exile and, as St. Pope Pius X says, "there die a cruel death", he will be succeeded by another "validly" elected Pope. Blessed Anna-Maria Taigi and Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich describe the events that culminate in a new, "valid" papal election. After the Church has been without a Pope for some time, a new conclave will be convened to elect his valid successor: "*After the three days of darkness, St. Peter and St. Paul, having come down from heaven [understood in a metaphoric sense] will preach in the whole world and designate a new Pope. A great light will flash from their bodies and will settle upon the cardinal who is to become Pope. Christianity, then, will spread throughout the world*" (Ibid.).

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*“I saw one of my successors taking to flight over the bodies of his brethren. He will take refuge in disguise somewhere; and after a short retirement [exile] he will die a cruel death.”<sup>43</sup> *The present wickedness of the world is only the beginning of the sorrows which must take place before the end of the world.*”<sup>44</sup>*

Other prophecies foretell the exile of a Roman Pontiff followed by a formal schism. Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824) offers three riveting illustrations:

*“I had another vision of the great tribulation... It seems to me that a concession was demanded from the clergy that could not be granted. I saw many older priests, especially one, who wept bitterly. A few younger ones were also weeping... It was as if people were splitting into two camps.”<sup>45</sup>*

*I was taken to Rome where the Holy Father, plunged in affliction, is still concealed in order to elude dangerous exigencies... If the Pope leaves Rome, the enemies of the Church will get the upper hand... I saw them intercepting or turning away the roads that led to the Pope. When they did succeed in getting a Bishop according to their liking, I saw that he had been intruded contrary to the will of the Holy Father; consequently, he possessed no legitimate authority.”<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>43</sup> If the pontiff will die “a cruel death,” it is not a death without God’s divine assistance. Some of the greatest spiritual giants underwent deaths deemed by many in a certain sense as cruel, beginning with Jesus Christ himself.

<sup>44</sup> Saint Pope Pius X, 20<sup>th</sup> century, in *Catholic Prophecy*, p.22.

<sup>45</sup> *The Life and Revelations of Anne Catherine Emmerich*, Very Rev. Carl E. Schmöger (Rockford: Tan), Vol. II [message of April 12, 1820].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 290, 292, 303, 310.

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*“...plans formed for the blending of religious creeds, the suppression of papal authority... I saw no Pope, but a bishop prostrate before the High Altar. In this vision I saw the church bombarded by other vessels... It was threatened on all sides... They built a large, extravagant church which was to embrace all creeds with equal rights... but in place of an altar were only abomination and desolation. Such was the new church to be...”<sup>47</sup>*

In the approved messages of Our Lady of La Salette the Blessed Virgin Mary revealed to Melanie Calvat and Maximin Giraud that Rome will become the seat of Antichrist: *“Rome will lose the faith and become the seat of Antichrist.”*<sup>48</sup>

Admittedly, history has borne witness to several “invalid” papal elections that the Church never acknowledged, including the 14<sup>th</sup> century schism in which the two Popes Gregory XI and Clement VII claimed the throne simultaneously – one was an imposter vested with false authority by a few nationalist cardinals who held an invalid conclave, namely Clement VII. What made this conclave *invalid* was the absence of the full body of cardinals and subsequently the required 2/3’s majority vote. The criteria that determine the “validity” of a papal election is not only a 2/3’s majority vote of the full consistory of cardinals, but, if the true pope is alive and even in exile, his expressed consent, otherwise no conclave may be held in attempt to elect another.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 346, 349, 353.

<sup>48</sup> Message of Our Lady of La Salette dated September 19, 1846. After a thorough investigation, the bishop of Grenoble ruled in favor of the La Salette apparitions.

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Therefore the prophecies predicting the pope's flight or exile from Rome do not signify a validly elected pope's abdication of office, but they indicate the infiltration of an imposter who was never validly or canonically elected. In Sacred Scripture God never leaves his flock untended, but on account of sin he tests his flock for a short period as gold is tested in the fire in order that it may emerge purer, holier and with greater faith. From all this one thing emerges as absolutely certain: Every validly elected Pope is the true Vicar of Christ on earth, and he alone enjoys "*supreme, full and immediate authority*".

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## CHAPTER VI

### Hypothetical Argument

Often quoted by the *sedeists* is the 1913 edition of the Catholic Encyclopedia that stated, “*The Pope himself, if notoriously guilty of heresy, would cease to be Pope because he would cease to be a member of the Church.*” What is overlooked is the glaring *if* clause that addresses a hypothetical argument – a possibility, not a reality. Apropos of this statement, Among the theologians who have discussed the possibility of a Pope becoming a heretic, noteworthy are Robert Bellarmine, Francisco de Suarez, Alphonsus de Liguori, Augustine Matthaueucci, Marie Dominique Bouix and Louis Billot. In addressing this hypothetical argument, Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) expresses his desire to discuss what should follow *if* this were to occur and he adds:

*“There are five opinions about this matter. The first is that of Albert Pighi (Hierarch. Eccles., lib. 4, cap. 8), for whom the Pope cannot be a heretic and therefore cannot be deposed in any case. This opinion is probable and can be defended easily... Since however this is not certain, and since the common opinion is to the contrary, it is useful to examine what solution should be given to that question, in the hypothesis that the Pope could be a heretic”.*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontefice*, lib. II, cap. 30, p. 418.

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He entertains this hypothesis – much like the hypothesis of the Blessed Virgin who hypothetically could sin, but would never actually do so, and affirms:

*“Just as it is licit to resist the Pontiff who aggresses the body, it is also licit to resist the one who aggresses souls or who disturbs civil order or above all, who attempts to destroy the Church. I say that it is licit to resist him by not doing what he orders and preventing his will from being executed. It is not licit however to judge, punish or depose him, since these are acts proper to a superior”.*<sup>50</sup>

The theologian Francisco de Suarez (1548-1617), a contemporary of R. Bellarmine, was sure that God’s “sweet providence” would not allow the Pope who could not teach error to fall into error, and that this was guaranteed by the promise, “*I have prayed for you (Simon) that your faith may not fail...*” (Luke 22: 32). Much like Bellarmine, Suarez was willing to consider the possibility of an heretical Pope *as an hypothesis* in view of the fact that several general councils had admitted the hypothesis in question.

Much like Bellarmine and Suarez, Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) did not believe that God would ever permit a Roman Pontiff to become a heretic, *not even as a private person*. He affirms:

*“We ought rightly to presume as Cardinal Bellarmine declares, that God will never let it happen that a Roman Pontiff,*

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<sup>50</sup> *De Romano Pontefice*, Book II, ch.29, *Opera Omnia*, Pedone Lauriel, vol. I, p. 418, Paris, 1871.

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*even as a private person, becomes a public heretic or an occult heretic.*<sup>51</sup>

In light of the preceding and as history has proven, no Roman Pontiff has contradicted Church pronouncements that are of “divine and catholic faith.” So while one may hypothesize endlessly on how to react to an infallible heretic if and when he emerges, nothing in Church Tradition supports the argument that such a heretic will *actually* emerge.

The position that no Pope has or, as some suggest, will contradict official Church teaching is predicated on the writings of such theologians as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Michael Bañez (1528-1604), Luis de Molina (1535-1600), Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) and Francisco Suárez (1548-1617).

### ***Promoetio physica***

Aquinas and Bañez affirmed that God’s divine influence that precedes all acts of creatures in causality takes on, to some extent, the character of a “physical premotion” (*proemotio physica*) of their free acts, which may also be called a physical predetermination (*proedeterminatio physica*). When applied to God’s divine knowledge, this premotion or predetermination suggests a divine omniscience that infallibly foresees all the future acts, whether absolute or conditional, of intelligent creatures. This

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<sup>51</sup> *Dogmatic Works of St. Alphonsus Maria de Ligouri*, Turin, 1848, vol. VIII, p. 720.

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divine omniscience of God predetermines the human will through efficacious grace (*gratia efficax*) to perform a free good act, whereby the human will, without being forced and with a metaphysical certainty, absolutely corresponds to God's grace. After all, *consensus*, brought about by efficacious grace, cannot at the same time be an actual *dissensus*.

Case and point. In the circumstances (*C*), influenced by grace (*G*), Peter, the Vicar of Christ, freely elicits an infallible act (*A*). In accord with the teachings of Bañez, one may affirm that God's efficacious grace (*gratia efficax*) supernaturally endows Peter's human will in such a way that he absolutely performs the infallible act God intends, i.e., he proclaims the divine truth and does not contradict the Catholic faith or any official doctrinal pronouncement of the Church.

Although Luis de Molina and the school of Molinism would disagree on the "intrinsically" efficacious influence of grace in the act of human willing, and Bellarmine and Suárez would establish a model of Congruism that brings Molinism more into line with Bañezianism, the aforementioned theologians agree that efficacious grace, in some way and without violating the freedom of the human will, efficaciously aids the human will in accomplishing what God intends.

Noteworthy is the dynamic of God's motion of God's grace that comes to the aid of the free human will of the Roman Pontiff. If God's efficacious grace (*G*) moves the free will of the Roman Pontiff to preach the truth and reject heresy (*A*), it is not for that matter without the aid of the corporate body of episcopal brethren who, united with him, share in his exercise of the Magisterium (*C*). By the power and action of the Holy Spirit who inspires,

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enlightens, sanctifies and guides the Church, the Roman Pontiff's free will may be said to be guided by the Holy Spirit's grace at work in him and through the presbyteral college,<sup>52</sup> as it perpetuates the one public revelation of Christ.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *“Christ gave the Apostles and their successors the command and the power to teach all nations, to hallow men in the truth, and to feed them. Bishops, therefore, have been made true and authentic teachers of the faith, pontiffs, and pastors through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to them.*

*Bishops, sharing in the solicitude for all the churches, exercise this episcopal office of theirs, which they have received through episcopal consecration, in communion with and under the authority of the supreme pontiff. As far as their teaching authority and pastoral government are concerned, all are united in a college or body with respect to the universal Church of God”* (Pope Paul VI, Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, 2-3, 1965).

<sup>53</sup> While the message of Jesus Christ and the Apostles never departs from its point of origin, it is continuously explicated throughout the course of the centuries (CCC, op. cit., 66).

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### Conclusion

In view of the documentary evidence provided in this presentation, one may affirm that the *sedeist* views toward the Roman Pontiff's teaching authority, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*, is flawed and spiritually harmful, as it brings with it the danger of judging the Pope according to one's own standards and falling short of the obedience asked of them by Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Such individuals who support this claim reflect a fundamentalist approach to Scripture and Catholicism by interpreting the texts and expressions of the faith divorced from their historical context and considering themselves the highest judge of what is Catholic and what is not. The lives of the saints reveal that such an approach appeals to pride and, as history has proven time and again, subtly leads into pernicious error; matters that in fact are very small become magnified into large matters and divisions ensue within the Church.

The Catholic approach to the Roman Pontiff that illustrated in this presentation is one of faithful adherence not simply to a mere human instructor, but to the true Vicar of Christ on earth who is endowed by Christ with a special charism of teaching authority that will endure for all ages.

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<sup>54</sup> Mt. 23:3: [Jesus tells his disciples:] "*The scribes and pharisees occupy the seat of Moses, so obey them in everything they tell you...*"

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I here recall Christ's words to Peter who alone among the Apostles received direct knowledge from above: "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly father. And I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it*" (Mt. 16.17-18).

In these words, Christ does not tell *Peter* to build his church, but that *He himself* will build his own Church, thereby implying that through Peter (who represents all future Pontiffs) Christ accomplishes his Divine Will within his Church by the power of the Holy Spirit whom he promised to send his Apostles to "lead them to all the truth" (Jn. 16:13). It is precisely this promised Holy Spirit who continues to inspire each Roman Pontiff to guide the Church in every generation. The Catholic Catechism relates as much with respect to papal infallibility which guides the Pope's definitions: "*Therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly held irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as assistance promised to him in the person of blessed Peter himself*".<sup>55</sup>

The 5<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council (1512-1517) sums it up as follows:

*"The eternal Father, who will never abandon his flock up to the close of the age, so loved obedience... that... when he [his beloved Son] was about to depart from this world to the Father, he established Peter and his successors as his own representatives on*

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<sup>55</sup> Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council II, vol. II, *De ecclesia*, (*Lumen Gentium*), op. cit., cap. III, art. 25, op. cit., p. 869.



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*the firmness of a rock. It is necessary to obey them, as the book of the Kings testifies, so that whoever does not obey, incurs death.*"<sup>56</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Vatican Council (1869-1870) sums it up in similar fashion:

*"That which our Blessed Lord... established in the blessed Apostle Peter, for the continual salvation and permanent benefit of the Church, must of necessity remain forever, by Christ's authority, in the Church which, founded as it is upon a rock, will stand firm until the end of time... Blessed Peter... received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ... to this day and forever he (Christ) lives and presides and exercises judgment in his successors... whoever succeeds to the chair of Peter obtains... the primacy of Peter over the whole Church. So that what the truth has ordained stands firm, and blessed Peter perseveres in the rock-like strength he was granted, and does not abandon the guidance of the Church which he once received...*

*To him (the Roman Pontiff), in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our Lord Jesus Christ to tend, to rule and govern the universal Church... Both clergy and faithful, of whatever rite and dignity, both singly and collective, are bound to submit to this power by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, and this not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world... he is the supreme judge of the faithful...*

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<sup>56</sup> Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 5<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council, vol. I, op. cit., session 11 (*circa modum praedicandi*), p. 640.

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*The Roman Pontiff possesses... the supreme power of teaching... that saying of our Lord Jesus Christ, 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church', cannot fail of its effect... the Catholic religion has always been preserved unblemished...*<sup>57</sup>

Picking up the thread of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lateran and 1<sup>st</sup> Vatican Councils, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council (1962-1965) declares:

*"The bishops, when they are teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to the divine and catholic truth... The religious assent of the will and intellect is to be given in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Pontiff even when he is not speaking ex cathedra.*<sup>58</sup>

In his teaching authority, which is "supreme, full and immediate",<sup>59</sup> the Roman Pontiff exercises a Magisterial office like no other in the Church. Indeed, when Christ constituted his divinely revealed truths once and for all in his one and unchanging Public Revelation (*depositum fidei*), he did so in order that Peter and those who occupy his Apostolic seat, would transmit this revelation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the college of bishops in union with him, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*. For this reason, throughout the course of the centuries the Roman Pontiff and the bishops continue to "explicate" Christ's one Public Revelation,<sup>60</sup> whereby all the members of the Church

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<sup>57</sup> Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council I, vol. II, op. cit., pp. cap. II-IV, pp. 813-815.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 869.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 923.

<sup>60</sup> CCC, op. cit., 66.

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may happily enjoy the sure guarantee of his unfailing guidance and that of his successors to whom Jesus Christ gave the pledge of victory over the falsehoods of hell for all time.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rev. Joseph Leo Iannuzzi is a doctoral alumnus of the Gregorian Pontifical University. He has obtained 5 post-graduate degrees, with studies in medicine, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and theology.

As a young medical student, Joseph traveled to a Marian shrine in 1988 where he was inspired to enter the seminary. In 1991 he obtained a Ph.B. in Philosophy and was awarded the Kilburn Award. While assigned for 15 years in Italy, Rev. Iannuzzi studied Italian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and other languages. He also obtained an STB, M. Div., STL and STD, Ph.D. in Theology, with specialization in patristics, dogmatics and mysticism.

Rev. Iannuzzi was one of four selected students to receive a grant from the Pontifical Biblicum University of Rome to study theology in Israel. While in Rome he assisted the exorcist of Rome, Fr. Gabriel Amorth, and has written several books on prophecy and revelation. He appeared on EWTN and was host of several television and national radio broadcasts. He has translated numerous theological works into English and has authored ten publications.

In 2012 Rev. Iannuzzi successfully completed his doctorate in theology at the Gregorian Pontifical University of Rome on the writings of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta. He has translated into English all of Luisa's writings that are cited in his doctoral dissertation, which is approved by the Pontifical University that is authorized by the Holy See.



