

Can a Pope Become a Heretic?

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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, perplexed over this challenge, asking for enlightenment in this regard. In response, I am providing the faithful with 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), and are therefore immune from error. Nevertheless, said adherents contend that "*non ex cathedra*" papal statements, even on faith and morals issues, are not immune from heresy. The three main groups associated with this movement are the "*sede-vacantists*", "*sede-privationists*" and "*sede-impeditists*".

The *Sedeist* movement

The "*sedevacantists*" reject the reforms of the Second Vatican Council – in some cases this rejection extends to the 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 will not complete the process to attain to 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. For purposes of brevity, throughout this article I collectively refer to in the adherents of this movement as, "*sedeists*".

While these three groups 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*’ appear at variance with the teachings of the 1st 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 Spirit... therefore they have no need of approval from others nor do they admit any appeal to any other judgment”.¹

“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...”² It is for the bishops, ‘with whom the apostolic doctrine resides’, suitably to instruct the faithful entrusted to them”.³

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 *unpopularly* 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: By exactly 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”⁴ when most of them are not conversant in Catholic theology? How many of the ‘people’ have effectively grasped the rich patrimony of doctrines accumulated over the course of 2000 years and that is acquired with 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 2nd Vatican Council:

¹ 1st Vatican Council, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II, Washington DC [1990], cap. II, De perpetuitate primatus beati Petri in Romanis pontificibus, p. 869.

², Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, trans. Austin Flannery, New York, 1987, 18, p. 755,

³ *Ibid.*, 25, p. 764.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City 1994, 2089.

*“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 the appropriate means duly to investigate this revelation and give it suitable expression”.*⁵

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*”.⁶

Much like the 1st Vatican Council, this 2nd Vatican Council statement reveals that the Roman Pontiff and the successors of the apostles in union with him,⁷ and not the people, transmit and 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,⁸ but such an appreciation is not authentic when divorced from the hierarchy. Only when guided by the hierarchy does “the whole body” of the faithful – not a small movement – enjoy immunity from err on matters of belief.⁹

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*) or despoiled them of legitimate teaching authority (*sedepriuationism*). 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 (in two letters to his heretical colleague, Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople) that touched upon faith and morals when he embraced the Monothelite heresy, which was condemned by the sixth Ecumenical Council, i.e., the doctrine that Christ had only one will (*hen thelema*), and not two (corresponding to his two natures); Pope John XXII for his heretical sermons – not official

⁵ Ibid., 2nd Vatican Council, p. 870.

⁶ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 25, op. cit., p. 380.

⁷ CCC, 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*”.

⁸ CCC, 92.

⁹ Vatican Council II, op. cit., *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

documents – in which he affirmed that the souls of the blessed departed do not enjoy the Beatific Vision until the Last Judgment; Popes John Paul II and Francis for their heretical statements on the Jewish covenant not having been revoked, and for having espoused various forms of modernism. To support their argument the *sedeists* invoke the statements of several Church Pontiffs, Fathers and Doctors who, they maintain, affirm that a Pope can and has become a heretic *while in office*.

Rebuttal to the *Sedeist* Position

In contrast to this view, 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 in nowise be imputed. Drawing from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, my response reveals that 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 (emphasis added). This notwithstanding, one may legitimately argue that Popes have formulaically¹⁰ – not substantially – erred in statements on matters pertaining to faith and morals *before* said matters were officially pronounced by the Church and, as we shall see, this in nowise makes them heretics.

To better illustrate this point, consider St. Thomas Aquinas’ definition of a heretic: “*Heresy is a species of unbelief, belonging to those who profess the Christian faith, but corrupt its dogmas*”.¹¹ Within the context of his definition, Thomas’ application of the word “dogma” suggests an official doctrinal pronouncement that is clearly defined by the Church – something no Pope in Church history has contradicted.¹² 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”,¹³ the Catholic Encyclopedia defines heresy as an “*imperfect apprehension and comprehension of dogmas*”.¹⁴ The Catholic Catechism moreover affirms, “*Heresy is the*

¹⁰ “Formulaically” refers to the statements of Roman Pontiffs that are unqualified in nature and may lead to misinterpretation, but when theologically examined within their theological context, are immune from “substantial” or doctrinal error.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Opera Omnia*, Ed. Leonina, Typographia Polygotta Vaticana, Rome 1882, 2/2.11,1).

¹² “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.

¹³ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Vatican City 1994, art. 88.

¹⁴ 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.

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”.¹⁵

Heretic

The meaning of “heretic” was subjected to various interpretations throughout the centuries. It is noteworthy that the Greek word for “heresy” (*αἵρεσις*) that originally meant, “choice” or “thing chosen”, was employed at the First Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) to signify a deviation from the established religious beliefs that were revealed by God (which elicits a *divine faith*) on the part of anyone, even before such beliefs were officially pronounced by the Church (which official pronouncement elicits a *catholic faith*).

In Paul’s Epistle to Titus 3:10, a heretic (*αἱρετικὸν*) 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, even before such beliefs were officially pronounced by the Church as matter of *catholic faith*. And heresy was one of the leading justifications for the Inquisition (*Inquisitio haereticae pravitatis*), in particular, for Galileo Galilei who was brought before the Inquisition for a heretical teaching that contradicted the established religious beliefs of the Church in his day, but that was not officially pronounced as a matter of *catholic faith*.

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, moral theology, etc. As a result, in addition to preserving the unchanging purity of doctrine, growing emphasis was placed on the importance of its explication¹⁶ without departing from its point of origin, namely the message of Christ and his apostles. Subsequently, one could engage in speculative theological discussions pertaining to matters on which the Church had not yet made any official pronouncement.

With the 1992 publication of the Catholic Catechism, the definition of heresy was not applied, as before, to those whose guilt extended to established religious beliefs not yet officially pronounced by the Church and that were held to be revealed by God (which elicit a *divine faith*), but now it extended to those who also opposed those teachings that had been officially pronounced by the Church (which elicit a *catholic faith*).¹⁷

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City 1994, 2089.

¹⁶ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City 1994, 66.

¹⁷ 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*

Given the foregoing, the Church's definition of a heretic emerges as one who contradicts a tenet of faith that the Church has officially pronounced as part and parcel of the deposit of faith. This may shed light on the Thomas Aquinas' position regarding the Immaculate Conception. Although Aquinas denied the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and held to this opinion, he did so *before* the Church had made any official pronouncement in this regard and before she declared it a dogma (which then elicits on the part of all believers a divine *and* catholic faith). Therefore one may not contend that because Aquinas opposed the Immaculate Conception he was a heretic, as heretic is one who opposes both divine *and* catholic faith.

Speculative and Dogmatic Theology

In light of the aforementioned disciplines 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”, which was 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.*”¹⁸ Therefore, until the Church makes an official pronouncement, the matter remains open to theological discussion.

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).

¹⁸ 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 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*”).

Unsustainable Theological Argument

Pope John XXII (1316-1334)

In referring to statements of Church Pontiffs, Fathers and Doctors to support their argument that the Church has been tainted with heretical popes, the *sedeists* fail to note that many of these statements were hypothetical in nature. Their argument is predicated on the aforesaid statements' acknowledgment of the possibility of infallible heretics occupying the chair of Peter.

Their claim that the Pope has no teaching authority when he preaches heresy is buttressed by Pope Adrian VI (1522-1523), whose text 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 ostensibly knew 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. Regardless of who actually penned this manuscript, such claimants fail to acknowledge 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, 1304. 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 adherents of the *sedeist* movement also fail to note the following context of Pope John XXII's statement, which sheds light on the intended meaning (substance) underlying his expression (formula).

In his 2nd 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, 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 cleanse 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.¹⁹ He emphasized that as long as the Holy See has not given a decision, the theologians enjoyed perfect freedom in this matter. Indeed he was right, as the matter was yet undefined. The theologians who received his comments commonly pointed out that the Pope had given no decision on this question but only advanced his personal opinion, and they eventually petitioned the Pope to make an official pronouncement on the matter. In response, the Pope appointed a commission at Avignon to study the writings of the Church Fathers regarding the matter. 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

¹⁹ The works containing the teachings of the Pope's sermons that were sent to others requesting feedback were a “*Libellus partis negative*” and a work entitled, “*Queritur utrum anime sanctorum ab omnibus peccatis purgate videant divinam essentiam*”.

to pronounce any decision on the matter whatsoever. All participants of the consistory, including the Pope, agreed on two points: the saints already enjoy “*beatitude*” in heaven, and after the General Judgement they will enjoy “*a beatitude that is in some way more perfect*”. Simply put, the conclusion they all agreed on 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, and they were in nowise heretical.²⁰

Pope Honorius (1216-1227)

The *sedeists* are fond of citing Pope Agatho (678-681) who condemned Pope Honorius’ affirmation of Christ have “one will” (*hen thelema*).²¹ However, when read in light of the context of Pope Agatho’s larger text, one discovers greater significance to his words. Pope Agatho stated, “*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 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

²⁰ 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*, 2nd edition, trans. [from *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 30th 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), 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: Divinization takes place through the divine energy («θεϊὰ ἐνέργεια») of God.

²¹ “...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...” (3rd 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, *Sacrosacra concilia ad regiam editionem exacta*, vol. VI, col. 943, Madrid 1729).

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. 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. Pope Honorius' response did not decide the question, and 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 "two wills" in Christ, affirmed in his *Disputation with Pyrrhus* that Pope Honorius was not a monothelite.²² And it was not until the Lateran Council of 649 that 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 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. Nevertheless, at the time of Pope Agatho, a heretic signified not one who contradicted official doctrinal pronouncements (*catholic faith*), but more broadly anyone who deviated from the strictly interpreted established religious beliefs of the time (*divine faith*), i.e., matters pertaining to speculative theology (cf. CCC, 2089; CIC, can. 751).

²² "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? ... 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).*

The *sedeists* cite Pope Adrian II (867-872) who condemned the writings of the monothelites, including those of Honorius who was self-expressedly 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 the 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 monothelism 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", quite possibly to cunningly allow the heresy to fester 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 Church doctrine. 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*"). In other words, Pope Honorius was offering Sergius a way out – he was asking him to profess *either* one of the two doctrinal truths, both of which he himself held to. This formula of Honorius opposed the monothelistic heresy of Sergius that affirms Christ had only "one operation" or "one will".

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 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.

When taken literally (only as a *formula*), the “one will” expression emerges as a heresy, but when read within the proper context as reported above (interpreted as what the Pope intended – grasping its *substance*), it is not an heretical statement at all. To further illustrate this point, consider the following analogy. The doctrinal pronouncement of the Council of Florence declared that souls who die “*in Original Sin alone go straight to hell*” (Council of Florence, 6th session, July 6, 1439). If taken literally (only as a formula) this statement is false, as there are millions of aborted babies who died without Sacramental Baptism while in Original Sin who, according to the Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, do not go to hell²³ or to limbo.²⁴ Cardinal Ratzinger stated, “*Children who die in this way (through abortion) are indeed without any personal sin, so they cannot be sent to hell.*”²⁵ 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 gross misinterpretation – an approach reminiscent of the *sedeist* movement in their interpretation of the aforementioned papal pronouncements.

Hermeneutics

The *sedeists*’ approach of interpreting texts ignores the principles set forth by Benedict XV²⁶ 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*”.²⁷ Indeed, the very books of Sacred Scripture, although guaranteed as 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 monothelistic, 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*” (John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, bk. II, 13, 11). Accordingly, when interpreting the

²³ J. Ratzinger, *God and the World*, Ignatius Press, 2002, pp. 401-402.

²⁴ J. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, Ignatius Press, 1985 pp. 147-148.

²⁵ *God and the World*, op. cit., pp. 401-402.

²⁶ Cf. Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*, Vatican City, 1920, 50ff.

²⁷ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, Vatican City, 1943, 33-34.

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 shown to be already judged, if for example he should wither away into heresy; because ‘he who does not believe is already judged’.* However, they fail to interpret this statement in light of the following affirmation of the same Pontiff, “*...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,**²⁸ 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”.²⁹*

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 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.* And the word “continues” is indicative of the Roman Pontiff’s teaching authority³⁰ that will “never be shaken or harmed”.

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

This notwithstanding, 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 states: “*The Old testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent*

²⁸ In this statement Pope Innocent II roundly debunks those who claim that such Popes before him were heretics whom the *sedevacantists* and the *sedeprivationalists* 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).

²⁹ Pope Innocent III, Sermo 4, *De diversis sermonis*, in *Patrologia Latina*, Paris 1958-1974, 217.

³⁰ For the conciliar statement of the Roman Pontiff’s teaching authority cf. “Conclusion”.

value, for the Old Covenant has never been revoked” (CCC, 121). And God has made it abundantly clear in Sacred Scripture that while he does not go back on his covenant, he nonetheless makes another that transcends the previous one: “*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 took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt*” (Jer. 31.31). In short the old covenant foreshadowed the new (Col. 2:26-17) which Jesus declared he did not come to do away with (Mt. 5:17).

Others affirm disapproval toward some of Pope Francis’ unqualified statements, with particular emphasis on his comments of certain bishops and priests possibly becoming “wolves and not shepherds”; his apparent deemphasize of Church teaching on homosexuality, cohabitation and contraception; his possible reformulation of the indissolubility of marriage and the relaxation of the moral law prohibiting divorcees from receiving the Sacraments; his demotion of conservative bishops and/or cardinals and their replacement with progressive ones.

In response to such concerns, Pope Francis has not changed or contradicted Church doctrine, though some fear he very well 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.

Given the foregoing, one thing is certain, i.e., synods are convened to discuss issues of doctrine, administration and application upon a platform where bishops 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 where 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 the 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, virtue 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 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 the Pope 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. And what might this refer to if not the secret society known as the Freemasons whose purpose is to destroy the Catholic Church? No less than eight of Francis’ predecessors have formally condemned the Freemasons,³¹ and Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI have referred to a “secret society” that is “directed from one common center” and whose aim it is to undermine the Church.

Usurper to the Apostolic Seat?

Several mystics whose writings are approved have foretold the emergence of an “invalidly” elected Pontiff (*nota bene*: not a validly elected Pontiff such as Francis whose election met all the requirements for a valid papal election) whose Freemasonic affiliation will subversively eviscerate the morale, doctrine, customs and tradition of the Catholic Church, Christian veteran churches and religious based organizations. Those who claim in the name of tradition that Pope Francis fits the description of an invalidly elected Pope, or that he is an antipope, are the very claimants of orthodoxy who use tradition much like a drunk uses a lamppost: for support, not for illumination.

Not even God’s prophets who foretell the rise of antipope (the Catholic Church has already witnessed over 30 antipopes and emerged unscathed) ever attribute this to a “validly”

³¹ 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.

elected Pope, but rather they attribute this to a usurper to the papal throne whose election is clearly “invalid”. 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 concerning 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 having stated, “*The devils will have unusual power, the 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.*”³²

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 either be exiled and possibly martyred, and during his exilic sojourn, an “invalid” papal election will occur. Blessed Anna-Maria Taigi 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*”.³³

Admittedly, the Church has experienced several invalid papal elections, including the 14th century schism in which the two Popes Gregory XI and Clement VII claimed the throne simultaneously. Needless to say, there can be only one “validly” reigning pontiff, not two. So one pope 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 consistory of cardinals, but, if the true pope is alive and even in exile, his consent, otherwise no conclave may be held in attempt to elect another without his expressed consent. Therefore the prophecies predicting the pope’s flight or exile from Rome do not signify the pope’s abduction from office, nor does it validate an attempted papal election in his absence. 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 a stronger faith. From all this one thing emerges as absolutely certain: Pope Francis is the Vicar of Christ. He is God’s

³² *Works of the Seraphic Father St. Francis Of Assisi*, London: R. Washbourne, 1882, pp. 248-250.

³³ 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 describes 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.).

true and validly elected Roman Pontiff who alone enjoys “*supreme, full and immediate authority*”.

His desire to welcome within the Church those who are in most in need of God’s mercy – “those who need a physician” – is a timely response to Pope John Paul II’s appeal to all Christians to “put out into the deep”. As for the suspicions of Pope Francis’ changing the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage, such an idea is unsubstantiated, as he has not suggested any such doctrinal change, but has encouraged a renewed commitment to foster a return of those who have separated themselves from the Church. In my opinion, this will result in a more expeditious and less costly approach to annulments, accompanied by a more diligent review of each individual case before one may be admitted to the Sacraments. Indeed, the Council of Trent was careful to note that there must not be any obstacle to grace on the part of the recipients who are to receive the Sacraments, and it declared it erroneous to assert that they require no previous dispositions³⁴. Such dispositions are required to prepare the recipient, they are a condition (*conditio sine qua non*), not the cause of the grace conferred.

Hypothetical Argument

Finally, the *sedeists* often quote 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.*” However, they fail to note is that this statement addresses a possibility, not a reality. Apropos of this statement, several theologians have discussed the possibility of a Pope becoming a heretic, and among them noteworthy are Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), Francisco de Suarez, Alphonsus de Liguori, Augustine Matthaеucci, Marie Dominique Bouix and Louis Billot. In addressing this hypothetical argument, R. Bellarmine 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*”.³⁵ He therefore entertains this hypothesis – much like that of the Blessed Virgin who, although hypothetically could sin, would never actually do so – by stating: “*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***” (*De Romano Pontefice*, Book II, ch.29, *Opera Omnia*, Pedone Lauriel, vol. I, p. 418, Paris, 1871).

³⁴ H. Denzinger, op. cit., 880, 1252.

³⁵ Robert Bellarmine, *De Romano Pontefice*, lib. II, cap. 30, p. 418.

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, even as a private person, becomes a public heretic or an occult heretic.***"³⁶

Simply put, while a Pope may formulaically – not substantially – err of matters of faith and morals before the Church has made any official doctrinal pronouncement, all agree that he has never done so. By virtue of the guaranteed charism of infallibility no Roman Pontiff, as history has proven, has ever contradicted Church pronouncements that are of "divine and catholic faith", otherwise known as dogma. 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 will ever contradict official Church teaching is, in my opinion, predicated on the writings of such theologians as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Michael Bañez (1528-1604), Luis de Molina (1535-1600), 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 an divine omniscience that foresees infallibly all the future acts, whether absolute or conditional, of intelligent creatures. This divine omniscience of God, through efficacious grace (*gratia efficax*), predetermines the human will to perform a free good act, whereby the human will, without being forced, with a metaphysical certainty absolutely

³⁶ Dogmatic Works of St. Alphonsus Maria de Ligouri, Turin, 1848, vol. VIII, p. 720.

corresponds to God's grace, for *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 infallible act *A*. In light 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 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 Francisco Suárez would establish a model of Congruism that brings Molinism more into line with Bañezianism, what is certain is that all such theologians agree that grace, in some way and without violating the freedom of the human will, efficaciously aids the human will in accomplishing what God intends. Therefore, it is my theological opinion that by virtue of the principle of *proemotio physica* in the Vicar of Christ, the argument of a Pope becoming a heretic is ultimately an unsustainable one.

Conclusion

The aforesaid *sedeist* views toward the Roman Pontiff's teaching authority, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*, is flawed and even 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.³⁷ 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. This 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 I have illustrated in this article is one of faithful adherence not simply to a mere human instructor, but to the inspired Vicar of Christ on earth who is endowed by Christ with a special charism of teaching authority that will endure for all ages. 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 the of 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

³⁷ Mt. 23:3: [Jesus tells his disciples:] "*The scribes and pharisees occupy the seat of Moses, so obey them in everything they tell you...*"

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 irrefragable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as assistance promised to him in the person of blessed Peter himself*”.³⁸

The 5th 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 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.”*³⁹

The 1st 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 for ever, 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... **But 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...***

The Roman Pontiff possess... 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...⁴⁰

³⁸ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 25, op. cit., p. 380.

³⁹ The 5th Lateran Council, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II, Washington DC [1990], caput II, *De perpetuitate primatus beati Petri in Romanis pontificibus*, p. 640.

⁴⁰ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1st Vatican Council, vol. II, op. cit., p. 813-815.

Picking up the thread of the 5th Lateran and 1st Vatican Councils, the 2nd 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.”⁴¹

In his teaching authority, which is “*supreme, full and immediate*”,⁴² 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 and through the college of bishops in union with him, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*. Thus the Roman Pontiff and the bishops continue to “explicate” throughout the course of the centuries Christ’s one Public Revelation.⁴³ In a word, all the members of the Catholic Church happily enjoy the sure guarantee of the unflinching guidance of Peter, the rock, and his successors to whom Jesus Christ gave the pledge of victory over the falsehoods of hell for all time.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 869.

⁴² Ibid., p. 923.

⁴³ CCC, op.cit., 66.

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 five publications.

Rev. Iannuzzi's first exposure to the writings of the Italian mystic Luisa Piccarreta occurred over twenty years ago while making a holy hour in a Trappist monastery. By a stroke of providence, there lay on the empty pew before him a volume of Luisa. After having read it, he discovered on the monastery windowsill a pamphlet of the same mystic. The following day a senior nun (now deceased) approached him and asked if he might be interested in translating Luisa's works from Italian to English. He accepted this task.

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