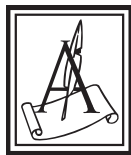


PRIESTS OF THE ITALIAN DISTRICT  
OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X

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# SEDEVACANTISM

**A False Solution  
To a Real Problem**



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**ON THE COVER:** The chair (*cathedra*) of St. Peter, the first pope. An eyewitness account from the 500's says it stood in the baptistry of St. Peter's. In the 17th century, it was *encased in the bronze throne* still visible today in the apse of St. Peter's. For the 1800th anniversary of the martyrdoms of Sts. Peter and Paul (1867), Pope Pius IX had it removed from its enclosure and displayed. The oak framework is its oldest part. Four large rings (unseen in the picture) incorporated into it date it to the time of Roman Emperor Claudius (41-54AD). Deterioration and relic-hunters made repairs necessary under Charlemagne. The oak frame was reinforced by the insertion of new panels. The front is adorned with square slabs of ivory, dated to the 5th century, representing the labors of Hercules. Some are placed upside down and were not, apparently, made for the places they occupy. Ivory ornaments of the back, however, are well-adapted to the chair. They represent the combats of animals, centaurs, and men. In the center of the horizontal bar of the *tympanum* (the triangular element) is the figure of an emperor between two angels. Some believe it to represent either Charlemagne, Charles the Bald, or some other emperor. **Photo credit:** Scala/Art Resource, NY. Museo Petriano, St. Peter's Basilica.

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# PREFACE

This issue presents a two-part study. This study, the work of lengthy reflection, deals with a delicate subject: the position of the Society of Saint Pius X with regards to the pope, and the objections others have made to this position or to our silence in the face of these objections. It was not our intention to enter this polemical terrain, since we have no desire to enter into a vortex of responses to responses leading nowhere. Accordingly, we have always tried to avoid treating the subject directly, refusing to engage in a vain and futile polemic, and refusing to shift the problem onto the universal plane of abstract ideas. This was always the prudential attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre and of the Society of Saint Pius X.

I insist on the nature of this attitude, since it seems to me that it has not always been understood and recognized. Faced with the mystery that at present envelops the Church, confronted with a crisis situation to which no one can furnish an apodictic and completely satisfying theological explanation, the only position truly in conformity with the Faith, the Creed, and Catholic doctrine, is to practice the virtue of prudence—a supernatural virtue which applies universal principles to concrete and particular situations.

We have never denied that an extremely grave problem has existed in the Church since the time of the Second Vatican Council: our position is well known. Nor did Archbishop Lefebvre dodge the question of the pope; on the contrary, he often posed questions, both publicly and privately, regarding papal legitimacy—this is also well known. But he never considered himself authorized to reach a conclusion, leaving judgment in this matter to the Church or a future pope. The problem exists, but it is a concrete problem, not a theoretical, mathematical, or metaphysical one, although metaphysics has some bearing on it. The safe attitude is one consistent with concrete reality; it may keep us from sliding into dangerous and deviant paths at odds with faith and hope. It is the attitude of supernatural prudence, founded on faith in the promises of Jesus to His Church and in hope for the grace to remain faithful to Jesus, always present in His Church. The Church belongs to Him and not to men, not even to the most holy pope. The moral order, to which the exercise of even the

theological virtues belongs, is governed by the virtue of prudence, *auriga virtutum*.

Archbishop Lefebvre and the Society of Saint Pius X chose this prudential path from the beginning. It has been expounded and explained many times, but it is never useless to repeat these explanations. This study is a common enterprise by the priests of the District of Italy. It is the fruit of our personal studies, reflections, exchanges of impressions, discussions... It therefore reflects the thought of all the priests of the Society of Saint Pius X who work in Italy, for whom I as district superior assume responsibility. It does not claim to be a position paper or an official declaration of the Society of Saint Pius X. Rather, it modestly expresses the reply of the District of Italy to sedevacantist arguments, whatever they may be. Nor does it claim to refute these arguments directly, but limits itself to demonstrating that these arguments resolve nothing. On the contrary, they give rise to other problems which are equally insoluble, yet even graver.

Faced with the mystery of the current situation of the Church, in no way can we claim to have understood and resolved every difficulty. Nor do we claim to have delivered some definitive theological or dogmatic definition. We do not claim to be infallible, nor do we desire in any way to condemn those who do not think as we do. We offer our reflections to everyone of good will; only God and the Church will provide the definitive solution to the mystery that we are experiencing.

This study is not addressed to the experts, the doctors or masters of sedevacantism, but to their disciples and the simple faithful, who have put their trust in these experts and in their considerable gifts, but without having studied the matter or without understanding their subtle and rather abstract arguments. It is also addressed to the faithful who do not adhere to these views, but who may be disturbed by accusations and criticisms directed against the Society of Saint Pius X, that they may understand that we are not bereft of intelligence or theological knowledge—as some would like them to believe—nor of the courage to address an extremely difficult question.

This work therefore solely intends to be an act of mercy towards those who are disturbed or worried, that they might not lose hope. “God is never lacking in necessary things; if he permits a great evil, the means of remedying such an evil will not be lacking,” as Bishop Zinelli said during the First Vatican Council.

Surely God has more mercy on the simple, who lack the capacity to protect themselves from error and evil, than on the learned. The light of faith and hope is enough for the simple to recognize the path of fidelity to the Church, without feeling the need of elaborate and subtle theories in order to delude themselves that they are resolving the mystery of the Church.

Finally, if anyone should believe that we are too hard on exponents of sedevacantist views, supposing them victims of our malice, let me recall that we have for years put up with the gravest accusations against ourselves and against Archbishop Lefebvre himself. We did so because we did not want to descend to the polemical level of our critics. For this reason we continue to avoid citing their literary productions. So as not to embitter our relations with priests who were once our brothers, or with faithful who were once our friends, we have chosen to remain silent, and we shall continue to do so, letting grace do its work of truth in souls of good will.

May God grant that this study, which aspires to help those faithful who saw in Archbishop Lefebvre the defender of their faith, at the same time be homage to him, whose prudence was inspired by the love of Jesus and Mary, the Church and the pope.

Mother of Holy Hope, convert us.

Rev. Fr. Michel Simoulin





# PART ONE

## WHAT IS SEDEVACANTISM?

### INTRODUCTION

Amongst those opposed to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and to the ensemble of doctrinal, liturgical, and pastoral deviations it has inspired there are significant differences of opinion about the attitude one should have towards the current ecclesiastical hierarchy, and in particular towards its head. One of these approaches is called “sedevacantism,” a theory according to which the See of Peter has not been occupied by a true pontiff since at least December 7, 1965. Consequently John Paul II (and others including Paul VI, at least since that date) would lack pontifical authority, and therefore the pontiff’s name should not be cited in the Canon of the Mass in that place where the liturgical rubrics specify mention of the pope. The following reflections have a specific intention. After clarifying the sedevacantist position, how it is expressed, and how it justifies itself, we shall inquire into its material consequences for laymen, priests, or bishops who embrace it. In other words, the goal of this study is to furnish tangible criteria of judgment for those who legitimately wonder about the actual and concrete possibility of professing sedevacantism, for those who have embraced it but have doubts, or for those who, having embraced it, are not entirely aware of the implications of their position.

Before going into detail let us make another point that seems unavoidable. Because the sedevacantist position has been embraced by some former confrères who no longer share the position of the Society of Saint Pius X, we intend to avoid any personal references to or caricatures of individuals, their characters or possible personal defects. The only effect of so doing would be to prevent a serene and dispassionate reflection on the very impor-

tant question we are posing. We hope to disappoint those who may look for gossip or grist for unseemly speculation in these pages. If for the sake of argument we are obliged to cite certain texts and authors we do so not to injure any persons or confrères. We hope in this way to contribute to the creation of a climate of true charity which may serve as the platform for a just estimation of reality and of possible divergences. Perhaps it is the precariousness of such a platform that has until now prevented calm discussion of this subject.

It should also be recognized that within the ranks of the sedevacantists there are some who would like to see a calm and dispassionate discussion of the problem and who are trying, if at times haltingly, to create a constructive atmosphere. Charity obliges us both to foster such a climate and to tell the truth.

## **A COMMON POINT OF DEPARTURE: REJECTION OF THE COUNCIL**

Our analysis of sedevacantism begins with a simple historical treatment of the subject, so that the reader may understand the fundamental problem in its concreteness and its immediacy. As far as possible we will avoid technical and academic language, which has often made these issues inaccessible to those who have nonetheless felt themselves obliged to make decisions in this delicate matter, or at least to come to grips with it. All “traditionalists” are heirs to the opposition to conciliar errors which found its first concrete expression during the Council itself and became visible in the *Coetus Internationalis Patrum*. From 1969 onwards, rejection of the liturgical reform marked the continuation of battles begun during the Council. It is outside our scope to trace the fascinating history of these protagonists of the early days; nevertheless, though it may seem banal, it should be noted that sedevacantism later arose out of this negative evaluation of the doctrinal content of the Council, and not from an *a priori* judgment of Paul VI. Those who opposed and continued to oppose the Council found themselves faced with a problem that still persists: in what terms to relate to the official hierarchy and to him whom Christendom recognizes as a legitimate pope for all intents and purposes. How was it possible for a Catholic to be obliged over a period of time to oppose a pope in the name of the Catholic faith, of which the pope himself is the guarantee?

## THE ORIGINS OF SEDEVACANTISM

Faced with this fundamental problem, the great majority of bishops who had fought against the conciliar reforms submitted, and, in some cases perhaps dying of heartbreak, accepted the reforms in the “spirit of obedience” (sometimes mixed with a smattering of expediency and weakness). The successors of these bishops, contemporary bishops considered sympathetic or friendly to groups connected with *Ecclesia Dei*, do not concern us directly here, for the simple reason that, apart from the subjective nobility of their intentions, their position—while certainly evidence of a crisis of conscience—is one of full integration into the conciliar complex.

Amongst those who would continue to oppose the conciliar errors, this problem would one day unleash not only divergences of opinion but also painful and insoluble divisions between those who continued to recognize the legitimacy of Paul VI and his successors, and those who decided to deny it. The former position was that of Archbishop Lefebvre and is still maintained by the Society of Saint Pius X; the latter, sedevacantist, position would be subdivided in turn into several different positions. We shall examine these positions in order to fully understand the current structures and demands of the sedevacantist world.

The first public declaration of a sedevacantist kind was that of the Mexican Jesuit Joaquín Sáenz y Arriaga, who in 1973 published a work entitled *Sede Vacante*. If the title gives an indication of the author’s thinking, it must nevertheless be admitted that it represents an embryonic brand of sedevacantism, and an unusual one at that. Its argumentation leaves aside the crucial element that will provide the basis for most later sedevacantist arguments—the definitive approval of the constitution *Dignitatis Humanae* in the context of the promulgation of the Council (December 7, 1965). Fr. Saenz prefers to base his own arguments on *Nostra Aetate*, ecumenism, collegiality, and the *Novus Ordo Missae* (art. 7). While testifying to considerable unease and indignation in the face of the Council and its spirit, his writings are not organized in a systematic and strictly argumentative manner. One has the impression of an instinctive sedevacantism, latent and implicit, rather than the result of rigorous demonstration, or even less of the systematic approach characteristic of later treatments. Furthermore, it must be recognized that this work seems to have had practically

no echo outside of Mexico, and the sedevacantists themselves do not seem to consider it an important point of reference for their position, nor even an official manifestation of sedevacantism. Shortly before *Sede Vacante*, Fr. Sáenz had published another interesting work entitled *The New Montinian Church* (1971). This work is one of the first syntheses of doctrinal deviations deriving from the Council; it does not yet assert the sedevacantist position, however. Fr. Sáenz y Arriaga died on April 28, 1976.

This initial, somewhat incomplete declaration was followed three years later in France by the more lucid and structured arguments of Fr. Noel Barbara (1976). If Fr. Barbara's approach seemed capable of easing the conscience of those who could not accept the Second Vatican Council, it contained in reality *in nuce* the presuppositions that within a short span of time would irremediably divide sedevacantism itself and manifest its internal contradictions. The question is not of merely historical interest but is entirely contemporary, since still today we are faced with the consequences of these same premises. If Paul VI was not the pope, where indeed was the Church? If Paul VI was not the pope, whence would the Church be "reborn"? Who would one day be able to elect a true pope? If Paul VI was not the pope, who could formally declare this fact before the Christian world, which continued to recognize him as the true pope? At stake was, and remains, the visibility of the Church and her continuity over time (indefectibility), constitutive and indispensable elements for the very existence of the Catholic Church.

## TWO ATTEMPTED RESPONSES TO THESE DIFFICULTIES

### A. CONCLAVISM

The first response was the most spontaneous, but also the most radical and, in a certain sense, the most logical. If the true Catholics remaining in the world could declare the See vacant, breaking every connection with Paul VI, these same people would also have the power and indeed the obligation to give the Church a true pope. Thus they could guarantee her visibility, indefectibility over time, and perennial magisterium in conformity with apostolic teachings. On the basis of this assumption the idea spontaneously arose of calling a conclave to elect a true pope. If this

intuition had its own logic and began with the noble and sincere intention of saving the Church, a surfeit of candidates and the lack of any mandated agreement on the terms of election led to the creation of over twenty “popes” in the world. Because of deaths and recent elections it is impossible to present a complete and up-to-date list; we limit ourselves to mentioning five such “popes” of American nationality:

1) PETER II, in the world Chester Olszewski (there are however four other “popes” who have chosen the suggestive name of Peter II);

2) PIUS XIII, Lucien Pulvermacher, elected in 1998;

3) ADRIAN VII, Francis Konrad Schuckardt, elected in 1984;

4) MICHAEL I, David Bawden, elected in 1990.

Well known in Europe is the case of Palmar, in Spain, where Clemente Dominguez y Gomez was elected “pope” in 1978 under the name GREGORY XVII.

At the present time there are also others who, preferring the solution of a conclave but not recognizing any of the currently elected popes, are awaiting conditions favorable to proceeding to a new conclave. If we speak of “conclavist sedevacantism” it is not with the goal of ridiculing the whole of the sedevacantist world, but, on the contrary, to do justice to those sedevacantists who are not conclavists. It would not be fair to assimilate these latter to such aberrations. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to recognize the rigorous and implacable logic that led to the election of these “popes.” In regard to this thorny problem a prominent exponent of the Cassiciacum<sup>1</sup> argument (which we will soon discuss) has written:

Conclavism, or rather the theoretical position and practice of those who maintain that, in the current situation of vacancy of the Apostolic See, private persons can or ought to proceed to a

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<sup>1</sup> [Cassiciacum is the name of the place to which St. Augustine and some of his friends withdrew for study and prayer after his baptism. In the late 1970’s, Fr. Guérard des Lauriers, O. P., together with a group of like-minded priests, founded a review called *Les Cahiers de Cassiciacum* to defend the sedevacantist position. The “Cassiciacum Thesis” is the name given to the theory that the pope is pope *materialiter* but not *formaliter*. Ed.]

conclave to elect a legitimate Pontiff,...is in fact the only solution from a completely sedevacantist point of view....The rigorist sedevacantists cannot defend the indefectibility of the Church in a manner consistent with faith or common sense. How is it possible that the Church still exists, as Jesus Christ constituted it, if all the hierarchy has completely and definitively vanished? The Cassiciacum thesis gives a difficult but satisfactory response to this objection. Rigorist sedevacantism does not give such a response: it invokes mystery...the coming end of the world (?), the death or the end of the Church as a transition to another reality (the reign of antichrist, the millennial reign of Christ, the spiritual Church of the abandoned faithful, *etc.*) or, rejecting the apostolicity of the Church, it proceeds to the uncanonical election of a burlesque "pope" ("conclavism") promptly forgotten by everybody, his own "electors" included.<sup>2</sup>

This harsh judgment, while redolent of the climate peculiar to the internal polemics of the sedevacantist world, nevertheless illustrates the logic that, beginning from a pure and simple sedevacantism, has led and continues to lead directly to conclavism, and indeed seems to act incoherently if it fails to do so. In fact, from the moment that one claims the right and the obligation to declare before the Church that a pope is in reality not the pope, logic dictates that one has also the right and the obligation to elect one. On this account it seems logically comprehensible that sedevacantism should result in conclavism. The large number of popes elected, together with the continuing persistence of such intentions, obliges us to take this interpretation into serious consideration.

## B. THE CASSICIACUM THESIS

Therefore the fundamental problem remains open: how is it possible to deny the authority of Paul VI and his successors? If it is possible, where then is the Church? Whence should the Catholic Church appear again? To these questions, to which conclavism has its own characteristic responses (which cannot, however, be taken seriously in practice), a mitigated form of sedevacantism has developed a seemingly more adequate response: the Cassiciacum thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Francesco Ricossa, *Risposta al libro: Petrus es tu?*, pp. 12-13, 24.

The advocates of this thesis, published by the Dominican Father Guérard des Lauriers in 1979, maintain that, while John Paul II lacks the authority and charisms of a true pope, he is nevertheless the legitimately elected subject designated to receive those prerogatives the day that he, or one of his successors, manifests the objective intention<sup>3</sup> of promoting the good of the Church. Only then will we have a true pope who is “formally” pope. In fact John Paul II is “materially” pope, a “pope” without authority or any pontifical charism. By consequence no obedience is owed to him in practice and he ought not to be named in the Canon of the Mass.

This position is substantially equivalent to sedevacantism plain and simple so far as the refusal to recognize the authority of John Paul II goes. It departs from that position in its manner of explaining the indefectibility of the Church over time. The Cassiciacum thesis designates the current ecclesiastical hierarchy, compared to a comatose body bereft of any authority, as the subject on the basis of which the Church will be regenerated. This will happen either when a future material pope will remove the obstacle (*obex*) which currently prevents the holder of that office from receiving the charisms and authority of the papacy, or when he will finally manifest the objective intention to act for the good of the Church. The succession of “material popes,” albeit lacking authority, jurisdiction, and assistance, is sufficient, from the perspective of the Cassiciacum thesis, to guarantee the necessary continuity between St. Peter and the last pope at the end of time.

We will use the term “sedevacantism” in the generic sense to signify the rejection of the authority of John Paul II. To distinguish the two sedevacantist positions we have discussed, we shall call the former “rigorist sedevacantism” and the latter “Guérardism,” by reference to Fr. Guérard des Lauriers.

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<sup>3</sup> This objective intention, according to the Cassiciacum Thesis, was no longer directed to the good of the Church from the moment when Cardinal Montini and his successors were elected to the pontificate. As a consequence God, faced with this obstacle (*obex*), was unable to confer papal authority on them. This defect of intention would be recognizable on the basis of the acts which these pontiffs promulgated. For this reason it is called an objective intention, as distinct from the subjective intention that God alone can recognize.

## THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN RIGORIST SEDEVACANTISM AND THE CASSICIACUM THESIS

Strict sedevacantism considers the Cassiciacum thesis to be a kind of mitigated Lefebvrism, devised by Fr. Guérard to justify the “ambiguous” position of the Society of Saint Pius X. For some this position even expresses an indirect communion with John Paul II and his errors. We shall mention two of the most important objections rigorist sedevacantists make to the Cassiciacum thesis. In the first place, it is not clear why a problem of intentions should actually prevent God from bestowing supreme authority and with this the charisms of infallibility on him who, legitimately elected, has freely accepted the supreme pontificate. To maintain the contrary would indeed seem to be an injurious limitation on the omnipotence of God. In the second place, it is not easy to understand how a merely material hierarchy can continue over time, or with what authority a “pope” without jurisdiction can name “material” cardinals, themselves lacking jurisdiction, who in their turn elect a future “material” pope, and so on.<sup>4</sup> On the face of it, it would indeed seem more credible, from a sedevacantist point of view, to hold that the Church is being maintained solely among those who maintain the Catholic faith in its entirety (rather than in a comatose hierarchy), and that Providence is free to give the Church a true pope in the manner it finds opportune, without being constrained to make use of material cardinals lacking any authority.<sup>5</sup>

The Guérardians, however, consider these positions to be spiritualist and protestant, since for the rigorists the Church would no longer have any visible element. A hypothetical pope who would not emerge from the material hierarchy would appear to be the initiator of a new apostolic succession—a sort of new St. Peter—and thus the founder of a new Church, a Catholic Church bis.<sup>6</sup> For Guérardism, rigorist sedevacantism is not consistent with the faith because it contradicts the dogma of the indefectibility of the Church. By considering the Church’s material and for-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 49, pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Il Nuovo Osservatore Cattolico*, no. 16, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ricossa, *Risposta*, p. 17.



mal hierarchy extinct, it inevitably lays the foundations for con-clavism.<sup>7</sup>

The dichotomy between the two positions is such as to sometimes altogether prevent sacramental communion between the two groups. The opinion of Don Francesco Ricossa, a paladin of the Cassiciacum thesis, is interesting in this regard. Don Ricossa maintains that it is licit to attend a Mass celebrated by a “rigorist” sedevacantist priest only if this priest is evidently at odds with the principles he professes. Even in this case, as in all others, any other type of collaboration is forbidden.<sup>8</sup> It is probably only on account of necessity that up to today there is a certain sacramental inter-communion, albeit precarious, between the two groups. Two recent episcopal consecrations for the Guérardian camp will presumably make it possible to avoid such forced adaptations in the future. These adaptations are not coherent with the grave mutual accusations about the faith that the two groups continue to exchange.

Furthermore, the Guérardians consider that the Cassiciacum thesis is the only one that justifies the decision, in itself of vital importance, to proceed to episcopal consecrations without papal mandate.<sup>9</sup> Within Guérardian circles, however, there is some division over the legitimacy of such consecrations. Amongst the first disciples of Guérard des Lauriers there were some who did not accept his own episcopal consecration and who, in keeping with their principles, still do not accept those which have followed.

In short, there exists between the two positions a real gulf which is likely, in our opinion, to become more and more clearly apparent. This gulf has sometimes been passed over by SSPX priests who have often thought it possible to argue with both camps in the same manner. It has also been passed over by sedevacantists themselves when, in arguing with non-sedevacantists, they have found it expedient to hide this wound which risks exposing the intrinsic difficulties of the sedevacantist position. On these occasions the dichotomy, often the source of internal polemics within sedevacantist milieux, is presented as a mere nuance. This intellectual divide and, in a certain sense, the current

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 29, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

reciprocal exclusion of the two positions reflect the choice of a point of departure. While rigorist sedevacantism mainly uses arguments of a juridical nature, the Cassiciacum thesis departs from characteristically theological and metaphysical considerations which, in theory as in practice, substantially exclude the application of canonical criteria.

Rigorist sedevacantism in fact bases its arguments on the canonical incompatibility of the functions and office of the papacy with the public profession of heresy. While these arguments have precise points of reference in canon law, they are systematically rejected by the Guérardians who observe that, in order to be formally a heretic (that is, to all intents and purposes, and before the whole Church) and thus to incur the canonical penalties, pertinacity in the face of a canonical warning is necessary. But no authority but Christ Himself can issue such a warning. There is a range of diverse positions on the possibility of applying the canons (canon 188 § 4 in particular), on the pertinence of the bull of Paul IV *Cum ex Apostolatus Officio*<sup>10</sup> (which some maintain to have been abrogated in 1917), and on the practical and contemporary significance of certain opinions of classical theologians (which are subject to doubt insofar as those thinkers were never obliged to take into account the contemporary situation of the papacy and the Church). These controversies are compounded by the impossibility of recourse to the Roman commission for the interpretation of legislative texts, and indeed seem likely to last even longer than the crisis in the Church.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CASSICIACUM THESIS

### A. INITIAL REFLECTIONS

What the Cassiciacum thesis styles the “observation” of the formal vacancy of the Holy See—we underline at the outset—actually implies the judgment on the person of John Paul II that it avoids making directly. Since the canonical approach seems impractical, a metaphysical-theological judgment takes its place

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<sup>10</sup> In the appendix to this study we will briefly present the contents of that bull, together with some considerations on the concrete possibility of its use and application by the sedevacantists.

which likewise arrives at a rejection of the authority of John Paul II. This process seems unacceptable for a very precise reason. Canon law is nothing but the juridical and codified expression of laws and principles, with their roots in Revelation, inscribed in the very being of the Church, just as the Ten Commandments are not the result of God's arbitrary choices but necessary consequences of God's being who He is. Now the fundamental principle that makes the canonical path impractical is that no one can judge the First See (*Prima Sedes a nemine iudicatur*). The Guérardians justly apply this principle in arguing for the necessity of canonical warnings, but then they trample on it by expressing a judgment on the Holy See, albeit formulated in non-juridical terms: every law has its loophole! It makes one think, if the comparison is permissible, of one of those rabbinical stratagems which made it possible to elude the suffocating pharisaical legislation on the Sabbath rest. For example, since it is prohibited to take medicine on the Sabbath, someone with a toothache could rinse out his mouth with a little vinegar on the condition that he immediately swallow it and not expel it. In this manner the vinegar could be assimilated to a food and thus its use—albeit per se clearly medicinal and not alimentary—could be legitimate. It is true that the Cassiciacum thesis says nothing about the personal faith of John Paul II, and in this sense does not judge him. But with regard to his persona as pope, it paradoxically arrives at an even more articulated distinction than rigorist sedevacantism, and in practice arrives at the same conclusions concerning the rejection of his authority and the Mass *una cum*.<sup>11</sup> The simple “observation,” from the moment it arrives at this conclusion, necessarily includes a real and true “judgment,” albeit one made outside of

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<sup>11</sup> [The expression “*una cum*” occurs in the second paragraph of the Canon of the Mass, which begins “*In primis*.” There the priest prays for the pope and his local bishop by name. When sedevacantists offer the Mass, they refuse to name the pope in order to show that they are not in communion (“*una cum*”) with a heretic (at least materially) and his heresies. In their study of sedevacantism (“A Little Catechism of Sedevacantism,” *The Angelus*, June, 2001, p. 22), the Dominican Fathers of Avrillé, France, explain that this interpretation of “*una cum*” is mistaken: “The expression ‘*una cum*’ in the Canon of the Mass does not mean that one affirms that he is in communion with the erroneous ideas of the pope, but rather that one wants to pray for the Church and for the pope, her visible head.” *Ed.*]

any strictly canonical setting. In other words, the Cassiciacum thesis manifests the inadmissible use of procedures that, in their foundations, are equivalent to those of other sedevacantists which the thesis itself claims to refute.

If this were not true, then the same simple “observation” would spontaneously and simultaneously take place in every Catholic who rejects the Council, in noticing (as he actually does) the irreconcilability between the traditional magisterium and the current teachings. The fact that this does not happen is a first indication that the “observation” of the formal vacancy of the Apostolic See is in fact a real judgment on the person of John Paul II, the result of a precise and articulated theological odyssey. It took some fifteen years for Fr. Guérard himself, a distinguished theologian who had rejected the Council and the *Novus Ordo* with a praiseworthy lucidity, to “notice” the formal vacancy of the Apostolic See and to understand that this fact should be publicly declared as a fundamental element of the profession of faith.

## **B. THE ATTITUDE UNDERLYING THE CASSICIACUM THESIS**

The outlook underlying this approach is a form of legalism (or juridical positivism), which amounts to the dissociation of law from reality. It often happens that the application of juridical norms ends up having a metaphysical effect, determining and conditioning reality (at least in the mind of the subject) instead of operating objectively. In other words, what we see here is the inversion of metaphysical priority: the priority of being over law. This inversion makes it possible to put one’s conscience at ease by evading determinate juridical norms (or rather interpreting them in accordance with one’s own needs), since the law is no longer conceived of as having a direct connection with reality.

By consequence, from the point of view of the Cassiciacum thesis, the reality of the Church is always becoming less knowable in itself. It is imprisoned by and depends directly on the application of juridical norms. In attentively examining the Cassiciacum Thesis one has the impression that the Church continues to exist simply by virtue of the fact that total vacancy cannot be declared. John Paul II’s papacy is saved in its materiality, and thus the fact that he remains materially the pope assures the indefectibility of the Church—by contrast with rigorist sedevacantism—because

of a juridical circumstance that prevents Guérardians or others from proceeding to such a declaration:

According to all the “complete sedevacantists” a private person would have the right to declare, also before the Church, that such a person is not the pope. Also this is not possible. If Francesco Ricossa declares that John Paul II is not the pope, *he affirms something that is absolutely certain and proven*, but this statement has no juridical value in the Church, because the speaker is a random individual. *It is for this reason that John Paul II remains materially “pope.”*<sup>12</sup>

Here the inversion of the juridical and metaphysical orders is manifest. In fact, starting from this principle, if John Paul II were not even materially pope (rigorist sedevacantism), it would be necessary to continue to maintain—against objective reality—that he is materially the pope. For whoever would declare this truth would remain a random individual lacking the authority to make this affirmation publicly before the Church. We should not forget that the existence of a material hierarchy—the result of this impossibility of making a declaration on the part of whoever would reject the authority of John Paul II—is indispensable, from the Guérardian perspective, not only to maintain canon law, but also in order to assure and guarantee the indefectibility of the Church over time. The very being of the Church, or rather of that which the Church ought to be, thus appears imprisoned and strictly dependent on the application of juridical norms.

It is a paradox that this juridical mentality is evident amongst the Guérardians, who avoid the canonical argument for rejecting the authority of John Paul II. In our opinion this is owing to the fact that, in spite of this perfectly credible premise, these same men who reject the authority of John Paul II by another argument, pretend to demonstrate *a priori* that a future true pope will necessarily be canonically elected by legitimate (albeit only material) “cardinals.” This eventuality would seem forced and indicative of some juridical scruple to anyone who rejects the authority of John Paul II. God would then permit that the Church be without a true pope for forty years, but could not give one to the Church except by a “canonical” procedure, that is by means of material “cardinals” (or, in their terminology, “residential bish-

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<sup>12</sup> *Sodalitium*, no. 29, p. 50.

ops”) named by a material “pope” himself elected by material “cardinals,” and so on. By such presuppositions Providence itself seems conditioned and bound by a norm of purely ecclesiastical administration, namely the election of the Roman Pontiff by the College of Cardinals. This forced argument, redolent both of legalism and of the inability to grasp the relationship between law and reality, is opportunely pointed out by the other faction of sedevacantists, albeit in a language somewhat different from our own:

This whole apparatus has the sole purpose of conserving possible electors (of the normal kind) of a legitimate pope. As we explained in the preceding paragraph, these electors can be changed because of contingent facts, times, or places. Would one say that a new Church was created when, in the place of the clergy and people of Rome, the emperors of the Eastern Empire or of the Holy Roman Empire chose or directly imposed a supreme pontiff? Finally, it is important to point out that when the Church encounters difficult situations she does not confine herself to theological and juridical formalisms, but proceeds through quicker paths to their solution. If the Fathers gathered in the Council of Constance had disputed overmuch on the legitimacy of the three obediences, we would still have three popes.<sup>13</sup>

### **C. THE PRIVATE CHARACTER OF THE JUDGMENT FORMULATED BY THE GUÉRARDIANS: CONTRADICTIONARY ELEMENTS**

It should be noted all the same that the Guérardians, by contrast with the other sedevacantists, claim that their own judgment on John Paul II is strictly “private.” This stipulation is sufficient, from the perspective of the Thesis, to demonstrate that in expressing their views about John Paul II they are not substituting themselves for the Church. This accusation they would themselves direct at the other sedevacantists in so far as they, by utilizing the juridical argument, recognize formal heresy on the part of the pope and so substitute themselves for those who should make canonical warnings.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Il Nuovo Osservatore Cattolico*, no. 16, pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 49, p. 43.

This distinction is of no little importance, since a private judgment has no juridical value before the Church. This is the reason why rigorist sedevacantism at times leads to conclavism (when it takes upon itself completely the role of the Church), while Guérardism never does. All the same, as already observed, their conclusions are altogether equivalent as far as the rejection of the authority of John Paul II and of the Mass's *una cum* are concerned. One can thus legitimately ask, in view of these shared conclusions, whether the "private" quality of the Guérardian judgment be real or fictitious. This ambiguity is always clearly apparent whenever the Guérardians are called on to demonstrate that their judgment has validity for the Church (we will also show the reason this subject arises). This validity is expressed in terms of "ecclesial certainty":

We call *ecclesial certainty* a certainty that has force in the Church, on the basis of which one can act in her presence ("*in faciem Ecclesiae*"). This certainty is of the same order as our belonging to the Church, and can therefore be taken into consideration in an analysis of the state of the Church and the situation of its authority:

whether because it derives from an act of ecclesiastical authority (whether it be magisterial, legislative, or jurisdictional);

or because it has its foundation in the faith, as exercised on occasions of public and well-known events.<sup>15</sup>

It is remarkable how the value of an act of ecclesiastical authority—which has an intrinsic juridical and normative value—is thus assimilated to the simple exercise of the faith on the part of the faithful. It is true that profession of the faith also has a public value before the Church; from the point of view of the Cassiciacum thesis, however, this profession includes the rejection of the authority of John Paul II. Thus the judgment that this approach aims to avoid comes in the back door, so to speak.

All the same, the fact that the Guérardians present their own judgment as, at least theoretically, private means that they cannot be canonically assimilated to the other sedevacantists (although they can be associated on the basis of their shared conclusions, as outlined above), and they are not at risk of electing a new pope on

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<sup>15</sup> H. Belmont, *L'esercizio quotidiano della Fede*, p. 18.

their own. Nevertheless this clarification, however necessary and dear to its exponents, binds them in a trap from which they cannot escape. Simply put, they will never know with absolute certainty (that is to say, certainty that is not founded on a simple private judgment) when we will have a true pope. We shall return to this very important point in the course of our reflections.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND FIRST CONCLUSIONS

Our outline discussion has sought to be as honest and clear as possible. We have sought to bring into evidence just a few of the difficulties intrinsic to sedevacantism. Nonetheless these elements seem sufficient to allow us to formulate some reflections and draw some preliminary conclusions. To begin with, although we have simplified our presentation to the greatest possible degree, without any pretension of being exhaustive, we have nonetheless touched on difficulties that cannot be the direct concern of every baptized person. Neither a normal catechetical training, however complete, nor the most attentive and supernatural *sensus fidei* of the faithful can be sufficient preparation to argue about the application of canon law, papal bulls that may have been abrogated, theological opinions or concepts such as canonical warnings, formal and material heresy, legitimate material succession and illegitimate material succession, subjective and objective intention, *etc.* But these concepts are unavoidable if one wishes to understand something of the problems that sedevacantism poses and then to orient one's own choices on this basis. Therefore a certain amount of theological baggage is necessary if one wishes to address these subjects. Without such training, all good will notwithstanding, it is very easy to fall into errors such as conclavism, or perhaps even to lose faith in the necessity of the Teaching Church and the indefectibility of the Church. In this respect, the sedevacantists' frequent accusations that others fail to understand their arguments is symptomatic. This claim is in fact most often made by the Guérardians in their conflicts with rigorist sedevacantists, who are sometimes portrayed as rather primitive sedevacantists.

In the second place it seems necessary to underline that the fundamental difficulty resides in the possibility of declaring the vacancy of the Apostolic See, or in the possibility of declaring be-



fore the Church that John Paul II is not the pope. We have already addressed this point in the preceding section and shall return to it in the course of our discussion. For the moment let us merely note that the Cassiciacum thesis (*de facto* and apart from its intentions) embodies and expresses the anxiety of this position, attempting a solution that is at the same time equivalent to the strict sedevacantist position and different from it, as already indicated.

Particularly significant in this regard would seem to be the clamorous odyssey of a man whom we do not hesitate to call the great apostle of rigorist sedevacantism, Fr. Noel Barbara, from that position to the Cassiciacum thesis. This historical event, while it brings grist to the mill of the Cassiciacum thesis, is further evidence that the difference between the two positions, which in the last analysis revolves around the above-mentioned difficulty, is of no little importance. After some fifteen years Fr. Barbara finally recognized that there is a substantial difference between formal and material heresy, and that the former stipulates that a higher authority admonish the pope in advance.

The two theses do not present themselves as simple opinions or attempts to explain the crisis of the papacy. They each represent positions that admit of no alternative point of view, and, at least in the current state of affairs, they present themselves as binding on the conscience as a condition for preserving the faith itself. In practice this principle is translated into the categorical and coherent refusal to participate in Masses *una cum* (but at times also at other sedevacantist Masses, as observed above). These Masses are defined as sacrilegious and schismatic, since they represent communion with the errors of John Paul II, all declarations to the contrary notwithstanding.

Furthermore, the unprecedented character of the current crisis and, by consequence, the absence of historical precedents and of relevant magisterial and theological pronouncements demand a certain degree of prudence. Such prudence would seem to be lacking in those who would present a thesis, intended to resolve the current problem, as definitive and binding on the conscience.

In this light a further reflection may be worthwhile: any kind of difficulty appears infinitely more grave and dangerous within the context of a system that pretends to be apodictic and to resolve the problem of authority *in radice*, rather than within a set of guidelines of a prudential character. If in fact a believer follows a certain thesis, under the (sometimes induced) illusion that this

definitively resolves the question at hand, and one day becomes aware of the presence of grave difficulties, there is the danger that he might abandon both the thesis and the faith itself. At least for the Cassiciacum thesis, this danger probably stems from the difficulty of the thesis itself with its many links, which are perhaps not always immediately accessible and comprehensible to those who nevertheless choose to embrace it.

## THE NECESSITY OF A PRUDENTIAL POSITION

Both sedevacantist positions arise from the supposition that it is possible to resolve the question of the papacy in an apodictic way, and thus to govern one's own conduct in conformity with this solution. Thus any solution of a prudential character that aims to act on the basis of a sufficient number of elements, without contemplating a definitive solution to the problem of authority in the Church (the position of the Society of Saint Pius X belongs to this category), is *a priori* excluded and branded as pragmatism. Thus it should be observed that, even before substantial differences emerge, there is a difference of register between the stance of the Society and positions of a sedevacantist variety. The Society admits the possibility of discussion regarding whatever explanation it may advance with regard to the nature of John Paul II's authority. For sedevacantism, on the other hand, its fundamental positions on the authority of John Paul II represent absolute stipulations, certain and beyond discussion. In this light the markedly bitter attitude characteristic of sedevacantist polemics, whether *ad extra* or *ad intra*, is perfectly comprehensible. This generalization of course admits of exceptions, and is based on an overall evaluation of the history of sedevacantism.

From this difference of register naturally arises a fundamental gulf of comprehension between the prudential and the sedevacantist positions. This gulf creates manifest difficulties of discussion and debate.

At this point we shall proceed by way of a *reductio ad absurdum*, precisely in order to prove the necessity of a prudential approach. In so doing we shall make some of the sedevacantist stipulations our own and draw their rigorously logical conclusions. If an argument is correct in its premises it will necessarily be correct also in its final conclusions. Accordingly, our intention is not to

demonstrate directly that John Paul II is the pope, rather than a pope *materialiter* or not the pope at all. Rather, we intend to show that, in the current situation, the path of prudence is the only one that is practical with absolute certainty. If the difficulties we have encountered up to now legitimize the use of this approach, we believe that the following observations make it necessary.

When we speak of a prudential solution we mean the attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre towards this most delicate question. We have already indicated something of the complexity of this problem, and other elements of this complexity will be signaled in the course of this study. In view of this complexity, and lacking as we do the authority to make a judgment on the person of John Paul II, it is our duty to continue to recognize him as Supreme Pontiff so long as this remains the common opinion of the Church throughout the world. Our assumption is based on this objective fact. It belongs solely to the Church herself, for example in the person of a future pope, to give definite clarity to the problems relative to the authority of John Paul II and its exercise. Paradoxically, a first confirmation—albeit an indirect one—of the intrinsic value of this position comes from sedevacantist circles themselves. In order to argue against this position it seems necessary from the outset to conceal its prudential character by presenting it in a grotesque caricature. “As perfect Gallicans, they say that they are attached to the See of Peter, but reject the doctrine of Peter (of him whom they recognize as Peter), making themselves the picture of schismatics (who do not submit to the pope) and of heretics (who reject the magisterium of the Church).”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately expressions of this kind are common in sedevacantist publications; such expressions are the main reason for the impossibility of a calm analysis of the question. They stem, in our opinion, not only from a good dose of superficiality (precisely where they are accustomed to make the most subtle theological distinctions), but also from a univocal and ideological reading of the elements of a prudential position. On the basis of these presuppositions it is inevitable that one will interpret as “contradictory” and “ambiguous” the attitude of someone who, while also recognizing certain

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<sup>16</sup> *Sodalitium*, no. 36, p. 76.

difficulties, does not resolve them on the basis of the interlocutor's prejudices.

Finally, let us observe that the refusal—or the inability—to take account of the prudential character of the position of the Society of Saint Pius X, and thus to recognize all the elements of which it is composed, has given rise, in sedevacantist circles, to wildly discordant and sometimes diametrically opposed interpretations of Archbishop Lefebvre's attitude. Therefore by necessity every expression or statement of the founder of the Society of Saint Pius X is immediately taken out of its prudential context and reinterpreted on the basis of the absolute prejudices and categories of thought characteristic of sedevacantism. His statements are thus put to use in the service of contingent necessities. In this way sedevacantist writings can depict an Archbishop Lefebvre who embraces the whole gamut of possible positions at the same time, from the most underhanded sedevacantism to the most acerbic anti-sedevacantism.<sup>17</sup>

Thus even today, in a note that aims to clarify terms, the position of the Society of Saint Pius X is read and presented in the following manner: "John Paul II is the pope if he teaches what is orthodox, and is not if he teaches heresy."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ricossa, *Risposta*, pp. 4, 25.

<sup>18</sup> *Sodalitium* no. 55, p. 58.

# PART TWO

## A FALSE SOLUTION

### THE END OF THE TEACHING CHURCH (*POTESTAS DOCENDI*)

Placing ourselves in a sedevacantist perspective, we are immediately faced with a first and insurmountable difficulty. The sedevacantist thesis cannot in any way explain where the Teaching Church has ended. The fact that within the Church there ought to be a permanent teaching body, with the mandate and the authority to teach, instituted by Our Lord Himself, is a dogmatic given contained in the Gospel, the catechism, and of course in manuals of theology. This teaching body, constituted by the ensemble of residential bishops under the authority of the bishop of Rome, is perennial by divine institution and will endure necessarily and without interruption until the end of time. Even in ordinary periods of a vacant See (between the death of a pope and the election of his successor) this body persists—in the episcopacy—as a teaching body, naturally in need of a new pope and under the authority foreseen by the Apostolic See for times of a vacant See. It would be monstrous to suppose that the Teaching Church dies with a pope, to be then resurrected on the day of the election of a new pontiff.

The Teaching Church is, therefore, a perennial, constitutive, and essential element of the Catholic Church. This means that without the Teaching Church the Catholic Church would become something else, different from the Church founded by Christ, just as a man without a soul would no longer be a man but a cadaver, or as a sea without water would become a salt mine. In other words, the Teaching Church, in its perennial nature, is not simply an integrating part of the Church, like a man's hand (even if the hand is lost he remains a man, albeit mutilated and no longer whole). Nor is it an element accessory to the Church, such as

*e.g.* the Franciscan Order. It is in fact an inseparable part of the Church and a *conditio sine qua non* for her existence.

Sedevacantism responds to this insurmountable difficulty, which touches the faith directly, in very different ways. This difficulty, more than any other—precisely because it is insurmountable—irremediably divides the sedevacantists and reveals their most profound puzzlements. For the conclavists the problem naturally no longer exists, but instead gives way to the difficulty—among others—of the unity of the Church, insofar as twenty popes simultaneously dispersed throughout the world are clearly too many.

Rigorist sedevacantism is constrained to admit that the Teaching Church no longer exists. She has literally disappeared without leaving a trace and will rise again with the creation of a true pope. Although this explanation is unacceptable because it denies the indefectibility of the teaching hierarchy, it seems paradoxically more credible in its fatalism than the Guérardian interpretation. If the Teaching Church in fact no longer exists, despite the existence of a legitimate and legal material hierarchy, then Jesus has not kept His promise to the apostles: “I am with you all days until the end of the ages.” This passage much embarrassed Fr. Guérard des Lauriers and still embarrasses adherents of the thesis. Fr. Guérard’s response was rather disconcerting: he reread this passage (Mt. 28:20) in an altogether new way, making Jesus say the contrary of what He had sought to affirm. The Dominican Father rereads this point substantially in the following manner: “I am with you all days until the end of an age,” signifying the age that ended with the Second Vatican Council. This interpretation exactly contradicts the sense of the passage.

Once again the difficulty of the argument, the enormity of the post-conciliar tragedy that we are experiencing, and the risk of falling into traps of error (such as a hallucinatory exegesis) are elements that demand and justify a prudential approach in this matter. Such an approach, however, is precluded by sedevacantist prejudices. The Faith demands that we continue to profess that the Teaching Church, as a perennial institution established by Christ, still exists, in spite of her failure to fulfill her mission. On the manner of this failure it is possible to advance and entertain various hypotheses, all the while leaving final judgment to the Church herself. Its cause, however, can only be sought in a failure to use and apply the charisms which Our Lord will always guaran-

tee His Church, and not in a deficiency on the part of Providence itself. In other words, to maintain that the Teaching Church no longer exists is in fact to deny and reject the Church herself in her perennial nature and her divine origin.

On the other hand, to uphold that from the time of the promulgation of the Council the Catholic hierarchy no longer applies its own charisms, though these charisms remain present, is not to ascribe the current crisis to a deficiency on the part of God Himself, but to men in their exercise of free co-operation. To establish how this might happen is outside the scope of these reflections, and to do so definitively is beyond our capacities. But we can nevertheless underline how an act of teaching, on the part of the hierarchy, can at the same time be a supernatural act, insofar as it is under the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and a human one, insofar as, in order for the pope to teach, he must from the outset want to impose a truth (recognized as absolute) as such. Without this last condition, teaching becomes simply impossible on the human level, and thus the application of supernatural charisms—embodied in an action which is altogether human, rational, and voluntary—likewise becomes impossible.<sup>19</sup> It is obvious, for example, that the Church's teaching is difficult to discern in a "magisterium" of an eminently dialogical kind, whose goal is not so much to impose Catholic truth on every intelligence as it is to conduct dialogue with the other, coupled with the intention of presenting an ever more smiling face to humanity, in the illusion that errants may thus be won over.<sup>20</sup>

Sedevacantism rejects this kind of explanation of the current crisis even as a hypothesis. It is inclined to transform the action of teaching on the part of the hierarchy (when it recognizes the hierarchy) into a sort of oracle. It becomes something like an impersonal and disincarnated manifestation of that which God somehow "dictates" to the pope. It avoids *a priori* the possibility of taking into consideration, on the basis of objective criteria, if and in what terms a pope is able and actually intends to teach.

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<sup>19</sup> If, for example, an action should be extorted from a pope under the pressure of threats or blackmail, such an action would have no value because it would not be a perfectly human, *i.e.* voluntary, action in which the charisms of infallibility could be embodied. To teach one must want to teach.

In concluding our remarks on the necessity of the Teaching Church it seems opportune to make a final reflection on the conclusions to which sedevacantism leads. It sets out from a noble and elevated—and altogether praiseworthy—conception of the prerogatives and charisms of the papacy. This concept, however (not because it is too sublime but because it is too abstract), in practice arrives at the most anti-Roman of conclusions. It concludes that the Catholic Church can continue to exist for forty years without a Teaching Church and without a pope. Thus that

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<sup>20</sup> In this regard particular mention may be made of the central element that constitutes the point of departure of John Paul II's magisterium: the concept of self-consciousness. In accordance with this principle, the Church in the last analysis is no longer the depositary and custodian of an absolute truth, but rather a people on a daily journey of deepening its own mystery. It is by this movement, through this dynamic of self-consciousness, that the Church discovers the truth every day. But this discovery is necessarily relative, in the sense that tomorrow it will inevitably be "transcended" by a further enrichment and advance of self-consciousness (this explains why, in the mind of John Paul II, there is no real contradiction between his own magisterium and that of his predecessors).

Therefore the mission of the Church in the world—the "new evangelization"—can no longer consist in announcing an absolute truth and the obligation to adhere to it. The Church instead becomes a sort of constant, universal stimulus to humanity, helping humanity to recognize its intrinsic dignity and so become ever more conscious that it has been redeemed by Christ. In accordance with these principles, belief in Jesus Christ means simply being perfectly "self-conscious," that is to say, being perfectly coherent with an intrinsic principle that is inside of every man, and no longer entails adhering to an extrinsic teaching as preached by one who holds its contents.

In this context it is clear that any kind of Church teaching—in the strict and authentic sense—becomes technically impossible for John Paul II. It loses its reason for being, and thus even the possibility of existing, simply because it cannot be willed as such, but will be transformed into something else, though it may perhaps preserve its original name.

But charisms are guaranteed to the hierarchy specifically for the purpose of teaching, and not for other actions determined by different goals.

In closing we reassert that the conjectures in this note are nothing more than a simple hypothesis about the problem of the authority of John Paul II. Our only goal is to indicate that different explanations of this situation are possible that do not in any way diminish our Catholic faith in the teaching hierarchy's charisms of infallibility.

[An elaboration of this analysis of John Paul II's work is presented by Johannes Dörmann in *Pope John Paul II's Theological Journey to the Prayer Meeting of Religions in Assisi* (Angelus Press); the recently published fourth and final volume of the set is especially valuable. *Trans.*]



which is recognized as lofty is paradoxically deprived of its first and most absolute perfection, the necessary foundation of all other perfections: being itself, real and concrete. However solid and firm our faith in the charisms of the hierarchy (the Teaching Church) may be, it would disintegrate into nothingness if we were to allow for its temporary nonexistence or deny its indefectible nature.

## THE END OF THE POWER OF JURISDICTION (*POTESTAS REGENDI*)

Closely connected and parallel to the mandate and authority to teach is the authority to rule in the Church. This is called, strictly speaking, the power of jurisdiction. Given the parallelism with what has already been said regarding the Teaching Church, we shall limit ourselves here to a few specific considerations. This authority is the authority of Our Lord Himself communicated to the Church in the person of him who is a pastor in the strictest sense of the word, either the pope or the residential bishops. Only they exercise this authority in their own name. Naturally, this authority has been communicated to the Church for all time. It abides, as it will continuously until the end of time (including those moments between the death of a pope and the election of his successor, when it continues to subsist in the episcopate), when Our Lord will come, *cum potestate magna*, to judge the living and the dead.

By consequence it is indispensable for the Church to benefit from this authority of Christ in order to legitimately accomplish any action that in the final analysis bears on the care of souls. It is especially necessary for the administration of the sacraments and, in particular, for that of confession. The care of souls is the reason for being of the Church. In practice this authority can be communicated in various ways to a cleric who is neither pope nor residential bishop. It may be temporarily or permanently delegated, it may be supplied due to a particular circumstance (*ecclesia supplet*), it may be presumed, *etc.*, but it is always necessary in order to accomplish an act that bears directly on souls and thus on the Church herself. Canon law regulates all of these different cases, organizing them in a systematic manner and contemplating all possible hypothetical situations.

While it may be that doubt can arise regarding the juridical particulars of such and such a case (for example, one may ask whether or not it be legitimate in a certain circumstance to appeal to supplied jurisdiction), in no way can it be supposed that this authority can fail to be communicated to the Church, even for one day. But this is precisely what sedevacantism maintains with respect to the last forty years. If this authority is no longer present in the Church, which therefore lacks a hierarchy with authority, the Church is ontologically and structurally incapable of fulfilling her own mission. She is no longer the Church of Christ and thus no longer the Church at all. Practically speaking—and this seems to be the gravest consequence—neither is it any longer possible to make an appeal, in a specific circumstance, to a presumed or supplied jurisdiction.<sup>21</sup> This is because recourse can no longer be had to the perennial and necessary authority of Christ in His Church; the Church is irremediably paralyzed.

## A QUESTION OF FAITH

We have already evoked the apodictic character of the sedevacantist thesis. It makes of the vacancy of the Apostolic See a question of faith which cannot be freely disputed. This characterization, substantially applicable to both rigorist sedevacantism and the Cassiciacum thesis, demands some clarification. The refusal of the authority of John Paul II is, for a sedevacantist, not a ques-

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<sup>21</sup> Both the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X and, as it seems, sedevacantist priests (cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 27, p. 5) appeal to such a jurisdiction. This kind of jurisdiction is transitory and short-lived *per modum actus*. It is not normal, nor is it personal or territorial but is supplied *ad casum*, or from time to time in order to perform a determined act that is legitimate by necessity. We don't here take into consideration the particular case of conclavism, where the "electors" receive directly from God the authority to make "popes," who in turn claim to receive directly from God universal jurisdiction over the whole Church and thus to delegate it as they see fit. Nor does it seem necessary to address a charge against the Society of Saint Pius X which is based on the use of an equivocation. By a confusion of the contingent necessity of the faithful (which demands and justifies a specific sacerdotal intervention) with the ontological foundation of any kind of jurisdiction (which in practice can only be the hierarchical Church with its authority), the Society of Saint Pius X is at times accused of making the source of jurisdiction reside in the faithful themselves (cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 27, p. 5).

tion of faith in the sense that it is a matter of dogma *sic et simpliciter*. It is rather assimilated to a dogmatic fact or to a theologically certain conclusion which, because of its direct connection with dogma, must be held in order to profess the Catholic faith in its fullness. In other words, to say that John Paul II is not the pope is necessary to continue to profess the faith and to call oneself Catholic. For a Guérardian it is necessary to further specify that John Paul II is indeed pope *materialiter* (otherwise the dogma of indefectibility would be denied, as has already been explained). Thus sedevacantism (or, better, the sedevacantisms) is presented as a necessary expression of Catholic orthodoxy.

From this principle logically and coherently follows the condemnation of the position of the Society of Saint Pius X. Some sedevacantists who formerly belonged to the Society have portrayed their abandonment of it as an actual profession of faith, sometimes even accompanied by a public abjuration. Equally condemned is a traditional Mass making mention of John Paul II in the Canon, even if celebrated by a priest who publicly rejects the Council. Such a Mass is considered “heretical and schismatic,” and therefore a very grave insult to God. Active attendance at such a Mass thus constitutes serious sin and is morally unjustifiable. It is better to sanctify the feast in some other way than to attend such a Mass.

In accordance with this logic, which is certainly rigorous and beyond appeal—but derives from a flawed premise—particular condemnation is reserved for the position defined as “cryptosedevacantist.”<sup>22</sup> This is the position of those who do not interiorly believe in the authority of John Paul II, but who abstain from speaking of it, because, for example, they consider it pointless or of secondary importance. This position is condemned as an extremely grave failure to profess the faith, since the subject has all the elements at hand to confess it publicly and completely. This condemnation may seem harsh, but it must be recognized as perfectly logical from the moment that public rejection of the authority of John Paul II is made necessary for profession of the faith. Indeed, a profession of faith by definition can only be public. It should also be observed that without an integral profession of the faith the Church herself would simply cease to exist.

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<sup>22</sup> *Sodalitium*, no. 43, pp. 53-54.

We know as a doctrine of faith that the Church, a society of believers, and with her the profession of the faith, will endure forever until the end of time, even if only in a small flock. In other words this profession of faith cannot be lacking on earth even for a single day. But from December 7, 1965—the latest possible date, sedevacantists believe, after which a true pope no longer sat on the throne of Peter—and for some years thereafter, no one declared the See to be vacant. Therefore, if we embrace sedevacantist assumptions, the profession of the faith and the Catholic Church herself were absent. This contradicts the dogma of the indefectibility of the Church.<sup>23</sup> It is necessary to wait until 1973 for such a profession of faith with the publication, in Mexico City, of the above mentioned work of Father Saenz, however confused and atypical. The attempt to redate this document, and thus the relevant public proclamation, to 1965<sup>24</sup> is based on evidence that is erroneous and simply false. Nevertheless this very attempt on the part of the sedevacantists has the value of indirectly bearing out our argument.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in his earlier work, *The New Montinian Church*, published shortly before *Sede Vacante*, the Mexican Jesuit (known for his ability to write a book in a few weeks) did not take a sedevacantist position. *The New Montinian Church* appeared in two editions, a first in 1971 published by the Christian Book Club of America in California, and a second in 1972 by Editores Asociados, Mexico D.F. This fact obliges us to date his public profession of sedevacantism to 1973.

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<sup>23</sup> Let us stipulate that, in our case, when we speak of profession of the faith we do not mean the simple external profession of a single believer, but rather the public adhesion to the Church as to truth itself. While the former is obligatory and necessary only in some cases (that is, when its absence would cause harm to the honor owed to God or to the good of one's neighbor), the second can never be lacking. The universal Church cannot even for an instant adhere publicly to something contrary to the faith. But this is exactly what happened, from the sedevacantist perspective, with the universal recognition of the authority of Paul VI after December 7, 1965. If the public profession of sedevacantism is indeed equivalent to a public profession of the Catholic faith, then both were indeed universally lacking. It should further be observed that, from the sedevacantist point of view, the personal profession of faith of individual Catholics was also lacking—since evidently there were no such Catholics—although such a profession was certainly *de necessitate salutis* by reason of the gravity of the situation.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ricossa, *Risposta*, p. 29.

This argument applies *a fortiori* to the Cassiciacum thesis. Not until 1979 did someone publicly and integrally profess faith in the papacy (a profession of the kind that excluded the possibility that Paul VI and his successors could be popes) and at the same time save faith in the indefectibility of the Church (through the material continuity of the hierarchy). Some maintain that Fr. Guérard was meditating a solution of the sedevacantist type in advance of this date; in any case it is the public profession of such belief which is at issue, which an authoritative Guérardian source dates to 1979.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, the logical consequences of these facts would lead to loss of faith in the indefectibility of the Church and thus of the Faith pure and simple.

If one were to pursue the logical implications of the original error, it would be necessary to recognize that a new Catholic Church, distinct from the one founded two thousand years ago, was born with the re-establishment of the integral profession of the faith. The same would apply if in reality someone in 1965, fallen into the trap of cryptosedevacantism, already thought in his heart that Paul VI was not the pope, since a profession of faith, now as then, is by definition public. It is not comprehensible that something could be vital today which has not always been so.

Parallel to these considerations, let us observe that opposition to the errors of Vatican II has its origins in the Council itself, and can claim absolute continuity from the end of the Council to our own days. Whether one likes it or not, the principal voice of this opposition, and thus its principal public profession, has been that of a non-sedevacantist priestly congregation.

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<sup>25</sup> The review *Sodalitium* itself, whose editor is the cited author, has repeatedly confronted the theological difficulty stemming from the fact that no one openly rejected the authority of Paul VI in 1965 (cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 14, pp. 10; no. 55, pp. 27-28). The solution proposed by that review will be taken into account in the appendix to this study. Our argument is based on the fact that at the time of this writing (January, 2003), in spite of some diligent research, we know of no public declaration of sedevacantism going back to 1965. In case such a declaration should be found to exist we would like to learn the tenor of its contents, the manner of its immediate public divulgation, and why it is that the review *Sodalitium* has even recently admitted the existence of this "very grave" difficulty (no. 55, pp. 27-28).

<sup>26</sup> Ricossa, *Risposta*, p. 34.

## THE ELECTION OF PAUL VI

Following on the argument set forth in the preceding section respecting the universal recognition of Paul VI in 1965 and the following years, we shall here consider the moment of his election on June 21, 1963. The date December 7, 1965, merely represents the latest date after which all sedevacantists agree that it is no longer possible to recognize the charisms of the supreme pontificate in the person of Paul VI. From that moment on, sedevacantists believe, he clearly showed that he could not be the pope. For the most part, however, sedevacantists—first of all the Guérardians—maintain that Paul VI was never pope. In fact, if Paul VI did not have papal authority in 1965, one would have to affirm that he never had it, and therefore that he was never a true pope.<sup>27</sup>

But it is a fact of dogma, that is to say a fact that must be admitted as absolutely certain because of its direct connection with dogma, that Paul VI was pope on the day of his election to the supreme pontificate. The formal cause which founds this dogmatic fact is the fact that a new pope, recognized as such by the whole Church dispersed in the world, is certainly pope. Whether one likes it or not, this is certainly what happened on June 21, 1963, in the case of Cardinal Montini, who—irony of history—had one of the most solemn coronation ceremonies ever celebrated! This does not mean that the universal Church elects the pope, but that its peaceful recognition of the elected pope is a sign that removes all possible doubt about a pope's legitimacy. The theological reason for this is that the Church dispersed throughout the world must know with certainty who is its legitimate pastor and who has authority over her. This is why God cannot permit a universal deception. It is faith in the Church itself that obliges her members to recognize her utter infallibility by recognizing her supreme pastor. Whatever doubt one might have about the legiti-

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<sup>27</sup> In order to make this crucial statement fully understood and appreciated in all of its import, it is necessary to resolve a difficulty: to demonstrate the impossibility that a true pope, on the practical level, could become heretical before the Church, publicly lose the faith and with it the pontificate after having been a true and legitimate pope with all the trappings. We shall consider this impossibility in the appendix to our study. For the moment we shall take it as already demonstrated, and thus we shall draw the necessary logical consequences from the universal recognition of the authority of Paul VI on the day of his election.

macy and authority of a pope is dissolved and reduced to nothingness in the face of this historical fact, which is objective and can be verified by anyone, not only by theologians.

Let us cite in this regard one of the most authoritative theologians that has treated *De Ecclesia et de Romano Pontifice*, Cardinal Billot.

Whatever one may think of the possibility or impossibility of the named hypothesis [reference is made to the hypothesis—considered “impossible” by Billot himself—that a pope might fall into heresy and thereby lose the pontificate; cf. appendix below] at least one element must be maintained as unshakeable and absolutely certain: the universal adhesion of the Church will always be, simply in itself, an infallible sign of the legitimacy of the person of the pontiff and likewise of the existence of all the required conditions for his legitimacy. The demonstration of this truth does not require long argumentation. In fact it is immediately demonstrable on the basis of the infallible promise of Christ and of His providence: “The gates of hell will not prevail against her,” and “Behold I am with you until the end of time.” From this it follows that if the Church were to adhere to a false pontiff it would be as though she would adhere to a false rule of faith, since the pope is the living rule (*regula*) whom the Church must follow in its belief, and in fact always follows, as will clearly appear in that which we shall say later on.<sup>28</sup> Therefore God may permit that at times the vacancy of the Apostolic See be protracted for a longer or shorter period. He may also permit that doubt might arise about someone who has been elected. But he would not permit that the whole Church might recognize as pontiff someone who is not a true and legitimate pope [the expression “a true pope” may be taken, in terms of the Cassiciacum thesis, as a synonym for “formally the pope”]. From the moment he is recognized and united to the Church like a head to a body, no longer should any doubt be raised regarding any possible anomaly in the election procedure or concerning a defect in any condition necessary for legitimacy, since such recognition on the part of the Church cleanses *in radice* every possible anomaly in his election, and infallibly demonstrates the presence of all the required conditions [including the intention of promoting the good of the Church].<sup>29</sup>

Sedevacantism can only deny this dogmatic fact by irremediably changing the tangible criterion on which it is based. And this is exactly what happens. Let us see how: the criterion for recogniz-

ing who is a true pope cannot any longer be objective, historical, verifiable, and empirical, as is required by Catholic theology, but will necessarily make appeal to a different, fundamentally subjective, source, even if an effort is made to certify it as objective.

Having listened to Cardinal Billot, let us consider the words of an exponent of sedevacantism, in this case of the Cassiciacum thesis:

The authority of the supreme pontiff is essentially supernatural. It is constituted by the usual special assistance promised by Jesus Christ to St. Peter and his successors. It is therefore in the

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<sup>28</sup> This truth, which would seem to represent an argument for the sedevacantists against those who recognize the authority of Paul VI and his successors, obliges one to maintain that a “teaching” irreconcilable or in contrast with the perennial magisterium of the Church cannot come from the pope as pope, that is, as living rule (*regula*) of the faith. It has to do necessarily with another reality (private doctrine, counsel, a point of reflection, a stimulus for the self-consciousness of humanity, *etc.*) but not with a teaching of the Church as such. The use of such an argument against the Society of Saint Pius X, rather than bringing grist to the mill of sedevacantism, instead reveals its intrinsic weakness. This is in reality an extreme attempt to respond to the insurmountable difficulty relative to the need for a teaching Church and the universal recognition of the authority of Paul VI, as if to say, “I don’t know what to say, so I shall make you aware that there is also a problem for you.” The sedevacantist argument goes thus: in every actual case Paul VI cannot be followed as a *regula* of the faith, therefore the argument does not hold. On the contrary, the argument holds all the same because it begins with what the Church must be *a priori* and must at all costs continue to be in order to continue to be the Catholic Church, and not from the consideration—only possible *a posteriori*—of what the men of the Church do. The pope does not always speak and act as *regula* of the faith. We limit ourselves to underlining, once again, that to explain the current crisis in terms of sedevacantism is to mutilate the Church in her being and to place on God the responsibility for not having kept his promises, a responsibility aggravated by having permitted a universal deception through the recognition of Paul VI as supreme pontiff. Once again the necessity emerges of finding an explanation of the current crisis that does not mutilate the Church in her being, but that considers the actions of her members not as reflecting a defect of the Holy Spirit, but rather a defect of the human element in its free coöperation and its use of the charisms that God has promised to assure every day to his Church. We have already expressed ourselves on how this might happen in practice and on the status of a possible explanation on our part (cf. the section entitled “The End of the Teaching Church”).

<sup>29</sup> L. Billot, *De Ecclesia Christi*, q. XIV, th. 29, §3.



light of the faith that we recognize pontifical authority and adhere to it.<sup>30</sup>

This passage, while it affirms something that is true, contains a sophism that is really the heart of the argument. It is in fact true that the authority of a pope is essentially supernatural; we know this through the faith that indicates to us the special charisms of the Bishop of Rome. Nevertheless, on the historical and contingent level—which is here at issue—we know that such supernatural authority is embodied in such and such a person (made of flesh and blood) on the basis of an external criterion: legitimate election, free acceptance, and above all the recognition of the universal Church, as Billot explains. For this reason it is false to give the impression that we recognize a pope as pope substantially through the simple exercise of the faith. For example, when Pius XII was elected pope in 1939, the average Catholic recognized Eugenio Pacelli as pope simply by taking note of the election and the ensuing universal recognition of his authority. Only then did the average Catholic simultaneously impute to the person of Pope Pacelli that which the faith teaches about the pope.

Let us now resume our quotation of the sedevacantist argument:

Let us take an example. It is 1950. In light of the faith I know that Pius XII is the pope. That is to say, by the mediation of a kind of knowledge that pertains to the supernatural order alone, and which supposes the natural knowledge of the fact known to everybody. Without this supernatural knowledge of the authority that he has received from Christ, I could not believe *de fide divina* in the dogma of the Assumption that he infallibly defined. That Pius XII is the pope is what might be called a dogmatic fact that, as such, falls under the light of the faith.<sup>31</sup>

Here the concrete criterion that has made it possible to recognize Pius XII as pope—the historical fact that the universal Church has infallibly recognized him—is reduced to an insignificant fact that anyone can notice. Already the author's conclusion can be glimpsed here: I can know who is or is not the pope by faith alone. This is true in the sense that we have outlined, but it is false on the practical and empirical level. From the sedevacantist

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<sup>30</sup> Belmont, *L'esercizio quotidiano della Fede*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

perspective this approach clearly leads to the definitive supplanting and absorption of the objective and historical criterion for recognizing the pope. Once this criterion has been destroyed it is possible to freely reject the authority of Paul VI together with his "teachings": "and therefore, with the simple exercise of the faith"<sup>32</sup> and without formulating any judgment, the believer is prevented and kept from adhering to the authority of Paul VI, which he cannot recognize; it is part of the faith that he sees that that man is not the authority, that he is not the gauge (*regula*) of the faith";<sup>33</sup> the infallibility of the Church in recognizing him as pope at the moment of his election and in the following years is evidently conceived of as an insignificant fact that does not deserve even an

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<sup>32</sup> In support of his argument the author attempts to demonstrate that "it is in the same supernatural light and in the same simple act of faith that I adhere to dogma and to the authority that presents it." This statement, true in part but which presupposes the sophism that has been illustrated, is false in the sense that it in fact excludes a definite recognition of the authority of a pope prior to some teaching act on his part, and therefore induces one to believe that a pope can be really and truly recognized as such only at the moment when he teaches, through the very act of adhering to the content of his teaching and the authority of him who presents it. The application of this theorem to Paul VI is predictable: "In whose case it is by the same supernatural light and by the same act that I would have to adhere to the doctrine of Vatican II on religious liberty and to the authority of Paul VI that guarantees it. Now, as we have seen, this adhesion is impossible by reason of the faith itself." The author does not notice that, simply on the historical level, his assertion is disproved by the facts: the rejection of Vatican II, precisely "by reason of the faith itself," was accomplished without rejection of the authority of Paul VI. Only at a later time, in a separate act albeit certainly in relation to the first, did sedevacantism reject the authority of Paul VI.

Furthermore the rejection of the authority of Paul VI, especially for those who, like this writer, adhere to the thesis of Cassiciacum, does not seem to be an act of "simple faith," but rather extremely complex and articulated in terms of necessary metaphysical distinctions that are clearly inaccessible to "simple faith."

Finally, the distinction of the two moments (rejection of the Council and rejection of papal authority) is still today observable on the empirical level, insofar as the potential adherents whom sedevacantism hopes to attract are obviously to be found amongst those who already reject Vatican II.

Sedevacantism appears inadmissible to those who have not made this first step. This accounts for the sometimes suffocating attention and scrutiny given the Society of Saint Pius X by the sedevacantists.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

attempt at a response (or perhaps it deserves a response to such an extent that it is expedient to pass it over in silence).

Notice how the author skirts this issue. No trace remains of the historical fact which is the external foundation of the dogmatic fact in question. It has been entirely replaced by "faith," or at least by a subjective criterion that certifies itself as "faith." In fact this no longer has to do with Catholic faith in the promises of Jesus to His Church, whence derives, according to the morally unanimous opinion of the theologians, the infallibility of the Church herself in universally recognizing a pope as such. The absurdity of this approach makes one think of the Protestant *liberum examen*, by virtue of which every believer, precisely because he has the faith, is directly illumined by God in knowing the truth without need of the mediation of the Church. The origin of the faith is no longer to be found in the preaching of Peter but in an immanent principle that permits me to understand who *my* true Peter is. In this manner a pope can no longer be, not even *de jure*, the objective gauge of the faith of the Church, but becomes the expression of *my* faith. If, to return to the example of the cited author, we have an absolute certainty that Pius XII was truly the pope, this would be based on the fact that we have heard him teach things that seem correct and therefore we have recognized him as pope. In reality, however, such "certainty" is in no way objective or absolute. Theoretically it would be possible in this way to reject, on the basis of "faith," the authority of any historical pope concerning whom the least doubt might arise. This because the determinate and infallible recognition of a pope on the part of the Church would no longer be binding. Finally, to have destroyed this dogmatic fact means that the sedevacantists are deprived of any criterion which might one day permit them to recognize—with absolute and ecclesiastical certainty—anyone whom they might want to regard as the true pope.

The argument we have here set forth naturally applies indirectly to the successors of Paul VI. Although there are some who have never recognized these successors as true popes, the source of this rejection is the observation of a perfect continuity between these pontificates and that of Paul VI. Up to now no member of the college of cardinals or of the wider residential episcopate has ever contested the authority of our contemporary popes.<sup>34</sup>

## THE “PRIVATE JUDGMENT” OF THE GUÉRARDIANS: FINAL CONSEQUENCES

By presenting its own judgment on John Paul II as “private” the Cassiciacum thesis manages to dodge the accusation of schism, which its own judgment on the rigorist brand of sedevacantism seems to intimate (whether because rigorist sedevacantism seems to lead inevitably to conclavism, or because it substitutes itself for the Church by pretending to judge the formal heresy of the pope—which, as we have underlined, is *per se* impossible). A private judgment, on the other hand, leaves to the Church (*e.g.* in the person of a future pontiff) the task of rendering an effective judgment before the Church herself. This is illustrated by the Guérardians with a celebrated example: the comparison of the situation of John Paul II with that of an invalid marriage that the Church has not yet declared to be null. Although it has never existed, it is juridically and officially valid in the eyes of the Church (that is, so far as its social effects are concerned) as long as the competent authority in the Church does not pronounce on it. Thus their private judgment on John Paul II, although true and binding on the conscience and even assimilated to a public profession of faith, does not pretend to have any juridical value before the Church. It remains merely the judgment of average Catholics so long as the Church herself does not officially pronounce the same judgment.

This idea, at first sight brilliant, in reality has very grave consequences. To begin with, whoever follows the Cassiciacum thesis is implicitly obliged to systematically examine whatever John Paul II does or says in order to deduce when he may have lifted the *obex* and thus become a true pope. Those who follow this thesis are in a situation of permanent quasi-conclave, since John Paul II—or one of his successors—will be their pope when they themselves will have perceived it.

Furthermore, even supposing that all the faithful who follow this thesis have understood all of its intricacies, these same faithful must have the means to perform this discernment on their own and with certainty, since the faith of baptism must be sufficient.

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<sup>34</sup> The reader who wants to more fully pursue the argument treated in this section may want to read the appendix to this study, where some possible objections to our argument are discussed.

They indeed claim that it is by dint of simple and naked faith that they do not recognize the authority of John Paul II. But in reality such discernment is a difficult thing. Lacking the necessary tools for such discernment, they are obliged to entrust themselves to the judgment of a trusted person (perhaps a layman, since no one has jurisdiction), who is necessarily chosen on the basis of subjective criteria. We are not far from charismaticism.

Up to this point the Cassiciacum thesis is at least open to discussion, but it becomes absurd if we follow through to its final consequences. If the judgment by which the Guérardians reject the authority of John Paul II is in fact a private judgment, of necessity the judgment by which they will one day recognize John Paul II or one of his successors as formally pope will also be private. But in this manner they will only be able to submit to him whom they consider to be pope on the basis of a private judgment, and not on the basis of the certainty of the Church which as such recognizes a pope to be the pope. Such a pope will in no way be a certain gauge (*regula*) of the faith, since he will in fact be the fruit of a choice which, although it certifies itself as illuminated by the faith, remains essentially private. To choose one's own *regula* of faith on the basis of the faith is an obvious *petitio principii*.

Let us illustrate the matter with an example. Let's suppose that on March 23, 2019, the second successor of John Paul II, John Paul IV (fifth pope in the material line) begins to put the Council into question. The Guérardians will naturally have to ask themselves if he has lifted the *obex*. Let us further admit that they are all in agreement to recognize him as the true pope (such assumptions are perhaps difficult to countenance given the complexity of their analyses, the lack of an authority, and the chronic tendency to meiosis characteristic of "traditionalist" milieux). Such a judgment could only be private. Whoever would act on this basis to recognize John Paul IV as the standard of their faith will be able to do so only on the basis of a private judgment by which he will choose "his" *regula* on the basis of a private judgment. In this way the Guérardians condemn themselves to never having a certain pope. In fact, from the moment they want to make their own private judgment a judgment with standing within and before the Church they will have to make a leap, attributing to their new private "observation" an official standing before

the Church. Thus they will be substituting themselves for the Church herself, which alone gives and recognizes a pope. Thus they will be operating like that same abusive judge they accuse the other sedevacantists of being.<sup>35</sup>

The muddle consists in the fact that a *regula* by definition cannot be chosen, because it is the criterion by which other choices are made. In this light a private judgment on the authority of the pope appears as such to be nonsense, from the moment that it wishes to express something more than a hypothesis without practical consequences. Whatever the historical contingencies of our time, it is not possible to choose on the basis of the faith him who is called to be the supreme *regula* of the faith. Once again we are faced with the fundamental principle that *prima sedes a nemine judicatur*.<sup>36</sup>

The sedevacantists are right to recognize that the hub of the current crisis revolves around the problem of authority. But for just this reason any solution that seeks to definitively resolve the problem of authority can only end by substituting itself for that authority and falling victim to a vicious circle. For this reason there is the danger, both theological and psychological, that the sedevacantist solution, rather than putting the conscience definitively at ease as promised, may render those who embrace it prisoners of an impasse.

If we place ourselves in the perspective of the Cassiciacum thesis, the comparison of the situation of contemporary popes with that of an objectively null marriage that the ecclesiastical authorities have not so declared before the Church seems utterly out of place. Rather, this comparison has the paradoxical value of illustrating and putting into evidence the difficulty that we are considering. In the case of a marriage that is *de facto* null one awaits the judgment of the competent authority, and, if and when a judgment is passed, such a marriage can also be null *de jure*. In the case of Paul VI and his successors, on the contrary, the thesis counsels that one should await a judgment, but only after having oneself authorized the competent authority. That is to say, the private judgment, of Mr. X (which in itself lacks all standing), rather than that of Father Y or Bishop Z, becomes the source of legitimacy for the competent authority. But in this case the competent authority called on to clarify the status of the person of a future

pontiff is the papacy itself; its authority is thus here and now destroyed and forever disqualified.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Without wanting to prejudge future intentions, it seems that this leap is already present, at least implicitly, in a fundamental ambiguity that we have given evidence of in the course of our reflections. Guérardism actually inserts its private judgment, by which it rejects the authority of John Paul II, into the exercise and profession of the faith. By consequence a “true” pope will not be recognized except through another private judgment, also inserted into the exercise of the faith. The “faith” of the individual Guérardian thus appears here and now as the panacea which can resolve every difficulty and which will be able to transform private judgment, which is necessary today in order to avoid assimilation to the rigorist sedevacantists, into an official judgment, since the faith represents what is most official in the Church. Thus, when it is convenient (today) the private character of their judgment on the authority of John Paul II can be brought in evidence; when it will be decided to recognize him or his successor as “true” pope it will be adduced that the pope in question is recognized by the light of the faith of the Church, and thus officially (although in reality the same private judgment is at work).

In light of these observations let us return to the cited text regarding the “ecclesial certainty” on which the Cassiciacum thesis claims to be based. “We call *ecclesial certainty* certainty that has standing in the Church, on the basis of which one can make an act before the Church (*in faciem Ecclesiae*), that is of the same order as our belonging to the Church and can therefore be taken into account in analyses of the state of the Church and of its authority:

- whether because it comes from an act of ecclesiastical authority (whether it be magisterial, legislative, or jurisdictional);
- or because it has its basis in the faith, exercised on the occasion of public and well-known facts” (Belmont, *L'esercizio quotidiano della Fede*, p. 18).

The mixture of an act of ecclesiastical authority and of the profession of the faith, in itself well-founded, becomes absurd when it is related to the rejection of the authority of John Paul II on the part of the simple believer understood as an act of faith.

It is in fact true that the public profession of the faith on the part of a believer has some standing “*in faciem ecclesiae*” as an act of ecclesiastical authority, but this standing derives from the fact that the believer professes that which the Church teaches. The Guérardians do not notice that the *regula* is exactly that magisterium to which—especially for them—it is not possible to have recourse for satisfactory and dogmatically cogent explanations concerning the situation of John Paul II. This is why the mixture in question becomes a serious error if, making use of its second element, it includes the rejection of the authority of the same John Paul II. Such a mixture permits the Guérardians to make their own judgment equivalent to that of ecclesiastical authority, in the sense that they claim that it has an official value *in faciem Ecclesiae* equal to the latter. Applied to the judgment by which they may one day recognize a true pope, this subterfuge will appear perfectly functional for performing the necessary leap of transforming a judgment that is intrinsically private into a judgment that will in practice have to substitute for that of the Church. This will manifest that same abuse for which the Guérardians reprove the rigorist sedevacantists (in their wanting to declare John Paul II a heretic before the Church) but applied in a positive sense—with the purpose of recognizing the authority of a pope rather than rejecting it. As far as whether or not it is possible to recognize the authority of a pope through the simple exercise of the faith—the only solution from the Guérardian point of view—we have already expressed our view in the section entitled “The Election of Paul VI.”

The rejection of other doctrinal elements (such as ecumenism, religious liberty, the *Novus Ordo*...) on the part of every "traditionalist" is an altogether different case from the rejection of the authority of contemporary popes. With respect to these innovations the faithful can actually observe the incompatibility between a conciliar teaching and its contrary as expressed in the perennial dogmatic magisterium of the Church, and thus recognize the impossibility of adhering to the new teachings. The situation of the authority of contemporary popes, on the other hand, has to do with an historical and contingent fact regarding which the Church has not yet expressed herself. Therefore any judgment, even a private one, lacks foundation from the moment that it aims to express something more than a purely private hypothesis lacking normative consequences. (The Church has in fact already expressed herself, at least in the case of Paul VI, albeit not through her own supreme authority. Cf. the section entitled "The Election of Paul VI.")

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<sup>36</sup> We can reformulate our reflections on Guérardian private judgment *in faciem Ecclesiae* with the following schema. The judgment can be:

- 1) private, that is to say made by a subject without authority, lacking juridical and normative effects;
- 2) canonical, that is by its nature public, with juridical consequences, pronounced by the competent authority.

The first kind, even if it is expressed publicly, leaves the pope as pope insofar as it recognizes that it lacks the authority to reject him. The second kind, *per absurdum* (i.e. if it were possible) would utterly destroy the pontificate (rigorist sedevacantists). However the second kind of judgment cannot be applied to the pope.

The private judgment "*in faciem Ecclesiae*" which produces a purely material pope is a *tertium quid* which *non datur*. Either it is a private judgment that, although publicly expressed, cannot have any practical consequence before the Church (because, if *prima sedes a nemine judicatur*, this can only be meant with respect to private judgment, since such canonical judgment is impossible because of the lack of a competent authority), or it is a judgment which is for all practical purposes juridical. And in fact the Guérardian "private judgment" has, in the very rejection of the authority of John Paul II, an eminently juridical effect. But such a judgment is impossible in the case of the person of the pope and leads to the same error as that of the rigorist sedevacantists.

To summarize, the Cassiciacum thesis pretends to somehow demonstrate that from a judgment that calls itself non-juridical devolve effects that are *de facto* juridical, having a normative value for the conduct of all the faithful.



Once again it appears that only the prudential position of Archbishop Lefebvre permits the faithful to resist current errors without falling into the vicious circle of *petitio principii*.

## THE STRANGE DYNAMIC OF SEDEVACANTIST ARGUMENTS

On the basis of the foregoing arguments it is not easy to understand how the sedevacantists can legitimately arrive at and morally justify their conclusions. They condemn as schismatic the attitude of those who, while also rejecting the Council, do not declare the See of Peter vacant because they consider themselves unqualified to pronounce on the authority of John Paul II. For them it is impossible in any manner and in any circumstance to resist the teaching—even if manifestly erroneous and contrary to Tradition and the perpetual magisterium—of him who is recognized as pope.

This objection, theoretically comprehensible when made by the modernists, becomes absurd when it comes from those who

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<sup>37</sup> Even less plausible than the view here illustrated is the “second solution” envisioned by the Cassiciacum thesis (cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 55, pp. 26, 59). In this view, if the material “pope” does not first remove the *obex*, the current normal electors (cardinals or material residential bishops), when they will have returned to the faith will formally receive the authority, assembled in a council, to take note of the formal heresy of John Paul II, declare him bereft of authority and elect a legitimate pontiff.

In such a case, where the material hierarchy would be regenerated from the base and not from the top, it is impossible to explain:

- a) how the return to the public and integral profession of the faith—and thus the reception of authority—of every single elector who would participate in such a council can be taken note of and guaranteed before the Church, from the moment that there is no longer a living *regula* of the faith on earth. In this case the Guérardian “private judgment” would retain all the same limits shown to apply in the recognition of a “true” pope;
- b) whence would the necessary authority to proceed derive, if the source of all ecclesiastical authority on earth is absent;
- c) by what right could a general council, convoked and assembled without the pope, claim to notice and declare before the Church the formal heresy of him who is still legally the pope before the Church;
- d) in this situation and in light of the Cassiciacum thesis, who could guarantee before the Church that the pope newly-elected by such a council would not place, as had his predecessors, an *obex* to the reception of authority from Our Lord.

first pronounce a negative judgment—in itself necessary—on the contents of the Council, and then from this point of departure arrive at further conclusions about the status of authority in the Church. To escape this contradiction sedevacantism uses the fig leaf of claiming that it is not licit to disobey him who is recognized as pope *habitually*.<sup>38</sup> This *habitually*, theologically speaking, is meaningless. By this logic it seems that it is permitted to disobey the pope *not habitually*...that is, long enough to understand that he is not pope. Without this initial disobedience it seems that one could not arrive at the necessary conclusion; thus a true good devolves from a true evil, a sort of necessary sin! Practically and historically speaking, however, this *habitually* signifies even less: for Fr. Guérard, his period of “disobedience” lasted for about fifteen years, and for sedevacantists generally it may have lasted a little or even much longer.

The sedevacantist objection bases itself on the fear of substituting oneself for the Church by searching out and rejecting contemporary teachings with a modernist odor. This fear is in itself thoroughly comprehensible, and for this reason any refusal must be based not on a “disobedience,” but rather on the exercise of the faith and the recognition of the incompatibility of modernist content with the perennial magisterium of the Church.<sup>39</sup> The same fear, however, should cause trembling amongst those who finish

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Belmont, *L'esercizio quotidiano della Fede*, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> In other passages sedevacantism does not in the least deny that rejection of the Council is based simply on the impossibility of integrally professing the Catholic faith while adhering to it. H. Belmont asserts as much in a timely manner (cf. *L'esercizio*, “L'impossibile atto di fede,” p. 12). When expedience serves, however, this argument may be used to allege “disobedience” of the recognized pope on the part of the SSPX. In making this accusation it is forgotten that the sedevacantists’ demonstration or perception that John Paul II is not pope is itself only possible *a posteriori*, that is to say after recognition of his errors and the refusal to embrace them. Thus the sedevacantists’ position itself follows a “disobedience,” at least logically speaking. Introduction of the concept of *habitual* disobedience—implicitly distinguished from that which is *not habitual*—appears to be an attempt to escape from this contradiction and to claim the right to condemn for *habitual disobedience* those who continue to reject modernist doctrine simply because irreconcilable with contrary expressions in the perennial and constant magisterium of the Church, without arrogating to themselves the right to pronounce further judgments on the status of the official authority.

by in practice substituting themselves for the Church. No Gallican ever went so far. By the same token, this same fear should cause trembling amongst those who even pretend to be able to recognize a future true pope, if and when we shall have one, on their own and by virtue of their private "faith." If the initial objection were coherent and sincere it should then lead to the uncritical acceptance of the Council and the *Novus Ordo*, without any possibility of making further judgments. As in fact has happened in several unfortunate cases.

## REJECTION OF THE MASS *UNA CUM*

As far as concerns the rejection of Mass mentioning John Paul II in the Canon, we can formulate some reflections which will appear as a sequel to what has been said about the lack of contestation of the authority of Paul VI during the Council and afterwards. From the sedevacantists' side, their motives for not wanting to assist at such a Mass are clear. It is not enough to celebrate in the traditional rite, or to publicly reject the Council, if the offering of the holy Sacrifice is not purified from mention of the name of John Paul II. "Bishop Guérard des Lauriers used to say that to cite John Paul II at the *Te igitur* of the holy Mass is to commit, objectively and ineluctably, the double crime of sacrilege and capital schism; this happens independently of the subjective intention of the celebrant or those present."<sup>40</sup> This problem, in itself doctrinal, has an immediate practical application regarding the possibility of attending such a Mass.

If a Mass *una cum* is truly a "schismatic and sacrilegious" Mass (at least since 1965), it must then be recognized that the *Oblatio Munda* (the offering of the most pure sacrifice) was ended at that time, to then be offered again later by publicly sedevacantist priests. In this regard it is significant that the expression *Oblatio Munda* was chosen as an episcopal motto by a bishop consecrated by the same Guérard des Lauriers. Now we know with certainty that, just like the profession of the Catholic faith, the *Oblatio Munda* will never cease on the face of the earth, although it may be diminished or suffer limitations at certain times. The public offering of the Holy Sacrifice will continue uninterrupted-

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<sup>40</sup> *Sodalitium*, no. 36, p. 77.

ly until the end of time<sup>41</sup> and will be obstructed by the Antichrist in person.<sup>42</sup> If, on the contrary, the *Oblatio Munda* were to cease, even for a single day, the Church founded by Our Lord would dissolve into nothingness. But the Catholic faith teaches that this cannot happen. But all Masses celebrated between 1965 and 1973, including those of hypothetical cryptosedevacantists, would have been sacrilegious. The same would apply to Padre Pio, deceased in 1968, who would have been a great impostor for having misled the multitudes with the pseudo-mystical celebration of an objectively sacrilegious and schismatic Mass. Unhappily, providence would seem to have forgotten to call forth a shrewd sedevacantist in time to warn against this deception and that of every other Catholic priest at the time. Once again the most coherent form of sedevacantism risks to be that which—*absit injuria verbi*—once and for all abandons the Catholic faith (or declares the imminence of Antichrist).

The only way to respond to this objection, as to other questions about the lack of an initial challenge to the authority of Paul VI, would be to admit that the Church progressively and with some delay became aware (in the persons of the sedevacantists) of the situation in which she found herself. This would be a sort of progressive self-consciousness of a typically modernist kind, a very grave matter if one considers that the problem at hand is considered to be of the greatest importance. Perhaps some sedevacantists are prepared to embrace such an interpretation, although it seems hardly worthy of consideration.

Finally, it should be pointed out that, with respect to this problem of the *una cum*, two errors seem to exist; in our opinion they are complementary. The sedevacantists insist that mention of the name of John Paul II necessarily also expresses communion with his errors. In response to this argument another argument is sometimes advanced, namely that, contrary to liturgical and historical evidence, the prayer for the pope in the Canon is comparable to that for any other person in need. On the contrary, mention of his name clearly expresses a state of communion with him. Both arguments are false, most likely the result of sterile arguments that have fossilized over time. It is clear that the problem of

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. I Cor. 11:26.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Dan. 12:11.

the *una cum* is simply a corollary of the position that a priest publicly embraces. When a priest rejects the Council the mention of John Paul II is to be understood in terms consonant with the doctrinal position which the priest publicly professes.

## A DIFFICULT QUESTION TO COME TO GRIPS WITH

From a sedevacantist point of view every baptized person can arrive at the rejection of the authority of John Paul II on the basis of the simple exercise of the faith, through which it is impossible not to arrive at such a conclusion. In other words the matter should be simple and spontaneous, just as a significant number of faithful spontaneously rejected the Council and the New Mass. Naturally, such spontaneity should lead, for the one group, to rigorist sedevacantism. The other group supposes that it should spontaneously lead to the Cassiciacum thesis since in the everyday practice of the faith the faithful cannot ignore the problem of the indefectibility of the Church and so fail to recognize the need for a material pope. In reality, more than spontaneity seems to be required to lend credibility to those who represent or try to explain these complex and articulated arguments. Such spontaneous adherence seems more characteristic of the simpler forms of sedevacantism, which tend either to remain at the level of a mere private hypothesis or, by virtue of that same simplicity, to lead to conclavism.

In our opinion, because of the problems that it involves and the questions that it raises, a serious approach to the sedevacantist hypothesis is beyond the means of the simple baptized operating on the basis of the *sensus fidei*. We have already alluded to this impossibility and, by mentioning it again, we deduce from it the logical conclusion that God does not expect from the individual believer a pronouncement on a question that lies beyond his capabilities.<sup>43</sup> To impose such a yoke on the simple faithful by making of it a question of faith is to risk colliding with the indignation of Jesus: "They gather heavy and unbearable weights and place them on the shoulders of men" (Mt. 23:4). Once again the example of Fr. Guérard manifestly vindicates our interpretation. In spite of his lucidity from the first hour (evident in his redaction of the

*Brief Critical Examination* of the New Mass, for which posterity is indebted to him), in spite of all his titles, it took him about fifteen years before he composed and published the Cassiciacum thesis. Only an ideological state of mind related to a loss of contact with reality could induce one to maintain that this thesis spontaneously imposes itself on the faithful. Furthermore, to make of this problem a question of faith is culpably and uselessly to deprive souls of the opportunity of attending Mass if celebrated *una cum*.

## THE ACTIONS OF BISHOP NGO-DINH-THUC

Before concluding it seems opportune to make some reflections of an historical character about the actions of Bishop Ngo-Dinh-Thuc. If history is not theology, it is in a way theodicy, insofar as it manifests the work of Providence. This is especially the case when contingent particularities make the intervention of Providences seem inevitable. If the sedevacantist world seems rather divided, we can still say that as a whole it survives sacramentally thanks to the episcopal consecrations of this Vietnamese bishop. This common origin is its fundamental unity.

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<sup>43</sup> In this respect the advice Bishop Sanborn, an advocate of the Cassiciacum thesis, gives to those attempting to understand it seems especially pertinent. This bishop can be credited with trying to make the thesis more widely comprehensible in his work *De Papatu Materiali*. In the last part of this work, striking for its clarity, he responds to a series of hypothetical objections that might be raised by the faithful. We quote objection XI: "The thesis is absurd because it asserts that someone is and is not the pope at the same time. *Resp.* Those who object in such a way do not understand the real distinction between act and potency, nor the distinction between non-being *simpliciter* and being in potency. Let them consult manuals of aristotelian-thomistic philosophy" (Most Rev. Donald J. Sanborn, *On Being Pope Materially* [manuscript, n.d.], p. 25. Published in *Sodalitium*, no. 49, p. 48). This advice is very opportune, indeed necessary. In fact, the metaphysical distinctions to which he makes reference are necessary for understanding the abc's of the thesis. Nonetheless, this very necessity demonstrates that the *sensus fidei* is not sufficient to reject the authority of John Paul II and to attempt to resolve the difficulties that such an act entails. Therefore this question cannot be a question of faith, precisely because it cannot be resolved with an act of "simple faith," with the simple "exercise of the faith" (contrary to what, probably recognizing the nature of the objection, sedevacantism elsewhere tries to demonstrate. — Cf. Belmont, *L'Esercizio Quotidiano della Fede*).

Bishop Thuc is the fountainhead, beginning in the middle of the seventies, of an extremely numerous and complex episcopal genealogy which includes over a hundred bishops, although he himself consecrated only a few of this large number. These consecrations are often called into question, above all because of questions about the worthiness of those consecrated, in particular on moral grounds. We do not wish to descend to this level for two reasons: above all to remain in accordance with our initial intention not to enter into disputes, usually as easy as sterile, concerning single individuals; but also because Bishop Thuc did also consecrate some persons of irreproachable morals, such as Fr. Guérard himself. What does interest us is the value of such consecrations with respect to the Church. If we place ourselves in a sedevacantist perspective, they have an absolutely providential significance insofar as they in a certain way secure for sedevacantism and its indispensable witness the possibility of continuation in time.

In all good will it seems impossible to perceive the Vietnamese bishop as the man of Providence. He appears rather as someone who was taken advantage of by many for the most divergent purposes. To begin with, Bishop Thuc arrived at the "traditionalist" position not during the Council but somewhat later. One can honestly wonder whether the development of his position reflects a serious analysis of the contents of the Council, or rather the reverberations on him and his family of Vietnamese communism and the undeniably odious Montini *ostpolitik*. The distinction is of some importance because it is a difference between doctrine and purely personal difficulties. The systematic "repentances" of Thuc in his dealings with the Vatican and above all his final "reconciliation" may lead one to embrace this latter interpretation.

Bishop Thuc is first of all the source of the episcopal consecration of Clemente Dominguez y Gomez, the future antipope of Palmar de Troya, consecrated together with four other bishops in 1976. This one consecration considerably multiplied the episcopal descendents of the Vietnamese bishop. Excommunicated after this episode, Bishop Thuc was reconciled to the Vatican in the course of the same year, if only for a short while. In 1981 Bishop Thuc proceeded to the episcopal consecration of Fr. Guérard des Lauriers (May 7) and of Carmona and Zamora (October 17) in his private apartment in Toulon (France). It is noteworthy that these consecrations took place in a strictly private, not to say clan-

## THE APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION OF BISHOP NGO-DINH-THUC

(This list is not exhaustive and stops some years ago. It is taken from the book of Frédéric Luz, *Sulfur and Incense*, 1995.)

**Bishop Peter Martin NGO-DINH-THUC (1897-1984), Roman Catholic Archbishop of Hué (Vietnam), titular archbishop of Bulla Regio, consecrated:**

five bishops at Palmar de Troya, near Seville in Spain, on January 12, 1976 (Clemente DOMINGUEZ Y GOMEZ, Manuel Alonso CORRAL, Louis Henri MOULINS, Francis COLL, and Paul Gerald FOX). These bishops have in turn consecrated many other bishops (about a hundred). Serious doubt exists about the validity of these consecrations, since the rite was profoundly modified.

- Bishop Jean LABORIE (†), February 8, 1977.
- Bishop Michel Louis GUÉRARD des LAURIERS (†), May 7, 1981. (2)
- Bishop Adolfo ZAMORA (†), October 17, 1981.
- Bishop Moïse CARMONA (†), October 17, 1981. (3)
- Bishop Christian DATESEN, September 25, 1982. (4)

**Bishop Michel L. GUÉRARD des LAURIERS, consecrated by Bishop Thuc, consecrated:**

Bishop Gunter STORCK (†), April 30, 1984.

Bishop Robert McKENNA, O.P., August 22, 1986. (5)

Bishop Franco MUNARI, November 25, 1987.

**Bishop Moïse CARMONA, consecrated by Bishop Thuc, consecrated:**

Bishop George MUSEY (†), April 1, 1982. (6)

Bishop Benigno BRAVO, June 18, 1982.

Bishop Jose de Jesus MARTINEZ, June 18, 1982.

Bishop Mark PIVARUNAS, September 24, 1991. (7)

**Bishop Christian DATESEN, consecrated by Bishop Thuc, consecrated:**

Bishop Pierre SALLE (†), June 27, 1983. (8)

Bishop André ENOS, October 14, 1988. (9)



**Bishop Robert McKENNA, consecrated by Bishop Guérard des Lauriers, consecrated:**

Bishop Vida ELMER (†), July 2, 1987.

Bishop Richard BEDINGFELD, December 17, 1987. (10)

Bishop Oliver ORAVEC, October 21, 1988. (11)

**Bishop Georges MUSEY, consecrated by Bishop Carmona, consecrated:**

Bishop Louis VEZELIS, August 24, 1982.

Bishop Conrad ALTENBACH (†), May 24, 1984.

Bishop Ralph SIEBERT (†), May 24, 1984.

Bishop Philippe MIGUET, December 2, 1987.

Bishop Michel MAIN, December 8, 1987.

**Bishop Mark PIVARUNAS, consecrated by Bishop Carmona, consecrated:**

Bishop Daniel DOLAN, November 30, 1993.

**Bishop Pierre SALLE, consecrated by Bishop Datessen, consecrated:**

Bishop Peter HILLEBRAND, July 27, 1984.

Bishop Jean OLIVERES de Mamistra, March 28, 1987. (12)

**Bishop André ENOS, consecrated by Bishop Datessen, consecrated:**

Bishop Alain-Marie FRAYSSE, March 4, 1989.

Bishop Lucien-Cyriel STRYMEERSCH, May 14, 1981. (13)

Bishop Christian LENOIR, October 20, 1991.

Bishop Jean-Didier FORGET, July 4, 1993. (14)

Bishop Bernard CAZENAVE, June 25, 1995.

**Bishop Richard BEDINGFELD, consecrated by Bishop McKenna, consecrated:**

Bishop Edward PETERSON, July 29, 1994.

**Bishop Olivier ORAVEC, consecrated by Bishop McKenna, consecrated:**

Bishop John HESSON, June 12, 1991.

**Bishop Jean OLIVERES de Mamistra, consecrated by  
Bishop Sallé, consecrated:**

Bishop Patrick BROUCKE de Tralles, November 1, 1988.

Bishop Jose LOPEZ-GASTON, June 29, 1992. (15)

**Bishop Lucien-Cyriel STRYMEERSCH, consecrated by  
Bishop Enos, consecrated:**

Bishop Gilles-Marie POMMIER, April 28, 1996.

**Bishop Jean-Didier FORGET, consecrated by Bishop  
Enos, consecrated:**

Bishop ALBINUS, May 15, 1994.

**Bishop Jose LOPEZ GASTON, consecrated by Bishop  
Oliveres de Mamistra, consecrated:**

Bishop Hector RIPOLL-PUGA, August 15, 1992.

Bishop Jules Edouard AONZO, December 27, 1992.

**DECLARATION OF HIS EMINENCE  
REV. ARCHBISHOP NGO-DINH-THUC**

How does the Catholic Church appear today if we look at her? In Rome, John Paul II reigns as “pope,” surrounded by the college of cardinals, many bishops and prelates. Outside of Rome the Catholic Church appears flourishing, with her bishops and priests. The number of Catholics is large. Mass is daily celebrated in very large churches, and on Sundays the churches receive a great number of faithful for hearing Mass and receiving Holy Communion.

But how does the Church appear today in the sight of God? The daily and Sunday Masses which they attend—are they pleasing to God? Not at all, in fact, because that Mass is the same for Catholics and Protestants. Therefore it is displeasing to God and invalid. The only Mass that pleases God is the Mass of St. Pius V, which is offered by a few priests and bishops, including myself.

Therefore, insofar as I am able, I shall open a seminary to educate candidates for the priesthood that is pleasing to God.

Beyond this “Mass,” which is not pleasing to God, there are many other things that God rejects: for example, in priestly ordination, episcopal consecration, in the sacrament of chrismation and extreme unction. Furthermore, those “priests” now profess:

1. modernism,
2. false ecumenism,

3. the worship of men,
4. the freedom to embrace any religion whatsoever;
5. they do not want to condemn heresies and expel the heretics.

Therefore, as a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church, I judge that the See of the Catholic Church at Rome is vacant, and that it is fitting that I as bishop do all that I can so that the Catholic Church may continue for the salvation of souls.

Munich, February 25, 1982  
 F. Petrus Martinus Ngô-Dinh-Thuc  
 Archiepiscopus titularis Bullae Regiae

Here I add the title (sic) of some illustrious documents:

1. The bull *Quo Primum* of Pius V.
2. The Council of Trent, twenty-second session.
3. The brief *Adorabile Eucharistiae* of Pius VII and the decrees of the Council of Florence “On Behalf of the Armenians” (Dz. 698) and “On Behalf of the Jacobites” (Dz. 715).
4. The Roman Missal of Pius V: On defects in the celebration of Masses: “Concerning defects of form.”
5. The constitution *Auctorem Fidei* of Pius VI, the decree *Lamentabili* of Pius X, the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* of Pius X.
6. The Council of Florence: “Decree for the Jacobites”; the encyclical *Quanta Cura* of Pius IX, the bull *Unam Sanctam* of Boniface VIII.
7. The Code of Canon Law, Canon 1322.
8. The bull *Cum ex Apostolatus Officio* of Paul IV; the Code of Canon Law, Canon 188, §4.
9. The Roman Pontifical: On the consecration of one designated to be a bishop: the “form of the oath” and the “examen.”

Munich, February 25, 1982  
 (signed) Petrus Martinus Ngô-dinh-Thuc  
 Archbishop

destine, place. Only later were some photographs and testimonies to the events made public. The other consecrations of Bishop Thuc were completely clandestine. One can question the standing of such bishops before the Church. One wonders whether all are in fact now publicly known, since these people began to appear only after their dubious consecrations.

One can wonder how Bishop Thuc could publicly (and also before his own conscience) justify such consecrations. His public declaration of a sedevacantist position, the Munich Declaration given above, goes back only to 1982. In this light it is comprehensible that some of Fr. Guérard's first disciples abandoned him on the occasion of his episcopal consecration. Furthermore, the Munich Declaration, although clearly sedevacantist, seems somewhat incomplete for a man of Providence who has been invested with the very grave mission of proceeding to episcopal consecrations without a mandate, in order to save the Church by "assuring through his episcopal role the continuity of the Roman Catholic Church, with a view to the salvation of souls."

It may be possible to overcome these difficulties by maintaining that the intentions of Bishop Thuc were always upright, and that he had no intention of in any way fomenting schisms and antipopes, as happened at Palmar, and that he acted only to save the Catholic Church from modernism (and Lefebvism). In this case such aberrations would only have appeared after the consecrations and against the will of Bishop Thuc. Unhappily, however, for this benevolent interpretation, Bishop Thuc is also directly responsible for at least two episcopal consecrations of persons who were already officially outside the Church at the time when he imposed hands on them, notwithstanding the attempts of some sedevacantists to deny this fact. In 1977, a few months after his first reconciliation with the Vatican, Bishop Thuc consecrated Bishop Jean Laborie, a Gallican and longstanding Old Catholic, founder of the Latin Catholic Church of Toulouse. In 1982, the year of the Munich Declaration, Bishop Thuc consecrated the Old Catholic Bishop Christian Datessen. Datessen was leader of the Union of *Petites Eglises* and in turn the font of many subsequent consecrations of schismatic bishops, many of whom were Gnostics. It was to the company of such people, openly and formally schismatic, that Fathers Guérard, Carmona, and Zamora had recourse for the laying on of hands. From the episcopal genealogy of the first two of these bishops emerged those who today

substantially assure sacramental continuity both to strict sedevacantism and to Guérardism—Bishop Thuc appears not to have recognized the dichotomy.

The list of Bishop Thuc's bungles could be continued, above all if we wanted to analyze the activities of the bishops consecrated by his hands, and if we attempted to count the number of "bishops" who maintain that they were clandestinely consecrated by him (even if Bishop Thuc never actually consecrated them, the secret and semi-clandestine character of his "recognized" consecrations is the principal argument of such "bishops"). It is nevertheless possible to draw some conclusions without lingering over such considerations.

To begin with, the discontinuity of Bishop Thuc's position (oscillating between sedevacantism and reconciliation with the Vatican), taken together with the heterogeneity of those consecrated and the very grave consequences of some of his consecrations, suggests sufficient lack of judgment and will to call into question the very validity of the consecrations. In this regard there is disagreement even within sedevacantist circles—some maintain that Bishop Thuc was perfectly lucid, while others disagree. Psychiatric experts disagree about this important question. The comportment of Bishop Thuc seems most easily explained as the classic natural and passionate reaction of a prelate fallen into disgrace, presumably victim to injustice and human unfairness on the part of the official hierarchy. His sedevacantism (at least on the occasions when he professed it) seems almost a flick of the tail against those who had somehow marginalized him. This does not mean that the Munich Declaration was not sincere, but it would explain why it came so late, was so incomplete, and was ultimately withdrawn. One thing is nonetheless certain: Bishop Thuc is not a point of reference for anyone, and, because of his contradictions, objectively cannot be one. For sedevacantists he is rather a headache, a source of continuous doubts or accusations from which they must defend themselves.

Our conclusion is that it is much easier to see in Bishop Thuc a good man much abused by many on account of his own readiness (and weakness), but not one whom God chose as the instrument of his Providence, although his work has shown itself altogether "providential" for the sedevacantists!

## THE FRUITS OF SEDEVACANTISM

There are those who think it possible to argue against sedevacantism simply by virtue of its sterility. Nor can this criterion be simply rejected as such, because it has an evangelical origin. Nonetheless, the estimation of a good or bad fruit is susceptible to at least an element of subjectivism, and might induce us to descend from universal and doctrinal considerations to purely human ones. We shall therefore cede the application of this standard to others. We shall leave to the reader the task of personally and freely applying this type of analysis, when he judges it opportune and has the necessary evidence to make an evaluation. There is nonetheless an abiding element of sterility in sedevacantism that does not depend on good or bad intentions, but rather on the objective situation in which it finds itself. It does seem appropriate to say something about this danger.

With the problem of authority resolved—at least subjectively—the average sedevacantist no longer has a true interest in fighting for the triumph of the truth in a Church that he can no longer consider in any way his own. He lives rather in the belief that the triumph of the truth will be automatic and universal with the arrival of a true pope. These assumptions risk leading to an attitude which is no longer directly touched by the current situation of the Church and its vicissitudes. These are part of a problem which, however unhappy, pertains to souls and prelates with whom the sedevacantists claim to have nothing in common. The only exception is the necessity for the Guérardians to make a daily analysis of the magisterium to determine when the material pope will withdraw the *obex*. In these circumstances it stands to reason that in the long term sedevacantism will no longer direct its bile and venom against modernism as such—such attacks are useful only to demonstrate that John Paul II is not the pope—but rather against those who, also rejecting modernist doctrines, do not embrace positions on authority identical to their own. The history of sedevacantism unhappily confirms that in fact the principal object of its spite does belong to this category. In this way a chronic sterility is indeed apparent.

The formal motive for such behavior seems perfectly identifiable and comprehensible. If we assume the sedevacantist perspective, the attitude of Archbishop Lefebvre in the post-Conciliar tragedy cannot be read as a barrier against error, but rather as a

bridge leading the antimodernist resistance to cross over into the Conciliar structure through recognition of the authority of John Paul II. This interpretation of Archbishop Lefebvre's attitude, which certainly admits of various nuances and some exceptions on the part of sedevacantists, finds numerous confirmations of this kind: "The function of *Sodalitium* is precisely to put souls on guard against the most insidious and latent dangers....Not lacking are those who denounce manifest enemies, but very few take heed of the hidden plotters. Now Archbishop Lefebvre, perhaps without realizing it, deceives those of the faithful (traditionalists) whom Wojtyla has not succeeded in deceiving, making them believe that Wojtyla, the great deceiver, is the Vicar of Truth himself."<sup>44</sup> Such interpretations, current in sedevacantist circles, have also been illustrated with due attention to detail by the already cited Bishop Sanborn.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, not absent in the ranks of sedevacantism are those who hope to see this interpretation crowned with success by a general capitulation of the Society of Saint Pius X. For decades now they have argued that such a capitulation is imminent.

The ensemble of these links, which match up logically and in perfect concatenation amongst themselves, inevitably places sedevacantism in a situation of objective sterility. It is paradoxically condemned to wage war against those who, without adhering to the sedevacantist position, are actually waging the struggle against neomodernist errors.

## CONCLUSION

Having arrived at the conclusion of our reflections one may ask where lies the final solution to the "true problem," with the recognition of which we began. Our *excursus* has only confirmed the necessity of leaving to the Church herself the task of giving a definitive response as to the current status of authority in her bosom. Since we cannot substitute ourselves for her, we can only take heed of the necessity of the existence of a hierarchy with authority, and of the general recognition of the authority of John Paul II on the part of the Church dispersed throughout the world.

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<sup>44</sup> *Sodalitium*, no. 21, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Sacerdotium*, XII, pp. 1-43; cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 39, pp. 45-58.

Our position is based on these objective facts, a prudential attitude, and the moral norms that govern obedience to the pope. Beyond this there remains the even more urgent and vital necessity of preserving the Faith in all its integrity. The Faith itself, founding the Church on Peter and his prerogatives, assures us that from him and him alone will one day appear the definitive solution to this question.



# APPENDIX

## THE ELECTION OF PAUL VI: SOLUTIONS TO CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES

In the section entitled “The Election of Paul VI” we took note of the significance of the universal and peaceable recognition of a new pope on the part of the whole Church. It is an absolutely certain dogmatic fact—admitted by all theologians and based directly on the promise of Jesus that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church—that, in such a case, he is certainly pope. Applied to Paul VI this principle entails obvious consequences that undermine sedevacantism *in radice*. In that same section we examined in detail an attack on this dogmatic fact. Nevertheless, the argument there set forth, to be understood and appreciated in all its value, requires still further clarification with respect to two possible difficulties that might be raised against it.

To begin with we must take into account the possibility that Paul VI could while pope have fallen publicly into heresy, and thus have lost the pontificate through formal heresy (hypothesis of the heretical pope). The argument for this hypothesis is found in a celebrated hypothesis entertained by St. Robert Bellarmine. In second place we must take into consideration the possibility that the election of Paul VI was null and void, because of heresy (hypothesis of the election of a heretic). This second possibility is largely based on the application of the Bull of Paul IV, *Cum ex Apostolatus Officio*. By the first hypothesis the election of Paul VI would have been valid, in keeping with Billot’s position, and he would have ceased to be pope only at a later time. By the second hypothesis, however, what Billot and Catholic theology say, and is implicit in our faith in the indefectibility of the Church herself, would be contradicted.

Both of these arguments are really characteristic of rigorist sedevacantism, since the Guérardians consider them inconclusive.

Nevertheless, although they reject it as a demonstration of the vacancy of the Holy See, proponents of the Cassiciacum thesis use the second argument to oppose a dogmatic fact defended by Billot and the whole of Catholic theology. It is noteworthy that the two arguments exclude one another, in the sense that if one applies, the other cannot be applied. For example, if the election of Paul VI is maintained to be have been null, it cannot also be maintained that he lost his authority after having received it. Nevertheless the two arguments are often juxtaposed in demonstrations of rigorist sedevacantism, as if to reciprocally augment their probative power. This is itself an indication of the intrinsic weakness of such demonstrations.

As far as the possibility of a pope's publicly falling into heresy—and thus of losing the faith and with it his belonging to the Church and the pontificate—is concerned, commentators, such as Billot, who take it into consideration generally regard it as the theoretical analysis of a pure hypothesis. They consider it impossible in practice, because of the promise of Our Lord to St. Peter: "I shall pray for you that your faith not fail."<sup>46</sup> The main interest of this hypothesis is that it was entertained by St. Robert Bellarmine; this is the reason that it has so much standing in the sedevacantist world. Use of this argument, more than of any other, has in fact thrown sedevacantism into a bedlam of casuistry and theological opinion-mongering, leading it to lose its contact with reality, its credibility, and of course the unity of its adherents.

We shall limit ourselves here to mentioning some reasons for the failure of the hypothesis of the "heretical pope."

- In the first place St. Robert Bellarmine himself does not seem to have taken the possibility of a "heretical pope" into consideration as concretely possible. That which the holy doctor affirms has all the aspects of a simple theological opinion, placed in the abstract, without practical consideration of how a pope could publicly fall into heresy and of how and when the Church could notice it. It should also be underlined that the same St. Robert at the same time considered the opinion that a pope could never fall into

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<sup>46</sup> Luke 22:32. The prayer of Our Lord is obviously infallible, in the sense that it always obtains what it asks for.

heresy as much more probable.

- Whether we like it or not the promise made by Jesus to St. Peter is the fundamental assertion in Sacred Scripture (*de fide divina*) of the public indefectibility of the pope's faith. Against this argument (something more than a simple theological opinion) sedevacantism has never given—and cannot give—a satisfactory explanation, beyond claiming that Paul VI never was pope and thus renouncing the hypothesis of the “heretical pope”: which is what we have set out to demonstrate. While some theologians, following St. Robert, have taken into consideration the possibility that a pope could profess heresy, they have always had in mind not the error of the pope as such but as a private person. To interpret the passage of St. Luke in a different manner would simply be to destroy the papacy forever and to deny its guarantee of infallibility.
- That Paul VI was indeed a heretic, even if only unconsciously and without pertinacity, is not taken as a point of fact even within the traditionalist world. Not all traditionalists recognize his teachings as “heretical.” For example, some who themselves reject religious liberty for reasons of faith consider this teaching nevertheless as *favens haeresi* (favoring heresy) and not as heretical *sic et simpliciter*.
- Paul VI does not seem to have been regarded as a notorious heretic in the eyes of the universal Church even when he promulgated *Dignitatis Humanae*. But this document is still the principal text used by rigorist sedevacantism to demonstrate the notorious heresy of Paul VI. Furthermore, the same universal recognition of his authority, as already demonstrated, continued even when he promulgated the Council. Thus Billot's argument remains applicable in 1965 and subsequent years.
- In order to be heretical before the Church, that is formally and notoriously heretical, the subject must show himself to be pertinacious after having proclaimed heresy and having been warned by the competent ecclesiastical authority. This was not the case for Paul VI. Sedevacantists themselves argue still today about whether a simple declaration of heresy was sufficient, or whether it was necessary that he

be warned, how he should and could have been warned, who should have declared the See vacant, and above all when<sup>47</sup> Paul VI should have been declared to have fallen from his office, *etc.* It is therefore in fact impossible to demonstrate, with a judgment having standing before the Church, the formal heresy of a pope. To this difficulty must be joined—to further complicate the operation—the principle that a pope is not subject to ecclesiastical law. To summarize: even when a pope falls into error, it is not practically possible that he fall into that type of heresy (formal) that *ipso facto* prejudices his belonging to the Church, and therefore deprives him of pontifical authority.

- Proof that the hypothesis in question is a mere theological opinion is given by the fact that other comparable hypotheses are not found.
- Finally, the interminable and inconclusive polemics within sedevacantist circles on this question in practice demonstrate its insufficiency as an argument. From a purely historical point of view, sedevacantism has been more paralyzed than stimulated by use of the Bellarmine hypothesis.

At this point it is worth citing the testimony of a master of the Cassiciacum thesis in argument against an interlocutor of the rigorist sedevacantist line, identifiable as P., who is attempting to apply Bellarmine's hypothesis to current pontiffs:

In the spirit of the author this (mention of heresy with respect to John Paul II) means that one should logically conclude, with St. Robert Bellarmine, that a heretical pope is *ipso facto* deposed. The author explains as much in the third chapter, the heart of his book, where is found, as it appears, the “proof” of sedevacantism. But in this P. adds nothing that is substantially

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<sup>47</sup> Amongst supporters of the “heretical pope” hypothesis it is disputed (and eternally disputable) what grade of notoriety of professed heresy is necessary to consider that the “heretical pope” has forfeited his office. Accordingly they argue in assessing whether and to what extent to which God could still preserve the jurisdiction of a “heretical pope.” While on the one hand these points may stimulate the speculative interest of the theologian or the researcher, they in practice confirm the insufficiency of the hypothesis in question to resolve any argument.

new to the debate, since he resumes and expounds, as the author himself writes, what Arnaldo Xavier Vidigal da Silveira wrote on the subject. That book reignited the passion for the thesis of the “heretical pope” (revived by the Abbé de Nantes, it had soon thereafter been forgotten again), but also led sedevacantism to a dead end, since the opinion of de Silveira, the defender of Bellarmine’s opinion, was that it was only a matter of... opinion, from which it was not possible to deduce certain and obligatory conclusions. After twenty-five pages in favor of Bellarmine’s opinion (poorly understood) and after having cited Journet in support of his theory (Journet actually maintained the contrary) P. is constrained to admit that one can arrive at no certainty by this route.<sup>48</sup>

To summarize, we hold that application of the hypothesis of a “heretical pope” to Paul VI and his successors will be considered a valid argument against our demonstration from the day it resolves these enumerated difficulties in a satisfactory manner, when it is universally held not as an opinion but as a theologically certain conclusion, and when it is applied unanimously and in the same terms at least by all those who reject the authority of the current popes. The inexcusable and fundamental error of those who make use of this argument to reject the authority of the current popes consists in using a purely theological hypothesis in order to draw certain and obligatory conclusions, even to the point of making it equivalent to elements of the Catholic creed. A simple theological opinion, even a most disputable one, can be embraced as such in all tranquility, but it cannot be the foundation of something binding for the conscience.

The author who seems to understand the tenor of the Bellarmine hypothesis better than others is once again Cardinal Billot. To begin with he is the only one who, like Bellarmine, entertains the hypothesis of the “heretical pope” and at the same time the thesis that a pope cannot fall into heresy (according to the study of A.X. Vidigal da Silveira). The apparent contradiction that St. Robert and Billot share derives from the fact that the first hypothesis is considered, as our cardinal explains, as a purely theological hypothesis that cannot in practice be realized.

Let us remember that this decisive nuance is not understood by the sedevacantists for a simple reason. For them the premise

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<sup>48</sup> Ricossa, *Risposta*, pp. 4-5.

that Paul VI and his successors have not been popes is an obvious and given fact. Consequently they make use of Bellarmine or other authoritative authors not in order to seek the truth in disinterested fashion, honestly trying to understand what they are saying, but simply in order to find arguments for the demonstration of a truth that was already obvious and taken for granted at the outset. It is important to acknowledge that the Guérardians do not use this argument in their demonstrations, but date the *obex* which prevents the material pope's reception of authority to the moment of his election.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless they also manifest the attitude of someone who intends to square theology with reality on the basis of a judgment already formulated *a priori*, as will be apparent from the following observations.

The last noteworthy argument that sedevacantism employs against the dogmatic fact illustrated by Cardinal Billot consists in the application of the bull of Paul IV *Cum ex Apostolatus Officio*, which declares invalid the election of a heretic to any ecclesiastical office, including the supreme pontificate; this would apply even if all his subjects were to recognize him and show obedience to him. The argument is set forth in the review *Sodalitium* (no. 14, pp. 9-10) and has been resumed in a more recent issue (*Sodalitium*, no. 55, pp. 27-28). From the outset, some concrete difficulties in the application of the bull are set forth with praiseworthy honesty. These difficulties include the lacking—and impossible—verification of the formal heresy of the elected pope (*in primis* Paul VI) at the moment of his election, the abrogation of the bull with the promulgation of the 1917 Code of Canon Law and, above all, its insufficiency to demonstrate the vacancy of the See.

Some have thought it possible to infer from the text in question a proof that the Apostolic See is actually completely vacant....It would be sufficient to prove that the occupants of the Apostolic See were heretics before their election, and then to apply the precepts of Paul IV.

This double task, however, in the current state of affairs, shows itself doubly arduous. To begin with, it is necessary to prove the formal and notorious heresy of the errant one. Failing a (hypothetical) admission of the guilty party, an intervention of the Church and its Magisterium then takes place, in accordance

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

with the words of St. Paul to Titus: "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, avoid." What Paul IV perhaps did not foresee—like all the classical writers on the question of the "heretical pope"—was that no authority would arise in such a case to make the admonitions required by Scripture and the canons.

The second difficulty consists in the current juridical value of the Constitution of Paul IV. The sixth canon of the Code of Canon Law prescribes that what is not taken up again in the 1917 Code should be considered as abrogated, unless the law is evidently by divine right. Now, the prescriptions of Paul IV are only partially resumed by the Code (can. 1888.4 and 2314.1) without any mention of the case of the supreme pontiff. Doubt therefore remains about the character of Paul IV's proclamation—whether it belongs to divine law, and thus is always valid, or to ecclesiastical law.<sup>50</sup>

These valuable clarifications show that the bull is insufficient to demonstrate the vacancy of the See. In spite of this, the bull is considered sufficient demonstration, as an act of the Church's magisterium, that Billot is mistaken when he maintains that a pope peaceably recognized by the whole Church is certainly the pope. Universal recognition is alleged to be of no value for a heretic. By means of this "proof" it is attempted to demonstrate that the argument of Billot is always faulty—even if the elected pope is not a heretic—because it would contradict the magisterium of the Church. The learned cardinal's contention is thus reduced to a discussable personal opinion (although in fact it has to do with a dogmatic fact admitted by all theologians<sup>51</sup>):

The reality is otherwise. The thesis of Cardinal Billot (and others) can only be an opinion, given that the Magisterium of the Church has affirmed the contrary, and legislated in this regard: "*The election of an heretic is invalid, and enthronement, his official recognition as Roman pontiff, or the obedience shown him by everyone and the prior exercise of his office, or its exercise for some space of time, do not render it valid.*"<sup>52</sup>

*Transeamus* to the intellectual honesty of those who, declaring the bull inapplicable for demonstration of the vacancy of the

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<sup>50</sup> *Sodalitium*, no. 14, pp. 9-10.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Da Silveira, *La Nouvelle Messe de Paul VI: Qu'en penser?*, p. 296.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Holy See (because of the manifest and recognized impossibility of recognizing the formal heresy of a new pope, with reference *in primis* to Paul VI), calmly suppose that it is useful against the dogmatic fact that Billot illustrates. If we leave moral judgment on this question of intellectual honesty<sup>53</sup> to God, we cannot fail to underline that the difficulty of sedevacantism in the face of Billot's argument is such as to constrain the Guérardians to revive an argument characteristic of rigorist sedevacantism, whose inconsistency they admit. This is yet another proof of the force of Billot's argument.

In our opinion the problem is nonexistent; the Magisterium has in no way maintained the contrary of what Billot and all the theologians maintain. Although we also would like to take heed of the possible current applicability of the bull of Paul IV, in practice no one considered Paul VI to be a heretic at the time he was elected. Therefore the bull, inapplicable in this case, turns out to be perfectly compatible with what Billot maintains about the recognition of a pope on the part of the universal Church. Furthermore, the formal heresy of Paul VI at the moment of his election remains indemonstrable. If we consider the fact that pertinacity in the face of warnings from the competent authority is requisite for being a heretic in the eyes of the Church, the bull of Paul IV turns out to be, in our case and in all comparable ones, even less applicable, as *Sodalitium* also quite rightly emphasized: "What Paul IV perhaps did not foresee—like all the classical writers on the question of the 'heretical pope'—was that no authority would arise in such a case to make the admonitions required by Scripture and the canons" (*vide supra*).

On a purely speculative level the bull may seem to be less reconcilable with Billot's words: then is a heretic elected and universally recognized as pope truly a pope or not? The difficulty, which is not here at issue because it passes from the case of Paul VI to the level of hypothetical abstractions, seems nevertheless easily resolvable. To begin with, it is significant that Billot, like the great majority of theologians who treated *De Ecclesia*, redacted their work af-

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<sup>53</sup> The equivocation is constructed by passing from the concrete level (that which here is of interest, that is to say, the application of this criterion to determine whether or not Paul VI was pope) to the theoretical and purely speculative level, in order to shift the problem to the world of theological abstractions. We shall therefore examine this question at both of these levels.



ter the promulgation of the bull of Paul IV.<sup>54</sup> The objection formulated by *Sodalitium* seems at first sight somewhat pretentious. It maintains that only today, thanks to the illuminating arguments of sedevacantism, do we perceive that a dogmatic fact—a theologically certain conclusion that has been borne out by the unanimous consensus of authors (authors who wrote after the promulgation of the bull in question)—is contrary to the Magisterium of the Church, which had already spoken and legislated in this regard for more than four centuries! A more serious and measured approach to the question seems therefore opportune.

Paul IV's document in fact concerns the election of a heretic to any ecclesiastical office, including the papacy. In this latter case, however, its application is impossible, insofar as the case appears to be metaphysically impossible if the elected pope is universally recognized as such. In fact, if someone is a heretic before the Church and is then elected pope, it's not easy to understand how his election could be universally uncontested and recognized by that Church for whom he is and remains a heretic. If such recognition were afforded it would seem on the contrary to indicate not so much the invalidity, by reason of heresy, of the subject's election before the Church, but rather the heretic's conversion before the Church, and by consequence his actual reception of authority.<sup>55</sup> To be a heretic before the Church actually means to be excluded from the body of the Church and outside of her body. To maintain even theoretically that the Church could consider someone excluded from her body and at the same time recognize that person as a member and even as the head—on earth—of her own body is necessarily to abuse and badly interpret the bull of Paul IV and to attribute nonsense to the Bride of Christ.

To oppose Paul IV to Catholic theology is in any case discreditable. To do so is to ridicule both the magisterium and sane the-

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<sup>54</sup> Most—though not all—of the great theological syntheses *De Ecclesia* were redacted in connection with or after the First Vatican Council (1870), because of the attention this council paid to questions related to this theme. Paul IV's bull dates to 1559.

<sup>55</sup> This hypothetical case seems historically comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, to that of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, elected pope in 1458 as Pius II. This pontiff, who in his youth had shown himself partial to the thesis of the conciliarist heresy, on ascending the throne of Peter said, with profound humility: "*Aeneam reicite, Pium recipite*," "Reject Aeneas, receive Pius."

ology. It manifests incomprehension of the import and the intrinsic value of the respective arguments, which are made use of not to seek the truth but to support a conclusion that has already been presumed and taken for granted from the outset.<sup>56</sup>

*Sodalitium's* demonstration, which had seemed to have apodictically demonstrated that the authority of the Magisterium trumped that of theology, at this point takes up, albeit in its own way, the thesis of Billot—a tangible indication that what has up to now been demonstrated is not considered probative even by the editors of the review. This turn in the argument of course does not put in discussion the only data that is taken as given and *a priori* certain from the sedevacantist perspective: the fact that Paul VI was not the pope. Therefore, even taking Billot's contentions into account, it is necessary to reconcile theology with this "certainty of faith": "Granted that the vacancy of the Apostolic See is certain,<sup>57</sup> one of the following two possibilities must hold: either the adhesion of the universal Church does not guarantee the legitimacy of an heretical pope...or, if it does guarantee it, one must conclude that the universal Church did not adhere to Paul VI and his successors."<sup>58</sup>

The dogmatic fact which Billot defends, some possible merit of which is now acknowledged, is not treated as a criterion for knowing who the pope is, but rather as an obstacle to be done away with. Taking note of the insufficiency—in part admitted—of the argument based on the bull of Paul IV, and recognizing the validity of Billot's contention, the necessity of indirectly destroy-

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<sup>56</sup> It is worth emphasizing that the morally unanimous consensus of theologians on a specific point of doctrine represents a theologically certain opinion (*theologicæ certum*) and is a certain criterion of Divine Tradition (cf. J. Salaverri, *De Ecclesia Christi*, XXI). We find just such a morally unanimous consensus to the effect that an elected pope universally recognized as such is indeed pope. The bull of Paul IV, precisely because it even takes an impossible case into consideration, has the value of giving the greatest possible testimony to the zeal with which the Church watches over the purity of doctrine of its own pastors. This bull has already in the history of the Church been poorly understood and badly interpreted. During the First Vatican Council adversaries of the proclamation of papal infallibility, with Döllinger at their head, drew arguments against proclamation of this dogma from the same document.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Sodalitium*, no. 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Sodalitium*, no. 14, p. 10.

ing the latter's argument becomes apparent. The sedevacantists would deprive it of its intrinsic value in practice by a logical pirouette that merits all our attention.

For Billot it is necessary that the legitimacy of the pope accepted by the whole Church be beyond question, for otherwise the whole Church would follow the false pontiff into error, which is impossible since the Church is indefectible: "to adhere to a false pontiff would in fact be the same as for the Church to adhere to a false *regula* of the Faith, since the pope is the living *regula* that the Church must follow, and in fact always follows, in its belief." If the thesis of Cardinal Billot were in fact true [thus it is no longer taken for granted that the Magisterium maintains the contrary], one would have to conclude that, in fact, the whole universal Church did not adhere to Paul VI and his successors, insofar as all did not adhere to the new teaching of Paul VI, rejecting, for example, religious liberty. In this case they did not follow Paul VI as the living *regula* of the Faith, but rather implicitly but objectively reckoned him to be illegitimate, even though they may have paid him the recognition of lip service.<sup>59</sup>

In the course of our exposition we have already alluded to this objection; we refer the reader to this passage (cf. footnote 28 above). It is worth noting at this point that the present argument completely destroys the objective and intrinsic value of the argument Billot sets forth, which is to say the possibility of using the only existing external indication to know who the pope is: universal recognition of his election. This external sign, this dogmatic fact, is reduced to words without meaning through an arbitrary interpretation of the position taken by the first traditionalists.

To summarize, this train of argument proves six things:

- Its own lack of viability, since it refers to the promulgation of the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*), which was formalized on December 7, 1965, while Billot's argument is applicable from the moment that a pope is elected. On December 7, 1965, Paul VI had been universally and incontestably recognized as pope already for two years and six months! It follows that, if one chooses to pursue this argument, after having been a real pope Paul

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

VI forfeited his office on December 7, 1965, from the moment when he began to be recognized by some only “in words.” The difficulty associated with the inapplicable Bellarmine hypothesis here re-emerges, in a slightly modified form.

- The same argument confirms our earlier demonstration, where it was maintained that in 1965 no one openly disputed the authority of Paul VI as such, in spite of their rejection of the Council (cf. the section entitled “A Question of Faith”).
- In order to save itself *in extremis* the argument is constrained to make appeal to the positions of those who did not reject the authority of Paul VI at the same time as they opposed the Council. Now this position—in practice that of the Society of St. Pius X—is considered, from the sedevacantist point of view, Gallican and schismatic. One therefore wonders what ecclesial value such positions can have for them.
- The current existence of such positions—systematically condemned by sedevacantism—in perfect continuity with the first rejection of conciliar teachings, demonstrates *a fortiori* that, in the immediate post-conciliar period, the authority of Paul VI was in fact and objectively recognized by all “traditionalists,” and not only “in words.” The perfect historical continuity of this position, inadmissible and unjustifiable for sedevacantism, gives clear evidence of the objective intentions of those who held it from the very beginning. Thus the backbone of the demonstration falls away.
- The mixture of two arguments which reciprocally exclude one another seems particularly significant and indicative of the argumentative insufficiency of both of them. If in fact the argument based on the bull of Paul IV resolves the matter, it is difficult to understand why the second argument was devised, an argument that does not complement the first one but rather presupposes its inutility. If the second argument (that which interprets the initial position of those who resisted conciliar errors as an implicit declaration of the vacancy of the Apostolic See) were truly certain,

probative, and sufficient, one wonders why an argument that renders it useless should be juxtaposed to it. This approach is comparable to what rigorist sedevacantism does in expediently crossing the bull of Paul IV with the hypothesis of Bellarmine: two arguments which, as we have pointed out, reciprocally exclude one another.

- The argument seems to begin with a judgment rendered *a priori* and inconsonant with reality, on the basis of which it is necessary to reread and rewrite all of theology and reality itself. Finally, the general inconsistency of the argument and the contrivances on which it is based further and definitively confirm our demonstration.

We intend to conclude these last reflections on a note of hope. While we consider the last illustrated argument a great and inconclusive contrivance, we consider positive and providential the fact that, faced with certain difficulties, sedevacantism is constrained to make appeal, in the illustrated terms, to the position currently maintained by the Society of Saint Pius X. It is devoutly to be hoped that sedevacantism may have the humility and the courage to deduce the ultimate consequences of the recognition of this necessity, so that the traditionalist world might rediscover that original unity that was lost on the day of the proclamation of the vacancy of the Apostolic See.

## THE LOGIC OF CHARITY AND PRUDENCE: THE TRUE FACE OF ARCHBISHOP LEFEBVRE

“How has a successor of Peter been able, in so little time, to do more harm to the Church than the revolution of 1789? ... Do we really have a pope or an intruder seated on the seat of Peter? Blessed are those who lived and died without having to pose themselves such a question!” Such is the question that Archbishop Lefebvre posed in *Cor Unum*, the internal bulletin of the Society, on November 8, 1979. It pertains to the deceased Pope Paul VI—as it already had during the “hot summer” of 1976—but it will soon pertain also to John Paul II: “How can it be, given the promises of assistance given by Our Lord to His Vicar, that this same Vicar could at the same time, by himself or through others, corrupt the faith of believers?”

Some say [Paul VI] pronounces heresies, he promulgated religious liberty, and he signed the seventh article of the *Novus Ordo Missae*. Now a heretic cannot be pope, therefore he is not the pope, therefore obedience is not due him. It is a simple and comfortable logic that is based on a theological opinion that theological authors have maintained in the abstract. But can one, practically speaking, maintain the formal heresy of a pope? Who will have the authority for that? Who will give the necessary warnings to the pope that it might be recognized? Furthermore, this line of reasoning in practice “puts the Church in an inextricable position. Who will tell us where the future pope is? How can he be designated, since there are no more cardinals,” because the pope is not pope? “This spirit is a schismatic spirit.” In addition, “the visibility of the Church is too necessary for her existence that God could omit it over the course of decades.”

To the “theoretical logic” of Fr. Guérard des Lauriers, Archbishop Lefebvre preferred “a superior wisdom: the logic of charity and of prudence.”

Perhaps one day, in thirty or forty years, a session of cardinals called by a future pope will study and judge the reign of Paul VI; perhaps they will say that some things should have jumped out at the eyes of his contemporaries, affirmations of this pope completely contrary to Tradition. I prefer for the present to consider as pope him who, at least, is on the throne of Peter; and if one day it should be discovered for certain that this pope was not pope, I will still have done my duty. Outside of cases where he uses his charism of infallibility, a pope can err. Why therefore

should we be scandalized and say, "Then he is not the pope," as Arius was scandalized by the humiliations of Our Lord saying in his Passion "My Lord, why have you abandoned me?" and reasoned, "Thus he is not God!"

We do not know up to what point a pope, "led on by who knows what spirit, what training, subject to what pressures or by negligence," may lead the Church to lose the faith; but "we recognize the facts. I prefer to set out from this principle: we must defend our faith; there, our duty does not admit the shadow of a doubt."

(From *Marcel Lefebvre: Une vie*, by Bishop Bernard Tissier de Mallerais [Etampes: Clovis, 2002], pp. 533-535.)

