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**THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION
ON THE VACANT SEE**

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Introduction

First of all, this is not a matter of entering into sterile discussions and controversies that detract from the intelligence and wisdom with which inherently difficult subjects ought to be treated, and which must be approached theologically as is fitting.

It is not a question of debate, but rather of a brief exposition on a subject so much disputed and so often mishandled by many, namely that of the Vacant See.

The aim, then, is to set forth (without pretension) the question of the Vacant See upon theological foundations and principles; for the matter must be approached theologically, in the light of faith, as sound doctrine requires.

This is a theological consideration, without any claim to render it dogmatic, as others unfortunately attempt to do with their opinions, whether in favor of or against the Vacant See.

The Vacant See is a problem that must be addressed without passion, within the theological order, with theological arguments, without attempting to monopolize the issue by disqualifying every opponent, and without weighing the value of their reasoning.

One cannot be sedevacantist or anti-sedevacantist a priori, as unfortunately so often occurs among traditionalists. Nor should the matter be made into a taboo—that is, a forbidden topic that must not be touched—just as many instinctively do, like the ostrich that hides its head in the sand so as not to see the danger.

Problems must be faced with wisdom and intelligence, and for this purpose the theology of the Church exists—her doctrine, her theologians, and her Doctors. Theology exists to shed light upon the problems that arise. It is the function of the theologian and the philosopher to enlighten minds and to inflame hearts in the knowledge and love of the truth. Truth known and loved is truth contemplated in the light of God, and in the light of faith in the supernatural order. One must not close one's eyes to the light of truth, nor walk in the darkness of error, nor shut one's eyes, depriving them of the light and clarity that make them shine, manifesting that there is intelligence and life.

It is painful to see how, in the face of so difficult a question, many prefer to close their eyes so as not to see, or worse still, to be compelled not to look, like mules that are fitted with blinders so that they look in only one direction, or even have their eyes covered so that they see nothing.

The theology of the Church exists precisely to prevent this; therefore, it must be consulted, in order to ground both our will and our understanding. Above all, we must bear in mind the Augustinian adage: *"in essentials unity, in doubtful matters liberty, and in all things charity,"* when faced with problems that are difficult to resolve.

If the question of Sedevacantism has come into the open, it is due directly to what is happening today in Rome in the face of the unrestrained loss of the faith of all time. If the Pope fulfilled his duty as Pope, as successor of Peter in the Roman See, the matter would not be debated with the urgency we witness today. If the Pope were guiding the Church along the paths of Truth and of the doctrine of yesterday, today, and forever – that is, along the paths of the infallible Tradition of the Church – if the Pope, or the Popes (for there have been several, from John XXIII to John Paul II), were using their authority to safeguard holily and expound faithfully the Revelation handed down by the Apostles, that is, the deposit of the faith, and not to teach a new doctrine as is systematically and tirelessly done today since the Second Vatican Council (the only ecumenical Council that did not wish to define or to dogmatize), then the bitter controversy that rends souls within Tradition would not arise. Sedevacantism would be nothing more than a purely theoretical consideration among theologians, as it was until recently in the Church. Today, on the contrary, the problem arises in a burning manner, since in the name of authority and obedience the faith and the very foundations of the Church are being undermined. Authority and obedience are invoked in order to destroy the faith, forgetting that it is authority which serves the faith, and that, in serving the faith, authority must be obeyed and respected. Moreover, in the Church this authority at the service of the faith is infallible. Authority exists for the service of the faith, for the service of the common good of the Church, and never to abuse it by acting against the faith or against the common good of the Church.

Only a voluntarist and absolutist conception of authority turns it into a monopoly of whim and the tyranny of the one who holds it, against the duty and the good which authority is meant to serve. Every authority that attacks the common good is an abuse and an offense against the truth. To think otherwise is iniquity; it is to deny Thomistic principles, which are those of the Church, of which Saint Thomas is the Common Doctor.

Let us recall what Pius IX said at the First Vatican Council when the infallibility of the Pope was defined: “The Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter so that, by His revelation, they might make known a new doctrine, but so that, with His assistance, they might holily safeguard and faithfully expound the revelation transmitted by the Apostles, that is, the deposit of the faith.” Denzinger 1836.

Therefore, the authority of the Pope and his infallibility (things which no Catholic can deny without being a heretic and a schismatic) are not given so that the Pope may do whatever he pleases¹ – as is the tendency of those who conceive authority in an absolutist and voluntarist manner, especially since the Renaissance in general and the Protestant Revolution in particular – but rather to safeguard holily and expound faithfully the revealed deposit of the Catholic faith. Authority exists to govern and to teach in accordance with the faith of all time.

¹ The Pope is bound before God by the laws of his office, says Cardinal Cajetan (Theological and Moral Implications of the New “*Ordo Missae*” (mimeographed work, São Paulo, Santo do, 1971, p. 185, note 3, Da Silveira)).

To govern consists in leading souls to their ultimate end, and to teach is founded upon the deposit of the faith, the doctrine revealed for salvation and for the glory of God: *“The teaching and the governance of the Church, which are the two great functions entrusted by Jesus Christ to Saint Peter, and to the other Apostles, and to their legitimate successors until the end of the ages,”* as is stated in the preface of the book *The Most Holy Ecumenical Councils of Trent and Vatican* by Father Machuca Díez (Madrid, 1903, p. VII). *“The ultimate end, which is salvation, is first of all bound up with the faith. Every hierarchy instituted by Our Lord is at the service of the faith, which will allow the faithful to be nourished at the sources of the charity of the Holy Spirit and of His grace.”* (Mons. Lefebvre, *Spiritual Journey*, Foundation of St. Pius X, Buenos Aires, 1991, p. 94).

So important is the faith and its transmission that the first salvation consists in preserving the right rule of faith (Denzinger 1830), and for this reason Saint Paul warned and anathematized (excommunicated) anyone who, whether in his own name or in the name of an angel from heaven, should teach anything other than what was taught and heard from the Apostles, thereby perverting the Gospel; for: *“there are some who trouble you and wish to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we ourselves, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a Gospel other than the one we have preached to you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so now I say again: if anyone preaches to you a Gospel other than that which you have received, let him be anathema.”* (Gal. 1:7–9).

Saint Paul is categorical in this, and he adds even against himself that *“if I were still trying to please men, I should not be a servant of Christ”* (Gal. 1:10). This applies equally to every minister of the Church, whatever his rank or hierarchy may be. In matters of faith there are no middle terms or compromises: yes, yes – no, no; anything beyond this comes from the evil one (Mt. 5:37).

The Pope, more than anyone, is bound to defend the truth of the faith; for this reason he is the Vicar of Christ, and for this he possesses the full power to shepherd, rule, and govern the Universal Church (cf. Denzinger 1834–1835), and yet, tragically, by a true mystery of iniquity, the contrary is occurring. Let it be clearly understood that it is the Pope himself who, by his conduct so contrary to the Church and to her most holy Tradition, raises anew the problem of the Vacant See. How can a Pope be one of the principal enemies of the doctrine and the worship of the Church? How can a Pope bring about a rupture with the Tradition of the Church? How can a Pope habitually and permanently act against the common good of the Church? How can a Pope corrupt the Church, Religion, and the Gospel by distorting them? How can a Pope not only favor heresy and error, but propose a new version of religion in accordance with the desires of the enemies of God, of Christ, and of His Church? How can a Pope destroy the faith, which is the very foundation of the Church? – which is far worse than denying this or that dogma, since it in fact undermines the very faith itself, the foundation of dogma and of all divine teaching. In sum, what are we to think of a Pope who does not profess the Catholic faith, but teaches another new religion? It is a fact, and facts have their explanations, and it is both lawful and indeed a duty to seek the explanation of so grave a situation. Yes, it is the Pope himself who, by acting against the common good of the Church, by acting against Tradition and against the faith

of the Church, does not profess the Catholic faith, and is the one who raises the question of the Vacant See. One cannot act with impunity against the sound exercise of authority indefinitely without eventually calling into question the legitimacy of the one who exercises such authority. Nor can one remain indefinitely in doubt while the facts grow ever more serious.

This is the great problem that objectively presents itself in itself. Moreover, how can one be in communion with someone who does not profess the Catholic faith? Even without questioning whether he is or is not Pope. How can one be in communion in the faith with someone who does not profess the faith? Consciences and hearts are judged by God, but as for public and external acts, it is the duty of every one of the faithful to confront them with the faith and to judge them according to the faith when the faith is in danger. Thus Saint Paul warns: to judge everything according to the faith and to hold fast to what is good (1 Thess. 5:21). It is the faith that judges; it is the Tradition of the Church that judges; it is the doctrine of the Church that judges deviations in matters of faith. It is not we who judge—far from it—may God preserve us from such a thing.

First of all, the matter of the Vacant See must be approached in its theoretical possibility (that is, whether it is theologically possible, whether it is not in itself something absurd or contrary to the faith); then, secondly, in its concrete and present realization (whether it in fact occurs).

There is a distinction that must be made before entering fully into the question of the Vacant See.

It is fitting, when speaking of the Vacant See, to distinguish between theological Sedevacantism and extreme Sedevacantism, such as that of those who have hardened themselves to the utmost in a position, who have sterilely separated themselves from Monsignor Lefebvre and from the Society of Saint Pius X, so as to have no other *raison d'être* than to criticize and systematically oppose it.

Thus, in summary, there are two kinds of Sedevacantism: the theological, grounded in doctrinal reasons, without categorical a priori assumptions, as was, for example, the case of Monsignor de Castro Mayer; and categorical Sedevacantism, a priori and necessary, typical of the modern Kantian mentality with its categorical and necessary a priori ideas.

Unfortunately, in fact, this has been the case of all those who, sadly, have made a separate cause, discrediting Monsignor Lefebvre and the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X founded by him.

These are the a priori sedevacantists, or ultra-sedevacantists pure and simple, who (by one of life's ironies) are the worst defenders and those who render impossible the only viable Sedevacantism (with its nuances), sound and intelligent as it is—the doctrinal Sedevacantism—free from passions and from discussions that are more an insult than a defense of the faith and the truth.

It is also fitting to clarify that the position of Monsignor Lefebvre with respect to the Vacant See was of a prudential character, without wishing to debate the question theologically and doctrinally, much less to settle it, leaving it for the future, when matters may one day be clarified, since it is a true mystery of iniquity that overwhelms us all. Nor was it his mission to resolve this question; for this reason he said of it, with great clarity and prudence, that “*it is not impossible that this hypothesis (that of the Vacant See) should one day be confirmed by the Church.*” (Ecône, 24/II/1977, *Le Coup de Maître de Satan*, p. 42).

The position of Monsignor Lefebvre was prudential, as was logical given the adverse and difficult circumstances through which he had to pass. He himself left the doubt raised as to whether the Pope was or was not Pope, without wishing to settle the question. This fact must be remembered, for for many the question of the Vacant See is a priori inadmissible, since they consider it contrary to the faith. These make it a matter of faith by holding a priori and to the utmost the anti-sedevacantist position; they are the ultra anti-sedevacantists – which is also an error, as we shall see. Moreover, if it were of faith that the Pope is Pope, it would not even be permissible to doubt it, for in matters of defined faith there can be no doubt. Monsignor Lefebvre admitted the possibility of doubt, from which we see that it is not a matter of faith.

Consequently, to pronounce oneself today in favor of the Vacant See is in no way to oppose the thought of the Church, nor that of Monsignor Lefebvre, a true champion of the faith who will forever bear the glory of being the great Saint Athanasius of the twentieth century. Moreover, it cannot be denied (as Da Silveira says) that the Church has always left open the question of the possibility of heresy in the person of the Pope².

Monsignor Lefebvre fulfilled his mission, which consisted not in pronouncing upon the Roman See, but in handing on what he had received faithfully and holily, and in providing not only a body of priests such as the Church requires in the midst of this crisis of faith and of the priesthood that afflicts her, but also in giving bishops capable of continuing the apostolic succession in the midst of a decadent clergy and a corrupt hierarchy on the brink of apostasy. For Assisi was a veritable Babylon, a spiritual fornication with false religions whose author is Satan. Assisi was a true abomination of desolation in a holy place, for the Buddha placed upon a tabernacle on the altar of the church of Saint Peter in Assisi in 1986 crowned the aberrations of the interreligious act, wherein all false cults and their gods assembled together with the one true worship, that of the Catholic Church.

Thanks to Monsignor Lefebvre and Monsignor de Castro Mayer, the Church projects herself apostolically without contamination by error, deceit, and falsehood, in the face of the precursors of a New Religion and of a New civilization (of Love), which is not that of Christ and therefore has nothing to do with Christendom, but rather the contrary. That is to say: it is in reality a Religion of Man and of his City, which is nothing other than the pseudo-religion behind which stands Satan and his City, or the City of the Antichrist, founded upon

² See *Theological and Moral Implications of the New “Ordo Missae”*, p. 154.

the bases of a Christianity adulterated and amalgamated with false cults and false religions, thanks to a syncretistic ecumenism of universal scope.

Clarifications on Infallibility

The Pope is not infallible in just anything or in whatever he pleases; he is infallible in fulfilling his duty as Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church, feeding souls with the truth of the supernatural faith. His infallibility is not absolute like that of God; rather, it is in virtue of his office, and for this reason it is an *ex cathedra* infallibility (from the chair or see of Peter), which has its well-defined conditions and limits.

Apart from God, every other infallibility is, by definition, participated and consequently limited.

The infallibility of the Pope is threefold in its limitation: first, with respect to the subject, because he is infallible only when he speaks as the universal teacher and supreme judge of the Church (hence the term *ex cathedra*); second, with respect to the object, because he is infallible only in matters of faith and morals; and third, with respect to the mode of the Pope's teaching, which consists in giving the force of definition to the doctrine proposed. (Cf. D.T.C., *Infailibilité du Pape*, col. 1696, and the Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I. Umberto Betti, O.F.M., Antonianum, Rome, 1961, p. 628).

Nor must infallibility be confused with impeccability. *"For infallibility does not directly pertain to the person, but to the exercise of the office of Supreme Teacher, which is exercised by the person of the Pope. If, on the contrary, infallibility were inherent to the person as such, then the Pope would also be infallible as a private person, because the person cannot be divided, and for the same reason he would be infallible always and in all things; whereas the Pope enjoys this divine privilege only in the fulfillment of the office of supreme teacher of the whole Church. Infallibility, in fact, is not inherent to the person but to the office, and consequently to the public person of the head of the Church."* (Betti, p. 235).

Infallibility pertains to the office, and in this sense it is personal—not with regard to the private person, but with regard to the public person. Pontifical infallibility, in what concerns dogma defined by the Church, cannot be called personal (personal infallibility) as attributed to the Pope considered as a private person; for it is not the private person of the Pope that is infallible, but his public person (the person exercising his public office as Pope). (Cf. D.T.C., *Infailibilité du Pape*, col. 1696).

The distinction between private person and public person has been approved by many theologians in order to counter the Gallican and therefore heretical distinction between the

Roman See and the one who occupies it (the Pope, the person of the Pope who holds it). (Cf. *ibid.*).

Consequently, one must not confuse infallibility with impeccability. That the Pope is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra* does not mean that he is impeccable – that is, that he cannot sin against the faith, that he is immune from error in matters of faith as a private person, as a man; for the Pope, as a private person, is subject to weaknesses and frailties common to all men; and for this reason, although it may be repugnant to the pious sensibility of the faithful, it is not a requirement of the faith to exclude that, as a private person, the Pope may fall into heresy, for otherwise he would be impeccable in this kind of fault. (Cf. Betti, p. 630).

The only thing that faith requires is that the Pope is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*. Outside of this, there are or may be theological opinions without anyone claiming to give them a dogmatic or doctrinal value which they do not possess.

Apart from the concrete and precise case in which a Pope speaks *ex cathedra*, it can be theologically maintained that he may err in matters of faith and even fall into heresy itself.

The Theological Possibility of the Vacant See

Many think that by admitting the Vacant See one falls into schism or heresy, and for this reason they defend at all costs an a priori anti-sedevacantist position.

Theologically, the theoretical possibility of the Vacant See (by reason of heresy in the Pope) cannot be denied as if it were something contrary to the faith. It is not heretical to admit that in fact the Vacant See has or may take place. It suffices to consult the book by Da Silveira, *Theological and Moral Implications of the New Ordo Missae*, where he treats the subject of the theological hypothesis of a heretical and/or schismatic Pope.

Many make it a matter of faith that the Pope truly is Pope, excluding a priori the possibility of the Vacant See as theologically impossible. However, the case of more than forty antipopes throughout the history of the Church shows the contrary, as does the very doubt admitted (at least in its possibility) by Monsignor Lefebvre. Indeed, that such-and-such a Pope is truly Pope is not a matter of faith; what is of faith is that every legitimate successor of Saint Peter in the Roman See is Pope. An example will make the distinction clear: just as it is not of faith that in a given host (supposedly consecrated) Our Lord Jesus Christ is truly present, but rather that every priest, with the intention to consecrate over the proper matter and pronouncing the formula, consecrates the Body and Blood of Christ – as Saint Thomas well explains when he asks whether faith can be mistaken, and gives the example of a priest who is mistaken or who does not wish to consecrate, and the faithful thinks that he is

adoring Christ in the supposedly consecrated host: *“Fides credentis non refertur ad has species panis vel illas; sed ad hoc quod verum corpus Christi sit sub speciebus panis sensibilis quando recte fuerit consecratum. Unde si non sit recte consecratum, fidei non suberit propter hoc falsum.”* (S.Th. II-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4).

The same applies to the Pope: it is not of faith to know whether such or such a Pope is truly Pope, but rather that every legitimate successor of Peter is Pope. This explains how, during the Western Schism, there were Saints who held one to be Pope, and others another. What is of faith is to recognize the Primacy of Peter and of his successors. Whoever does not recognize the institution of the Papacy is a schismatic and a heretic – this is clear. Such is the case, for example, with the Orthodox, who are schismatics and heretics for not recognizing the Papacy, the Primacy of Saint Peter and of his successors, nor its infallibility.

Religion and the faith are not papist (or papolatrous), but Catholic; it is one thing to believe in and defend, with faith and as a Catholic, the Primacy of Peter and the Papacy, and quite another thing to embrace papism, which exaggerates the infallibility of the Pope to such a degree that one falls into a kind of infallibilism. Infallibility belongs to the Pope insofar as he is Supreme Pontiff, a public person, Head of the Church, which is in direct relation to the Universal Church. For this reason, he is not simply infallible by virtue of the papacy, but only when he exercises it *ex cathedra*. (Cf. Betti, p. 373).

Theologically, the Vacant See is possible, and it does not constitute something contrary to the faith to affirm it, to believe it, or to think it. The tradition of the Church demonstrates it; Canon Law likewise; the theologians of the Middle Ages admitted it as well. Let no one today come forth with intransigent and harsh attitudes against all who are favorable to or who think that the Holy See may be vacant. To deny, in the name of the Church, the theological possibility of the Vacant See is either ignorance or an abuse of authority. The theological consideration of the Vacant See falls within the mind and the thought of the Church. When Monsignor Lefebvre on repeated occasions said that the Society of Saint Pius X has the spirituality (the mind and the thought) of the Church, let no one now come to tell us – still less to consider as traitors to the Church or to the Society of Saint Pius X and to its founder, Monsignor Lefebvre – those who simply believe or think that the See is or may be vacant. If the Church admits it, even though theologians today may differ, there is no justification for stigmatizing anyone for believing that the See is vacant, even if he should be mistaken.

Xavier Da Silveira, in the work already cited, establishes the theological hypothesis of the Vacant See, whether by reason of heresy or schism.

So certain is the theological hypothesis of the Vacant See that theologians such as Saint Robert Bellarmine, Suárez, and Billot – while holding it more probable that the Pope cannot fall into heresy – nevertheless did not consider this certain, and for that reason they examine the eventuality of a Pope becoming a heretic and take a position on the problem of the loss of the Pontificate. Other theologians, such as Torquemada, Cajetan, Báñez, and Melchor Cano, hold that the Pope can fall into heresy and take a direct position on the matter. Thus there are various theological opinions regarding the moment at which he loses the

Pontificate, but all admit that the Pope can lose the Pontificate through schism or heresy. It is thus evident that the possibility of the Vacant See is a theologically certain proposition, as Da Silveira affirms.

All the canonists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries admitted without difficulty that a Pope could fall into heresy, as into any other grave fault; they concerned themselves only with determining why and under what conditions he could be judged by the Church (Cf. D.T.C., *Infailibilité du Pape*, col. 1715). The possibility of a heretical Pope was so commonly accepted that Christopher Columbus himself, in his first testament, went so far as to say: "*at the feet of the Holy Father, except if he were heretical (which God forbid).*" (Bulletin of the College of Doctors and Licentiates in Philosophy and Letters and Sciences, Madrid, 1992, no. 36, p. 11).

There is only one Flemish theologian, Albert Pighius (1490–1542), who denies that a Pope can fall into heresy. Pighius alone denies the possibility that a Pope could fall into heresy, for, given the promise of Jesus Christ (Mt. 16:18), it would be impossible for the Pope to be heretical; if the foundation of the Church were to fail or cease to be united to Jesus Christ, it would be true that the gates of hell had prevailed against the Church. The famous Spanish theologian Melchor Cano vigorously opposed the assertion of Pighius, concluding that one cannot deny that the Sovereign Pontiff can be a heretic, since there is one example, or perhaps two. Melchor Cano was followed by Domingo Soto and by Báñez (Cf. D.T.C., *Infailibilité du Pape*, cols. 1715–1716). Dublanchy, the author of this article, states that although it cannot be demonstrated, in accordance with the dogma of infallibility, that the Pope as a private person possesses the privilege of not falling into heresy, neither can it be proven that such a possibility is inadmissible. In any case, none of the arguments invoked in favor of pontifical infallibility demonstrate the privilege in question. The two scriptural texts, Matt. 16:18 and Luke 22:22, according to the arguments put forward and in accordance with the constant interpretation of theologians, prove only the infallibility of the Pope when teaching as Pastor and Doctor of the Universal Church. This is what the testimony of Catholic Tradition proves. (Cf. D.T.C., *Infailibilité du Pape*, cols. 1716–1717). It is therefore clear that, theologically, one cannot infer or demonstrate that the Pope has the prerogative of not falling into heresy, on the basis of the sacred texts or of the promise of Our Lord Jesus Christ contained therein; they prove only the infallibility of the Pope when he speaks *ex cathedra*, and nothing more, according to the theology of the Church.

Palmieri, in his *Treatise on the Roman Pontiff*, likewise explains in the same sense the passage of Sacred Scripture upon which some seek to base the supposed indefectibility of the Pope in the faith.

According to Palmieri, the Roman Pontiff as a private person—that is, when he does not exercise his office as Doctor of the Church—can err in the faith. He cites Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), who said: "*In tantum fides mihi necessaria est, et cum de ceteris peccatis solum Deum iudicem habeam, propter solum peccatum quod in fide committerem possem ab Ecclesia iudicari*" (insofar as the faith is necessary to me, and although for other sins I have God alone as judge, for the sin committed against the faith alone, I could be judged by the Church).

Pope Adrian II (867–872) read the phrase of Saint Boniface (which is found in the Decretals of Gratian): “*Culpas (Rom. Pontificis) istie redarguere praesumit mortalium nullus, quia cunctos ipse iudicaturus a nemine est iudicandus, nisi forte deprehendatur a fide devius*” (Tractatus De Romano Pontifice, Palmieri, p. 631), (no mortal should presume to reproach—or contest—the faults of the Roman Pontiff, because he is to judge all, and is judged by no one, unless he be found to have deviated from the faith).

The D.T.C. also brings these passages in the articles *Infailibilité du Pape*, col. 1714, and *Déposition et Dégradation des Clercs*, col. 519; and in mentioning the principle which admits that a Pope can be judged only if he deviates from the faith, it states that “*this principle is beyond all doubt.*” (ibid., col. 520).

If we analyze with Palmieri the scriptural passage most often invoked to deny that the Pope can fail in the faith — “*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith may not fail; and thou, once converted, confirm thy brethren*” (Luke 22:32) — we shall see that the faith which confirms and the infallible faith are one and the same faith. The confirming faith is able to confirm precisely because it is infallible; there is only a distinction of reason between the faith that confirms and the infallible faith, since if the faith that confirms were not infallible, it could not confirm the brethren in the faith. The faith that confirms is such because it is infallible. Da Silveira, citing Palmieri in order to elucidate the meaning of Luke 22:32, says: “*as to the exact meaning of Saint Luke, numerous theologians observe that, for the fulfillment of Our Lord’s promise, it suffices that there be no errors in infallible documents. Thus, they conclude that there is no sufficient reason to judge that the confirmation of the brethren also presupposes the indefectibility of the Pope’s faith as a private person. Here is how Palmieri, for example, sets forth this argument: (...) it is not necessary that the indefectible faith be really distinct from the confirmation of the brethren, but it suffices that it be distinguished by reason. For if the preaching of the authentic and solemn faith is infallible, it can confirm the brethren; therefore, one and the same is the infallible faith and the faith that confirms; being infallible, it likewise possesses the power to confirm. The indefectibility of the Pontiff in the faith was asked for in order that he might confirm his brethren; therefore, from the words of Christ one can infer as necessary only that indefectibility which is necessary and sufficient for the attainment of that end; and such is the indefectibility of authentic preaching.*” (Da Silveira, p. 147).

Saint Thomas, referring to the text of Luke 22:32, states that this passage refers to the faith of the Universal Church, which cannot fail: “*...nisi pertinaciter eorum erroribus in particulari adhaereant contra universalis Ecclesiae fidem, quae non potest deficere, Domino dicente, Luc. 22: Ego pro te rogavi, Petre, ut non deficiat fides tua.*” (S.Th. II-II, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3). From this it follows that, for Saint Thomas, the promise made to Saint Peter is not that of his particular or personal faith (as a private person), but that of the faith of the Universal Church, of his public office as the foundation of the Church, as a public person in his office as Pastor and Doctor of the Church.

Of this there should be no theological doubt whatsoever. Saint Thomas, in another text, says, referring to the power of the Pope to formulate a new symbol of the faith and to avoid the errors that may arise against the faith: “*Unde et Dominus, Luc. 22,32, Petro dixit, quem Summum Pontificem constituit: Ego pro te rogavi, Petre, ut non deficiat fides tua: et aliquando conversus confirma fratres tuos. Et huius ratio est quia una fides debet esse totius Ecclesiae:*

Secundum illud I ad Cor. 1,10: Idipsum dicatis omnes, et non sint in vobis schismata. Quod servari non posset nisi quaestio fidei de fide exorta determinaretur per eum qui toti Ecclesiae praeest ut sic eius sententia a tota Ecclesia firmiter teneatur." (S.Th. II-II, q. 1, a. 10).

It is clear that, according to Saint Thomas, the words "to confirm in the faith" of Luke 22:32 signify that it belongs to the Pope (Saint Peter) to determine what is of faith, and this cannot take place without infallibility. For this reason, it is necessary to be subject to the Pope under pain of condemnation. Thus Saint Thomas explains: "*Ostenditur etiam quod ad dictum Pontificem pertineat quae fidei sunt determinare... Item etiam hoc patet ex auctoritate Domini dicentis [Luc. 22,32]: Tu aliquando conversus confirma fratres tuos. Ostenditur etiam quod subesse Romano Pontifici sit de necessitate salutis.*" (Opusc. Theol., vol. 1, ed. Marietti, Taurini, 1954, nos. 1123-1125, pp. 343-344, Contra Errores Graecorum, c. 36).

Thus it is seen that the faith (of Peter) which confirms and the infallible faith which defines are one and the same faith of the Church, of the Universal Church, which cannot fail and for this reason is infallible. This can be made even more evident with the following text: "*Saint Thomas expressly affirms that the faith of the Universal Church cannot fail, in accordance with the word of Jesus Christ, ego pro te rogavi, Petre, ut non deficiat fides tua (Luke 22:32). Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3.*" (D.T.C., Église, col. 2182).

It was by the confession of faith that Saint Peter obtained the primacy (the papacy), as can be seen in two texts of Saint Thomas commenting on the words: "*Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,*" and "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" The first of the texts: "*Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam. Hoc enim per veram fidei confessionem habuit. Equidem demonstravit multos esse venturos ad eandem veram fidem quam confessus est Petrus; et ideo sensum eius elevavit vel suscitavit, et pastorem ipsum fecit.*" (Opus Theol., vol. 1, Appendix, ed. Marietti, 1975, p. 400).

From this we see that the Pope remains in his office as Vicar of Christ by the confession of the faith. A Pope who does not profess the faith is an absurdity; he cannot be Pope.

The other text to which we referred says: "*Et ideo propter ista duo; scilicet (Matth. 16,16): Tu es Christus et Filius Dei vivi, duo eidem Petro, quae sunt solius Dei, promittit: primum, solvere peccata, quod solius Dei est; secundum, super confessionem fidei eius, id est super ipsum Christum, (aedificare) insubmergibilem Ecclesiam a fluctibus maris tempestosi mundi.*" (Opus Theol., vol. 1, Appendix, ed. Marietti, 1975, p. 401).

From this it is manifest the necessity of the confession of faith of Saint Peter, upon which the promises were made.

Juridical Justification of the Vacant See

The Vacant See is not only theologically possible, but also juridically so. It could not be otherwise, since the juridical has its foundation in the theological; Canon Law translates into juridical norms the theology of the Church, divine law, and natural law.

We must take careful note of what Saint Thomas says regarding Canon Law and its laws, both divine and natural, which cannot be changed: *“jura illa antiqua continent, jus naturale abrogari non possit per contrariam consuetudinem, utpote irrationalem. Quantum autem ad hoc quod solum de jure positivo continent, possunt esse abrogata.”* (Quod. 9, q. 7, a. 15).

Although it is true that the Roman Pontiff stands above any earthly jurisdiction, this does not mean that he stands above divine law.

The theological-juridical principle which states, *“Prima Sedes a nemine judicetur”* – the First See is judged by no one – is a principle that admits of two exceptions: heresy and schism, as we shall see.

The canon attributed to Saint Boniface and cited by Gratian (Decretum, part I, dist. 50, c. 6), according to which the Pope can judge everyone and can be judged by no one, contains this reservation: *nisi deprehendatur a fide devius*. Heresy constitutes a fault by which a Pope can be deposed.

The Roman Council of 503 makes the same observation regarding Pope Symmachus: *nisi a recta fide exorbitaverit*. This doctrine was received and confirmed throughout the Middle Ages. (Cf. D.T.C., *Déposition et Dégradation des Clercs*, col. 519).

Let it not be said, then, that the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III, 680–681), Pope Saint Leo II (682–683), and the Seventh (Nicaea II, 787) and Eighth (Constantinople IV, 869) Ecumenical Councils erred – having been misled by falsified documents – when they condemned Pope Honorius. For, whether the documents were falsified or not, the fact that a Pope could be judged in the case of deviation from the faith is thereby affirmed and proven. The precise judgment rendered against Pope Honorius matters little – whether he was a heretic or merely a favorer of heresy; the point is that he could be judged and was judged because the matter concerned the faith. This is acknowledged even by Saint Robert Bellarmine himself, who inclines toward the position that denies that a Pope can fall into heresy. Although Saint Robert Bellarmine holds this opinion as probable, he does not consider it certain; and for this reason he considers that a Pope can fall into heresy and he holds how and when he would lose his Pontificate. As Da Silveira notes, authors such as Saint Robert Bellarmine, Suárez, and Billot consider it more probable that the Pope cannot fall into heresy, yet they do not regard this position as certain. For this reason, they analyze the eventuality of a Pope becoming a heretic and take a position regarding the problem of his possible loss of the Pontificate. (Mimeographed publication, June 1971, São Paulo, note 2, p. 143). The reason for this lies in the theological principle which maintains a theological incompatibility between heresy and the office or public function of the Pope as member and visible head of the Church, just as there is with schism and apostasy. This theological incompatibility, in turn, gives rise to a juridical incompatibility.

The theological and juridical principle is categorical: he who is not a member of the Church cannot, much less, be its head. The Spanish canonist Eduardo Regatillo, S.J., states in this regard, in his *Institutiones Iuris Canonici*, vol. I, ed. Sal Terrae, Santander, 1951, p. 280, the following opinion as the most common concerning the loss of the Pontificate: *"ob haeresim publicam ipso facto communior: quia non esset membrum Ecclesiae, ergo multo minus caput."*

Juridically, this is an accepted opinion, and thus constitutes one of the reasons by which the Pontificate may be lost, namely: heresy. This opinion is common, as Prümmer expresses it in his *Manuale Iuris Canonici*: *"Per haeresim certam et notoriam Papam amittere suam potestatem auctores quidem communiter dicunt."* (Ed. Herder, Freiburg, 1927, p. 131). This is the position commonly taught, according to Prümmer, by theologians.

Although some authors such as Salaverri, when treating the possibility of a Pope falling into heresy as a private person, admit that theologians dispute this question and that some, such as Saint Robert Bellarmine, consider it more pious to believe that he cannot (cf. *Sacrae Theologiae Summa I De Ecclesia*, ed. BAC, Madrid, 1962, p. 703). Nevertheless, what is more pious is neither a juridical argument nor the most theological one. For this reason, Saint Robert Bellarmine himself is concerned to consider the possibility of a heretical Pope, as is also Billot. From this it is evident that this opinion is at least probable for those who do not wish to hold it as certain. And for those who do not wish to admit all that has been set forth here concerning the possibility of a Pope falling into heresy, it is fitting to bear well in mind what Da Silveira says on the matter: *"In any case, however, Cardinal Billot does not deny – nor could he deny – that the Church has always left open the question of the possibility of heresy in the person of the Pope. Now this fact, in itself, constitutes a weighty argument in the evaluation of the data of Tradition. This is what Saint Robert Bellarmine brings out in the following passage, in which he refutes, three centuries in advance, his future brother in the cardinalate and in the glorious Ignatian militia: 'on this point it must be observed that, although it is probable that Honorius was not a heretic, and that Pope Adrian II, misled by falsified documents of the Sixth Council, erred in judging Honorius as a heretic, we cannot nevertheless deny that Adrian, together with the Roman Synod and even with the Eighth General Council, considered that, in the case of heresy, the Roman Pontiff can be judged.'" (Op. cit., p. 154).*

The weighty theological argument (and indeed throughout the Middle Ages) is that *"all admitted without difficulty that the Pope could fall into heresy as into any other grave fault; they concerned themselves only with determining why and under what conditions the Pope, in such a case, could be judged by the Church."* D.T.C., *Infailibilité du Pape*, col. 1715. In such a way that *"the thought of Gratian, whether in a restricted or broad sense, dominated the canon law of the entire Middle Ages."* (ibid.).

In the *Enchiridion Iuris Canonici*, referring to the election of the Pope, the election is indicated as invalid if the one elected is a heretic or a schismatic: *"Eligi potest quodlibet masculinum, usu rationis pollens membrum Ecclesiae. Invalide ergo eligeruntur foeminae, infantes, habituali amentia laborantes, non baptisati, haeretici, schismatici."*

From this it is established the principle that does not admit that a Pope can at the same time be a heretic or a schismatic.

The texts of Sacred Scripture, Matt. 16:18 and Luke 22:32, prove only the infallibility of the Pope when teaching as Pastor and Doctor of the Church—that is, when he speaks *ex cathedra*—as is emphasized by the D.T.C., *Infailibilité du Pape*, col. 1717; let us not forget this. We have a pontifical text of the highest importance, as Da Silveira points out: as we shall see, whatever judgment may be made concerning the case of Honorius I, we have here a pontifical declaration that admits the eventuality of a Pope falling into heresy. These are the words of Adrian II, pronounced in the second half of the ninth century, that is, more than two centuries after the death of Honorius: *“We read that the Roman Pontiff has always judged the heads of all the Churches (that is, the Patriarchs and Bishops); but we do not read that anyone has ever judged him. It is true that, after his death, Honorius was anathematized by the Orientals; but it must be remembered that he was accused of heresy, the only crime that renders legitimate the resistance of inferiors to superiors, as well as the rejection of their pernicious doctrines.”* (Da Silveira, *op. cit.*, p. 149).

It is clear that, juridically and theologically, it has been admitted—especially in the Middle Ages—that the Pope can fall into heresy and thereby lose the Pontificate: *“A Pope who were to fall into heresy and who should persist in it would, by that very fact, cease to be a member of the Church and consequently to be Pope; he would depose himself.”* (D.T.C., *Déposition et Dégradation des Clercs*, col. 520).

That is to say, it was admitted as juridically certain that the Pope could deviate from the faith by falling into heresy, and for this sin he could be judged by the Church.

Thus, in reality, as Vacandard explains in the D.T.C., *“No one would dare to depose a heretical or schismatic Pope, because in the first case he ceases to be Pope, and in the second he never was. Consequently, the exceptions to the rule that written law seems to indicate are only apparent. The principle: prima sedes a nemine judicetur is absolute; it admits of no exceptions. A Pope, whatever his crimes may be, has in the external forum no judge other than God.”* (D.T.C., *Déposition et Dégradation des Clercs*, col. 520). From this, with respect to the principle that the First See is judged by no one, one may respond in two ways which could be one and the same depending on how they are considered. First response: except in matters of faith, the Pope cannot be judged by anyone. Second response: he is never judged as Pope, for if he has fallen into heresy (or schism), he has ceased to be such. We may also say that, when speaking of judging, the term does not necessarily indicate that a true *“judgment”* is rendered upon the Pope, but rather that a pronouncement may be made concerning one who was Pope and has ceased to be so by having incurred in heresy.

The Question of the Schismatic Pope

Theologically, the Pope can lose the Pontificate not only through heresy but also through schism and apostasy. Apostasy is a question of degree with respect to heresy (*“apostasy and heresy are sins of the same species, between which the only difference is that of more or less: the denial*

is total in apostasy and partial in heresy." (D.T.C., *Apostasie*, col. 1604)), whereas schism is a rupture (separation).

The rule that applies to heretical Popes applies equally to schismatics, and thus we have the second exception (Cf. D.T.C., *Déposition et Dégradation des Clercs*, col. 520), which we have already mentioned.

The question of the schismatic Pope is admitted unanimously by theologians, except for Pighius, following the line of the Decree of Gratian. (Cf. D.T.C., *Schisme*, col. 1306).

The Cardinal and renowned Thomist Cajetan bases himself on the distinction between the function of the Papacy and the person of the Pope. Cardinal Juan de Torquemada (uncle of the Grand Inquisitor), Vitoria, and Suárez admit the fall of the Pope into schism. (Cf. D.T.C., *Schisme*, col. 1306). *"The cases specifically treated by these theologians are those in which the Pope would reject his communion with the Church, or cease to conduct himself as her spiritual head, acting as a mere temporal lord; or if he were to refuse to obey the law and constitution given by Christ to the Church and to observe the Traditions established since the Apostles in the Universal Church; or also, Torquemada adds, visibly concerned by the memory of the Great Schism, if in a conflict over the Tiara or the legitimacy of the true Pope – which would appear doubtful to serious persons – he were to refuse to do what is necessary to restore unity."* (D.T.C., *Schisme*, col. 1306). Da Silveira, who also cites Torquemada on the same subject, expresses himself thus: *"To demonstrate that 'the Pope can illicitly separate himself from the unity of the Church and from obedience to the head of the Church, and therefore fall into schism,' Cardinal Torquemada uses three arguments:"*

- I. (...) by disobedience, the Pope can separate himself from Christ, who is the principal Head of the Church and in relation to whom the unity of the Church is first constituted. He can do this by disobeying the law of Christ or by commanding what is contrary to natural or divine law. In this way, he would separate himself from the body of the Church, insofar as he is subject to Christ through obedience. Thus, the Pope could undoubtedly fall into schism.
- II. The Pope can separate himself, without any reasonable cause, but solely by his own will, from the body of the Church and from the college of priests. He would do this if he did not observe what the Universal Church observes on the basis of the Tradition of the Apostles, according to c. *Ecclesiasticarum*, d. 11, or if he did not observe what has been universally ordained by the General Councils or by the authority of the Apostolic See, especially with regard to divine worship. For example, by not wishing personally to observe what pertains to the universal customs of the Church or to the universal rite of ecclesiastical worship. (...) By thus withdrawing, and with obstinacy, from the universal observance of the Church, the Pope could fall into schism. The consequence is sound, and the premise is not doubtful, because the Pope, just as he could fall into heresy, could also disobey and obstinately fail to observe what has been established for the common order in the Church. For this reason, Innocent says (c. *De Consue.*) that in all things one must obey the Pope insofar as he does not turn against the universal order of the Church; for in such a case the Pope must not be followed, unless there be a reasonable cause for doing so.

- III. Let us suppose that more than one person considers himself Pope, and that one of them is the true Pope, although regarded by some as probably doubtful. And let us suppose that this true Pope conducts himself with such negligence and obstinacy in seeking the unity of the Church that he refuses to do what he can to establish unity. In this hypothesis, the Pope would be regarded as a fomenter of schism, as many argued, even in our own day, concerning Benedict XIII and Gregory XII." (Op. cit., pp. 186-187).

The common good of the Church is central in the question of schism as treated by Cardinal Torquemada; thus, a Pope who attacks the common good of the Church (the common order, the universal order of the Church) would fall into schism, just as if he were to act against divine worship or Apostolic Tradition. In saying this, one cannot but think of the liturgical reform in general, and of the *Novus Ordo* in particular, as well as of all the things which are done from Rome against the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls, considering that there is a true liturgical schism initiated with the liturgical reform that is destroying the faith and the Church.

Cardinal Cajetan and Suárez say that the Pope can fall into schism if he does not wish to maintain with the whole body of the Church the union and conjunction that he ought, or if he were to attempt to excommunicate the whole Church, or if he wished to overturn all ecclesiastical ceremonies established by Apostolic Tradition: "*si nollet tenere cum toto Ecclesiae corpore unionem et conjunctionem quam debet, ut si tenderet totam Ecclesiam excommunicare, aut si vellet omnes ecclesiasticas caeremonias apostolica traditione firmatas evertere.*" (D.T.C., Schisme, col. 1303). "*Schismatics are outside the Church,*" affirms Tradition unanimously. (D.T.C., Schisme, col. 1306).

Da Silveira brings forward a text (op. cit., p. 185) from Cardinal Journet, who summarizes the thought of the most authoritative theologians on the possibility of a schismatic Pope: "*The ancient theologians (Torquemada, Cajetan, Báñez), who held, in accordance with the Decree of Gratian (part I, dist. XV, c. VI), that the Pope, infallible as Doctor of the Church, could nevertheless personally sin against the faith and fall into heresy (see L'Église du Verbe Incarné, vol. I, p. 596), admitted all the more readily that the Pope could sin against charity – even insofar as it realizes the unity of ecclesiastical communion – and thus fall into schism. The unity of the Church, they said, subsists when the Pope dies. Therefore, it could also subsist when a Pope falls into schism (Cajetan, II-II, q. 39, a. 1, no. VI).*"

It is clear that, theologically, the Pope can fall into schism. The liturgical reform, which subverts the entire liturgy of the Church – whose apostolic origin is beyond doubt – gives much to reflect upon in this regard, once the passage cited above has been read; but of this we shall speak further on.

The Question of the Apostate Pope

Apostasy and heresy are two distinct forms of the sin of infidelity: the former is the complete renunciation of the religion of Christ, the latter is a partial rupture with Christian doctrine. (Cf. D.T.C., *Apostasie*, col. 1603).

Heresy and apostasy are sins of the same species; the difference is one of degree (Cf. *ibid.*, col. 1604). Moreover, "*formal heresy is equivalent to apostasy*" (D.T.C., *Hérésie*, col. 2228).

Apostasy can be not only explicit and formal – as in the case of a categorical declaration or acts equivalent to a declaration renouncing the faith, as with those who convert to another religion or proclaim themselves unbelievers, freethinkers, or atheists, etc. – but it can also be implicit and interpretative, as we see in D.T.C., *Apostasie*, col. 1603. This latter case is of particular interest, since the hidden enemies of the faith and of the Church, as Saint Pius X said, remain within her precisely in order to destroy her more effectively, being true concealed heretics and apostates.

"Apostasy," says Beugnet, author of the aforementioned article, *"is implicit and interpretative when a Christian, without formally declaring that he renounces his belief, while claiming to retain his title as a Christian, conducts himself in such a way that it can be concluded with certainty that he has become estranged from the faith."*

This type of implicit apostasy is very revealing, especially among the modernists and progressives who, from within the Church, bring about her destruction.

This can be applied even to the Pope himself, who, instead of defending the faith, gradually and systematically destroys it by making use of the authority and prestige of the Papacy. To perceive this, it suffices to draw up a list of the most significant facts in order to verify what we might call the course of an apostasy, as we shall see later.

It is thus evident that the possibility of a heretical, schismatic, or apostate Pope is theologically grounded and does not run contrary to the faith. *"One does not find,"* says Da Silveira, *"in Scripture and in Tradition reasons that demonstrate the impossibility of a Pope falling into heresy. On the contrary, numerous testimonies of Tradition speak in favor of the possibility of such a fall. This being so, we must consider it theologically possible that a Pope may fall into heresy, and study the consequences that such a fact would entail for the life of the Church."* (Op. cit., p. 177).

The possibility of a heretical Pope is juridically solid, since the canonical principle which admits that a heretical Pope can be deposed remains in force. (Cf. Umberto Betti, *La Costituzione Dogmatica Pastor Aeternus*, Pontifical Antonianum Athenaeum, Rome, 1961, p. 232).

Moreover, it is fitting to recall that one who is obstinate in schism is practically indistinguishable from a heretic, and that the schismatic, according to Canon Law and Natural Law, is suspected of heresy, as Da Silveira notes (p. 188).

Response to the Most Relevant Questions

Once the theological and juridical principle of the possibility of a heretical, schismatic, or apostate Pope has been established, it is fitting to clarify the questions that arise concerning the loss of the Pontificate, such as the visibility of the Church, the jurisdiction of a heretical Pope, communion in the faith, among the most relevant.

a) Jurisdiction of the Heretical, Schismatic, or Apostate Pope

There is a radical theological incompatibility between heresy and jurisdiction, between the condition of being a heretic and the possession of jurisdiction, for the heretic ceases to be a member of the Church.

As Da Silveira says, “this incompatibility is such that ordinarily the condition of heretic and the holding of ecclesiastical jurisdiction do not coincide. Nevertheless, it is not absolute; that is to say, it is not such that, upon falling into internal heresy, or even external heresy, the holder of ecclesiastical jurisdiction is deprived of office ipso facto, in all cases and immediately. (...) For this reason, we do not call this incompatibility “*absolute*,” but rather we speak only of an “*incompatibility at the root*.” Heresy cuts the root and the foundation of jurisdiction – that is, the faith and the condition of membership in the Church – but it does not ipso facto and necessarily eliminate jurisdiction itself. Just as a tree can still retain life for some time after its root has been cut, so also, in many cases, jurisdiction endures even after the one who possessed it has fallen into heresy. Nevertheless, jurisdiction is retained in the person of the heretic only in a precarious manner, in a state of violence, and insofar as a precise and evident reason requires it, dictated by the good of the Church or of souls. (...) Once cut at its root, the jurisdiction of the heretic subsists only insofar as it is sustained by another.” (Op. cit., pp. 177-178).

In the case of a heretical Pope, Da Silveira concludes that it is sustained by Jesus Christ, since the Church, considered in contrast to the Pope, is not superior to him and therefore could not sustain his jurisdiction.

We may add that jurisdiction can be sustained only for those acts that require it, in view of the common good of the Church and the salvation of the faithful, by Our Lord Jesus Christ (the invisible Head of the Church), for as long as necessary, even after his heresy has become manifest and until the matter is resolved by the Church. In this way, the Pope would remain Pope only putatively, but not truly and in reality, by reason of his publicly manifest heresy, schism, or apostasy – whether for a few who understand (*quoad sapientes*) or for all (*quoad omnibus*) who preserve the Catholic faith – while the general public continues to think or believe otherwise due to its lack of discernment.

In the case of a heretical, schismatic, or apostate Pope, the question is not to investigate his genealogy, but to verify an accomplished fact; it therefore seems naive and childish to question his fall on the grounds that the precise moment is not known. One cannot reject something simply because one does not know the exact moment of its occurrence.

The question of the putative Pope was upheld by Monsignor de Castro Mayer, among others. That a Pope falls into heresy and thereby ceases to be Pope—whether ipso facto (Torquemada), or when his heresy is declared by the Church (Suárez, Cajetan), or when his heresy becomes manifest (Saint Robert Bellarmine, Melchor Cano, Billot), or, with a more explicit nuance as Da Silveira adds, when the heresy becomes manifest, notorious, and publicly widespread, thereby losing the Pontificate ipso facto—the margin that one allows matters little. In practice, there is a principle that cannot be denied: the heretical Pope (sooner or later) ceases to be a member of the visible Church by reason of his heresy, schism, or apostasy.

There may be a margin, as in all human affairs, but it cannot be indefinitely prolonged. Just as one cannot deny motion, as Zeno did, by saying that no moving body can reach the halfway point of a given distance, because before doing so it must traverse half of that half, then half of that, and so on to infinity. In the case of delimitation of boundaries: there may be a margin, but there comes a moment when the border zones between countries are clearly separated. The same would apply to a heretical Pope when one seeks to determine the exact moment of his heresy and of the loss of his Pontificate. Because one cannot determine precisely the beginning of life or of death, no one would therefore think to deny the life of the being in gestation or the death of the corpse.

The heretical Pope would be Pope only in appearance, putatively, in the eyes of public opinion manipulated by modern media, which dictate what is to be done and thought; in this way, his heresy would be manifest, notorious, and publicly evident by that very fact, even if the general public does not perceive it as such, except for a small group of the faithful—a little flock, or perhaps only a few within that faithful remnant (the more discerning).

The jurisdiction of the heretical Pope would be maintained by Christ Himself, the invisible Head of the Church, for those concrete acts in which the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls so require; and this situation may last as long as the tribulation endures, according to divine permission. Billuart speaks of a jurisdiction given by Christ to a heretical Pope by reason of the common good of the Church: "*Communior sententia tenet, quod pontifici etiam manifeste haeretico Christus ex speciali dispensatione, propter bonum commune et tranquillitatem Ecclesiae, continuet jurisdictionem donec ab Ecclesia declaratur manifeste haeticus.*" (Cursus Theologiae, t. V, Tractatus de Fide, Dissert. V, art. III).

The heretical Pope would be Pope only putatively—according to appearance—occupying the See of Peter in Rome as an impostor, in likeness to the false prophet, who has horns like a lamb (an image of Christ) but speaks like the Dragon (an image of Satan), having the appearance of piety but in reality being impious, just like the beast of the earth in the service of the beast of the sea described in Apocalypse 13:11.

The case of the Orthodox can shed light for us in understanding the jurisdiction of the heretic, schismatic, or apostate. The Orthodox possess jurisdiction given by the Church, for she supplies it; but not because they possess jurisdiction by a tacit permission of the Apostolic See are we to say that they are not schismatics or heretics. On the jurisdiction of

schismatics, one may consult D.T.C., Schisme, col. 1309, which states: *“It can always be explained in its practical extent by common error, titulus coloratus, and the supplying of the Church. But if it is permitted to reason by analogy with the case of confirmation conferred in the Orthodox churches by simple priests – a case which seems to presuppose a tacit but positive delegation not withdrawn – we are led to think that, by an agreement or tacit permission of the Apostolic See, the schismatic churches of the East retain a real and true jurisdiction in the internal and external forum.”*

As can be seen, jurisdiction can be grounded in many ways; but one is not to accept heresy, schism, or apostasy simply because jurisdiction is present – as in the case of the Orthodox, for example – nor even in the case of a heretical Pope; for what the Church does with the Eastern schismatics,

Our Lord Jesus Christ can very well do with the jurisdiction of a heretical, schismatic, or apostate Pope, while matters are not yet restored as they ought to be; what would indeed be madness is to accept the heresy, the schism, or the apostasy of the Pope who has fallen into one of these three errors – or into all three at once – and to continue naively to regard him as the visible Head of the Church, thereby placing theology and the faith in open contradiction. It is a theological contradiction for a heretic, a schismatic, or an apostate to be the visible Head of the Church.

b) The Visibility of the Church with a Heretical, Schismatic, and/or Apostate Pope

Another of the questions that arises in the eventuality of a heretical, schismatic, and/or apostate Pope is that of the visibility of the Church. What becomes of the Church, which must be visible, with a heretical Pope? The visibility of the Church is a dogma of faith.

Now, it is this very visibility of the Church that requires the public profession of the faith: *“What constitutes the visibility of the Church is her external organization, all the more so since it is of divine right – an organization manifest to all eyes and to which all the faithful must belong by the visible bond of the same obligatory faith, outwardly professed, by the bond of obedience to a common visible authority, and by the bond of the same communion in participation in the Sacraments established by Jesus Christ.”* (D.T.C., Église, col. 2144). It is therefore evident that the visibility of the Church requires, first of all, the public profession of the Catholic faith, for: *“the Church is the society of the faithful united by the integral profession of the same Catholic faith, by participation in the Sacraments, and by submission to the same supernatural authority proceeding from Jesus Christ, principally to the authority of the Roman Pontiff, Vicar of Christ.”* (D.T.C., Église, cols. 2109–2110).

“Cardinal Torquemada (†1468) defines the Church as the society of Catholics or the universality of the faithful, whether predestined or not, whether in charity or not, provided that they profess the integral Catholic faith and are not separated from the Church by the just sentence of her pastors.” (D.T.C., Église, col. 2141).

We see that the public and integral profession of the faith is the primary requirement for belonging to the visible Church; without the public and integral profession of the faith, there is no visibility of our belonging to the Church. The visibility of the Church depends first and

fundamentally upon the integral and public profession of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman faith.

The theological distinction between the body and the soul of the Church encompasses her visible and invisible elements, such that belonging to the body of the Church constitutes her visibility; thus, to speak of the visibility of the Church is to consider the body of the Church, that is, to refer to her visibility: *“the body of the Church comprises the visible element or the visible society, to which one belongs by the outward profession of the Catholic faith, by participation in the Sacraments, and by submission to legitimate pastors; and the soul comprises the invisible element or the invisible society, to which one belongs by the fact of possessing the interior gifts of grace.”*

Let it be clearly understood, then, that to belong to the body of the Church the profession of the faith is required, in the first place; for Saint Robert Bellarmine *“indicates three indispensable conditions for belonging to the body of the Church, or to the visible Church, which is the only true Church. The first condition (which is what most concerns us here) is the profession of the true faith, always required by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church, which has continually regarded heretics as not belonging to the Church, according to the texts cited above, many of which are here indicated by Saint Robert Bellarmine.”* (D.T.C., Église, col. 2160).

He who is not a member of the body of the Church cannot be its Head; and if the faith is not professed – the first requirement of every member of the body of the Church – how can one be Pope, that is, its Head? Let us hear Saint Robert Bellarmine himself (cited by Da Silveira, op. cit., p. 172): *“The manifestly heretical Pope ceases by himself to be Pope and Head, in the same way that he ceases by himself to be a Christian and a member of the body of the Church; and for this reason he can be judged and punished by the Church. This is the teaching of all the ancient Fathers, who hold that manifest heretics immediately lose all jurisdiction – among them Saint Cyprian (Lib. 4, Epist. 2), who speaks thus of Novatian, who was Pope (antipope) during the schism that occurred in the pontificate of Saint Cornelius.”*

Let us note that when Saint Robert Bellarmine says that he loses all jurisdiction, he does not mean to exclude a sustaining by Our Lord Jesus Christ in the case of a heretical Pope, as could be the case today. He refers rather to the loss, by right, of jurisdiction through the loss of the Pontificate, without excluding a purely actual (and not habitual) sustaining in fact, according to the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls.

Without the public and integral profession of the faith, there is no belonging to the Church; one is not a member of the body of the Church, for the visibility of the Church requires this. A Pope who does not profess the Catholic faith fails in the first visible bond of the unity of faith; he fails in the visible unity of the faith by lacking the outward profession of it. Without the unity of faith made visible by the public and integral profession of the faith, how can one be considered a member of the visible body of the Church if he fails in the profession of the faith? Without the public profession of the integral faith, there is no visible bond that would allow one to affirm that he belongs to the body of the Church – this is as clear as day. And he who is not a member of the visible body of the Church, how can he be its head? Either the faith is publicly professed, or one is not a member of the body of the Church.

As Melchor Cano says (cited by Da Silveira), “one cannot even conceive that someone be head and Pope without being a member and a part.” (Op. cit., p. 173). And how can one be a member and a part of the visible Church without the public and integral profession of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman faith?

The profession of faith is a necessary bond for belonging to the body of the Church; Saint Robert Bellarmine likewise confirms this when referring to the heretic in a text cited by Da Silveira: “(...) *the manifest heretic is in no way a member of the Church, that is, neither spiritually nor corporally, which means that he is neither by internal union nor by external union. For even bad Catholics are united and are members spiritually by faith and corporally by the confession of the faith (...)*” (Op. cit., p. 173).

It is evident that the profession (confession) of the faith is necessary to belong corporally to the Church, that is, to be a member of the body of the visible Church.

Therefore, a Pope who does not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety cannot be a member of the body of the Church; and if he cannot be a member corporally, much less can he be its head. This is evident even in a physical sense. Whoever does not see it, does not wish to see it – and there is no worse blind man than the one who will not see. But we shall continue to call things by their proper names.

The question of the visibility of the Church is directly and intimately related to belonging to the Church as a member – visible belonging, or belonging to the body of the Church – which is founded first and foremost upon the public profession of the Catholic faith in its entirety.

Thus, it is the very visibility of the Church that does not admit a heretical Pope, but rather rejects and repels him as a dead and putrefied member; the same applies to the schismatic and/or the apostate.

Let us also recall that the visibility of the Church is based on what is of divine constitution – that is, on the Papacy, on the hierarchy – more than on the private persons who occupy such public offices. The visibility of the Church, given by her divinely instituted hierarchy, refers to the offices (or investitures), such as the Papacy, the Episcopate, etc. It is the public person – the office or public function divinely instituted – and not the private person who occupies, exercises, and performs it. The visibility of the Church is not lost because the See is vacant, which occurs whenever Popes die. The very fact of the Vacant See manifests the visibility of the Church with regard to the Papacy, until the Holy See is occupied by a legitimate successor of Saint Peter. Divine institutions are not destroyed by the failings of men; for this reason, the Church is divine despite men.

By the body of the Church is understood, says Hugon, the obligation of belonging to this organism by the baptismal character and by the visible bonds of a threefold unity: of faith, of worship, and of government (Hors de l’Église Point de Salut, p. XVIII).

The visible body of the Church requires a threefold bond – three bonds that are visible – and the first of these visible bonds is that of the outward profession of the Catholic faith. The bond of faith is not merely interior faith; this does not suffice to constitute a visible

bond, which therefore requires the visibility of that faith, manifested through its outward profession.

In this sense, Hugon affirms: *“Unity, the cause of life, the sign of truth, is visible and tangible, because it implies the outward profession of the same articles throughout the whole world, and which requires a public and authentic Magisterium to which all are obliged to submit. Without this sovereign and infallible authority, controversies would be endless, as they are in Protestantism.”* (ibid., p. 246).

It is precisely this infallible Magisterium, which resolves controversies and defines dogmas, that is today being denied by the modernists, whether under progressive or conservative appearances, such as Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Faith (which safeguards the faith), about whom Monsignor Lefebvre spoke shortly before his death, referring to the journal *Sí Sí No No* (Italian edition, January 15, 1991): *“I invite you to read the substantial leading article of Sí Sí No No that appeared today on Cardinal Ratzinger. It is terrifying! I do not know who the author is, since they always use pseudonyms, and so one does not know who it is. But in any case, the article is very well documented and concludes that the Cardinal is a heretic. Cardinal Ratzinger is a heretic. Not only that – he sets himself against dogmatic decrees and declarations, as he himself has stated. One can even discuss whether Quanta Cura, Pascendi Dominici Gregis, the decree Lamentabili, etc., are infallible or not; these things can be debated. That is not what is grave in Cardinal Ratzinger, but rather that he calls into question the very reality of the Magisterium of the Church. He calls into question that there is a Magisterium which is permanent and definitive in the Church. This is not possible. The very root of the Church’s teaching is being attacked. There is no longer a permanent truth in the Church – truths of faith, and therefore dogmas. There are no more dogmas in the Church! This is radical! Evidently, it is heretical – this is clear. It is horrible, but such is the case.”* (Last spiritual conference of Mons. Lefebvre at Ecône, February 8–9, 1991).

If this is what Monsignor Lefebvre said shortly before his death in his final spiritual conference to the seminarians at Ecône, then heresy cannot be denied; it exists among the highest ranks in the Church and even in Rome itself. Cardinal Ratzinger is the right hand of John Paul II in theological matters, and they think alike – of this there can be no doubt – one and the same; the conclusion imposes itself, but of this we shall speak further on. From all that has been set forth, it is established that without the profession of the faith one cannot belong to the body of the visible Church. A Pope who does not profess the faith – how is he to transmit it? It is impossible. For this reason Monsignor Lefebvre said, referring at that time to Pope Paul VI: *“And as successor of Peter he must transmit the faith of his predecessors. Insofar as he does not transmit to us the faith of his predecessors, he is no longer the successor of Peter. Then he would become a person who separates himself from his office, who renounces his office, who does not devote himself to his office. I can do nothing; it is not my fault.”* (La Condamnation..., p. 262).

c) On Communion in the Faith

When one speaks of communion in the Church among her members, one is referring first and foremost to communion in the faith – that is, communion in the same faith believed and

professed by all. It concerns the unity of the faith: one God, one Baptism, one faith. Without unity in the faith, there is no unity of worship nor unity of government. The faith is therefore the foundation of the Church, together with the Sacraments: *“Quia Ecclesia fundatur in fide et Sacramentis.”* (S.Th. Suppl., q. 6, a. 6).

Faith is exclusive; it excludes every other false belief and every other false religion. Faith admits of no combinations. Yes, yes – no, no; anything beyond this comes from the Evil One (Mt. 5:37).

It is impossible to be in communion in the faith with someone who does not possess the faith, or who does not profess it when he ought. If a Pope does not profess the faith, one cannot be in communion with him. To be in religious communion with those who do not profess the Catholic faith is what is called *communicatio in sacris*, which is strictly forbidden, as moral theology teaches.

Communion in the same faith obliges one not to be with those who do not profess it; this is so evident and clear that it admits of no evasion, except for one who wishes to evade it.

“The necessity of union or communion in the Christian faith, preached by the Apostles with the authority of Jesus Christ, results from the affirmation of Saint Paul: Unus Dominus, una fides, unum baptisma (Eph. 4:5 ff.). This faith, it is true, is nothing other than the objective faith or Christian doctrine. But since its perfect unity is strictly obligatory, union or communion in this unity of faith is its necessary consequence. (...) every rupture with this unity of the Christian faith is severely reprobated; the communion or union in this faith is, by that very fact, strictly imposed.” (D.T.C., *Communion dans la Foi*, col. 422).

Moreover, according to Saint Ignatius of Antioch: *“He who corrupts this faith of God by a perverse doctrine shall go into the unquenchable fire, and so also shall he who listens to him.”* (ibid., col. 422).

Non-communion with one who does not profess the faith is required by the doctrine of the Church. Not to be in communion with a Pope who does not profess the Catholic faith is a legitimate separation that has nothing to do with a schismatic attitude – quite the contrary – for, as medieval theologians distinguish, schism proceeds from illegitimate separation, not from legitimate separation. *“Medieval theologians, at least those of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, are careful to note that schism is an illegitimate separation from the unity of the Church; for there can be a legitimate separation, as when someone refuses obedience to the Pope when he commands something evil or improper, as Torquemada says.”* (D.T.C., *Schisme*, col. 1302).

Thus, there can be a licit separation, which constitutes no schism; on the contrary, if ecclesiastical authority or even the Pope himself commands something evil or improper, one must not obey – much less if it is to the detriment of the faith. One must resist; and if it concerns matters of faith and doctrine, a legitimate separation is required, lest one succumb to error to the detriment of the faith. The reason for this legitimate separation lies in charity itself, which is identified with truth: where there is no truth, there is no charity – *Ubi veritas et iustitia, ibi caritas.*

Ecclesiastical communion (or ecclesiastical unity), which is broken by schism (a rupture), is an effect of charity and is therefore always linked to charity (Cf. D.T.C., col. 1302), in such a way that the schismatic is one who breaks ecclesiastical communion or unity by not acting as a part (a member) of the Church, acting, thinking, and living independently and not according to the Church and within the Church. (Cf. D.T.C., Schisme, col. 1301).

As long as communion with the Church is not broken by acting as part of her, one is not schismatic. To be schismatic, one must break the bond that keeps the part within the whole. Not every disobedience to authority or to the Pope constitutes schism; it must be a disobedience that challenges authority as such, thereby attacking the unity of the Church in itself: *“For the notion of schism to be verified, it is necessary that the unity of the Church itself be violated, that there be a refusal to act ut pars in a matter that concerns the unity of the Church (...)”* (D.T.C., Schisme, col. 1302).

And as we have already said, the first unity of the Church is visibly given by the profession of the faith; therefore, when the faith is in danger, it is a duty not to remain in communion with the one who destroys it—even if it be the Pope himself. For this reason Monsignor Lefebvre himself, on several occasions, stated that if there were a schism, it was not on his part but on that of modernist Rome: they have changed, not we.

One must not, therefore, invoke an ecclesiastical communion, a communion in the faith, with one who knowingly destroys the faith, as is happening today. The faith is being destroyed from Rome itself—not from Catholic Rome, from the Rome of all time, but from modernist Rome, from the Rome turned into the Babylon of all religions.

There is a duty of legitimate separation, which is not schismatic³, but quite the contrary; it is a duty, an obligation, under pain of succumbing to error and being carried away by it. True obedience is absolute with respect to God and relative with respect to men, insofar as they are of God.

One might erroneously think: one must always remain in communion with the Pope, for the Pope is the Pope; moreover, the axiom which says *“Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia”* (where Peter is, there is the Church) reassures me—nothing else concerns me—as a papalist, or rather a true papolatrist, might say. Now, Cardinal Cajetan says on this matter: *“The Church is in the Pope when he behaves as Pope, that is, as Head of the Church; but in the case that he should not wish to act as Head of the Church, neither would the Church be in him, nor he in the Church.”* Cardinal Journet also repeats the same: *“As for the axiom ‘where the Pope is, there is the Church,’ it holds when the Pope behaves as Pope and Head of the Church; otherwise, neither is the Church in him nor he in the Church.”* (Both citations taken from Da Silveira, op. cit., pp. 188 and 185).

Consequently, it is evident that a Pope who does not behave as such—that is, as Head of the Church—is not a guarantee of the visibility of the Church; on the contrary, for he is not in

³ *“Medieval theologians, at least those of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, are concerned to emphasize that schism is an illegitimate separation from the unity of the Church, since, they say, there can be a legitimate separation, as when someone refuses to obey the Pope when he commands something evil or improper. Torquemada, op. cit., c. 1.”* (D.T.C., Schisme, col. 1302).

the Church, nor is the Church in him, which means that he does not belong to the Church, nor does he represent her, according to the words of the two Cardinals.

Communion with Rome and with the Church is principally and fundamentally communion in the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman faith.

Communion in the faith raises the question of the *Una Cum*, for in principle one cannot be in communion in the faith with a Pope who does not profess the faith – this is evident.

It is not simply a matter of praying for the Pope, but of being in communion with the Pope in the same profession of the Catholic faith. And if there were doubt, one would at least have to say the *Una Cum* *sub conditione* or *secundum quid*, but never *simpliciter*. The same applies in the case of a putative Pope: he would be named only putatively, as Monsignor de Castro Mayer indicated could be done in such a case.

The Oremus *pro pontifice nostro*, if it is simply a matter of praying, one may pray for anyone – even for heretics and apostates, just as for the perfidious Jews; but if it is a matter of publicly and solemnly professing our communion with the Pontiff *noster* for whom we pray, this too is not admissible, for the same reasons as the *Una Cum*. In any case, let us retain with Saint Thomas Aquinas that in the Canon of the Holy Mass one does not pray for those who are outside the Church – that is, neither for schismatics, nor for heretics, nor for apostates: “*Unde et in canone missae non oratur pro his qui sunt extra Ecclesiam.*” (S.Th. III, q. 79, a. 7, ad 2).

d) On the Putative Pope

A heretical Pope, not being a member of the Church, can much less be her head. Setting aside the discussion of the exact moment, and holding as theologically more certain that when heresy becomes manifest, by the very objectivity of the fact, it is theologically untenable that a heretical Pope should continue to be the true Pope of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church.

Those who maintain that a declaration by the Church is required for the heretical Pope to be deposed may sustain this position, but with the following observation: since there is an apodictic theological principle – that he who is not a member of the Church cannot, much less, be its head – the manifestly heretical Pope would be a putative Pope (in appearance only) until such a declaration takes place (a purely declaratory act) on the part of the Church (a representative part of the Church or of Rome). He would be Pope only putatively until he is deposed, throughout the entire time that elapses until his deposition.

It would seem that the opinion of Monsignor Lefebvre inclined toward the need for a declaration by the Church, since on repeated occasions he said that one day the Church will judge what is happening, thereby referring to a (future) declaration by the Church.

Father Coache, in *Combat de la Foi*, Sept. 15, no. 96, p. 3, very wisely and prudently states: “I say once again that very learned and holy theologians have declared that if a Pope falls into heresy or betrays the Church, he remains Pope radically until a sufficiently representative sentence of the Church or of Rome has deposed him (while one awaits, of

course he must not be obeyed, especially in those points where he has betrayed the Church), but other theologians, equally learned and holy, have declared that the Pope is deposed by the very fact of his public and obstinate heresy.

These two theoretically distinct opinions can have a practical reconciliation; that is, they may coincide in their practical and de facto effects, in the formula of the putative Pope (considered as such without being so in reality), with a jurisdiction supplied directly by Christ (the invisible Head of the Church, let us not forget) for the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls.

The formula of the putative Pope comes from Monsignor de Castro Mayer; it was he himself who told me so at the seminary of La Reja in 1989 when I asked him about his thought concerning the Pope and the Vacant See. He stated categorically: a heretic cannot be Pope, and this Pope is a heretic. To this I objected: but one would have to distinguish between formal heresy and material heresy; to which he replied emphatically that such a distinction has no place. Then there is no Pope, I said; he replied: he may be considered a putative Pope. I asked him about the *Una Cum*, to which he replied: he may be named as a putative Pope; his authority would be putative, and canonizations that were just, as well as other just acts for the good of the Church, would have value insofar as he is a putative Pope. In short (as can be seen), it is a matter of a supplied jurisdiction that renders acts valid in favor of the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls, until the matter is resolved.

Let no one say, then, that Monsignor de Castro Mayer was not among those who held that the See is vacant; he affirmed that a heretical Pope was not Pope (nor could he be). He was a sedevacantist in the proper sense of the term (without the pejorative connotation that this word may have today). In reality, one may say that the heretical Pope occupies the See only putatively; he occupies the See in fact, but not in right.

A heretic cannot be Pope, and John Paul II is a manifest and public heretic (for those who wish to see and who judge according to the faith); nevertheless, the See of Peter may be falsely occupied by a heretical (schismatic or apostate) Pope—hence the formula of the putative Pope—and thus John Paul II is Pope only in appearance (a putative Pope), but not in reality. All his actions that require jurisdiction and that are for the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls are supplied directly by Christ, the invisible Head of His Church. It is the Church, in this sense, that always supplies jurisdiction in one way or another.

We would thus have a practical reconciliation of the two most authoritative theological positions which admit that a Pope may fall into heresy:

- a) Some affirm that he loses the Pontificate immediately (*ipso facto*) when the heresy becomes manifest (Saint Robert Bellarmine – Melchor Cano – Billot), or with the variant nuance of understanding “*manifest*” as heresy that is notorious and publicly widespread (Wernz – Vidal – and Da Silveira himself.)”
- b) Others affirm that the heretical Pope loses the Pontificate when there intervenes a declaration by the Church (by her most representative members or by Rome).

Although theologically refutable, this position contains a truth if understood as we propose: namely, that the Pope would be Pope only putatively from the moment he loses the Pontificate ipso facto through manifest heresy until the purely declaratory sentence of the Church, which would depose him.

Whether one holds the one position or the other (although Saint Robert Bellarmine refutes the latter)—that is, whether one holds it as certain that the Pope loses the Pontificate ipso facto through manifest heresy, or that a declaration (by a representative part) of the Church is required for the loss of the Pontificate—one may conclude that he loses it ipso facto through manifest heresy, and while he remains in office, until the matter is clarified by a sentence of the Church, he is Pope only putatively. Thus, for practical purposes, we have the reconciliation of two valid positions with differing emphases.

In summary, to be clear and precise, there would be a surpassing of the two most authoritative theological hypotheses—a surpassing imposed by the necessity of the case as actually and concretely lived, and not merely as ideally envisaged in speculative consideration.

The synthesized thesis, theologically certain, is that the heretical Pope loses the Pontificate by the very fact of his public and notorious heresy (schism or apostasy), as Saint Robert Bellarmine essentially teaches (or with the nuance added by Da Silveira); but until this is confirmed by a declaration of the Church through her most authoritative representatives, the heretical Pope is only a putative Pope, with a jurisdiction that is occasional or accidental (in fact and not by right), derived directly from Christ for those acts in which the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls so require.

Nothing, then, of absurdities—often promoted by the hidden enemies of the Church—such as the election of another Pope by a group that imagines itself to represent the Church (as in the case of Palmar de Troya in Spain or the Jovites in Canada, etc.), or the creation of an imperfect council seeking a head upon whom to confer authority by electing a Pope from among the attending bishops.

Our position has nothing to do with strange and foreign ideas to the theology of the Church, inventing absurd solutions that lead to a chaos worse than that which one seeks to avoid. The notion of the putative Pope, upheld by Monsignor de Castro Mayer, together with the explanation we have given, is theologically coherent and corresponds to what is taking place. And this situation may extend to more than one Pope who has fallen into schism, heresy, or apostasy—or into all three.

From what has been said, as can be seen, this situation could endure—and will endure—as long as Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, wills or permits this crisis to last, for the purification of His Church on earth and of His faithful followers until the end.

The election of another Pope faithful to the Tradition of the Church may always take place, whether by the cardinals appointed by the putative Pope (with jurisdiction supplied for the common good of the Church), or by the clergy of Rome, for in the end it is the cardinals who

elect the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) by virtue of holding the title of parish priests of Rome. The Vacant See does not prevent the election of another Pope, as many think.

Question of Fact – Verification of the Vacant See

Having clarified the theological possibility that a Pope may fall into schism, heresy, or apostasy, and having removed the most relevant obstacles that might be raised, we may affirm that the possibility of the Vacant See through the loss of the Pontificate by reason of the Pope's schism, heresy, or apostasy is a theologically certain proposition (even if some theologians hold the contrary as probable out of a pious opinion).

Therefore, if it is theologically possible that a Pope may fall into schism, heresy, and/or apostasy and thereby lose the Pontificate, it may also occur in fact in reality; in such a case, it suffices to verify the facts by comparing them with the principles in order to have the answer.

We may begin by comparing all that has been set forth (the theological principles) with what Pope John Paul II does; we shall limit ourselves to him, since Paul VI is dead and the question today centers on the reigning Pope (although everything said can well be applied to him). As for John XXIII, although he was the one who initiated the Second Vatican Council, he did not sign or promulgate any of its decrees; this was the work of Pope Montini (Paul VI), of unhappy memory. Of Paul VI we may affirm that he signed, under his own responsibility, all the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, thereby ratifying these errors. Moreover, he renounced the tiara, under the pretext of humility and poverty; yet he publicly wore the pectoral of the Jewish High Priest, erroneously called the Ephod, which is in fact another garment.

The pectoral is a square with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel, a garment used solely by the High Priest as a symbol of his authority and power over the Jews (see Exod. 28:15–20).

Monsignor Lefebvre himself acknowledges: *"It is not absolutely certain that the Pope is truly Pope. Heresy, schism, excommunication ipso facto, the invalidity of the election – these are so many causes that may eventually make it the case that a Pope never was Pope or is no longer so. In such a case, evidently very exceptional, the Church would find herself in a situation similar to that which occurs after the death of the Supreme Pontiff."* (La Condamnation Sauvage de Mgr. Lefebvre, Itinéraires, special issue, Dec. 1976, p. 176). From this text it is clear how Monsignor Lefebvre foresaw the possibility of the Vacant See.

One often invokes the difficulty of proving the (formal) heresy of the Pope and, consequently, of proving the loss of the Pontificate; on this point we wish to make a clarification. First of all, it is not a matter of proving something theoretically if we are referring to facts; it suffices to verify them a posteriori. Secondly, if by proving the formal heresy of the Pope one means its theoretical possibility, this has already been done, and it

has been both established and defended with theological arguments. Thirdly, if by proving the loss of the Pontificate one means the theoretical question, it has been established that the schismatic, heretical, or apostate Pope loses it (even if there are variations regarding the moment); but that he loses it is most firmly proven by all the testimonies of the renowned theologians we have cited. Fourth and finally, if by proving the loss of the Pontificate one means the verification in fact, once the schism, heresy, and/or apostasy of the Pope has been established, this is precisely what we shall consider by examining the facts.

Schism – Verification

According to the most renowned theologians, a Pope can fall into schism when he goes against Tradition, the common good, or the law of Christ (or by commanding what is contrary to natural or divine law); that is to say, when he impugns the most sacred duties of his office by what he says, does, or enacts – duties to which he is bound before God.

A Pope can fall into schism by acting against the observance of the Universal Church based on the Tradition of the Apostles, especially in what concerns divine worship; by acting against the common good of the Church; by not observing what has been established for the common order of the Church; by turning against the universal order of the Church; or by failing to observe the law of Christ or by commanding what is contrary to natural or divine law, according to Torquemada, Cajetan, Suárez, and Journet.

Thus, a Pope can fall into schism by acting against Apostolic Tradition, especially in what pertains to divine worship. This, precisely, has taken place with the entire liturgical reform and, in particular, with the *Novus Ordo Missae*.

Monsignor Lefebvre did not cease to oppose the New Mass on the grounds that it is not Catholic: *“We are convinced, precisely, that the new rite of the Mass expresses a new faith – a faith that is not ours, a faith that is not Catholic. This new Mass is a symbol; it is an expression, an image of a new faith, of a modernist faith.”* (Sermon of June 29, 1976, *Itinéraires*, special issue, Dec. 1976, p. 125).

He likewise described the conciliar Church as non-Catholic (cf. *ibid.*, p. 171), and further stated: *“All those who cooperate in the implementation of this upheaval, by accepting and adhering to this new conciliar Church (...), enter into schism.”* (*ibid.*, p. 175); from which it is seen that, if one obeys, one breaks with the Tradition of the Church – and this is nothing other than schism. Hence he said: *“Insofar as the Pope distances himself from this Tradition, he would become schismatic; he would break with the Church.”* (*Un Évêque Parle*, vol. II, p. 96). *“We believe we can affirm, on the basis of an internal and external critique of Vatican II – that is, by analyzing the texts and studying the events and results of this Council – that it, by turning its back on Tradition and breaking with the Church of the past, is a schismatic Council. “The tree is judged by its fruits.”* (Declaration of August 2 and 4, 1976, *Itinéraires*, special issue, Dec. 1976, p. 174).

Referring to the conciliar Church of Vatican II, he states: *"This conciliar Church is a schismatic Church, because it has broken with the Catholic Church of all time. It has its new dogmas, its new priesthood, its new institutions, its new worship, already condemned by the Church in many official and definitive documents. (...) This conciliar Church is schismatic because it has taken as the basis of its aggiornamento principles opposed to those of the Catholic Church – for example, the new conception of the Mass (...)." (July 29, 1976, Itinéraires, special issue, Dec. 1976, p. 171).*

Monsignor Lefebvre does not cease to affirm, in response to the proposal of Monsignor Benelli urging him to submit: *"The request of His Excellency Monsignor Benelli is, in fact, illuminating: submission to the conciliar Church, to the Church of Vatican II, to the schismatic Church. But we, we shall continue in the Catholic Church, with the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary." (ibid., p. 172).*

There is a schism in the Church beginning with Vatican II – a schism that cannot be denied – and this schism, whether one wishes it or not, is headed by the Pope himself. Monsignor Lefebvre did not wish to pronounce definitively, but he saw before his eyes the schism that was taking shape and which is today a fact. A schism which Monsignor Lefebvre perceived within the Council itself, hence his expressions (in fieri) of a schism in the making, going so far as to say: *"Who separates from the Church? Those who separate from the Church of all time. It is said: the Pope is the Church. Yes, insofar as he continues the Church of all time. Insofar as he separates from it, it is he who makes the schism." (ibid., p. 218). "One cannot create a schism, as I have already told you; one cannot create a schism when one remains united to the Church of all time. It is those who separate from the Church who create schism – whoever they may be. Likewise, if one day it were the Pope (I do not say that he does so), or a Cardinal, or several cardinals, or even an entire episcopate, who were to separate from the doctrine of the Church, they would be schismatics." (ibid., p. 221).*

In his final book, *Spiritual Journey*, Monsignor Lefebvre speaks of the schism of those who condemned him together with Monsignor Antonio de Castro Mayer: *"Those who consider it a duty to minimize these riches and even to deny them can only condemn these two bishops, and thus they confirm their schism and their separation from Our Lord and His Kingdom, because of their secularism and their apostate ecumenism." (Ed. Foundation of St. Pius X, Buenos Aires, 1991, p. 14).*

Let us retain for later the expression *"apostate ecumenism."*

We shall cite several more texts from Monsignor Lefebvre on the reality of schism, establishing its factual existence.

We must say that, in the last analysis, what justified the apparent disobedience of Monsignor Lefebvre was precisely the necessity of rejecting any obedience that entailed schism; his words are explicit on this point: *"As for us, we believe that it is our duty not to obey when we are being compelled to break with the traditional teaching of the Church." (Itinéraires, no. 233, Mgr. Lefebvre et le Saint Office, p. 103).*

“How could we, by a servile and blind obedience, play the game of these schismatics who ask us to collaborate in their enterprise of destroying the Church?” (Itinéraires, special issue, Dec. 1976, p. 175).

And if: *“A Pope worthy of the name and a true successor of Peter cannot declare that he will devote himself to the application of the Council and its reforms. By that very fact, he places himself in rupture with all his predecessors and with the Council of Trent in particular. The Church, which is essentially Tradition – that is, the faithful transmission of the deposit of the faith from generation to generation – cannot endure a rupture such as that of Vatican II without destroying herself.” (Itinéraires, no. 233, p. 130).* Thus, there is a schism with Vatican II – this is what Monsignor Lefebvre says – and John Paul II, as Pope, confirms the same doctrine by his acts and words; this is evident.

The Fathers of Campos, following the line of Monsignor Antonio de Castro Mayer, affirm: *“a formal rupture with customs founded upon Apostolic Tradition, especially in matters of worship, entails schism. For this reason the great theologian Suárez does not hesitate to affirm that the Pope could be considered schismatic if he ‘wished to subvert all ecclesiastical ceremonies founded upon Apostolic Tradition’ (De Caritate, Disp. XII, sect. I, no. 2, pp. 733–734). Thus, a liturgy tending toward heresy and desacralization has no basis whatsoever in Tradition; on the contrary, it constitutes a formal and violent rupture with all the norms that until now have guided Catholic worship.” (A Missa Nova: Um caso de consciência, Fathers of Campos, São Paulo, 1982, p. 35).*

There is a real schism that cannot be denied, as follows from the affirmations of Monsignor Lefebvre and of the Fathers of Campos; and, tragically, it is the Pope himself who stands at the head of this schism – this is an objective verification. It cannot be denied, however much one may wish to deny it, the evident schism of the post-conciliar New Church, manifest in the light of the faith; as well as that of John Paul II, who reaffirms the errors of Vatican II.

Heresy – Verification

As we have seen, the Vacant See may occur through the fall of the Pope into heresy, in addition to that produced by schism; and thus it suffices to verify the fact as proof, after having demonstrated the theological possibility. Since it cannot be denied that the Pope may fall into heresy and lose the Pontificate – this being theologically possible – the task now is to verify a posteriori whether this fact is realized, that is, whether it is a reality.

John Paul II not only breaks with Apostolic Tradition, especially in what pertains to divine worship – thus falling into schism – but his error also leads him into heresy. The very idea of aggiornamento in the Church – that is, bringing the Church up to date with impious principles and revolutionary principles of the modern world reveals a heretical spirit, in addition to that of rupture (schism) with Tradition.

Syncretistic ecumenism, which unites all men without dogmas that divide, is in itself a heresy. The personalism (neo-Pelagian) of John Paul II, introduced into the Second Vatican Council by Maritain, is a heresy, for grace (if it is necessary) is so as a requirement of human nature itself and of the dignity of the human person.

Religious liberty, conceived as a natural right that claims a civil right of the human person and of his conscience (subjectivist), is another heresy, for it denies the divinity of the Church and falls into personalist naturalism and religious indifferentism, whether one wishes it or not.

The Incarnation, conceived as the definitive and perpetual union of Christ with every man, is a heresy—something that John Paul II taught before being elected Pope (cf. *Sign of Contradiction*, BAC, Madrid, 1979, pp. 131-132). This allows him to affirm or to hold that all men are saved by the very fact of the Incarnation, proclaiming everywhere the universal salvation of all men—their justification—without distinguishing the twofold mystery: one, that of Redemption (which indeed is universal) for all men; the other, that of Salvation (or justification) for many, since unfortunately, by the free will of man, not all are in fact saved: “All men (says Cardinal Wojtyła), from the beginning of the world until its end, have been redeemed and justified by Christ and by His Cross.” (ibid., p. 113). Let it be clearly heard: all men have been justified by Christ—if this statement is not heresy as it stands, then say what it is.

Thus, in the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II allows himself to say: “It concerns every man, because each one has been included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united Himself forever through this mystery.” (ibid., no. 13).

John Paul II, as Pope, fully identifies Redemption with Salvation: “in the mystery of Redemption, that is, of the salvific action accomplished by Christ (...)” (ibid., no. 20).

Salvation was accomplished by the Incarnation, in the very nature of man, by the union in Christ of the divine nature with the human nature: “the mystery of the Incarnation is the focal point of the entire plan of salvation, and precisely of the salvation of man. Salvation was not conceived or realized apart from what is essentially human (...)” (*Sign of Contradiction*, p. 151).

The entire anthropological character that John Paul II gives to religion is based on his conception of Revelation, for, according to him: “Revelation consists in the fact that the Son of God, by His Incarnation, has united Himself to every man (...)” (*Sign of Contradiction*, p. 132).

The new ecclesiology of Vatican II, and even the redefinition of the Church itself expressed by John Paul II, manifests heresy. To redefine the nature of the Church is in itself something unimaginable. (Cf. ibid., p. 24). It is to give the Church another essence; it is to change her nature. Hence the need to redefine her once again.

To conceive of the Church as the ordinary way of salvation, and of the other false religions as extraordinary ways of salvation, is a heresy against the dogma which says: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* — outside the Church there is no salvation. (Cf. Ds. 802, 3866).

To say that the Church of God subsists in the Catholic Church, as well as to teach a twofold supreme power in the Church, are other heresies of Vatican II and of its faithful follower

John Paul II, not to mention *communicatio in sacris*, euphemistically called “*ecumenical hospitality*,” nor the inversion of the ends of marriage.

We have spoken of the heresies of the Second Vatican Council on the basis of Monsignor Lefebvre’s own words: “*Speaking of non-Catholic Christian religions, Vatican II teaches that ‘although we believe them to suffer from deficiencies, they are by no means deprived of significance and value in the mystery of salvation.’⁴ That is a heresy! The only means of salvation is the Catholic Church.*” (They Have Uncrowned Him, Ed. San Pío X, Buenos Aires, 1987, p. 177). “*Therefore, to speak of the ‘salvific’ values of other religions, I repeat, is a heresy.*” (ibid., p. 178).

Daniel Leroux likewise warns in this regard: “*It is a very grave error which Monsignor Lefebvre does not hesitate to qualify as heresy.*” (Peter, Lovest Thou Me?, Ed. Fideliter, 1988, p. 37).

Moreover, Monsignor Lefebvre denounces the naturalist heresy contained in personalism: “*To maintain, as Vatican II does, a naturally upright orientation of all men toward God is total unrealism and pure naturalist heresy.*” (They Have Uncrowned Him, p. 199).

What more is desired? Monsignor Lefebvre denounces two key heresies of Vatican II, and John Paul II does nothing but repeat and confirm them constantly. Therefore, he is a heretic; there can be no doubt.

A Cardinal, Monsignor Lefebvre related, told me that “*article 7 of the Instruction in its first draft was heretical.*” (Itinéraires, Mgr. Lefebvre et le Saint Office, no. 233, p. 84). This Cardinal was Cardinal Journet, who told Paul VI that such a definition was heretical (Cf. L’Église Infiltrée, Ed. Fideliter, 1993, p. 34).

The doctrine presently being taught is riddled with errors and heresies, as Monsignor Lefebvre denounces: “*There is today in the Church a teaching full of errors, when not of heresies.*” (Spiritual Journey, p. 87).

To say that Catholics and Muslims adore the same God is a blasphemy and a heresy. Muslims do not acknowledge the Most Holy Trinity; how, then, can they adore the same God as Catholics? It is impossible. “*The Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, adore together with us the one merciful God.*” (Lumen Gentium, no. 16). “*The Church also regards with esteem the Muslims, who adore the one God, living and subsisting, merciful and almighty.*” (Nostra Aetate, no. 3).

With regard to the liturgical reform, Monsignor Lefebvre says: “*This reform, having issued from liberalism and modernism, is entirely poisoned; it comes from heresy and ends in heresy, even if all its acts are not formally heretical.*” (21-XI-1974, Itinéraires, Dec. 1976, The Savage Condemnation of Monsignor Lefebvre, special issue, p. 9).

Regarding Religious Liberty — liberty of conscience in religious matters — Monsignor Lefebvre points out: “*The Church that affirms such errors is at once schismatic and heretical*” (July 29, 1976, Itinéraires, special issue, p. 171). For Religious Liberty ultimately destroys the Social Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ, a Kingship which is a dogma of faith, and

⁴ Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio, no. 3.

therefore whoever denies it is heretical: *“At the risk of repeating myself, I return to the subject of the Social Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that dogma of the Catholic faith, which no one can call into question without being a heretic – yes, a perfect heretic.”* (They Have Uncrowned Him, p. 101).

John Paul II does nothing but repeat these errors identified by Monsignor Lefebvre as schism and heresy. Of this there is no doubt.

Apostasy – Verification

Let us now pass to apostasy, as if the foregoing were not enough; but the facts manifest it clearly. It is enough to consider what has been very aptly published under the title *Itinerary of an Apostasy*, in addition to John Paul II’s praise of the gesture of renunciation of the Tiara, which symbolizes the Pontificate, in these words: *“We could also recall that my most venerable predecessor Paul VI, by laying aside the Tiara, made a gesture that has not ceased to bear fruit in the Church.”* (Peter, *Lovest Thou Me?*, Ed. Fideliter, 1988, p. 16). John Paul II was likewise not crowned, a fact symbolically very significant.

The apostasy of John Paul II – some significant facts:

- November 17, 1980: John Paul II goes to a Lutheran temple in Germany and declares: *“I come to you with the spiritual heritage of Martin Luther.”*
- May 25, 1982: he attends a religious service in the Anglican – Protestant – cathedral of Canterbury, England.
- January 25: he promulgates the New Code of Canon Law, which sets forth in juridical terms the new post-conciliar ecclesiology.
- December 11, 1983: he preaches in Rome in a Lutheran temple and recites a prayer composed by Luther.
- April 17, 1984: he receives a delegation of the B’nai B’rith – a high Masonic lodge exclusively Jewish – describing the visit as a reunion among brothers.
- May 10, 1984: in Thailand, he bows deeply before the Buddhist patriarch, Supreme Vasana Tara, who receives him seated upon his throne.
- July 29, 1984: he officially sends delegates to the Ecumenical Council of Churches – Protestant – in Vancouver, Canada.
- December 11, 1984: he sends a representative to Rome for the laying of the first stone of a mosque that will be the largest in Europe.
- June 24, 1985: an official Vatican document invites Christians to unite with the Jews in order *“to prepare the world together for the coming of the Messiah.”*
- August 8, 1985: in Togo, Africa, he attends pagan ceremonies in the *“sacred forest,”* later taking part in satanic rites in Kara and Togoville.

- August 19, 1985: in Morocco, beside King Hassan II, “*Commander of the Faithful*” – Muslims – he preaches dialogue with Islam: “*we have the same God.*” This is, properly speaking, to deny Our Lord Jesus Christ.
- February 2, 1986: during his journey to India, he first receives from a Hindu priestess the sign of the tilak, the mark of recognition of the worshippers of the goddess Shiva.
- February 5, 1986: in Madras, he receives from the hands of a man the sacred ashes – or vibhuti – upon his forehead, an initiation ceremony still more grave.
- February 24, 1986: the official “*Catholic*” Church joins the council of Protestant churches.
- April 13, 1986: for the first time in the history of the Church, a Pope visits the synagogue of Rome, takes part in the recitation of the psalms with the chief rabbi, an enemy of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and acknowledges that the Church persecuted the Jews.
- October 5, 1986: on the occasion of his journey to Lyon, France, he congratulates the Protestant community of Taizé and congratulates the Charismatics of Paray-le-Monial.
- October 27, 1986: Assisi. John Paul II invents and presides over the U.N. of religions: those who believe in the Eternal One, those who believe in a thousand gods, those who do not believe in a precise God. A staggering spectacle, as the press called it. The golden statue of Buddha placed upon the tabernacle of the high altar, adored by Buddhists in a church of Assisi.
- August 4, 1987: Cardinal Arinze represents the Pope in Kyoto, Japan, at the ceremonies commemorating the introduction of Buddhism into that country.
- October 28, 1987: Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims celebrate their rites, each group in a side chapel, in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome. Afterwards, they are received in private audience by the Pope.
- January 1, 1988: in his message, “*Religious Freedom, a Condition for Peaceful Coexistence,*” John Paul II reaffirms the Judeo-Masonic principle of Religious Liberty, as condemned by the Popes Pius VI, Pius VII, Gregory XVI, Pius IX, Leo XIII, and others.

Monsignor Lefebvre Speaks of Apostasy

Monsignor Lefebvre did not cease to denounce the present apostasy, referring – in his final work, *Spiritual Journey* (Ecône, 1990, p. 70) – to the occupation of the Church by unfaithful Popes and by apostate Bishops who destroy the faith of the clergy and of the faithful, affirming that: “*This apostasy makes these members adulterers, schismatics opposed to all Tradition, in rupture with the past of the Church and consequently with the Church of today, insofar as the Church of today remains faithful to the Church of Our Lord.*” This text, unfortunately, it must be

said, has been mutilated in the Spanish edition published in Buenos Aires in 1991; it is a disgrace that Monsignor should be cut down with impunity.

In the prologue of the same work, Monsignor Lefebvre makes evident the schism and apostasy of those who condemned him together with Monsignor de Castro Mayer, by minimizing and denying the riches of the Incarnation and of the Redemption: *“Those who deem it a duty to minimize these riches, and even to deny them, can only condemn these two Bishops and thus confirm their schism and their separation from Our Lord and His Kingdom, the cause of their secularism and their apostate ecumenism.”* (Spiritual Journey, Spanish edition, Buenos Aires, 1991, p. 14).

Religious liberty, as taught and proposed by Vatican II and by John Paul II, its faithful servant, contained in the declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, constitutes a blasphemy and a true apostasy, as Monsignor Lefebvre states: *“it is a blasphemy and an apostasy to make of this argument an absolute and fundamental principle of the public law of the Church. The Popes themselves have formally condemned the attitude of States, even Catholic in name, which thus reduce the Church to the regime of common law (...)”* (Itinéraires, no. 233, pp. 46–47).

Continuing with the orientations of the Council, which John Paul II does with great enthusiasm and diligence, is to spread apostasy everywhere: *“The situation of the Church is such that only a Pope like Saint Pius X can halt the self-destruction that the Church is suffering, especially since the Second Vatican Council. To continue with the orientations of this Council and of its post-conciliar reforms is to spread apostasy and to lead the Church to ruin. The tree is judged by its fruits, said Our Lord Himself.”* (Itinéraires, no. 233, pp. 129–130).

Liberalism leads to apostasy, as Monsignor Lefebvre warns (cf. *They Have Uncrowned Him*, p. 11).

“Religious Liberty is the legal apostasy of society: remember this well...” For this reason Monsignor Lefebvre did not sign the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*), because, as he rightly emphasizes: *“One does not sign an apostasy!”* (ibid., p. 75).

Practical apostasy, latent apostasy – these were expressions used by Monsignor Lefebvre to describe the state of loss of the faith. (Cf. ibid., pp. 113 and 208).

More forcefully, Monsignor Lefebvre affirmed: *“Sadly, I must say that Rome has lost the faith; Rome is in Apostasy. These are not empty words; it is the truth: Rome is in apostasy. One can no longer have confidence in those people, since they are abandoning the Church. This is certain.”* Monsignor Lefebvre said this after the interview he had with Cardinal Ratzinger on July 14, 1987, in the conference given during the priestly retreat at Ecône on September 14, 1987.

The ultimate and profound reason for Monsignor Lefebvre’s resistance was this: *“it is the general apostasy; it is for this reason that we resist (...)”* (*L’Église Infiltrée par le Modernisme*, Ed. Fideliter, 1993, p. 69).

The apostasy of John Paul II was expressed by Monsignor Lefebvre when, in reference to the future consecrations against the will of the Pope, he was answered in these terms: *“Against the Pope? But against a Pope who destroys the Church, who is practically an apostate and*

who wants to make us apostates, I ask: what is to be done? Must one renounce the continuity of this work of the Church in order to please one who no longer wishes to know anything of Tradition, who no longer wishes Our Lord Jesus Christ to reign publicly, and who leads us to apostasy?" (Conference of 14/8/1987).

Conclusion

We see that the loss of the Pontificate through heresy, schism, and/or apostasy is a theologically certain proposition. The possibility of the Vacant See by reason of a schismatic, heretical, and/or apostate Pope is theologically certain according to the consensus of medieval theologians, based upon the ancient Fathers, who considered it theologically possible for a Pope to fall into heresy. Hence the manifestly heretical Pope ceases by himself to be Pope and Head, just as he ceases by himself to be Catholic and a member of the body of the Church; and for this reason he can be judged and punished by the Church.

The Vacant See is possible because it is theologically possible for a Pope to fall into schism, heresy, and/or apostasy, according to the doctrine of the Church.

The conclusion of the Vacant See imposes itself upon verifying, a posteriori, the concrete facts which denote the schism, heresy, and apostasy of John Paul II.

The impossibility of a Pope falling into heresy is found neither in Scripture nor in the Tradition of the Church. Theologically, one cannot prove the impossibility of a Pope falling into heresy; it is found neither in Scripture nor in the Tradition of the Church. Theologically, one cannot prove the impossibility of a heretical Pope, nor consequently the impossibility of the Vacant See.

If the more modern theologians dispute the matter – whereas the medieval theologians commonly admit it – they do not do so concerning the principles which establish as theologically possible that a Pope may fall into heresy, but rather concerning how and when he would lose the Pontificate by reason of his heresy. This discussion among theologians regarding the exact moment of the loss of the Pontificate is what gives rise to the various propositions and opinions which Saint Robert Bellarmine gathers and summarizes, and then refutes those which, for one reason or another, do not accord with theological principles according to the ancient Fathers and the medieval theologians.

The opinion which maintains, with Pighius, that the Pope cannot be a heretic – that is, fall into heresy – is set aside by Saint Robert Bellarmine as being merely probable and not theologically certain, in order to consider the contrary opinion, which is the common opinion and which admits as theologically certain that the Pope can fall into heresy – be a heretic – and therefore lose the Pontificate.

Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori classifies the opinion of Albert Pighius as extreme, in relation to the opinion of Luther and Calvin, considering both to be false and erroneous.

Luther and Calvin hold that the Pope is always fallible; they deny the infallibility of the Pope when he speaks *ex cathedra*.

The opposite extreme of this heretical doctrine, according to Saint Alphonsus, is the doctrine of Pighius, who affirms that the Pope can never err, even when he speaks as a private doctor. According to Pighius, the Pope is always infallible and therefore can never fall into heresy. This doctrine of Pighius is followed by the French canonist Bouix (+1870).

One may think that the doctrine of Pighius, being the opposite extreme of the doctrine of Calvin and Luther, according to Saint Alphonsus, is also a heresy, for extremes meet.

The excessive infallibilism of Pighius and of all papalists is at least a grave theological error against Tradition and against the Fathers of the Church. For this reason, Saint Alphonsus, when speaking of the infallibility of the Pope, classifies the doctrine of Pighius as the opposite extreme to the doctrine of Luther and Calvin, and as equally false and erroneous⁵. And it is fitting to clarify, moreover, that when the words *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam* (Mt. 16:18) are invoked, they refer to the Chair of Peter, to the See, that is, to the Papacy as a divine institution, and not to the physical person of Peter nor of his successors, but to the charge, to the office, to the public person; for, as Saint Cyprian says, cited by Saint Alphonsus: "*The Chair of Peter, upon which the Church is founded.*" (ibid., p. 300).

Saint Robert Bellarmine maintains as true and theologically certain – refuting the others – the opinion which affirms that the heretical Pope loses the Pontificate *ipso facto* when the heresy becomes manifest, publicly and notoriously manifest, with the precision or nuance made by Da Silveira.

There is, theologically, a profound incompatibility – at the root – between the condition of heretic and the possession of jurisdiction. This incompatibility is not absolute, in such a way that, by falling into internal heresy or even external heresy, the holder of jurisdiction would be deprived *ipso facto* of office, in all cases and immediately.

Heresy cuts the root and foundation of jurisdiction, that is, the faith and the condition of being a member of the Church; but it does not *ipso facto* and necessarily eliminate jurisdiction. For this reason, one speaks of incompatibility at the root.

Nevertheless, jurisdiction is preserved in a precarious manner by Our Lord Jesus Christ, the invisible Head of the Church, until the heresy becomes manifest according to Saint Robert Bellarmine; or, with a nuance according to Da Silveira, when the heresy becomes manifest in the sense of being notorious and manifest to the public – public and notorious – at which point he then loses jurisdiction *ipso facto*.

⁵ Œuvres Complètes de S. Alphonse de Liguori, Œuvres Dogmatiques, excerpt from vol. IX, Traité sur le Pape et sur le Concile, Ed. Compagnons de Saint Michel, Ghent, Belgium, 1975, p. 286, by Fr. Jules Jacques

Saint Robert Bellarmine therefore refutes another theologically more authoritative opinion: the one which holds that the heretical Pope does not lose the Pontificate until there has been a declaration by the Church confirming his heresy; such that the heretical Pope must be deposed by a declaration of the Church verifying the heresy.

Saint Robert's reasons for refuting this opinion—which, under another aspect, can be sustained and even integrated into it—are:1)

- 1) Heretics withdraw and separate themselves from the body of Christ, and one who is not a member cannot be the head.
- 2) The Holy Fathers unanimously teach not only that heretics are outside the Church, but also that they are ipso facto deprived of all ecclesiastical jurisdiction and dignity (see Da Silveira, *op. cit.*, p. 169).

Nor should it be said that this argument lacks value by claiming that the Holy Fathers were basing themselves on the Ancient Law, whereas today, by the Decree of the Council of Constance, only those who are nominally excommunicated lose jurisdiction, or that the Code of Canon Law has been reformed, as some say. This argument has no value whatsoever, for those Fathers, in affirming that heretics lose jurisdiction, do not invoke any human or ecclesiastical law—which, moreover, perhaps did not exist at that time—but rather the very nature of heresy itself (cf. Da Silveira, *op. cit.*, p. 170). That is to say, they based themselves on theological arguments and divine law; and these do not depend upon the will or dispositions of men, nor upon the contingency of time or of what is human.

Nor should it be said that no distinction is made between the formal heretic and the material heretic, a distinction which, as Hugon rightly says, the Church does not make in practice; for *“as for material heretics, they likewise do not belong to the body, because they withdraw from the social element, which is the visible profession of one and the same faith. So true is this that the Church, in her practice of the external forum, does not distinguish between the formal heretic and the material heretic; she regards them all as strangers; and if the Church receives them into her bosom, she imposes upon all of them the same public retraction.”* (Hugon, *Hors de l'Église...*, p. 327).

This is the doctrine of the Church as set forth by a renowned theologian such as Father Hugon. We invent nothing; but we do adhere to the consequences, lest we fall into absurdity and ambiguity.

For this reason Monsignor de Castro Mayer likewise did not make this distinction, nor did he accept it, when he said that the heretical Pope is not a true Pope, but only putatively so.

Nevertheless, the opinion which says that the heretical Pope must be deposed by a declaration of the Church testifying to the heresy, and that at that moment he loses the Pontificate ipso facto, contains a truth that can be integrated at the present hour with the opinion of Saint Robert Bellarmine, considering the declaration as a certificate of the heresy, without its being the cause or the instrument of the loss of the Pontificate.

Given the present situation, very concrete and precise, the opinion of Saint Robert can be held entirely, with Da Silveira's nuance: the heretical Pope loses the Pontificate ipso facto

when the heresy is publicly and notoriously manifest; but until there is a declaration of the Church certifying – or verifying – the heresy, the schism, and/or the apostasy, the heretical, schismatic, and/or apostate Pope would be a putative Pope, that is, Pope only in appearance.

It would suffice for the declaration of the Church to be made by a representative part of the Church, of Rome.

The putative Pope would have jurisdiction only for those acts which the common good of the Church and the salvation of souls require.

This would be a jurisdiction for each act, only in fact and not by right; a jurisdiction supplied by the Church directly from Christ, the invisible and permanent Head of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, outside of which there is no salvation.

The putative Pope occupies the See of Peter sacrilegiously and impiously, just as the prophecies of Our Lady at La Salette say expressly and clearly: Rome will lose the faith and will become the Seat of the Antichrist.

Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) saw that evil could even seize the See of Peter, and for this reason he composed the short exorcism against Satan, the following passage later being modified: *“Behold, cunning enemies have filled the Church, the Bride of the Immaculate Lamb, with bitterness; they have given her wormwood to drink; they have laid their impious hands upon all that is desirable in her. Where the See of Blessed Peter and the Chair of Truth were established as a light for the Nations, they have erected the throne of the abomination of their impiety, so that, once the shepherd has been struck, the flock may be scattered.”*

Postscript: The Last Times – It Is Possible

The Vacant See through the schism, heresy, and/or apostasy of the Pope is a great mystery; it is almost the summit of the mystery of iniquity, making one think of the last times described by Scripture – truly apocalyptic times, which today, more than ever, cannot be disregarded.

Given the gravity of all that is taking place, it would be senseless to dismiss the possibility that we are living through the apocalyptic times announced by Our Lord. In the Church there have always been great difficulties of every kind, but never has there been a crisis so vast and universal as that through which the Church is passing today; this calls to mind the Great Apostasy announced by Saint Paul.

We do not exaggerate. Monsignor Lefebvre himself, so measured and prudent in his statements, did not fail to declare to all the faithful on the occasion of Lent 1987 that: *“This... ..collapse of the faith seems to prepare the Antichrist, according to the predictions of Saint Paul to*

the Thessalonians and according to the commentaries of the Fathers of the Church." Letter of January 25, 1987.

Yes, everything calls to mind the Great Apostasy of the last times, which Saint Thomas describes thus: "*Erit tunc tribulatio magna, quia erit perversio doctrinae christianae per falsam doctrinam. Et nisi esse dies breviati, scilicet documento doctrinae, per additamenta verae doctrinae, non fieret salva omnis caro, idest omnes converterentur ad falsam doctrinam*"; and shortly before, he brings forward: "*Quod sicut verbum Evangelii divulgatum est adveniente Antichristo; et sicut Christus habuit suos prophetas, sic et Antichristus.*" (In Com. Matth., cap. 24).

The obstacle that restrains the appearance of the Antichrist also seems to have been removed, if we adhere to the explanation of Saint Thomas taken from Pope Saint Leo: "*Discessio a Romano imperio debet intelligi, non solum a temporali, sed a spirituali, scilicet a fide catholica Romanae Ecclesiae. Est autem hoc conveniens signum, quod sicut Christus venit quando Romanum imperium omnibus dominabatur, ita e converso signum Antichristi est discessio ab eo.*" (In Com. II Thess., cap. 2, no. 35, ed. Marietti, 1953, vol. II, p. 198).

The obstacle is the Catholic faith, and its center or heart is the *Mysterium Fidei* – the mystery of faith. In this regard it is worth citing Pablo Caballero Sánchez, C.M., who says in his book *The Prophecy of Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the Destinies of the Jewish People*: "*If interpreters were willing to admit that the Eschatology of Saint Paul is the same as that of Daniel and of all the Prophets, including Saint John and Christ Himself (...) they would know that the obstacle which prevents the apothotic coming of that leader – the Antichrist – both agent and thing at once, neuter and masculine in the texts of Saint Paul, is the Sacrifice and the Oblation of which Daniel speaks...*" (Ed. Luz, Madrid, 1946, p. 97).

Monsignor Straubinger, commenting on Daniel 12:11 – "*the perpetual sacrifice shall be taken away and the desolating abomination enthroned*" – says with Scio: "*by perpetual sacrifice Saint Jerome, together with other Fathers, understands here the worship of the Eucharist and the whole solemn worship of the Church, which in the times of the Antichrist will be hindered.*"

Regarding the present situation of the Church, Monsignor Straubinger⁶ already said in 1949, long before the Second Vatican Council took place: "*With what clarity Saint Paul saw our time! And he also gave it the name that belongs to it: a time of apostasy – practical apostasy, of course, since the 'appearances' of piety prevent formal apostasy. Disguised apostasy is, for the Apostle of the Gentiles, 'the mystery of iniquity,' of which he speaks in 2 Thess. 2 ff., in order to open our eyes concerning the spirits that deceive us under the form of piety and ostentatious religiosity, even apparitions. (...) For every false prophet has two horns like the Lamb (Apoc. 13:11), that is, the outward appearance of Christ (...). The mystery of iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7), which will culminate in the Antichrist and his triumph (...), the mystery of apostasy (2 Thess. 2:3), with the triumph of Antichrist over the saints (Apoc. 13:7), with the waning of faith upon the earth (Luke 18:8), and, in a word, with the apparent victory of the Devil and the apparent defeat of the Redeemer through the*

⁶ Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Münster; a learned German exegete, born in Freiburg im Breisgau in 1883, he was professor at the seminary of La Plata, Argentina, and died in Stuttgart in 1955.

apostasy that surrounds us, until He comes to judge the world (...)" (Biblical Spirituality, Ed. Plantin, Buenos Aires, 1949, pp. 27-29 and 174).

Father Castellani said in 1951: The Mystery of Iniquity is hatred of God and the worship of man. The Two Beasts are political power and man's religious instinct turned against God and dominated by the Pseudo-Christ and the Pseudo-prophet. (...) The Great Harlot is religion decomposed and handed over to temporal powers (...). The Mystery of Iniquity is the principle of the City of Man, which struggles against the City of God from the beginning (...). The summit of the Mystery of Iniquity is hatred of God and the idolatrous worship of Man. (...) And then the temporal structure of the existing Church will be seized by the Antichrist; it will fornicate with the Kings of the earth – at least an ostensible part of it – and the abomination of desolation will enter the holy place. *"When you see the abominable desolation enter where it ought not, then it is already here."* Will it be the reign of an Antipope, or of a false Pope? Will it be the material destruction of Rome? Will it be the enthronement there of a sacrilegious cult?" (Christ: Is He Returning or Not?, Ed. Dictio, Buenos Aires, 1975, pp. 28-29).

For his part, Father Meinvielle says in this regard: *"The Mystery of Iniquity consists precisely in this: that the 'publicity apparatus of the Church,' which ought to serve to lead souls to Jesus Christ, instead serves to lose them and enslave them to the devil. Here lies the 'Mystery of perversity': that the salt should become corrupted and cease to salt (Matt. 5:13). (...) A few more years, and unless the hand of God intervenes directly, the 'publicity apparatus of the Catholic Church' will profess a religion completely different from that which Jesus Christ taught us, and which the Fathers, Doctors, and Saints of the Church, twice-millennial, have handed down to us. Hence this satanic fury that has been unleashed against the pre-conciliar Church. (...) The Church today would be governed in large part by Jews, Masons, and Communists – governed against the interests of the Church herself. Here lies the *Mysterium iniquitatis*."* (Christian Progressivism, p. 131 ff.).

Father Meinvielle concludes his book Critique of Maritain's Conception of the Human Person by citing the words of Saint Pius X when he condemned the Sillon: *"(...) and it is no longer anything but a miserable tributary of the great movement of apostasy organized in all nations for the establishment of a universal Church without dogma or hierarchy, without rule for the mind or restraint for the passions; a Church which, under the pretext of liberty and human dignity, would bring back into the world, were it to triumph, together with the legal reign of cunning and force, the oppression of the weak, of those who suffer and labor."*

With these words Saint Pius X condemns the Ecumenism of the post-conciliar Church, and its false liberty and human dignity, its personalism, and the errors that John Paul II disseminates everywhere.

For this reason Monsignor Lefebvre affirmed, as we have already seen: *"Sadly, I must say that Rome has lost the faith; Rome is in Apostasy. These are not empty words; it is the truth: Rome is in Apostasy."* (Conference, Sept. 14, 1987, Ecône). And almost a year earlier, Monsignor Lefebvre, together with Monsignor de Castro Mayer, in their joint declaration of December 2, 1986, said: *"The height of this rupture with the previous Magisterium of the Church was accomplished at Assisi, after the visit to the Synagogue. The public sin against the oneness of God,*

against the Incarnate Word and His Church, makes one tremble with horror: John Paul II encouraging false religions to pray to their false gods – a scandal without measure and without precedent. (...) Therefore, the rupture does not come from us, but from Paul VI and John Paul II, who break with their predecessors. This denial of the whole past of the Church by these two Popes and the Bishops who imitate them is an inconceivable impiety and an unbearable humiliation for those who remain Catholic in fidelity to twenty centuries of profession of the same faith."

These words, my dear brethren, are not empty words, nor should they be forgotten. They are the words of the only two Bishops in the whole world who *"publicly condemned error, for he who does not resist manifest error – as Saint Robert Bellarmine says – when he can and ought to do so, is regarded as approving it."* (De Conciliis et Ecclesia, L. 1, c. 14).

Father Coache says with regard to the Vacant See: *"One may be a sedevacantist in view of the heresies of John Paul II."* (Le Combat de la Foi, no. 94, p. 6). *"It is evident that John Paul II publicly betrays the Church in the external forum ('Assisi,' warm approval of Lutheranism, man justified by the mere fact of the Incarnation, explicit and enthusiastic support for the forces of evil or for the press that destroys the faith and the Church, such as La Croix, La Documentation Catholique, etc.), this despite some good words elsewhere. Every faithful Catholic therefore has the right to draw the conclusions permitted by theology, without being constrained to think otherwise..."* (ibid., no. 96, p. 3).

If we affirm, judging by the fruits, that the See is vacant, given the schism, heresy, and apostasy of John Paul II, and that he is only a putative Pope until the Church declares his rupture, we do not thereby cease to be Catholics, as Father Coache expresses it: *"We are attached to Rome; we are Roman Catholics. And precisely because we are attached to the Roman Church, for which we would be willing to be killed, and to her traditional institutions, we 'disobey' those who possess or occupy the highest offices. In history there have been bad Popes and Antipopes: recognizing them or not as Popes does not prevent the well-disposed faithful from remaining attached to the Holy Roman Church. In dubiis libertas."* (ibid., no. 96, p. 3). Yes, in dubiis libertas – at least!

Monsignor Lefebvre left the door open – let us not forget it – when he said in the Easter sermon of 1986 before all the faithful at Ecône: *"What conclusion shall we perhaps have to draw in a few months' time before these repeated acts of communication with false worship? I do not know. I ask myself this. But it is possible that we may be obliged to believe that this Pope is not Pope. I do not yet wish to say this in a solemn and formal manner, but it seems, yes, at first sight, that it is impossible for a Pope to be publicly and formally heretical."* With this, Monsignor Lefebvre allows it to be glimpsed that, if a Pope is publicly and formally heretical, he is not Pope. And we today consider this to be a fact.

La Salette speaks of the eclipse of the Church. This makes us think of the motto of Saint Malachy corresponding to John Paul II, De Labore Solis, badly translated as *"The Labors of the Sun,"* which has no meaning, when in reality the true translation is *"The Eclipse of the Sun"* – the Church, which is the light of the world in the image and likeness of Christ. Well then, with the Pontificate of John Paul II, the prophecies of Saint Malachy express what is taking place today: the eclipse of the Church, confusion reigning, the light of faith being

eclipsed. With regard to the motto *De Labore Solis*, Father Rafael Pijuán, Doctor in Sacred Theology and Archpriest of the Holy Cathedral Church of Menorca, says: “*The second motto, De Labore Solis, is truly somber, because if we consider it in its physical sense, it seems to indicate the realization of that evangelical sign of the end of the world: sol obscurabitur (...) the motto De Labore Solis corresponds to the threatening realities of the future.*” (The Twentieth Century and the End of the World, Ed. Hormiga de Oro, Barcelona, 1953, pp. 229–234).

Father Urrutia — who is not a traditionalist — says that Melanie, in her correspondence with Father Roubaud of 30/IX/1894, speaks of “*two weak, indecisive Popes (vermoulus, plats, douteux)*” (Apparition and Message of La Salette, Madrid, 1983, p. 38). Father Urrutia does not dare to render the expression “*doubtful*” into Spanish, leaving it untranslated; but it is enough that he cited the text and gave the term only in French, which permits us to affirm that the prophecies of La Salette are related to a period in which there will be two doubtful Popes, thus leaving open the possibility of the Vacant See. This cannot be denied.

There are prophecies of Saints that speak of the Vacant See. Father Urrutia, in a work entitled *The Time That Is Approaching* (Madrid, 1983, p. 24), gives the following text, among others that speak of the Vacant See: “*Saint Celestine V (1251–96), hermit, the only Pope who abdicated, adds — a prophecy attributed to Saint Cyril — that before the renewal of the Church, God permitting the Holy See to be vacant — it will be for a long time — (...).*” The most striking text cited by Father Urrutia is the one directly related to John Paul II: “*Saint Anselm, Bishop of Sunium, Greece, thirteenth century (Vaticinia illustrium virorum, Venice, 1605): ‘Woe to thee, city of the seven hills — Rome — when the letter K is acclaimed within thy walls! — Karol, the name of John Paul II. Then thy fall shall be near; thy rulers shall be destroyed. Thou hast angered the Most High with thy crimes and blasphemies; thou shalt perish in defeat and blood.’*” (ibid., p. 31).

Comments are unnecessary. It is enough to see the present prevarication of Rome, with the letter K of Karol Wojtyła acclaimed in Rome, for the truth of the prophecy to shine forth, lamentably.

Saint Vincent Ferrer, who proclaimed himself the angel appointed by the Apocalypse and, to prove it, raised a woman from the dead⁷, announced as a sign of the last times: “*Take heed that in that time women shall dress like men and conduct themselves according to their own pleasure, licentiously, and men shall dress vilely like women.*” (Sermon *Timete Deum*).

In the complete works of Saint Francis of Assisi printed in Paris in 1880 — together with those of Saint Anthony of Padua — the Seraphic Saint of Assisi prophesies a false Pope, not canonically elected, although recognized by the majority of Catholics, referring to the great tribulation announced in Sacred Scripture and pointing to a schism in the Church: “*Aliquis non canonice electus, in articulo tribulationis illius ad Papatum assumptus, multis mortem sui erroris sagacitate propinare molietur. Tunc multiplicabuntur scandala, nostra diuidetur Religio, plures ex aliis omnino frangentur, eo quod non contradicent, sed consentient errori. Erunt opiniones et schismata tot et tanta in populo, et in religiosis, et in clerico, quod nisi abbreviarentur dies illi juxta verbum Evangelicum (si fieri posset) in errorem inducerentur etiam electi, nisi in tanto turbine ex*

⁷ Cf. Saint Vincent Ferrer: *Biography and Writings*, BAC, Madrid, 1956, pp. 172–173.

immensa misericordia Dei regenerentur." (Opera Omnia S. Francisci Assisiatis, Paris, 1880, vol. 1, col. 430).

Incredible though it may be, it would seem to be describing what is taking place today after the Second Vatican Council and after the scandal of the meeting at Assisi, precisely in the church where the remains of Saint Francis rest, and which suffered a collapse as a consequence of successive tremors that may well express divine indignation at such a fraud; just as in the church of Saint Peter, where a little statue of Buddha reigned upon the tabernacle to the sound of an unparalleled interreligious ecumenism. Divine wisdom would seem to manifest its displeasure by permitting the symbol of ecumenism to collapse.

To speak today of the apocalyptic Last Times and of the Antichrist is in no way exaggerated or absurd; quite the contrary, it is wisdom and prudence. Saint Pius X, in his first encyclical, *E Supremi Apostolatus* of 1903, speaks in favor of this and of its nearness: "*There can be no doubt that whoever considers all this will have to admit outright that this perversion of souls is as it were a foretaste, a prelude to the evils that we must expect at the end of time; or he may even think that the son of perdition,⁸ of whom the Apostle speaks, already dwells in this world. (...) On the contrary, this is the proper sign of the Antichrist according to the same Apostle...*" (Saint Pius X: *Doctrinal Writings*, Ed. Palabra, Madrid, 1975, pp. 19–21). If Saint Pius X said this in 1903, what would he not say today? He would not doubt, not for an instant, that we are living in the last times, since he was already speaking of the possibility of the coming of the Antichrist in 1903. Therefore, let no one impiously and senselessly dismiss or exclude at least the possibility that we find ourselves in the last times.

Pope Benedict XV also, in his first encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi* of 1914, refers to the end of times: "*It seems that, in truth, those days have arrived of which Jesus Christ prophesied: You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars... Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*"

This passage corresponds to the eschatological discourse of Our Lord Jesus Christ, related to the end of times and to His Parousia.

Pope Pius XI, in the encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor* of 1928, exclaimed: "*It seems to be the beginning of the sorrows that the man of sin is to bring (2 Thess. 2:4).*" "*The thought arises that the times announced by Our Lord are drawing near: Because iniquity shall abound, the charity of many shall grow cold (Mt. 24:12).*"

Pius XII, in his Easter message of 1957: "*There are many signs that the return of Jesus is not far off.*"

It is evident that to pronounce oneself, in the face of this crisis of faith and true universal apostasy, in favor of the end of times is the most sensible position, in accordance with Scripture, the Prophecies, the Saints, and the Popes.

To assert against the Vacant See the moral argument *melior est conditio possidentis* is valid so long as it is not to the detriment of the common good and of the faith of the Church. Heretics, schismatics, and/or apostates have no part in the Church; they are strangers to

⁸ 2 Thess. 2:3.

her. For this reason they are excluded from her bosom; they neither belong to nor consequently possess anything of the Church, save the dishonor of their betrayal.

That the Church has perpetual successors as a dogma of faith does not exclude antipopes, nor periods, whether short or long, of the Vacant See.

We do not judge the Pope; we do judge the error and the heresy of the Pope. It is the faith that judges: *"We are obliged to judge according to Tradition, according to the faith of the Church, according to the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church, in order to know whether this or that document conforms to the Orthodoxy which the Church has always taught us."* (Un Évêque parle, Ed. D.M.M., 1974, vol. 1, p. 237). We do nothing other than follow the warning of Saint Vincent Ferrer: *"Saint Thomas says that when some error arises among Christians, or danger threatens the faith, every Christian is obliged, if he wishes to be saved, to confront such error or danger, publicly confessing the faith insofar as he is able."* (Saint Vincent Ferrer: Biography and Writings, BAC, Madrid, 1956, p. 452). The danger and the error against the faith are the heresy, schism, and apostasy of John Paul II, which are a manifest fact for anyone who wishes to see.

As Monsignor Lefebvre said: *"It is the general apostasy; that is why we resist."* (L'Église Infiltrée par le Modernisme, Ed. Fideliter, 1993, p. 69). *"What matters is fidelity to our faith. We must have this conviction and always remain calm."* (La Condamnation Sauvage..., Itinéraires, 1977, p. 263).

We ask all those who do not agree with what we set forth here at least to bear in mind the attitude of Saint Joseph, who, faced with a mystery, yet compelled by the evidence of the facts and without denying them, preferred to withdraw until God should give him light. He knew that his wife was Virgin and holy, and of this he never doubted; yet, on the other hand, she was with child. He chose to withdraw in a holy manner, but he neither denied nor closed his eyes to the facts. We, faced with the evident facts of the heresy, schism, and apostasy of John Paul II, are not obliged to go on affirming that he is Pope — the tree is known by its fruits. Permit us at least, if we do not understand, the option of not having to deny what for us is evident according to the faith and the doctrine of the Church, together with all her Tradition.

We adhere with all our heart to the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, and for that very reason we reject the new ecumenical-syncretistic religion, with the help of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, and of His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

AUTHOR'S PROTESTATION

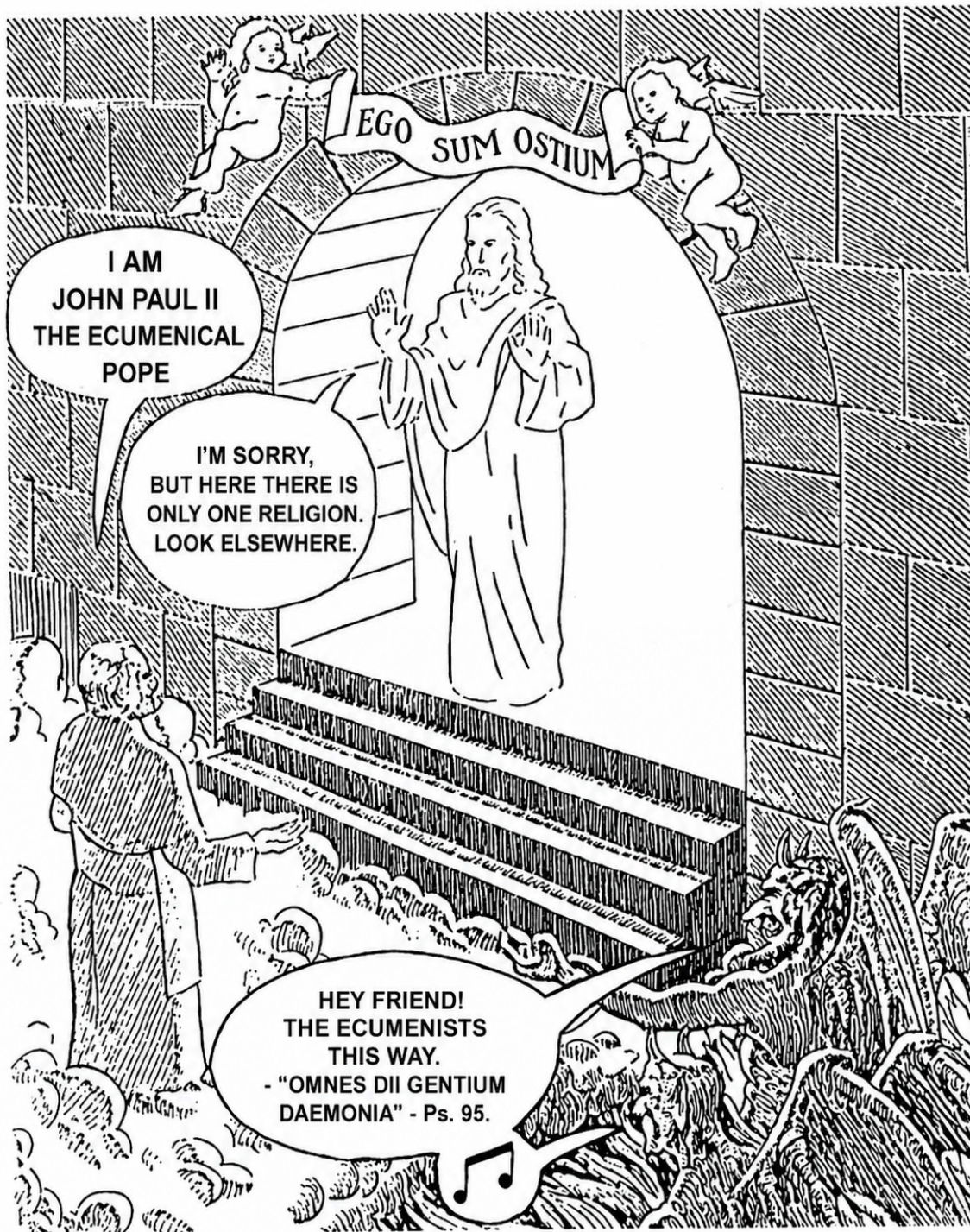
Everything contained in these pages, from the first word to the last, is submitted to the judgment and correction of the Holy Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, outside of which there is no salvation.

Excerpt from Father Coache's letter of May 16, 1994, concerning this work

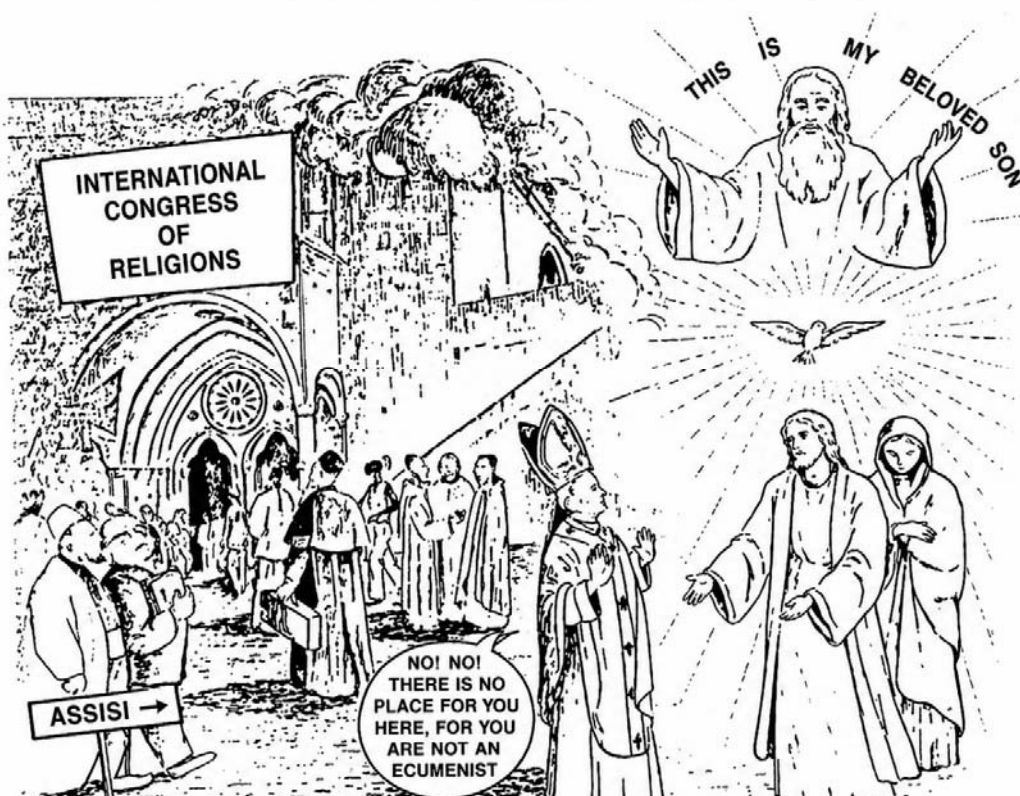
(...) I have read your very well-documented and profound study with great attention... Indeed, I state that I approve this manuscript and consider it extremely satisfactory, with the following reservation: insofar as I may not have been mistaken because of my limited knowledge of the Spanish language.

... You may therefore say to your interlocutors: "*Father Coache makes the entire development of my work his own,*" with the reservation I indicated above. It is clear that John Paul II, like Paul VI, has fallen into heresy and has consequently lost all authority, so long as he has not corrected or retracted his heretical positions. (...)

Images of Archbishop Lefebvre sent to John Paul II on the occasion of the Apostasy of Assisi.



THE ASSISI IMPOSTURE



CLARIFICATIONS ON THE PUBLICATION OF THE WRITING “*THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION ON THE VACANT SEE*” FROM ALMOST TWENTY YEARS AGO

Although there were several printings due to certain orthographic or grammatical corrections and a change of format, the work *Theological Consideration on the Vacant See* was never made public.

This essay was written twenty years ago, being completed at the end of 1993 and sent to the then Superior General of the Society of Saint Pius X, Father Franz Schmidberger, on May 13, 1994, a Marian date of great significance. I now bring it to public light – without modifications, apart from the occasional correction of punctuation and two or three citations from Saint Thomas that were added – and I do so with a certain fear, for it is not my intention to stir up controversy, which is not to my liking, there already being so many positions assumed and taken by one side and the other, given the prejudices and erroneous ideas that many have when maintaining this or that position on the subject, even absolutizing it as if it were a dogma or quasi-dogma of faith, though with contrary views and positions.

The question of the Vacant See has never been set forth as an evident theological conclusion *quoad sapientes tantum* – for the learned and those who understand – and perhaps now, with the passage of time, it may become evident *quoad omnes* – for all, or, if one wishes, at least for many – in light of all that has manifested itself up to the present day.

The great majority, whether on the traditionalist side or on the modernist side, have approached the subject as a truth *per se nota*, that is, self-evident and in an *a priori* manner, or as a dogma of faith, or quasi-dogma of faith. In other words, they stand within a categorical, *aprioristic* outlook or posture, where theological discourse or reasoning has little importance or place, for that which is of faith is not reasoned out.

As a theological conclusion, it begins from principles or premises – at least the first of which is of faith – through which one reasons toward a conclusion, which depends upon the whole argumentative value that one possesses. It is quite another thing if, in a rationalist manner, one begins from categorical and *a priori* principles or ideas, like the famous Kantian categories; or likewise in a fideist manner, by making of a principle or truth something dogmatic, of faith or quasi of faith, which imposes itself imperatively by itself, without any kind of theological deductive reasoning intervening.

A theological conclusion presupposes that there is reasoning from premises taken from the faith, but that by way of rational inference one arrives at a theologically certain and true

conclusion, without categorical a priorisms like the Kantian ideas of modern philosophy, much less from an a priori dictate of faith, as though it were a dogma or quasi-dogma when it is not.

Far from a priorisms and from the rationalisms typical of the modern mentality, or from the obtuse fideism that suppresses in a single stroke theological discourse and doctrine.

To give an example, while keeping the proper distances, something similar would occur with the famous philosophical question of the proofs for the existence of God, where there is an entire philosophical argumentation starting from the existing reality that surrounds us, and not through ideas, as in the case of ontologism – which, incidentally, must not be confused with Saint Anselm's ontological argument, which, although apparently similar, has nothing to do with it in philosophical content – by making the idea of God an innate idea per se nota. This was the root of all modern thought inaugurated by that discarded Descartes, and thus one arrived at such delirium as to reject the demonstration that Saint Thomas offered us through the famous five ways to prove the existence of God. For, sadly, it must be said: philosophy, and much less theology, is not the patrimony of many, but unfortunately of few, very few; as the great Fray Luis de León already said in verse: *"What a restful life, far from worldly noise, to follow the hidden path along which have gone the few wise men who have been in the world."*

One must not make of the Pope's infallibility – only when he speaks ex cathedra – an illegitimate extension that does not fall within the canons of what has been rigorously, strictly, and limitedly defined by the infallible Magisterium of the Church, so that, compulsively and excessively, one believes as a dogma of faith what is not such, without realizing that by that very fact one falls into a foolish idolatry, divinizing or almost divinizing the person of the reigning Pope, as though everything that came from his mouth were a dogma of faith, without realizing that the only Divine Person of a man is the unique and exclusive case of Christ. And that the only infallibility without bounds, conditions, or limitations is that of God; every other infallibility is, for that very reason, participated and therefore limited within the context of the recipient in whom it is communicated. Thus, the infallibility both of the Church in her Universal Ordinary Magisterium – of the whole Episcopal College united with its head, the Bishop of Rome, unanimously proclaiming and teaching a truth as divinely revealed – and the very infallibility which the Bishop of Rome, the Pope or Roman Pontiff, alone and unilaterally, without any kind of magisterial collegiality – which, incidentally, must not be confused with juridical collegialism, commonly known as collegialism – possesses when he speaks ex cathedra, is subject to what that term contains and therefore limits. Outside those limits, if one goes beyond them, one departs from what has been strictly defined by the Church and falls into a subtle idolatry, as much as that of the pagan peoples, such as the Romans who divinized Caesar, or the indigenous empires such as that of the Aztecs, who divinized the Emperor – the chieftain – or, in the desert, the Jews as the chosen people of God, who idolized the golden calf. Here, what is idolized, though not so crudely, would be the person of the Pope, or at least the exercise of his divine power by extending it beyond what has been defined. For

this reason the Church teaches through canon 1323 § 3: *"No truth is to be held as dogmatically declared or defined unless this is manifestly evident."* (Code of Canon Law of 1917).

This is what many do not understand or do not wish to see: if the Pope alone were always infallible, this canon would be superfluous, unnecessary, and useless. Many, unfortunately, confuse the Universal Ordinary Magisterium – of the whole teaching Church – with the Ex Cathedra Magisterium – the Pope's Extraordinary Universal Magisterium, his alone.

An infallibility which is not for saying whatever he wishes or whatever comes into his head, but for confirming his brethren in the faith of Holy Mother Church, Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman, outside of which there is no salvation, teaching the most holy Tradition without new doctrines – progressive and modernist: *"For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter so that, by His revelation, they might make known a new doctrine, but so that, with His assistance, they might holily guard and faithfully expound the revelation transmitted by the Apostles, that is, the deposit of the faith."* (Dz. 1836).

Because of all this, the divisions have been tremendous within the traditionalist field, that is, among all those who, in one way or another, have not wished to accept modernism, but who have been inhibited on the one hand, as in the middle line, or exacerbated on the other, as in an ultra and rigidly visceral sedevacantism, which has not weighed the question of the Vacant See within a more equitable and real theological context, wishing thereby to impose it right and left, to the point that whoever does not accept it is branded ipso facto as a heretic, even wishing to make this imputation against Monsignor Lefebvre himself and against the director of the French Seminary, the famous Father Le Floch, who already in 1926 prophetically said: *"The coming heresy will be the most dangerous of all; and it consists in the exaggeration of the respect due to the Pope and in the illegitimate extension of his infallibility."* This is exactly what is happening. Thus one may see how far, perhaps with the best of intentions, but falling into a mental rigorism lacking philosophical and theological depth, one may go so far as to saw off the branch on which one is sitting, or to cut the rope that could draw us out of the abyss.

For all the foregoing, the subject has become a taboo and brings with it a term of disqualification for anyone who wishes to address it, being branded as mad and extremist; this, in the end, has been fostered by Apostate Rome itself and has benefited that new position within the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, through the neuronal synapse Ratzinger-Schmidberger, in order to draw from it the benefit obtained for its own advantage, and which is now on the verge of devouring that glorious association founded by Monsignor Lefebvre and today vilely betrayed by Monsignor Fellay and his circle, turning it into the Neo-Society of ill-deserved memory.

Those who hold power in the Modernist Church, and not a few even within Tradition, have always maliciously sought to take advantage of the ignorance that the common faithful – and even many priests – usually have in these matters, in order to intimidate them with the stigma of schism or heresy. It must be made clear once and for all that the theological position concerning the Vacant See in no way constitutes either schism or heresy, since it does not concern dogmas of faith, but theological questions that have been raised and

considered by the great Doctors and theologians; and, as is set forth in the writing in question, it has a clear argumentation and corresponds to a fully grounded conclusion. At no point is the authority of the Papacy denied; on the contrary, we confirm our attachment and adherence to the Eternal Rome of all time, to the Chair of Peter, and to the Magisterium of all the Popes prior to the Second Vatican Council. Yet we cannot fail to verify when the attitudes, conduct, and teachings of those who usurp the See of Peter coincide with the cases of heresy, apostasy, and schism set forth by the Doctors of the Church.

I have nothing more to say — so as not to have to make modifications to the text — except that one would have to take into account what Monsignor Lefebvre said concerning the visibility of the Church, which at that time I did not have present in my memory. He says very clearly: *“It is clear that we are the ones who preserve the unity of the faith, which disappeared from the official Church.”* (Fideliter, no. 66, November–December 1988). And furthermore, specifying in a masterly manner: *“It is not we, but the modernists, who leave the Church; as for saying ‘to leave the visible Church,’ that is a mistake, assimilating the official Church to the visible Church. (...) To leave, therefore, the official Church? In a certain measure, yes, obviously.”* (ibid.). And so that no doubt may remain on the matter — although internally there was always an attempt to eclipse, cover over, and hide this by the black hand of the superiors general, both he who was then Father Schmidberger and today’s Superior General, Monsignor Fellay, together with the whole circle — Monsignor Lefebvre says openly: *“It is incredible that one could speak of the visible Church in relation to the conciliar Church and in opposition to the Catholic Church, which we are trying to represent and follow. (...) But we truly represent the Catholic Church as she was before, since we continue what she has always done. We are the ones who have the marks of the visible Church: unity, catholicity, apostolicity, holiness. This is what constitutes the visible Church.”* (Fideliter, no. 70, July–August 1989).

For this reason Monsignor Lefebvre allowed himself, and was able, to say after an interview with the then Cardinal Ratzinger, on July 14, 1987: *“Sadly I must say that Rome has lost the faith; Rome is in apostasy. These are not empty words; it is the truth: Rome is in apostasy.”* (Conference during the priestly retreat at Ecône, September 4, 1987). Exactly what Our Lady of La Salette had already prophesied: not only that the Church would be eclipsed, but also that Rome would lose the faith and become the seat of the Antichrist. For this reason, in the same conference, he also dared to say: *“I think that we can speak of dechristianization, and that those persons who occupy Rome today are antichrists. I did not say anti-Christ; I said Antichrists, as Saint John describes in his First Epistle: ‘Already the Antichrist is ravaging in our time.’ The Antichrist, the antichrists; they are such, it is absolutely certain.”* Although later those who today consider themselves the worthy disciples and successors of Monsignor Lefebvre tried to refine and conceal this, when in reality they are quite the opposite.

It would also be fitting to clarify, concerning what is said of the Obstacle, with what Saint Pius X said — unknown to me at that time, but which completes and specifies its mysterious meaning, shedding great light — when, taking up the passage of the mandate of the Apostle Saint Paul, 1 Timothy 6:13–14: *“I command thee to keep this commandment — the doctrine which he had taught — spotless, intact, until the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ.’ When this doctrine can no longer be kept incorrupt, and the empire of truth is no longer possible in this world, then the Son*

of God will appear a second time. But until that last day, we must keep the sacred deposit intact and repeat the glorious declaration of Saint Hilary: 'It is better to die in this age than to corrupt the chastity of truth.'" (Pie X, Jérôme Dal-Gal, 1953, pp. 107–108). From this it is seen that the Obstacle is the Empire of Truth maintained by the Church, which encompasses all the other aspects that may be partially glimpsed and which are now understood and synthesized in the Truth that reigns through the work of the Church and her Divine Magisterium. This is precisely what, beginning with the Second Vatican Council, has been destroyed and has ceased to exist.

On the other hand, it should be specified that the theological argumentation of this study, which was made during the pontificate of John Paul II, can be extended retrospectively to the pontificate of Paul VI, who continued, formalized, and decreed the Second Vatican Council, making it the official doctrine of the Church and culminating it with his closing address on December 7, 1965, by proclaiming the "*New Religion of Man,*" or what the Colombian writer Nicolás Gómez Dávila had already stereotyped as present-day democracy, born of the so-called French Revolution, defining it as an anthropotheistic religion; and it can likewise be extended prospectively to the pontificates of Benedict XVI and of today's triumphant and radiant Francis. And likewise to all those who shall come in the name of Vatican II conciliabulum and its heretical reform, which officially establishes the Counter-Church of the Antichrist, or the New conciliar or post-conciliar Church.

I also publish two letters: one from Father Schmidberger, as Superior General, in response to my writing, in which he admits having been, at first, a sedevacantist; and the other, the endorsement of the well-known Father Coache, doctor in Canon Law and known to all those of that time, giving his support to the same.

Father Basilio Méramo

Bogotá, May 13, 2013.

Apéndice.

Letter from Father Schmidberger to Father Méramo, dated May 24, 1994.

Letter from Father Louis Coache to Father Méramo, dated May 16, 1994.

+ 24 mai 1994

Cher Monsieur l'abbé,

Votre lettre du 13 mai avec votre travail concernant la vacance du siège apostolique est entre mes mains.

Vous ne doutez pas de ma surprise en lisant votre document.

Laissez-moi d'abord vous dire que cela fait vingt ou même vingt cinq ans que je pensais comme vous. Si par la suite j'ai abandonné successivement cette position, c'est parce qu'elle est intenable.

Tout d'abord, les arguments des théologiens sont moins unanimes que vous le voulez. M. l'abbé Ceriani l'a bien montré lors de son exposé à la cession d'études à Flavigny en juillet 1993. La question en elle-même est extrêmement difficile et complexe et c'est à l'Eglise de se prononcer un jour dans cette matière, point aux simples fidèles ni même à un prêtre. Si l'Eglise un jour proclame solennellement que le Pape Jean-Paul II n'était pas Pape, il n'y a aucune difficulté pour moi d'accepter de suivre.

Dans votre étude, vous apportez beaucoup de citations de Mgr Lefebvre sans considérer ses prises de position dans le sens contraire, et sans prendre en considération le fait que Mgr Lefebvre s'est séparé de plusieurs pêtres qui tenaient cette position. Il a toujours prié lui-même pour le Pape publiquement, et il a demandé aux membres de la Fraternité de donner aux fidèles qui posent des questions la position officielle, à savoir que le Pape est libéral, mauvais, mais qu'il n'a pas, par ce fait, ipso facto, perdu la papauté. Monseigneur a même exigé, si je ne me trompe en 1980, de l'abbé Kelly et de ses amis, une déclaration écrite de fidélité à cette ligne.

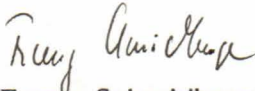
Cher Monsieur l'abbé, on peut se poser bien des questions au sujet du Pape, on peut travailler la question théologiquement, mais trois éléments sont essentiels pour tout membre de la Fraternité :

- prier publiquement pour le Pape et au Canon de la Messe et aux autres fonctions liturgiques que les rubriques prévoient.
- présenter aux fidèles, quand ils le demandent, la position de la Fraternité qui est celle de ne pas considérer le siège apostolique comme vacant.
- Laisser le dernier jugement en cette matière difficile à la sainte Eglise, c'est-à-dire à un futur Pape ou un concile approuvé par le Pape.

De toute façon, la question du siège apostolique vacant ou non ne peut pas être matière du chapitre général. De plus, je vous demande de ne pas diffuser votre brochure.

Veillez croire, cher Monsieur l'abbé, en mes sentiments fraternels et dévoués in Christo et Maria.

Monsieur l'abbé MERAMO
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Abbé Franz Schmidberger



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Cher Monsieur l'Abbé

Ma grave maladie m'a fait retarder de beaucoup l'étude du document important que vous m'avez envoyé concernant le Sédévacantisme, son appréciation et la nécessité d'en tenir compte théologiquement et pastoralement.

Après de nombreuses péripéties j'ai maintenant retrouvé suffisamment de force pour étudier ce document quoique je sois encore dans mon lit.

Aussi pour ne pas retarder davantage je vous fais la réponse suivante: j'ai lu avec beaucoup d'attention votre étude très fouillée et approfondie. Je ne connais l'espagnol que pour l'avoir étudié rapidement à l'occasion de mes voyages en Espagne et au Portugal. Je précise donc que j'approuve ce manuscrit et je l'estime extrêmement satisfaisant, avec la réserve suivante: "dans la mesure toutefois où je n'ai pas été trompé par mon insuffisance de la langue espagnole."

En réalité vous attendez davantage de moi, mais je suis encore trop fatigué pour réétudier vos pages. Vous voudrez bien m'en excuser. Vous pouvez donc dire à vos interlocuteurs que "l'Abbé COACHE fait siens tous les développements de mon travail^{*}". Il est clair que JEAN-PAUL II (comme PAUL VI) est tombé dans l'hérésie et a perdu en conséquence toute autorité tant qu'il n'aura pas rectifié ou regretté ses positions hérétiques.

Pour la précision de cette perte d'autorité, il faut recourir aux déclarations ou aux thèses des théologiens cités dans le document.

On ne peut donc pas affirmer purement et simplement que JEAN-PAUL II est encore Pape, ou bien qu'il a perdu sa légitimité, qu'il s'agisse de questions de fait ou de droit. (Autorité putative, titre coloré etc.....). De toute façon l'Eglise y supplée et il faut considérer uniquement comme opinion la position qui s'impose à notre entendement.

* avec la réserve ci-dessus



Les traditionalistes, sur ces points de doctrine, qui ne sont pas encore élucidés, ne doivent donc pas s'anathématiser, mais respecter l'opinion de l'autre. Et de toute façon cela ne change rien ^{puisque l'opinion} à suivre l'Eglise dans son Magistère tel qu'il s'est transmis par la Tradition, soit que l'on estime JEAN-PAUL II comme hérétique et donc ayant perdu d'une manière ou d'une autre son autorité, soit si on préfère le considérer toujours comme Pape, qu'on lui "désobéisse" lorsqu'il parle ou agit contre la doctrine. (cela aussi les Saints et les théologiens l'ont affirmé au cours de l'Histoire.

Croyez bien cher Monsieur l'Abbé en mes respectueuses et ferventes amitiés. En union de prières.

Carlo

P.S. L'Abbé SCHMIDBERGER viendra me voir jeudi. je lui parlerai encore de cette question, mais je ne sais pas s'il est mieux ou non que je parle de vous. Je ne le ferai que s'il me tend la perche.