

TRUE OR FALSE POPE?

Refuting Sedevacantism and other Modern Errors

Foreword by His Excellency Bernard Fellay

A CFN Interview with John Salza and Robert Siscoe

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1) What prompted you to write the book?

Siscoe/Salza: A thorough refutation of Sedevacantism has been sorely needed. Due to the crisis in the Church and the papal scandals that have become so commonplace, Sedevacantism is a topic on the mind of many people, but to date there has been no complete refutation of its errors. While the number of Sedevacantists is relatively small (.001% of the total number of Catholics), there are many Catholics who wonder if it could provide an explanation for the situation in the Church. We both wondered the same thing, about 10 years ago, although neither of us ever embraced the position, either secretly or publicly. We each spent the past 10 years studying Sedevacantism independently, and both found it entirely lacking in sound, theological scholarship. Some of the arguments presented in defense of Sedevacantism seem credible on the surface, but as you begin to dig just below the surface, many errors and contradictions are discovered. It is these errors and contradictions that ultimately result in all of the division and infighting within the movement. The purpose of the book is to demonstrate that the Sedevacantist thesis is untenable (and, in fact, leads straight to heresy) and also to refute each and every argument presented in defense of the position.

2) Do you see an uptick in the temptation to Sedevacantism under Pope Francis? How do you think the faithful should react?

Salza/Siscoe: No doubt the temptation to Sedevacantism has increased since the election of Pope Francis, and this is not at all surprising. And it is not only Traditional Catholics who are being tempted in this way. The more conservative or “Novus Ordo” type Catholics are now

having to deal with issues that the Traditional Catholics have been struggling with for decades, namely, what happens if a Pope appears to have lost the faith, and is undermining the faith by his words and actions? The doctrinal aberrations of the post-Vatican II Popes prior to Francis were swept under the rug and ignored by the conservatives. This is because their focus was directed primarily to the moral issues (abortion, contraception, etc.), rather than doctrinal matters (specifically doctrines related to the First Commandment). In other words, the conservatives were concerned almost exclusively with the last seven Commandments. Well, now that Pope Francis is undermining not only the faith, but also morality (the last seven Commandments), the conservatives are searching for answers. One "answer" they are no doubt considering is whether Francis is a true Pope. And because most of the conservative types have a false understanding of Papal Infallibility (as do their Sedevacantist counterparts), it is to be expected that many of them will be tempted to embrace the Sedevacantist thesis (although they will likely do so in secret rather than in public). How should the faithful react if they are tempted to Sedevacantism? They should react by reading our book, which will provide the answer to every question they are wondering about, and many others that they have not yet considered. For those confused over the situation with the Pope and the Church today, this book is a must read. As Bishop Fellay himself said, there is no other book like it - at least not in the English-speaking world.

3) What is the basic premise of Sedevacantism?

Siscoe/Salza: There are actually two related errors: the first is the simple error that the Popes after Pius XII (d. 1958) have not been true Popes. The second error, which quickly follows from the first (and sometimes precedes it), is that the entire Church over which the recent Popes have reigned is a false Church - a "New Church." Why do they claim the recent Popes have not been true Popes? There are five basic arguments presented in defense of the thesis. One argument is that the last six Popes were heretics before their election and therefore were not valid *matter* for the papacy. Another is that they were validly elected but later fell into heresy and lost their office. A third argument, which falls in between the first two, maintains that the recent Popes were validly and legally *elected* and remain *legal occupants* of the papal office, but, due to their alleged heresies, they did not receive papal jurisdiction (i.e., God did not unite the man - the "matter" - to the pontificate - the "form"). This latter argument claims that the recent

Popes are only “material Popes” rather than “formal Popes.” These first three arguments (as well as the fourth, discussed below) are based on the *realm of being*: all three maintain that the recent Popes have been heretics (in the realm of being), and therefore could not be true Popes. As an aside, these first three arguments are founded upon the opinion that a heretical Pope cannot maintain jurisdiction over the Church – an opinion that the Church herself has never adopted, and which, in fact, is contradicted by the common theological opinion that a heretical Pope will remain Pope as long as he is tolerated by the Church. The fourth argument, which is also based on the *realm of being*, alleges that the last two Popes were not validly consecrated as bishops, and therefore cannot be the Bishop of Rome. Needless to say, all four of these arguments are based on *private judgment* which is directly opposed to the *public judgment* of the Church.

The fifth argument approaches the issue from a different angle. It claims that the recent Popes cannot be true Popes because they have violated infallibility, which is something that is *impossible* for a true Pope to do. When Sedevacantists speak of an “impossible crisis,” this is what they are referring to. This last argument is founded on the *realm of action*: it essentially maintains that because the recent Popes have allegedly *done* what a real Pope could not do, it “proves” that they have not been true Popes. This latter argument is rooted in a doctrinal error concerning the nature and scope of infallibility, which is a topic that we cover in detail in four separate chapters. The Sedevacantists bounce back and forth between each of these five arguments, which makes it difficult for those not conversant with their argumentation to pin them down.

4) How does the book proceed?

Salza/Siscoe: The book proceeds very systematically and logically, with each chapter building on the previous material. It begins with a thorough treatment of the nature of the Church, of its marks and attributes, followed by an explanation of the internal and external bonds that unite man to the Church. These initial chapters alone demonstrate that Sedevacantism is untenable, since the thesis effectively denies essential qualities (marks and attributes) of the true Church. Chapter 4 explores issues related to salvation, such as Baptism of Desire and No Salvation Outside the Church. A seminary professor (priest and rector) who read this chapter informed us that it is the most thorough treatment of these issues that he has ever seen in one place. This chapter is followed by an explanation of suspicion of heresy, and

the different degrees of error and theological censures. This is important because not all errors are qualified, strictly, as heresy, and not everyone who professes a heretical doctrine is considered a heretic by the Church. We also include many enlightening historical examples showing how Doctors and saints of the Church reacted when fellow Catholics publicly professed heresy - even when they continued to do so after they were warned by Popes, and after their errors and heresies were formally condemned by the Church. Chapter 8 is a thorough treatment of papal infallibility and its limitations. This chapter also includes many useful examples. By considering examples of previous papal errors, and the previous crises that have shaken the human element of the Church (some due to Popes professing errors against the Faith), it shows what God can permit His Church to endure without the gates of hell prevailing against her. These examples also help us navigate through the current crisis, without deviating either to the Left or to the Right. By serving as a precedent for future generations, we can see how God draws good out of the evils that afflict the Church throughout the course of her existence, adding experiential knowledge to the revealed knowledge she possesses. And if the Church and the world today are experiencing a prefigurement of the final apostasy, as many believe, today's crisis will serve as a precedent for those who live during that day.

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 address all of the questions related to the deposition of a heretical Pope. We have never seen the material addressed in these chapters set forth in any English work - at least not to the extent that we cover it (which is the fruit of a detailed analysis of translations from the original Latin texts from the theologians who have addressed the question of a heretical Pope over the last eight centuries). In studying some of the Church's greatest theologians on these questions, we discovered something that we have never seen addressed before. It is not uncommon for different religious orders to have differing opinions concerning doctrinal issues that have not been settled by the Church. For example, there was the famous debate between the Dominicans and Franciscans over the Immaculate Conception. There was also the debate between the followers of Luis de Molina (a Jesuit) and the Thomists (Dominicans) over certain details regarding grace and predestination. What we discovered in our research is that there is a similar debate between the Jesuits and the Dominicans over precisely how a heretical Pope loses his office, which is a question that the Church herself has never settled. These two opinions, and the differences between them, are addressed in precise,

step-by-step detail. The Sedevacantists will no doubt be surprised to learn that John of St. Thomas (Dominican) refuted each and every objection that St. Robert Bellarmine (Jesuit) made against the opinion of Cajetan (Dominican) regarding how a heretical Pope loses his office. We provide Bellarmine's objections and John of St. Thomas' refutations in Chapter 11. We also include John of St. Thomas' refutation of Suarez (Jesuit) against the opinion of Cajetan regarding the same issue. These three chapters (9, 10 and 11) are quite technical and, as noted above, present information and theological arguments that, to our knowledge, have never been addressed in the English-speaking world.

Chapter 12 shows how the faithful can have infallible certitude that a determined Pope is, in fact, the true Pope; it also addresses the Papal Bull of Paul IV, *Cum ex Apostolatus*, and canon 188.4 (1917 Code) which deals with tacit resignation from office due to public defection from the faith. This chapter also discusses the controversy surrounding the resignation of Pope Benedict and the election of Pope Francis. We explain why some think Benedict is still the true Pope and provide our thoughts on whether we believe this is possible.

Beginning in Chapter 13, we change directions and begin our discussion on the issues related to the *realm of acting* - that is, the alleged violations of infallibility. These chapters include a thorough treatment of conciliar infallibility, the infallibility of the ordinary and universal Magisterium, universal disciplines, the new Mass and canonizations. We also cover in great detail the new rites of episcopal consecration and priestly ordination, as well as the "Recognize and Resist" position. Our final chapter, which is a real eye-opener, explores the bitter fruits of Sedevacantism. As the reader will see, we allow the Sedevacantists and the Church's theologians to speak for themselves. Throughout the book you will find copious quotes from today's top Sedevacantists, which makes the book both practical and very engaging at the same time.

5) The book seems to be an important restatement on true Catholic ecclesiology. Can you comment on this?

Siscoe/Salza: Our chapters on ecclesiology (i.e., the study of the nature of the Church) could be a book in themselves. We dedicate hundreds of pages to this important topic, and readers will no doubt be very edified by the material. It was necessary to cover this material thoroughly because a correct understanding of true Catholic ecclesiology is essential to grasping some of the fundamental errors of Sedevacantism. Thanks in large part to the false ecumenism that has spread throughout

the Church during the post-Vatican II era, there is today much confusion over ecclesiology. We treat this subject thoroughly, relying on the Popes, Doctors, saints and some of the most respected pre-Vatican II theologians. We also cite the *original* Vatican II schemas, which present the clear teaching of the Church regarding its nature and the bonds of unity. These chapters should provide much clarity and dispel many errors that have been caused by the current crisis - especially the common error of many Sedevacantists, who believe that the sin of heresy alone (and loss of interior faith) severs one from membership in the Church and will cause a prelate to lose his office.

6) Your book covers a tremendous amount of ground: but is there one central point on which you believe the Sedevacantist argument stands or falls?

Salza/Siscoe: The simplest way to refute Sedevacantism is by considering the properties of the Church, especially the attribute of visibility. When we say the Church is visible, we don't mean that it merely has visible people, or visible rites or ceremonies. False religions also have this *material* visibility. When we say the Church is visible, we mean it is both materially and formally visible. Formal visibility means that the Church is a visible society (or visible social unit) *that can be recognized as the true Church founded by Christ*. It is recognized as being the true Church by its four marks (One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic). While the Sedevacantists will pay lip service to the marks of the Church, they are unable to point to any Church that possesses them. They confidently proclaim that the Catholic Church of our day does not possess the marks, yet it is a fact (as we prove) that none of the Sedevacantist sects possess them. This means that, according to their own theory, there is no Church today that possesses the four marks - marks that will be with the Church to the end of time. In fact, the only Church that even claims to possess them is the Catholic Church (that is, the Church which everyone in the world *but* the Sedevacantists identify as the Catholic Church). The inescapable conclusion of their theory is that the gates of hell have prevailed against the Church, which means the Church has defected (which is also a denial of the attribute of indefectibility).

It is important to realize that the promises of Christ - e.g., "the gates of hell shall not prevail" - apply to the *visible social unit* (Pope, hierarchy, laity), and *not* to the individual members as such. Now, if the visible social unit had morphed into a New Church sometime following the death of Pius XII (as the Sedevacantists claim), it would

mean that the gates of hell had prevailed against the Church (the visible social unit). Hence, it is not possible to hold the Sedevacantist position without denying at least one of the Church's attributes, if not all three (visibility, indefectibility and infallibility). When you study the subject in depth, there is no escape from this conclusion. In fact, we quote from a recent book written by a former Sedevacantist seminarian (released only a few months ago) who came to realize that this is indeed what his Sedevacantist position necessarily required. What was his solution for this dilemma? He ended by publicly denying two attributes of the Church: he still concedes that the Catholic Church is *visible*, but now denies that the visible Church is *infallible* and *indefectible*. Having lost faith in the Church, he ended by joining an Eastern Orthodox sect. Most Sedevacantists do not take this approach. Instead, they will continue to accept (or claim to accept) the attributes of infallibility and indefectibility, but be forced to deny the attribute of visibility (or else they will understand this attribute in a way that differs from how the Church itself understands it). Their distorted notion of visibility, which they are forced to embrace due to their erroneous Sedevacantist thesis, causes them to profess the Protestant error of an *invisible* Church of *visible* members.

7) The book covers much more than just Sedevacantism. Is this what you initially planned?

Siscoe/Salza: The book was originally intended to be a refutation of Sedevacantism alone, but it developed into much more. It addresses and answers virtually all of the difficult questions that are on the minds of Traditional Catholics, and even the conservative Catholics, today. Something else worth noting is that as the book developed systematically, it logically led to the refutation of other errors that depart from Tradition to the *Right*. In the post-Vatican II era, Traditional Catholics have been fighting against the errors of Modernism and Liberalism that have infected the Church. But, as usually happens, the reaction to these errors of the Left has caused some to overreact in the opposite direction. With the human condition as it is, such a pendulum swing is entirely to be expected. We address a number of these overreactions to the *Right*, which can be just as dangerous as the errors to the *Left* - especially for Traditional Catholics, since the errors on the *Right* appear to be nothing but a refutation of a Liberal error on the *Left*. The result is that the Traditional Catholics' *sensus fidelium*, which is flashing with lights and sirens in response to the errors on the *Left*, is less likely to alert them to

the errors of excess on the Right. The solution to the errors in either direction is a firm adherence to Tradition, which, as St. Vincent of Lerins said, “can never be led astray by *any* lying novelty” – that is, by a lying novelty on the Right or on the Left.

8) What were some of the greatest surprises you found in researching and writing the book?

Siscoe: For me, the biggest surprise dealt with the new rite of episcopal consecration. Although I had never studied the subject in depth, like many others I personally had doubts concerning its validity. But as I studied the matter thoroughly (as well as the arguments against its validity), it became clear that there is absolutely no reason for such doubt.

As we make clear, the Church has the authority to change the words that make up the form for episcopal consecration, since the words that constitute the form for this Sacrament were instituted by the Church and not directly by Christ (unlike that of Baptism and the double-consecration at Mass). The controversy over the new form concerns whether the words used meet the requirement for a valid form. The requirement is that the words sufficiently signify the sacramental effect – that is, the words must signify what it is that the sacrament is intended to confer (i.e. the episcopacy). After studying the matter in depth, I believe the words that make up the new form signify the sacramental effect just as clearly as do the words of the traditional form. A well-known Sedevacantist priest (who features prominently in our book) claims that the new rite of episcopal consecration is absolutely null and utterly void. If you read his fallacious arguments against the new form, and then apply the same arguments to the traditional form of Pius XII, the traditional form will also seem doubtful. In fact, if an honest person applied the arguments presented by this Sedevacantist priest to the form of Pius XII, they would likely conclude that it is invalid. The defect, however, is not in the traditional form of Pius XII, or the new form of Paul VI (which is not new, but dates back to the earliest centuries of the Church), but rather in the specious arguments of this Sedevacantist priest, which we examine and refute in great detail. Those who read the chapter carefully will see that there are no reasonable grounds for doubting the validity of the new rite of episcopal consecration, which explains why Cardinal Ottaviani himself approved it with no reservations. And he did so one year before publicly criticizing the New Mass, which shows that he would not have remained silent if he had reasons to object.

Salza: For me, a couple of things come immediately to mind. First, I was amazed to see that the top Sedevacantist apologists, in both their oral and written defenses of their thesis, explicitly embrace the Protestant heresy of an invisible Church with visible members, thus denying the Church's attribute of visibility. We quote from them directly, and compare their definition of the Church with the Protestant definition (taken from the Westminster Confession and other Protestant authorities). In short, because they cannot point to a Church which has the attribute of visibility, they have been forced to adopt the Protestant heresy that the true Church merely exists "in the hearts and minds of true believers." That definition, of course, would gladden the heart of any Protestant.

Second, I was surprised to see how *all* Sedevacantists have misunderstood (and abused) the quote from St. Robert Bellarmine, who said "the manifest heretic is *ipso facto* deposed," as if Bellarmine actually meant that a cleric or Pope automatically loses his office when a person privately judges him to be a heretic. Hardly! First, Bellarmine said his opinion of "*ipso facto*" deposition was based upon St. Paul's instruction in Titus 3:10 that the heretic is to be avoided after two warnings - and we prove, from St. Thomas and others, that these are *ecclesiastical* warnings which establish that the Pope is guilty of the crime of heresy. Second, Bellarmine's statement that a manifest heretic is *ipso facto* deposed was his opinion of what happens to the heretical Pope *after the Church determines the crime* (this fact has been universally missed or ignored by all Sedevacantists). In other words, Bellarmine was giving his opinion on the *consequences that follow* the Church's determination of manifest heresy (that the heretic Pope would fall from office with no *further* declaration by the Church). This we have called the "Jesuit" opinion, because it was held by both Bellarmine and Suarez (and the fact that Sedevacantists claim Bellarmine and Suarez disagreed with each other shows that they have not understood Bellarmine's opinion).

However, Cajetan and John of St. Thomas rejected the opinion of *ipso facto* loss of office, and instead held that the Church would also play a ministerial role in the deposition itself, by declaring the heretical Pope *vitandus* (to be avoided). We have labeled this the "Dominican" opinion. Essentially, the Jesuit opinion maintains that the heretical Pope loses his office by separating from the Church, while the Dominican opinion claims that he loses his office when the Church separates from him (by virtue of the *vitandus* declaration). But in *either*

case (whether one holds the Jesuit or the Dominican opinion, which regards a mere speculative question), the theologians are *unanimous* that the Church (and not individuals by private judgment), must *first* determine that the Pope is guilty of the crime of heresy, and thus that he has judged himself (or, as Christ said, "is already judged"). In fact, we discovered a quote from St. Bellarmine himself who said heretical bishops (who are judged as such by private judgment) must be deposed by the Church (not declared deposed by private judgment) before Catholics could formally separate from them. Here Bellarmine was simply following the definitive teaching of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, which forbids Catholics to formally separate from their Patriarch before the Church has rendered a judgment.

9) Would you like to comment on how the Passion of the Church relates to the Passion of Christ?

Salza/Siscoe: This provides the explanation for the crisis in the Church: it is not that we have no Pope, or that the Church has morphed into a New Church. Rather, the explanation is that God is permitting His Church - the Mystical Body of Christ - to undergo a Passion similar to what Christ Himself endured. Just before Our Lord's Passion, He warned his Apostles: "All you shall be scandalized in me this night. For it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be dispersed" (Mt. 26:31). Just as the Apostles lost their faith in Christ during His Passion, so too the Sedevacantists have lost their faith in the Church during the present crisis. In the book, we even demonstrate how there is a mystical death taking place in the Mystical Body of Christ. In such an unimaginable crisis, it is entirely to be expected that there would be some individuals today, who claim to believe what the Church teaches, yet lose their faith in the Church itself. Just as the Apostles could not believe that the Messiah could suffer what He did, so too the Sedevacantists cannot believe it is possible for the Church to suffer what it is enduring. A consequence of their loss of faith *in the Church* is that the Sedevacantists end up becoming the most bitter persecutors of Christ's Church. They focus all attention on the wounds of the Church, not so they can be dealt with, dressed and healed, but for the purpose of mocking and ridiculing the Church. Each new wound brings them joy and satisfaction and encourages them in their

efforts. As the faithful suffer with the Church, the Sedevacantists laugh and rejoice; but just as the sorrow of the faithful will be turned into joy, so the laughing and rejoicing of the Sedevacantists will be turned into weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Sedevacantists are victims of the current crisis, no less than the Modernists. And their error – which results in their attacking the suffering Church – explains something that the Sedevacantists themselves are at a complete loss to understand. As we show in the book, even the Sedevacantist apologists admit that the extent of spiritual maladies and disorders amongst Sedevacantists is beyond explanation. This is exactly what one would expect to find in those who viciously attack, mock and ridicule the Church as it endures its own bitter Passion.

It is our hope that the Sedevacantists will read the book carefully and prayerfully. If they do so with an open mind, they will see that Sedevacantism is not the answer for the current crisis. It is instead an overreaction to the crisis, and a most serious error in itself – an error that, according to the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, places the Sedevacantists objectively outside the Church.

To end on a positive note, we should consider that just as Christ rose again, so too will His Mystical Body. And just as the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ resulted in a restoration of the spiritual order, so too the Passion, death and *resurrection* of His Mystical Body (which will follow the collegial consecration of Russia) will result in a restoration of the temporal order and an Age of Peace. For now, let us persevere in our fidelity to Christ and His Church by holding fast to tradition (2 Thess 2:14), which can never be led astray by *any* lying novelty.

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