

Sedevacantists – Catholics who deny that we have a pope

Vatican 1 Dogma: If anyone then says that it is not from the institution of Christ the Lord Himself, or by divine right that the blessed Peter has perpetual successors in the primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of the blessed Peter in the same primacy, let him be anathema. This study proves how untrue this dogma and invalid this anathema or excommunication is.

Sedevacantism is the view held by several Catholic traditionalist sects that the popes after Pope Pius XII, the Vatican II popes, that is John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II and Benedict XVI are anti-popes and not real successors of Peter. The main proof of this is that they were heretics and for the first time we seem to have popes altering Catholic dogma and so they were not popes for popes are infallible. The idea that they are heretics because the pope isn't infallible hasn't occurred to them. Most sedevacantists say that there has been no pope only impostors since 1958 when Pius XII died.

They argue as well that since these men were heretics before their accession to the papacy that they are not real popes so the popes after Pius XII were impostors because they were heretics making them non-Catholics before they were elected and non-Catholics cannot become pope. This is a most unchristian view for they should take it for granted that the popes may have confessed their heresies and sins before election. The Church has always taught that ex-heretics can become good popes and has theologians who argue that heretics like Pope Vigilius and Pope Honorius who were heretics after their election were still valid popes.

They quote the Papal Bull of Pope Paul IV *Cum ex apostolatus officio* which says: if anyone was a heretic before the Papal election, he could not be a valid pope, even if he is elected unanimously by the Cardinals. Canon 188.4 of the Roman Catholic 1917 Code of Canon Law lays it down that if a cleric (pope, bishop, priest, deacon etc.) becomes a heretic, he loses his office without any declaration by operation of law. That is he is automatically fired and he fires himself and doesn't need to be actually thrown out by the Church. St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Antonius, St. Francis deSales, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and many other theologians all teach that a heretic cannot be a pope: "If however, God were to permit a pope to become a notoriously and contumacious heretic he would by such fact cease to be pope, and the apostolic chair would be vacant." -- St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Church Doctor: Verita bella Fede*. Pt. iii, Ch.viii, 9-10. But the 1917 Canon Law is now obsolete and many theologians believe a heretic can become a valid pope.

We know that it can't be proved that the popes the Sedevacantists say were heretics before election didn't repent or knew they were heretics which absolves them of any condemnation under Pope Paul IV's law. What if Paul IV was a heretic for saying that the pope unanimously elected by the cardinals would be a false pope? Paul IV was probably speaking hypothetically for he held that the gates of hell could never prevail over the Church. He was not saying then that a heretic might masquerade as pope which would be the gates prevailing but what would be the case IF it happened.

Some sedevacantists claim that the papal elections after Pius XII who died in 1958 were rigged. Others claim that the cardinals were heretics and could not cast a valid vote to make a pope.

Others claim that God rejected the Vatican for its heresy so once the true pope died the Church lost the power to make a new pope.

Others claim that the papacy was taken over by an impostor changed by plastic surgery to look like the real pope during the reign of Paul VI who was kept prisoner in the Vatican which led to the loss of authority in the Church to create a new pope when he died for this offence brings excommunication with it.

Others, even devoted Catholics, think that since John Paul II or one of the others was a heretic he lost the power to be a real pope.

Reasons for Hope (page 153) attacks the view that a pope who is a heretic ceases to be a member of the Church and pope on the grounds that a pope cannot become a heretic. The curious suggestion that a pope cannot fall into heresy because the Church would have to formally condemn him making him condemn himself is offered as proof! The mind boggles at this. The pope has no authority to teach what he likes. All agree with that so if he does advocate false teaching the Church can formally condemn him. His doctrine has to fit what the Church always taught before when what was taught comes from scripture or divinely inspired tradition. Heresy is notoriously difficult to avoid especially with such a complicated faith as Catholicism. Even a wrong interpretation by the pope of a Bible text counts as heresy.

So the pope can be excommunicated by the Church and deposed if he becomes a heretic and spouts heresy all the time for

he deposes himself becomes one for he becomes not a Catholic anymore. Perhaps the pope who falls into such brazen heresy ceases to be a pope and that is what we mean by saying a pope cannot become a heretic. The pope will be condemning himself in a fashion if he becomes a such heretic for his job is to look after the faith and he is not doing it but accepting false beliefs.

However, the Church seems to believe that if the pope hates the Catholic Church and is a heretic though he is not really a Catholic he is still pope for the pope is the marker of the true Church more than anything else.

The chief reason for the existence of the Church is to teach (page 231, Catholicism and Fundamentalism) for it cannot sanctify without the teaching so to dispute the teaching is to leave the Church. That's logic. The pope who is a heretic does not have to condemn himself as a heretic. It seems he can excommunicate himself with a decree. Why not? Some say that a non-Catholic pretending to be a Catholic can be a pope. In so far as he runs the Church and teaches it he is pope though he will not have as much authority as one who is a Catholic and will have to be watched carefully and they say too that only those who are excommunicated by name by the Church and become popes would be becoming fake popes for though a heretic or a person automatically excommunicated is not a Catholic he is a real pope though an illicit one if he becomes pope. All this is impossible to believe. Automatic excommunication amounts to you excommunicating yourself and that is a better excommunication than one coming from the Vatican for that is the Vatican forming an opinion of you and rejecting you and it might be wrong for nothing is simple. At least you know what is in your heart. If anything automatic excommunication is a greater hindrance to valid accession to the papal throne than anything else. A Church declared excommunication cannot possibly be valid if you sincerely think your heresy is the true Catholic doctrine.

It could be argued, "The fundamental thing in religion is supposed to be embracing the truth. Truth comes first. The Catholic Church says this. For you then the true Catholic doctrine of God, is that there is no God, if you are convinced God does not exist. Statements to the contrary in the Church are just the Church falling short of what the Church should teach and the truth to which it strives." With that logic, you could be a Muslim atheist or a Mormon agnostic. And why pick the Catholic Church? Islam and Mormonism claim to be the truth as well.

The Society of St Pius X, Catholics who rejected Vatican II, rejects Sedevacantism saying that there is no reason to think that the popes since Vatican II are formal heretics but are just material heretics. Formal heretics are those who know what the Church teaches and still reject it which pulls automatic excommunication on them. Material heretics think they are orthodox but are wrong. If the throne of Peter has had no legitimate pope on it since Vatican II there would be no valid cardinals left to elect a true pope for the fake popes could only appoint fake cardinals. Canon law says that the pope has to come from real cardinals and is strict about how the pope is elected. Sedevacantists say that Jesus himself will take care of that. The result of that has been a number of individuals claiming to be the true pope appointed by divine revelation from Heaven or by conclaves made up of sect members.

The idea that the promise of Christ that he would build his Church on the rock of the papacy and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it means that the pope cannot lose his legitimacy by falling into heresy or that the Church cannot be left for decades without a pope though Sedevacantists are saying it has happened is dubious. If Christ said that then what if a pope who is too young is elected (like Benedict IX who was only eleven at his election) and is jailed for the next seventy years and cannot rule or guide the Church? The Church would have to go on without him. If that can happen and if the pope can't be pope or the rock then why can't there be a long absence? The time makes no difference anyway, the Church has to run itself when there is no pope so why not do it twenty years as well as say twenty days? If a pope can wreck the Church by not condemning serious apostasy and heresy and not doing his job then why can't he become a heretic which would do less harm? If God can let a boy devoted to the sins of the flesh like Benedict IX or a jailed man become pope who is not able to function as pope then there is no truth in the claims the Church makes for the papacy. Hell prevails when that happens. And it has happened in the past. The Church recognised Benedict IX as a real pope and bishop. This despite him being too young to validly become a priest or bishop. Despite his consecration ceremony as a bishop this pope can by no means be regarded as a true bishop. The Catholic claim that modern bishops and priests are truly ordained is only a guess. If a fake bishop came along the ordinations he performs are as bogus as himself.

Most Catholics who say that the pope cannot become a heretic, or that the chair of Peter cannot become vacant and have a fake pope on it who everybody thinks is real still argue that if a woman was unknowingly elected pope this would simply be an invalid election and the Church teaching on the papacy wouldn't be affected (page 168, Pope Fiction). They continually contradict themselves for what if a heretic who was totally closed to divine grace became pope without intending to be a real pope but just a pretend one to fool everybody? They say that can't happen and that sedevacantists are terrible for saying the Vatican II popes are false popes and then they teach this sedevacantism themselves and accept that it is right in principle. If the Church never realised that its new pope was a woman and she gave out dogmas and called ecumenical councils and taught the Church what then? The gates of hell then must have prevailed over the Church.

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, the founder of the Society of St Pius X, which continued with traditional Catholicism in opposition to the "reforms" of Vatican II wrote in 1978 that the last two conclaves to elect popes, for John XXIII and Paul

VI, could have questionable authority to choose the pope. Cardinals over eighty were removed and there were secret meetings to prepare these conclaves (see Archbishop Lefebvre's position on The New Mass and the Pope, a leaflet you can get from the Society of St Pius X). He argued that we must assume the elections were valid because God needs the Church to have a visible head and to be visible and wouldn't let it happen that any intruder would end up masquerading as pope for decades.

WHAT IF THERE IS NO POPE?

Conclavists are those Sedevacantists who believe in working towards appointing a new pope of their own in opposition to the pope in the Vatican. They consider him to be an apostate and a fake and not a real pope at all. Some say the pope can only be elected by a revelation from Heaven. Some say the pope can only be elected by the laity for there are no true cardinals left to perform an election of the pope. Others say they hope that the Vatican will convert and that God will make it choose a true pope and restore its power to.

It is surprising that the Protestant Reformers didn't attempt to put a Protestant pope in Rome to rival the Catholic one. Many Protestants thought that the Bible said that the successor of Peter was head of the Church. They rejected the pope because they believed he was a heretic because the pope exists for the faith and not the faith for the pope. They could have argued that say Leo X was a heretic for opposing the reformation and upon his death claimed the right to correct this by electing a Protestant ecclesiastic to take his place.

Jesus appearing to appoint the true pope is one way the papacy could be restored, only the Church teaches that until Jesus returns in the second coming there will be no new revelations equal to tradition and scripture and for a revelation to make a new pope it would have to be of that standard and be an addition to the Bible. Logic would say that if the cardinals are all lost to the Church that this is only a disciplinary rule anyway for many popes in the first millennium were elected by priests and the people so the group believing itself to be the embodiment of the true Catholic Church can create and elect a new pope without having cardinals. Another option is to say that the Church has been run at times without a pope and depended on the teaching of dead popes so it can do it now. The pope has seen his role as rock chiefly in terms of teaching so not having a pope is not the end of the world. This view contradicts the Catholic interpretation of Jesus telling Peter that he was the rock indicating that if he meant to make Peter a pope then Peter or a pope could not possibly be done without. Many of the supporters of election from Heaven say that it is true that such a revelation can't make a pope by itself but if the faithful accept what the revelation says about who should be pope that is what validates the election.

It seems that if the Church is in heresy and putting heretics on the chair of Peter to rule the Church that the next time there is a Vatican conclave to elect a pope what should be done is this. A faction of bishops would have to fight the Church on this through its courts and tribunals on the basis of canon law. If the Church wouldn't give in, the bishops could declare all involved to be heretics and schismatics and excommunicate them. This way then the right of power would pass to this group who could then elect a new pope and declare the Vatican pope an antipope. It needs to be bishops and who are also involved in trying to correct the Church through the legal channels for it would be a serious problem if a group has to go to some sedevacantist or schismatical bishop to look for holy orders for only bishops can ordain and make new bishops. That would be against God's law that you stay with the legitimate hierarchy. Even if the hierarchy are now heretics they still represent the visible Catholic Church. What we are trying to preserve is the visibility of the Church and it can only be done in the way we have outlined. The bishops could involve priests and laity but the bishops would have to be the leaders in the rival conclave. The pope used to be chosen by priests and laity. The group would have to be legally recognised by the Church as having serious points to make and a legitimate complainant. That would be the only way to stop just any group from getting together to elect a pope. If a bunch of laypeople can choose a pope as you see in the case of some of those fake popes going around then what mandate do they have to elect a pope? They need recognition from the Church and if the Church disobeys the law of God and defies them to the end only then can they proceed to elect a pope.

The conclave of bishops we were talking about need to get together and elect a pope before the Vatican does for the question of a visible Church means that if Rome gets there first then the pope it elects must be considered a true pope. This rival conclave would have more authority than the Vatican if it is orthodox. Divine law and reason decree that the papacy can be created this way in case of absolute necessity. The first pope to be elected this way would be the real pope and not the likes of Pius XIII and Michael I who based a lot of their claims on gossip about the Roman pontiffs being heretics and members of occult organisations and concluded that they were therefore antipopes.

So if the bishops set up a conclave then in opposition to the Vatican one, what will happen? The jurisdiction of the Church would be taken away from the Vatican and continued in the new pope elected in a rival conclave at the same time as the Vatican is holding its conclave and the visibility of the Church would be maintained. It is Catholic dogma that the visibility of the Church will never pass away even if an impostor Catholic Church and pope take over the Vatican so it must be plain that the visibility has switched to the rival conclave. The Church law currently says only cardinals can elect a pope but clearly if the cardinals and the pope were all nuclear bombed the archbishops and bishops would have to look for a new pope. The cardinals rule is only a disciplinary rule. It is possible that people who agree will find that there could be as many

as ten rival conclaves at the one time in the future producing several rival popes so it does seem that if the college of cardinals disappears and fakes take their place that the papacy cannot be restored.

Anti-sedevacantists say that the biggest criticism of sedevacantism is how it opens the door to chaos and schism and disorder. They are not one Church though they say the true Church is one so in their actions they deny that the Church is the united visible body of Christ on earth. If the authority of a Church that is drifting into apostasy can be transferred to a small conclave say in Berlin then how can you say the Church is visible for that would mean true Catholics won't be in communion with the true pope for they won't know about him? Is the idea that the power to elect a pope will transfer to a new conclave if the Vatican conclave is heretical and non-Catholic any help to visibility when it opens the door to chaos? God needs to keep things simple. If the Church and pope become heretical then they were never instituted and protected by God in the first place. It seems that the answer then if the Cardinals who are electing a new pope are mostly heretics and there is two or more cardinals who walk out and start their own conclave they would choose the true pope even if one just chooses the other as pope.

Conclusion

Sedevacantists are right that the Catholic Church is led by heretics but what's new? The pope claiming to be pope is heresy for such a claim was a Roman Catholic invention. Sedevacantists show us what nonsense it is to follow the Catholic Church. It is good to have them for they keep an eye on the mercenary chameleon that is Catholicism and find new ways to break it up.