

The Cassiciacum Thesis

A Brief Exposition

by Rev. Nicolás E. Despósito

Saint Thomas Aquinas:

When there are two things, both of which we speak of as being something or as doing something, then one of them—the one that is first—serves as the **form**, whereas the other serves as the **matter**.

Sententia libri De anima II, lect. IV.

Saint Robert Bellarmine:

When Cardinals create the Pontiff, they exercise their authority not over the Pontiff, because he does not yet exist; but over the **matter**, that is, over the person whom they dispose in a certain measure through election, that he might receive the **form** of the pontificate from God.

De Romano Pontifice, lib II, cap. XXX.

Saint Antoninus of Florence:

The power of the Pope remains in the Church and in the College with respect to that which is **material** in the papacy, since after the death of the Pope the College is able, through election, to determine a person to the papacy, that it be such or such a one.

Summa Sacrae Theologiae, pars III, tit. XXI, n.3.

Introduction

AROUND SIXTY YEARS AGO, the theological equivalent of an atomic bomb was dropped on the Catholic Church. After the death of Pope Pius XII, his apparent successor decided to call upon a General Council. The Second Vatican Council, as it is known, took place under John XXIII and Paul VI successively, between the years 1962 and 1965. These two popes - so called - maneuvered the Council in such a way as to favor the most radical ideas which were being defended by the so called “new theologians”. The New Theology was a rebranding of Modernism, a heresy condemned by the Church. To make a long story short: the new theologians had in mind one single goal: *to change the Church from within in order to adapt it to the modern world*. As a result of their victory, **Vatican II ended up promulgating documents containing false and even condemned doctrines**. To the world it was presented as a non-infallible Pastoral Council that was bringing the Church to date,

without changing anything substantial. But the truth was very different: a new religion had been born, and the great majority of Catholics fell for it.

But not all. By the grace of God, there were Catholics all around the world who remained faithful to the traditional pre-Vatican II Catholic religion. They soon began to be known as Traditional Catholics.

The context in which the Vatican II crisis happened makes the situation totally unprecedented. An alteration of doctrine took place not only inside the juridical structures of the Church, but even proceeded from the highest positions of power, thus appearing as officially sanctioned teaching. Traditional Catholics then found themselves in a very difficult situation. Two realities, one known by faith, the other an evident fact, had to be reconciled: first, that Catholic doctrine *cannot change*; second, that the same hierarchy left by Pope Pius XII *had changed* Catholic doctrine.

A very respected dominican Theologian, Michel-Louis Guérard des Lauriers, who before the Council had been an enemy of the New Theology and, after it, an avid opponent of the Vatican II revolution - being the author for example of the famous short critical study on the new Mass - came up with an explanation that takes into consideration both realities. His analysis is known as the Thesis of Cassiciacum, or the “material/formal” Thesis.

Matter and form

The Thesis, in agreement with great doctors and theologians such as St. Robert Bellarmine and St. Antoninus of Florence, applies the classic scholastic distinction of *matter* and *form* to the office of the papacy and explains how those elements are found in the present day papacy.

First of all, we must understand that matter and form are concepts which are predicated by way of *analogy*. A material principle is something potential, that is, something that needs to be perfected and completed in order to be such or such a thing. The formal principle is an act, a perfection, which is received in the matter or deduced from it. Matter can be considered in three ways. First, it can be taken as a subject *from which* something happens: for example, from marble a statue can be produced, marble here is the matter of the statue. Second, matter can be taken as a subject *in which* something inheres, for example, the virtue of prudence inheres in the intellect. The intellect in this example is the matter in which the virtue of prudence is found. Finally, matter can be taken as *an object*, for example the material object of the sense of vision are the things that are seen. Visible things here are the matter of vision. The Thesis of Cassiciacum uses matter *in the second sense*, that is, as that *in which* something inheres. A person elected to the papacy is the subject *in which* authority is received, or more simply: a pope-elect is the matter of authority. By extension,

the things pertaining to the election are said to be the *material element of the papacy*; authority or ecclesiastical jurisdiction is said to be the *formal element of the papacy*.

The Cassiciacum Thesis analyzes this twofold element as it exists in the post Vatican II papacy, and argues, on the one hand, that the formal element of the papacy is not found in the Vatican II *popes*, and, on the other hand, that the material element of the papacy is found in the Vatican II *popes* and *cardinals*.

First part of the Thesis **The formal aspect of the Papacy is lacking in the Vatican II popes**

For the sake of brevity, I will limit this part of the Thesis to two arguments: one from the demands of the Church's indefectibility, which proves *the fact* of the non-papacy of the Vatican II *popes*; the other from the notion of ecclesiastical authority, which explains *the manner* in which authority is lacking in the Vatican II *popes*.

Our Lord Jesus Christ promised the Church that the gates of Hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). This means that the Catholic Church is indefectible, that is, it cannot change in its essential constitution. The Catholic Church is *the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth* (I Tim. 3:15), built not upon sand, but upon a rock, Peter. The end of the Church is to pour forth salvation procured through Christ and at the same time the benefits emanating therefrom upon all men of all ages, and especially to protect the doctrine of Christ by a living and authentic teaching authority and to propagate it complete and uncorrupted. The Church cannot neglect truth nor impugn it, nor permit obscurity in the more important truths of faith and morals; nor again treat of errors once definitely condemned. The Church cannot change the sense of defined dogma, nor can it establish harmful discipline.

Now, the hierarchy responsible for Vatican II, not only permitted obscurity in the truths of faith and morals, but it literally corrupted Catholic doctrine, distorted dogma and established harmful discipline, replacing traditional Catholicism with a system of moral and religious relativism, a *new humanism*, to borrow the expression used by Paul VI (Address during last general meeting of Vatican II, Dec. 7, 1965).

Vatican II attacked two fundamental dogmas of the Catholic Church: that the Church is **One**, and that **there is no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church**.

1) Vatican II teaches that *the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church*¹; it also teaches that *the one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church*²; the

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

² *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1.

expression **subsists in** establishes a **real distinction** between the Church of Christ, the one true religion, and the Catholic Church. The Council deliberately used the term *subsists in* instead of *is* in order to introduce the notion of *elements*: in this system, the Catholic Church has the fullness of the elements of sanctification and of truth, but other religions are not deprived of value since they have some of those elements, for example, valid sacraments or faith in Christ. In virtue of these salvific elements, false religions are able to become means of salvation³. 2) Since the Church **is not one**, *ecumenical dialogue with other religions* must be fomented to restore unity⁴. 3) Since the Church **is not the only means of salvation**, the human person has the right to religious freedom⁵.

It is evident that Vatican II is a substantial alteration of the Catholic religion, a real defection; Catholics believe in *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church outside of which there is no salvation*. Catholics believe that man has the right to embrace and profess that religion which is *objectively* true.

Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is the public power of governing and leading the faithful towards the goal of eternal life⁶. If we analyse this definition we conclude with absolute certainty that the so called *conciliar popes* cannot have the formal aspect of the papacy. From the time of the promulgation of Vatican II we are able to verify that the occupants of the See of Peter lack the *objective intention* of promoting the good of the Church and of achieving the end to which authority is ordered. Indeed, the intention they manifest is of *teaching and imposing false doctrines and harmful disciplines on the universal Church*. Such an intention is an obstacle to the proper acceptance of the election to an office that requires as a necessary condition the willingness to promote -*objectively*- the common good of the Church. Vatican II doctrines hinder souls from reaching eternal life, therefore, the willingness of imposing Vatican II is *an infallible sign that the proper objective intention required in a Pope is lacking*. Notice that the Thesis purposely uses the term “objective intention”, since we are not concerned here about *subjective dispositions* that can be reconciled with error. Someone may be in good conscience and mean well, thinking that Vatican II doctrines are good for the Church: this is *subjective*, and in our discussion, irrelevant. An *objective intention* refers to the *very thing willed*, independently of anything else; thus no matter how good willing a person might be, if he teaches error he intends something objectively harmful.

In short, from the indefectibility of the Church and from the notion of ecclesiastical authority, we know that the Vatican II *popes* do not possess the formal aspect of the papacy.

³ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

⁶ Cf. F.S. Miaskiewicz, J.C.L., *Supplied jurisdiction according to Canon 209*.

Second part of the Thesis

The material aspect of the papacy remains in the Vatican II popes and cardinals

I will divide this part of the Thesis into three sections.

First section: the philosophy of authority

We said that ecclesiastical jurisdiction is **the public power of governing and leading the faithful towards the goal of eternal life**. Now, authority in general (ecclesiastical jurisdiction being a species of authority) has two objects, one subordinated to the other. The primary object of authority is the common good of the society: in the perfect society which is the Church, that common good is realized by the doctrinal, disciplinary and liturgical laws that lead to the attainment of eternal life. The secondary object of authority is the determining of the subject or person who will enjoy the power of government, which in the Church is the power to rule, teach and sanctify the Church. From a philosophical point of view, then, it is clear that there exists a real distinction between the *faculty to rule* and the *faculty to designate the ruler*. The Cassiciacum Thesis affirms that even though the power to rule is not found in the Vatican II popes, nevertheless the power to determine the ruler still remains in the *official Church*.⁷

Second section: the legal aspect

The Catholic Church is both human and divine. The human element is what constitutes the Church as a society and is found in the juridical principles established by Christ. The divine element is the Spirit of our Divine Redeemer who penetrates and fills every part of the Church's being. The analogy of matter and form can be used here as well. Indeed, Pope Pius XII uses the analogy of body and soul (these things relate to each other as matter and form) to explain the juridical and social aspect of the Church in its relation to the principle that vivifies it: "Just as our composite mortal body, although it is a marvelous work of the Creator, falls far short of the eminent dignity of our soul, so the social structure of the Christian community, though it proclaims the wisdom of its divine Architect, still remains something inferior when compared to the spiritual gifts which give it beauty and life, and to the divine source whence they flow."⁸

⁷ The term "official Church" should be understood here to mean the *material hierarchy* of the Catholic Church, which remains the same before and after Vatican II. It would be theologically erroneous - even heretical - to designate the present day hierarchy as the Catholic Church formally. Technically, Vatican II was the beginning of a *new religion*, but not of a *new Church*.

⁸ "Hence, this word in its correct signification gives us to understand that the Church, a perfect society of its kind, is not made up of merely moral and juridical elements and principles. It is far superior to all other human societies; it surpasses them as grace surpasses nature, as things immortal are above all those that perish. Such human societies, and in the first place civil Society, are by no means to be despised or belittled; but the Church in its entirety is not found within this natural order, any more than the whole man is encompassed within the organism of our mortal body. Although the juridical principles, on which the Church rests and is established, derive from the divine constitution given to it by Christ and contribute to the attaining of its supernatural end, nevertheless that which lifts the Society of Christians far above the whole natural order is the Spirit of our

The human - juridical - structure of the Church, even though is not the most important element, *cannot nevertheless disappear* since it derives from the divine constitution of the Church.

***Before continuing with the subject of legal succession, we must point out that even though the chair in which the fulness of authority resides is formally empty, nonetheless the **mission of the Church** - for which all ecclesiastical authority is given - **has not ceased**. The mission of the Church is a command given by Christ to the Apostles and their successors: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." [Matt. 28:19] Christ passed on to the Church the continuation of the same mission He received from His Father: "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you" (Jn. 20:21).

The mission of the Church is being carried out today in an extraordinary manner by those bishops and priests who integrally profess the Catholic faith, offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and administer the Sacraments to the faithful.***

Now, let us resume the aspect of legal succession: the human - juridical - element of the Church and the power of designation, that is, the material aspect of the papacy, must necessarily exist today and it is indeed present in the current hierarchy.

First: no canonical procedure has taken place nor any declaration has been issued against the said hierarchy. The post-conciliar Catholic hierarchy **even though it has absolutely no authority in act**, is nevertheless ordered to it. The legal order and the factual order are really distinct and each one carries with it diverse consequences. For example, a non-sentenced heretic is a heretic in the factual order. But according to the Code of Canon Law, the non-sentenced heretic *does* retain jurisdiction. It is only after the legal declaration of his heresy, that is, after establishing his legal pertinacity, that the ecclesiastical acts of the heretic become *invalid*. Analogically, the current hierarchy enjoys a legal status which can only be removed by a legal process.

Second: adherents of Vatican II retain *possession* not only of the See of Peter but also of all the dioceses in the world. Possession is a juridical fact which has juridical consequences. In order to understand how important possession is, notice that Vatican II popes, even though they lack ecclesiastical jurisdiction to rule the Church, they nevertheless enjoy true *civil power* to rule the territories of the Vatican State. Jorge Bergoglio is truly the secular head

Redeemer who penetrates and fills every part of the Church's being and is active within it until the end of time as the source of every grace and every gift and every miraculous power. Just as our composite mortal body, although it is a marvelous work of the Creator, falls far short of the eminent dignity of our soul, so the social structure of the Christian community, though it proclaims the wisdom of its divine Architect, still remains something inferior when compared to the spiritual gifts which give it beauty and life, and to the divine source whence they flow." (Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 63)

of the Vatican State and if you set your foot in St. Peter's Basilica you are under his secular authority.

Third: the post-conciliar hierarchy possesses a *colored* title, which although in itself lacks value or effect, nevertheless enjoys the appearances, the “colors” of a valid title. The colored title causes the common error by which the great majority of Catholics perceives this hierarchy to be legitimate. When a colored title is present, the common error is able to produce the same effects as a true and legitimate title (cf. D.T.C. *Titre de juridiction*).

Appendix to section II Supplied power

Authors such as the Jesuits Zapelena⁹ and Wilmers¹⁰ have spoken about supplied jurisdiction in antipopes in virtue of a colored title, when discussing the issue of the Great Western Schism. The Dominican theologian Billuart¹¹ does not hesitate to affirm that ***even a heretical pope, who by the fact of his heresy has lost ordinary power, is able to receive supplied jurisdiction from Christ for the common good of the Church.***

The Cassiciacum Thesis does not say that the post conciliar hierarchy enjoys supplied jurisdiction for each and every ecclesiastical act. The common good of the Church prevents those who intend to impose false doctrines from having real power. Nevertheless, nothing impedes the application of the principles of *common error*, *colored title* and *supplied jurisdiction* to those acts which are ***absolutely necessary for the continuation of the Catholic Church***, that is, for those acts constituent of the *material element* of the papacy. ***In order to have perpetual successors of Peter, it is necessary to have perpetual electors of Peter.***

Whichever be the aspect of jurisdiction that is required to create new cardinals, there is a precedent in Catholic theology that such power is able to be supplied by Christ to a non-pope in a case of extraordinary necessity. The common good of the Church demands the continuation of the material element of the papacy. Consequently, the present day cardinals constitute this element, and the subject designated by them must be considered a pope-elect, or *materially* the pope until proven otherwise.

Third section Indirect argument: *Reductio ad absurdum*

An indirect proof in favor of the Cassiciacum Thesis can be had by analysing the absurd claims of *conclavism*.

⁹ De Eccl. Christi, pars alt., p. 115

¹⁰ De Christi Eccl., L. III. c. III, a. II, n. 200 in fine.

¹¹ Summa Sti Thomae, tom. V, p. 221

Conclavism is the position of those sedevacantists who affirm that the next pope must be elected by sedevacantist bishops. They argue that since the cardinals are heretics, the power to elect the pope corresponds now to the Church. The problem lies in the fact that when pre-Vatican II theologians speak about the Church, they have something very specific in mind: by “the Church” they mean the bishops who in virtue of their **ordinary jurisdiction** have **the right** to represent the whole Church in a General Council.

But,

Sedevacantist bishops do not enjoy any title of jurisdiction. The *supplied sacramental jurisdiction in the internal forum* exercised *per modum actus* in Confession, must not be confused with the ordinary jurisdiction to govern the Church, which belongs to the external forum, is habitual and can only be granted by a Pope.¹²

Since sedevacantist bishops are not part of the material-legal hierarchy of the Church which is the basis for juridical status, and have no title (either *true*, *colored* or *presumed*) to jurisdiction to *any* territory, **they do not have the right to represent the whole Church in a General Council.**

The only power that sedevacantist bishops have is the power of orders, which allows them to validly ordain priests and administer confirmation.

The faculty of designation, the material element of the papacy, in no way is found in sedevacantist clergy. But we know that this power has to be *somewhere*. The Cassiciacum Thesis is the only explanation that satisfies the demands of Sacred Theology.

Conclusion

It is no wonder that the first man was created immediately by God, but the rest of men proceed from men. The first pope was chosen by Christ, the rest of popes are chosen by men. The analogy is very fitting, given the fact that even when man proceeds from man, it is God who creates the individual soul, which is the formal principle in man. Similarly, popes are elected by men, but it is God who grants them jurisdiction, the formal principle in the pope. Furthermore, there is a true material succession of the human lineage since Adam, which is the reason why Original Sin is necessarily transmitted (with one miraculous exception) through generation. So, if God were to create a rational animal that is not linked to Adam’s lineage, that person would not be related to us at all. If God were to give us a ‘pope’ that is not linked to St. Peter’s line of succession, that pope would not be the head of the Catholic Church, but of some other institution.

¹² “Yet in exercising this office they are not altogether independent, but are subordinate to the lawful authority of the Roman Pontiff, although **enjoying the ordinary power of jurisdiction which they receive directly from the same Supreme Pontiff.**” (*Mystici Corporis*, 42)

The papacy can be considered under two aspects: the material and the formal. The formal aspect, *authority*, is not found in the person presently occupying the See of Peter, by reason of his willingness to impose false doctrines and evil disciplines upon the Church. The material aspect, *designation*, is still found in the cardinals and in the pope-elect, by reason of material succession, legal status, possession of the office and colored title.

The solution to any problem depends to a great extent on the proper formulation of the problem. The first and most important thing Catholics must understand is that *Vatican II is a defection from the true religion revealed by God*. The integral profession of the Catholic faith demands the total rejection of Vatican II and the acknowledgment of the formal vacancy of the See of Peter.

A proper and complete understanding of the current crisis includes the recognition of the material aspect of the papacy *as it exists today*. We believe that the more people understand and accept the Cassiciacum Thesis, the sooner the crisis of authority in the Church will end. True: ultimately, God is the one Who will restore all things to order. But even then, it is through secondary causes, that is, through His creatures, that God's work is accomplished in this world.

U.I.O.G.D.