

# THE DOCTRINAL ARGUMENT FOR AN IMPERFECT GENERAL COUNCIL

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## 1. The Dire State of the Church Today

It is common knowledge that since the revolution of Vatican II, the enemies of God, through their words and deeds, have worked tirelessly to destroy the Catholic Faith. Through teachings contrary to the Faith of our Fathers, through revolutionary changes in the liturgy, and through false interreligious dialogue, they have accomplished the wildest dreams of all those who, for centuries, have conspired to destroy the Church of the Incarnate Word.

They attacked the Faith at the Second Vatican Council by substantially changing the holy doctrine of the Church. They attacked the sacraments and, in particular, the rites of priestly ordination and episcopal consecration. They transformed the Mass, turning it into a Protestant worship service. They perverted canon law, traditional devotions, and all the other treasures of the Holy Church.

To make these great evils worse still, it may be said without fear of being mistaken that these enemies of God have found help in their efforts from every successive pretender to the papacy since Vatican II. With the help of the official hierarchy, they have established a new Church about which it is legitimate to ask whether it is indeed the Church founded by Jesus Christ and perpetuated by the Apostles and their successors. Are we dealing with a new sect, totally foreign to the Church of God? The Church of Vatican II professes a naturalistic and humanistic religion based on indifferentism and preaching a false ecumenism and a false religious liberty. All sincere Catholics will agree. The words, teachings, official texts, and actions of many modern prelates contradict the infallible magisterium of the 260 popes who preceded the Second Vatican Council and of all the General Councils of the Catholic Church.

“The most crafty enemies have filled the Church, the spouse of the Immaculate Lamb, with bitterness, and have made her drunk with wormwood; upon all her precious things they have laid impious hands. Where the See of the most blessed Peter and the Chair of Truth stand, established as a light to the nations, there they have set up the throne of their abomination and impiety; that, the Shepherd having been struck, they may be able to scatter the flock.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Rituale Romano* (1900), “Exorcism against Satan and the Apostate Angels”

## 2. An Inevitable Scattering of the Flock

Faced with such a disaster, as we can easily understand, Christ's flock was scattered. *"I will strike the shepherd, and the flock will be dispersed."* (Matt. 26:31)

For many years now, some have proclaimed the Apostolic See to be vacant and have continued their episcopal or priestly ministry completely independently of what they consider to be a false Church. They found themselves in a desert where brothers who shared all their convictions and actions were difficult to come by. They were not afraid of ridicule and contradiction, and have tirelessly continued to assert the illegitimacy of the pretenders to the papacy. But are their voices the official word of the Church? Can they canonically bind the whole Church?

Others were more cautious and, while keeping their distance, turned a deaf ear to everything that came from the pretenders to the papacy. They preferred to reserve their judgement and lead independent lives while waiting for better days. Better days have not come. Without the cooperation of men, will they come at all?

Still others preferred to seek reconciliation with the Church that emerged from the Second Vatican Council. They worked tirelessly to preserve a place for Catholic liturgy and traditions in what they consider to be a Church in disarray. But shouldn't Catholic doctrine, liturgy, and traditions belong everywhere in the Church, not just somewhere within it? Can they be relegated to a side chapel of the Barque of Peter? Can Catholic Tradition be just one option among a pantheon of novelties?

All around us today, even among those who have remained steadfast in the Faith of the Church, we cannot help but notice many unfortunate divisions. Who will bring about this much-desired unity among us? We do not deny that the Church's unity, which is one of her marks, yet endures, but we maintain that at present, especially with regard to governance, it is considerably obscured. The Church must remedy this situation.

## 3. The Question of the Legitimacy of Conciliar Authorities

The observation of the disastrous state of the Church leads us to question the legitimacy of the authorities who carried out such a revolution. Indeed, if we maintain that these harmful changes resulting from the Second Vatican Council were approved by legitimate authorities, do we not have to conclude that the Catholic Church has defected from the Faith and that the gates of hell have prevailed? As Catholics, we believe in the infallibility and indefectibility of the Church. Since we know that the Holy Catholic Church has received the assurance from Our Lord that the gates of hell will not prevail against her, must we not necessarily conclude that the prelates of the new conciliar Church do not have the authority that they claim to have? These questions need to be studied carefully by the Church.

In the face of this unprecedented disaster afflicting the Church, the question of the vacancy of the See cannot be dismissed out of hand. This question must be considered with courage and caution, despite the fears it may inspire. While many consider the vacancy to be a theologically certain conclusion, others deny it. All will agree that the

authority of the Church is necessary to decide this question legally. Several of the claimants to the papacy since the Second Vatican Council have been publicly suspected of heresy before or after their election. Does this fact have canonical consequences that need to be brought to light?

Seriously considering the question of the vacancy of the Apostolic See is therefore simply an application of Catholic principles to the current situation of the Church. All claim to be Catholic; Catholics believe in the papacy, papal infallibility, and the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. But the individual voice of each person cannot be the voice of the entire Church.

#### **4. In Search of a Solution**

It will be up to the Church as a whole to clearly determine the present status of the Apostolic See, and we do not wish to pre-empt its work. However, if the vacancy of the Apostolic See were clearly established, this could only be a first step: the diagnosis of a very serious problem. This first step would not be sufficient. A solution to this serious problem would have to be sought. We believe that the See of Peter is the centre of our Catholic faith, the rock on which the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ was established. The Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and we know that her unity is founded on Peter. There is no other rock given to the Church than the rock of Peter. *Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*: where Peter is, there is the Church.

Undoubtedly the Clergy and faithful, in diverse ways, resisted the Vatican II revolution; the revolution of the new Church. But since they were not guided by the voice of Peter, there was no unity in action. This is the case even today. Many years later we are all scattered into different groups that view each other with suspicion.

Which liturgy should be followed? Which disciplines apply? Who exercises a truly legitimate apostolate? In the absence of an indisputable leader who can decide these questions, they give rise to endless quarrels. Thus, the reaction of the clergy to the new Church, which originated in the Second Vatican Council and has found its crowning glory in the Synodal Church of recent years, is not bearing the fruits that might have been hoped for. Chapel after chapel is erected, and still the Christian people are suffering without any hope of remedy.

We do not wish to deny the admirable work accomplished by members of the clergy during this period of darkness. Men of indomitable courage have travelled the earth to provide souls with the spiritual assistance they need for salvation. This cannot be despised; we can only see it as an act of Providence, which never abandons those who place their hope in God.

But why so many divisions? Why so many heresies? Why so many schisms? Why so many apostasies? Why so much corruption? The answer is simple: because there is a most serious problem affecting the very head of the Church. For some, the one who should be “the pillar of truth”, the rule of faith, simply is not there to bring us together in unity. For others the pretenders to the papacy are leading us in a direction contrary to their mission. Could the Church’s

Magisterium, considered not merely by individuals but by the Church as a whole, finally shed light on her true condition?

## 5. The First Duty of the Church

It is certainly an excellent thing that the Mass and the true sacraments have been preserved by the clergy who have remained faithful to the Faith. But we must nevertheless lament the fact that we do not hear the indisputable voice of Peter among us and ask ourselves whether the battle has really been fought as it should have been. Is it not indeed the primary duty of the Church, when there is serious doubt about a pretender to the papacy, to seek to remedy the situation? Can the Church's divine mission to spread the light of truth, which alone can save us, be founded on any rock other than Peter's? Must not this rock be identifiable without any doubt by all members of the Church?

Not only does the fractured *Catholic* world desperately need to find the certainty of Peter's voice, but the *whole* world, sunk in apostasy, will find no remedy unless the Catholic Barque is itself under the command of a Catholic. Here is the main problem of this world, the most important problem, the most urgent problem, the one that must be solved before all others. The voice we hear is not recognisable as the living voice of the Vicar of Christ, and without it, nothing can be done to reverse the situation and restore order. We must work to clarify this question of the legitimacy of the modern pontiffs. This is a serious duty, especially for faithful bishops, who today embody the visible authority of the Church.

If the See of Peter were truly vacant, or even occupied by a non-Catholic, as many believe, the election of a true Pontiff would be the first duty of the Church. The constitutions governing the vacancy of the Apostolic See and the election of a Roman Pontiff all insist on the urgent necessity of electing a Supreme Pontiff: "most weighty task divinely entrusted to the Church," as Pius XII tells us in the Apostolic Constitution *Vacantis Apostolicae Sedis* (8 December 1945). And St. Pius X, in the Constitution *Vacante Apostolica Sede* (25 December 1904), teaches: "When the Apostolic See is vacant, it is a most grave and most sacred matter to choose the supreme shepherd and head of the Lord's flock for the prudent and diligent governance of the Catholic Church, one who, succeeding to the place of Blessed Peter, bears the person of Jesus Christ on earth."

Pope Boniface VIII, in his famous bull *Unam Sanctam*, warns us: "Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." How, then, can one not put one's salvation at risk if one is totally indifferent to the undisputed presence of Peter within the Church?

## 6. The Presence of Peter, an Absolute Right of the Church

When the Apostolic See is vacant, the election of a Supreme Pontiff is not merely an option for the Church. It is its primary obligation. It is therefore the right of Catholics. This election is usually carried out by the Cardinals. However, if there is serious doubt as to the legitimacy and Catholicity of those who have been appointed Cardinals, this duty falls to the universal Church.<sup>2</sup> The Church, being a perfect society, must necessarily possess all the means within herself to obtain an undisputed pope. This is what Pope Leo XIII teaches in his encyclical *Immortale Dei*: “[The Church] is a society perfect in its kind and by right, since, by the will and beneficence of its Founder, it possesses within itself, and of itself, all the resources necessary for its preservation and for its activity.”

Now, what is more necessary for the existence and action of the Church than the indisputable presence of Peter? Are we not reminded daily of this crying need by the terrible crisis the Church is going through, with many contesting the authority of the one who presents himself as the Successor of Peter, while others simply ignore the direction he wants to give to the Church? Has the Supreme Pontiff become little more than a ceremonial figurehead? Shouldn't the Church, rather, live in perfect harmony with Peter?

As theologian Sylvester Berry explains, the Universal Church will always have the right to elect the successor of Saint Peter:

“Christ ordained that St. Peter should have successors in his primacy of jurisdiction over the Church, but He did not designate the person of the successor. It is left to the Church to elect, or otherwise designate, the person who then obtains the power of universal jurisdiction by virtue of divine institution, i.e., immediately from Christ, not from those who have elected him. When the Apostolic See is vacant, there is no supreme authority in the Church; the bishops retain power to rule their respective dioceses, but no laws can be made for the universal Church, no dogmas of faith can be defined, no legitimate council convened.<sup>3</sup> In place of this supreme authority, the Church has the right and the duty of selecting someone upon whom Christ will again bestow it. It is evident, then, that the Apostolic succession cannot fail in the Apostolic See so long as the Church herself continues to exist, for although the see be vacant for many years, the Church always retains the right to elect a legitimate successor, who then obtains supreme authority according to the institution of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cajetan, Thomas de Vio, *Apologia de comparatione auctoritatis papæ et concilii*, cap. XIII., nos. 744-745, in *Tractatus de comparatione auctoritatis papæ et concilii cum apologia ejusdem*, Cardinal Billot, *Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi*, 1909, Tomus Prior, Quaestio XIV, *De Romano Pontifice*, Th. XXIX, § 1, p. 610-611.

<sup>3</sup> We shall see later that there is an exception for the extraordinary case of the Imperfect General Council, whose purpose is precisely to remedy the absence of the visible head of the Church.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. E. Sylvester Berry, *The Church of Christ: An Apologetic and Dogmatic Treatise*, (St. Louis, MO & London, WC: B. Herder Book Co., 1927), p. 2, cap. 12, art. 1, § 1, pp. 397-398.

## 7. Where Is the Remedy Today?

The duty of resolving the legitimacy of the pretender to the Apostolic See cannot be the responsibility of those who do not hold the Catholic Faith. This has never happened in the history of the Church. It was never the heretics who brought a solution to the various Church crises, but rather the clergy who remained steadfast in the Faith.

“God is one,” says St. Cyprian; “Christ is one; the Church is one; her faith is one; her people are one, bound together by the bond of concord into one solid unity of body. You cannot split that unity, nor can you break apart the structure of a body that is one in itself.”<sup>5</sup>

There cannot therefore be two Churches, as some imagine:

1. A Church of jurisdiction, legality and authority on the one hand, which while not having preserved the integral Faith has somehow retained the right to elect the Pope or determine his legitimacy, and
2. A Church of Faith on the other, which while possessing the Mass and Sacraments and the integral Faith, inexplicably has no legal authority to resolve doubts regarding the legitimacy of the Supreme Pontiff.

Such a conception is not Catholic. That portion of the Pastors who have unfailingly preserved the faith have also necessarily preserved the jurisdiction of the Church. Let us listen to the teaching of His Holiness Pope Pius XII:

“Wherefore we grieve over and reject that fatal error of those who dream up for themselves an imaginary Church, as though it were a kind of society nourished and shaped by charity, and who, not without contempt, set over against it another, which they call ‘juridical.’ But they introduce this distinction altogether wrongly; for they do not understand that the divine Redeemer, for this very reason, willed the body of men founded by Him to be a society constituted, in its own kind, as a perfect society, furnished with all juridical and social elements, so that the saving work of Redemption might endure on this earth; and that, to attain the same end, He willed it to be enriched with heavenly gifts and endowments by the Paraclete Spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

Monsignor Maur Cappellari (the future Gregory XVI) teaches us:

“That body of pastors which, amid the most subtle conflicts, the most unfounded pretensions, the most illegitimate usurpations, in short, amid the thickest shadows of fanaticism, violence, and ambition, withstands them with invincible firmness, and is the only one that does not allow itself to be seduced, would alone constitute the true Church, and would therefore possess the marks and qualities inseparable from the true Church. [...] The

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<sup>5</sup> St Cyprian of Carthage, *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*, 23, quoted by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Satis Cognitum* (29 June 1896), no. 5

<sup>6</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 65

Church must always subsist as Christ established her, and therefore must always preserve, in a manner that cannot be overcome, the essential form of her government; but this is not found in the party that does not resist innovations; therefore it is found only in the party that does resist them, and that party alone will consequently be the true Church.”<sup>7</sup>

## 8. Should We Wait for Divine Intervention?

God is all-powerful and does not need the cooperation of men. But He nevertheless wants men to cooperate with Him. The history of the Church and the history of mankind show abundantly that God desires men to act and cooperate in their salvation. The Church, in the same way, cannot and never has in the past, relied on direct intervention from God as a remedy for the various crises that have afflicted its earthly pilgrimage.

At the time of the Great Western Schism, three different “popes” had each appointed their own cardinals and excommunicated one another. The situation was disastrous. Nevertheless, Christians did not settle into a passive expectation of divine intervention. A General Council was organised within the Church, comprising clergy from the various factions and people from different groups and nations. The three pretenders to the papacy either abdicated or were forced to abdicate. Martin V was elected in their place and the unity of the Church was restored.

The solution to the various crises endured by the Church, has always come from the clergy who remained faithful. In all probability, it will once again have to come from the Catholic clergy.

We therefore affirm that, in order to remedy this affliction of the Church, something must be done today. We must pray, but we must also act. Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote: “We must pray as if everything depended on God, and act as if everything depended on us.”

We believe that the Church must work towards organising an Imperfect General Council.

Purely legal questions about authority cannot take precedence over questions of Faith and divine law. Pretenders to the papacy are teaching a gospel other than the one handed down to us with the Faith. Who in the Church today has the authority to resolve this issue, is secondary to the question of faith and divine law. Members of the clergy who are aware of the gravity of the present situation of the Church cannot remain inactive. They must come together to seek a remedy for the current crisis in the Church.

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<sup>7</sup> D. Mauro Cappellari, *Il trionfo della Santa Sede e della Chiesa contro gli assalti dei Novatori combattuti e respinti colle stesse loro armi* (Venezia: Giuseppe Battaglia, 1832), 21 (Discorso preliminare, § XII). Work republished during his pontificate.

## 9. Unam Sanctam

We have therefore deemed it appropriate to gather together in an association of clergy and laity to work effectively, with all necessary caution and determination, towards the convening of a General Council of the Church to seriously study the problems posed by the pretenders to the papacy who have imposed destructive reforms upon us that will soon have ruined the Church of Christ, if that were possible. We firmly believe that divine Providence necessarily requires that the Church be led by a true Successor of Peter. We reject the passivity that has taken hold among the clergy on this issue and we hope to see our brothers join us in this project, which can only take place with their cooperation.

We will gladly welcome into our midst all those who recognise the serious problem afflicting the head of the Church at this time and who wish to unite their prayers, sacrifices, efforts, talents and almsgiving to prepare the circumstances necessary for the action of Providence.

Joining us does not mean joining a new group.

Joining us does not mean committing to participate in a General Council organised in a hasty and disorderly manner.

Joining us simply means working to advance the cause of a legitimate General Council to remedy the crisis in the Church.

Our union, despite all our differences, is inspired by the union of Christians during the Battle of Lepanto. The various rival factions, understanding the danger that threatened Christianity, came together to face their common enemy, despite their many political disagreements. The result was the great victory over the Mohammedans that we know so well. Thus, we hope that the union of the different factions of true Christianity will be inspired, in these dark days, by the wisdom of our fathers in the Faith. Today's enemy is not an external enemy, but an enemy that has penetrated the institutions of the Catholic Church.

The Church has a duty to expel heretics from its midst.

The title of this website, which will be our main working tool and our rallying point, was chosen to express both our refusal to embrace the new religion and our determination to refuse the dispersion of Christ's flock into a variety of small autocephalous Churches.

*Unam Sanctam* (One Holy). The Church is one in unity of Faith, Sacraments, but also of government. She is holy, that is to say, she is not the gathering of all those who profess various heresies, but only of those who profess the true Catholic Faith.

## 10. The Imperfect General Council

A General Council is an assembly of bishops from all over the world convened to deliberate on matters of doctrine, discipline or government of the Church under the direction of the Roman Pontiff.

A General Council is necessarily convened by the authority of the Roman Pontiff, who has the power to make definitive decisions in matters of faith. A General Council presupposes the presence, convocation and assent of the Supreme Pontiff. It can define dogmas, engage the conscience of all the faithful of the universal Church and make definitive pronouncements on matters of faith and morals.

In contrast, an Imperfect General Council is an assembly of bishops from around the world convened without papal authority, in the event of a manifest or doubtful vacancy of the Apostolic See, and whose purpose is to remedy a serious problem affecting the head of the Church. The Imperfect General Council is convened to respond to an emergency situation: either the prolonged vacancy of the Roman See, or reasonable doubt about the legitimacy of a pretender to the papacy. Since the Pope is the one who gives legitimacy to the convocation of any General Council, who also gives it its true universality, and who finally ratifies its decrees, the Imperfect General Council suffers by definition from a legal problem. This is why the great theologian Cajetan calls such a council “imperfect but useful,”<sup>8</sup> insofar as it begins, in a sense, outside the bounds of legality, but finds its full force after the question of the legitimacy of the Roman Pontiff has been settled and, if necessary, a true Roman Pontiff has been elected, who then gives the General Council full force of law. From imperfect, the General Council becomes perfect.

To those who would argue that the clergy who have held fast to the Faith do not have the power to convene an Imperfect General Council on the pretext that they do not have the necessary jurisdiction, we respond that no one, in the absence of the Supreme Pontiff, has the legal power to convene a General Council, quite simply, whether or not they have territorial jurisdiction. This gathering is by definition a gathering “*praeter legem*” (beyond the law) but through which the Holy Ghost can remedy a situation of extreme urgency in the Church. Once a legitimate Supreme Pontiff is recognised, it is he who gives legal force to what the Council has decided. He may choose to reject certain decisions of the Council and retain others. Consequently, we totally reject the condemned error of “conciliarism”. The legitimacy of an Imperfect General Council can only be found in the Supreme Pontiff who will give it the force of law.

This concept is not new. It has been considered by many past theologians who explain that the Church can take extraordinary remedies for the extraordinary evils that may afflict her. Thus, when there are no longer any legitimate or indisputably valid cardinals, the Church, which must necessarily possess within herself the means to reconstitute herself and restore her authority, must convene an Imperfect General Council.

“A council [...] not only acting independently of the Vicar of Christ, but sitting in judgment over him, is unthinkable in the constitution of the Church; [...] in fact, such assemblies have only taken place in times of great

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<sup>8</sup> Tommaso de Vio (Cardinal Cajetan), “*De comparatione auctoritatis papae et concilii*,” in *Opuscula quaestiones et omnia quolibeta* (Lugduni: excudebat Ioannes Crispinus, 1541), cap. xiv, 8

constitutional disturbances, when either there was no pope or the rightful pope was indistinguishable from antipopes. In such abnormal times the safety of the Church becomes the supreme law, and the first duty of the abandoned flock is to find a new shepherd, under whose direction the existing evils may be remedied.”<sup>9</sup>

## 11. The Authority of Saint Robert Bellarmine, Doctor of the Papacy

In his famous *Controversies*, Saint Robert Bellarmine, Doctor of the Church, details the various reasons why an Imperfect General Council may be convened. He teaches that in the event that a pretender to the papacy has fallen into heresy or schism, an Imperfect General Council may be convened for the purpose of declaring that this man was never pope or has deposed himself through heresy or schism, and to replace him with a true Supreme Pontiff. According to St Robert Bellarmine, only this kind of Council can be convened by the cardinals or bishops, and only in serious circumstances, because the Church necessarily must always have the means to provide itself with a leader:

“Besides these arguments of the heretics, Catholics are accustomed to propose certain doubts. One: whether it is not lawful for a council to be convoked by someone other than the Pope, when it is necessary for the Church, and yet the Pope is unwilling to convoke it. Another: whether it is not lawful for a council to be convoked by someone other than the Pope, when the Pope ought not to convoke it, because he is a heretic or a schismatic. A third doubt: whether it is not lawful for a council to be convoked by someone other than the Pope, when the Pope cannot convoke it, because he would be a captive among infidels, or dead, or become insane, or had resigned.

[...]

“To the second and third [points] I reply that in no case can a true and perfect council, of the kind we are here discussing, namely one that has authority to define questions of faith, be convoked without the authority of the Pontiff. For the chief authority is in the head, that is, in Peter, to whom it was commanded that he confirm his brethren; and for that reason the Lord also prayed for him, that his faith might not fail (Luke 22). Nevertheless, in those two cases an imperfect council can be assembled, which suffices to make provision for the Church with respect to the head. For the Church without doubt has authority to provide for herself with respect to the head, although without a head she cannot determine many matters which she can determine with a head, as Cajetan rightly teaches in his little work on the power of the Pope, chapters 15 and 16; and much earlier [this is taught] in the letter of the presbyters of the Roman Church to Cyprian, which is [letter] 7, Book II, among the works of Cyprian. Moreover, that imperfect council can be held, either if it is convoked by the college of Cardinals, or if the bishops themselves, coming together into one place, convene of their own accord.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, “General Councils”, 1913 edition.

<sup>10</sup> St. Robert Bellarmine, *De Conciliis*, in *Opera Omnia*, t. II, (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1870), lib. I, cap. 14, p. 217

If necessary, in situations of extreme necessity, it is therefore possible for the bishops to convene an Imperfect General Council. This will suffice to provide the Church with a new visible, authentic and indisputable head. The Imperfect General Council allows, by extraordinary means, the restoration of the head of the visible hierarchy, from which jurisdiction will undoubtedly flow. This power of appointment, Bellarmine specifies, derives from the very authority of the Mystical Body, which cannot perish for lack of a head.

## 12. Saint Robert Bellarmine Gives the Conditions for the Validity of a General Council

Saint Bellarmine also gives four conditions for such a General Council to be valid. He states that it is necessary:

1. "...that it be convoked as general, so that it be made known to all the major Christian provinces."
2. "...that no bishop be excluded, but that whoever comes may come, provided it is established that he is a bishop and not excommunicated."
3. "...that the four principal patriarchs be present, [...] namely the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem" (But, says St. Bellarmine, these patriarchs are no longer necessary, for they are certainly schismatic today.)
4. "...that at least some should come from the greater part of the Christian provinces."<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, an Imperfect General Council is legitimate under these conditions. The history of the Church, particularly during the Council of Constance, shows that the General Council can play a crucial role in dealing with a major crisis threatening ecclesial unity. When papal authority is usurped or uncertain, the Council is an extraordinary remedy. Convened by faithful bishops, it acts as a substitute to restore the legitimate papacy and manifest the unity of the Church, without creating a new hierarchy or overthrowing papal authority.

This is not an act of subversion. On the contrary, it is a necessary act to ensure the continuity of the visible Church and the restoration of its authority. Such a council usurps nothing, but fills a gap and mends a breach. It aims to restore normal order rather than overthrow it.

Theologians justify this extraordinary power by two fundamental principles: the indefectibility of the Church, which guarantees that she cannot disappear or lose her unity, and the idea that in the absence of an undisputed pope, the Universal Church herself becomes the ultimate subject of authority, capable of acting to ensure her own survival. This is a transitional measure dictated by necessity.

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<sup>11</sup> St Robert Bellarmine, *De conciliis et Ecclesia*, in *Opera omnia*, t. II, lib. I, cap. XVII, "*Quot episcopi requirantur ad generale concilium*" (Neapoli: apud Josephum Giuliano, 1857), 31–32.

St Alphonsus teaches “that the Pope is above a council is not to be understood of a doubtful pope in a time of schism, when there is probable doubt about the legitimacy of his election; for then each person must submit to the council, as the Council of Constance defined. For then the general council holds immediately from Christ the supreme power, just as in the time of a vacant see, as St. Antoninus rightly observes.”<sup>12</sup>

Theology, canon law, history and the actions of the saints therefore converge to show us that an Imperfect General Council is the realistic and traditional way to restore the Church’s hierarchical unity and to bring her out from the current crisis. We therefore call for the authority of the current Catholic Episcopate to be recognised at last. We affirm that it has the right and the duty to act. In order to remedy the grievous malady that afflicts the head of the Church today, we propose to work under its authority to bring together in Council all the faithful Catholic bishops, who certainly have the power necessary for such extraordinary action.

### 13. Who Can Work at This General Council

Since an Imperfect General Council by definition is not convened by the Supreme Pontiff and operates “*praeter legem*” (beyond the law), it seems that its universality is truly the determining criterion of its legitimacy. Therefore, we want the invitation to join us to be as universal as possible. Regardless of whether you are convinced of the vacancy of the Apostolic See or have serious reservations about this conclusion, if you acknowledge that there is a very serious problem at the head of the Church, you are welcome.

Similarly, we believe that the question of the validity of Orders received should not, in the context of the General Council, be an obstacle to your participation. It is common knowledge in our age of universal chaos that practically all priestly and episcopal lines are suspected of invalidity by one party or another. We therefore believe that the best criterion for acceptance is a reasonable claim to having been ordained a priest or consecrated a bishop, and that for the time being, each person should be treated according to the title he believes he has, provided that he can reasonably justify that title. St Robert Bellarmine does not demand the exclusion of those whose lineage some may doubt; he demands, rather, that no bishop who is in fact a bishop be excluded. It therefore seems that the most prudent course of action is to tolerate anyone who can present reasonable proof of ordination or consecration. Once doubt has been removed and the Church has an indisputable Supreme Pontiff, the question of actual validity of episcopal lineages should be left to his decision. The General Council does not in fact involve an act of ordination, such as priestly ordination. Provided that you have reasonable grounds for having been ordained a priest or consecrated a bishop, if you wish to join your brothers in working for the good of the Church, you are welcome.

For an Imperfect General Council to be able to meet without being convened by the Supreme Pontiff and while there exists a pretender to the papacy, it is necessary that at least a serious doubt be admitted as to the legitimacy of the said pretender. It is therefore necessary in this context not, on principle, to refuse the possibility that the See in fact be

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<sup>12</sup> St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, *Theologia Moralis*, t. 1 (Augustae Taurinorum: Ex Typis Hyacinthi Marietti, 1879), lib. I, tract. II, *De legibus*, no. 421, 86.

vacant. The vacancy of the Apostolic See is not yet a fact that has been canonically established by the authority of the Church. It may therefore happen that some will come to the General Council convinced of the vacancy of the See, while others may not yet be convinced, but nevertheless admit that the situation of the Church is sufficiently serious to justify the convening of an Imperfect General Council. There may also be differences of opinion as to the date of the beginning of the vacancy. Whichever opinion they favour, any member of the clergy is welcome who recognises the absolute gravity of the present situation affecting the head of the Church, and is willing to listen to what his brothers have to say on the subject and to submit to the decisions of the General Council.

## 14. The Serious Questions Facing the Council

It will be up to the General Council itself to determine the course of its own action. However, we feel it is important to emphasise a few points:

1. This General Council cannot proceed with the election of a Supreme Pontiff without first clearly establishing that the Apostolic See is vacant. It would be absurd and impious to proceed with the election of a Supreme Pontiff without first substantiating that such an election is necessary. The Council will therefore have to establish the absence or loss of the pontificate among the pretenders to the papacy since Vatican II before any election can take place. Therefore, those who work with us need not fear that this General Council intends to elect a Supreme Pontiff at any cost, without first demonstrating that it is a necessity.
2. The General Council, which will be an assembly gathered in the Holy Ghost, will also have to study and clearly affirm its legitimacy to proceed with the election of a true Successor of Peter, if the vacancy of the Apostolic See is established with certainty. There are voices that deny the legitimacy of such a Council to proceed with the election of a Roman Pontiff, if that were necessary. But what voice is more legitimate to establish such a fact than that of the General Council itself?
3. Assuming that the General Council has concluded that the See is vacant, it will also be its responsibility to determine who the legitimate electors will be. Here again, the voices of individuals do not agree, but it is the General Council that will be able to determine what seems good to the Holy Ghost (Acts 15:28).
4. As for the other serious issues affecting our Mother the Church in these troubled times, it seems reasonable to say that the presence of the Supreme Pontiff is necessary to resolve them. This General Council is therefore first and foremost an assembly intended to study the question of the legitimacy of the Pontiffs of the Conciliar Church and, if necessary, to remedy the vacancy of the Apostolic See.

## **15. Presentation of the Website**

This website is the result of a firm determination to work effectively towards the convocation of an Imperfect General Council. This movement is underway and, provided that God wills to open the way of deliverance for His Church, we have no intention of turning back.

In addition to the main arguments in favour of such a Council, you will find a page where the main objections to us and our responses to them will be gathered. We invite all those who wish to do so to present their objections. As far as possible, we will respond to the main ones. If your objections do not receive a response, it will be either because they are similar to other objections already presented, or because they have not been deemed serious in light of the principles set out in the main argument.

We undertake in advance to retract any errors that are brought to our attention. Please note, however, that we do not intend to allow a deadly legalism to break the momentum that is inspired by Faith and a long theological search on the subject.

You will also find on the main page of the website a total count of the bishops, priests and religious who support this initiative. This number includes only those members of the clergy and religious who have contacted us. We will update these numbers regularly in order to highlight the will of Providence.

## **16. Invitation to the Clergy to Contact Us**

A number of clergy members who until now had remained silent have already contacted us because they wholeheartedly support this desire to work towards resolving the unprecedented crisis afflicting the Church. They have a very international character, bringing together clergy from both the Latin Church and the Eastern Churches. We thank them for this welcome and encouraging initiative.

We invite other members of the clergy and religious who support this project to contact us. As the website is managed by clerics who are accustomed to secrecy, your names will be kept confidential and will not appear on the site without your express permission. Clerics who fear reprisals or damage to their reputation therefore have nothing to fear.

It is imperative that members of the clergy contact us. Indeed, we have decided to see the gathering of clergy around this project as a sign from Providence that it is time to move on to the next stage, namely the practical organisation of the General Council and its convocation. There will be no convocation without genuine universality in the approval of this initiative.

Regarding the convocation, please note that the clergy who have approved the Imperfect General Council project will be consulted before it takes place. If the Lord allows this project to reach the stage of convocation, we hope that it can

be done by all the clerics who have joined us. It will be time to come out of anonymity and take up the weapons of Faith, Hope and Charity to carry out an action that will henceforth bear all the signs of the Divine Will.

*Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*