

Catholic Candle

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Words to Live by – from Catholic Tradition

Let Us Fight Darkness of Mind by Fighting Self-Indulgence!

Nothing so darkens the mind as being made soft by earthly things.

Words of St. Thomas Aquinas, greatest Doctor of the Catholic Church, quoting St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church, in *The Catena Aurea* on St. John's Gospel, on Ch. 1, v.10.



Catholic Candle's 2025 Catholic Calendar

The *Catholic Candle's* 2025 Traditional Catholic calendar is now available at catholiccandle.org. Here is a link: https://catholiccandle.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/calendar_2025.pdf The calendar is free to download and is freely distributable.

To make this calendar into a hanging calendar, follow these instructions and use the picture at this link: <https://catholiccandle.neocities.org/#gsc.tab=0>



Catholic Candle note: The article immediately below is part six of the study of the Choleric temperament. The first five parts can be found here:

1. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #36: About the Temperaments – Beginning our Study of the Choleric Temperament:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/08/27/lesson-35-about-the-temperaments-the-choleric-temperament/>
2. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #37: About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/09/26/lesson-37-about-the-temperaments->

[continuation-of-the-choleric-temperament/](#)

3. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #38 -- About the Temperaments – Continuing our Study of the Choleric Temperament – Their Spiritual Combat: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/lesson-38-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat/>
4. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #39 About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament – That Temperament's Spiritual Combat – Part IV: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/11/26/lesson-39-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat-part-iv/>
5. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #40: Temperaments – Choleric Temperament – Their Spiritual Combat – Part V: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/12/30/lesson-40-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat-part-v/>

Mary's School of Sanctity

Lesson #41 – About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament: a Choleric's Spiritual Combat -- Part VI

Note: When referring to a person with a choleric temperament in this article we simply will refer to him as a choleric.

As we continue our study of the choleric temperament, we examine some aspects of anger more closely because anger is one of the most prominent features of the choleric temperament (and unreasonable anger is one of its greatest dangers).

In this present lesson, we will look more at what anger does to the body and the role that reason plays in anger. This present examination of anger focuses on signs which a person can use to detect anger in himself. We will see the importance of using these signs when we see (in a future article) what a great danger excess anger can be for a choleric.

What Does Anger Do to the Body?

St. Thomas explains that there is a bodily transmutation that occurs in the passions of the soul. This transmutation is in proportion to the movement of appetite, that is, the

desire. He says that every appetite tends with greater force to repel that which is contrary to it. Here is how he explains this concept with regards to the passion of anger:

Since the appetitive movement of anger is caused by some injury inflicted, as by a contrary that is present; it follows that the appetite tends with great force to repel the injury by the desire of vengeance; and hence ensures great vehemence and impetuosity in the movement of anger. And because the movement of anger is not one of recoil, which corresponds to the action of cold, but one of prosecution, which corresponds to the action of heat, the result is that the movement of anger produces fervor of the blood and vital spirits around the heart, which is the instrument of the soul's passions. And hence it is that, on account of the heart being so disturbed by anger, those chiefly who are angry betray signs of it in their outer members. For, as St. Gregory says [*De Moralis volume 30*] *the heart that is inflamed with the stings of its own anger beats quick, the body trembles, the tongue stammers, the countenance takes fire, the eyes grow fierce, they that are well-known are not recognized. With the mouth indeed he shapes a sound, but the understanding knows not what it says.*¹

How is reason involved with the passion of anger?

There are two aspects of the relationship of reason and anger that we will address at this time: 1) How anger requires an act of reason, and 2) how the heat of anger counteracts

¹ This quote is taken from St. Thomas's question, "Whether Anger above All Causes Fervor in the Heart?" Found in the *Summa Theologica* Ia IIae Q. 48 a.2 *Respondeo*

It is interesting to note a distinction that St. Thomas makes regarding fervor. He says that the passion of love, which is the beginning and cause of all passions, itself, causes a heat of fervor. Anger, too, causes a heat; however, the fervor caused by love differs from that of anger. Furthermore, anger increases the fervor of love and makes it [love] to be felt more in the case where a person senses that what he loves is done an injury. Here is St. Thomas's explanation of the differences in fervor:

The fervor of love has a certain sweetness and gentleness; for it tends to the good that one loves, whence it is likened to the warmth of the air and of the blood. For this reason, sanguine temperaments are more inclined to love; and hence the saying that love springs from the liver, because of the blood being formed there. On the other hand, the fervor of anger has a certain bitterness with a tendency to destroy, for anger seeks to be avenged on the contrary evil: whence it [anger] is likened to the heat of fire and of the bile, and for this reason Damascene says in *De Fide Orthodox* that it [anger] 'results from an exhalation of the bile whence it takes its name chole.' (Taken from the *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.48 a.2 ad.1.

the proper use of the reason.

1) How anger requires an act of reason

In our last Lesson (#40), we discussed St. Thomas's statement: "*Anger is the desire to hurt another for the purpose of just vengeance.*" This just vengeance is as a repayment for an injury done. There are a variety of types of injuries which we pointed out also in Lesson #40. Reason is used in determining that an injury was done and what is proper to do about the injury.

St. Thomas explains for us how reason is involved in the passion of anger. First, St. Thomas quotes Aristotle saying, "*Anger listens to reason somewhat,*"² and afterward tells us the following:

Anger is a desire for vengeance. However, vengeance implies a comparison between the punishment to be inflicted and the hurt done; wherefore the Philosopher says in *Ethics Bk. 7 ch.6 #1149b1*, that *anger, as if it had drawn the inference that it ought to quarrel with such a person, is therefore immediately exasperated.* However, to compare and to draw an inference is an act of reason. Therefore, anger, in a fashion, requires an act of reason.³

Even though the passions are connected to our bodies in what is called the sensitive appetite or desire, St. Thomas makes it clear that our reason is certainly also involved in what we do with our passions, including anger. He explains in these words:

The movement of the appetitive power may follow an act of reason in two ways. In the first way, it follows the reason in so far as the reason commands: and thus the will follows reason, wherefore it is called the rational appetite. In another way, it follows reason in so far as the reason denounces, and thus anger follows reason. For the Philosopher says (*De Problematibus section 28; probl. 3*) that *anger follows reason, not in obedience to reason's command, but as a result of reason's denouncing the injury.* Because the sensitive appetite is subject to the reason, not immediately but through the will.

We must keep in mind another aspect of anger, and that is, the second point given just above.

² Aristotle's *Ethics Bk.7; ch.6, #1149b1*.

³ *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.46, a.4, *Respondeo*.

2) How the heat of anger counteracts the proper use of the reason.

St. Thomas relates what St. Gregory says in his *De Moralis* that anger “*withdraws the light of understanding, since it [anger] confounds the mind by stirring it [the mind] thoroughly*”.⁴

St. Thomas delves into the topic further as follows:

Although the mind or reason makes no use of a bodily organ in its proper act, yet, since it needs certain sensitive powers for the execution of its act, the acts of which powers are hindered when the body is disturbed, it follows of necessity that any disturbance in the body hinders even the judgment of reason; as is clear in the case of drunkenness or sleep. However, it has been stated (A. 2) that anger, above all, causes a bodily disturbance in the region of the heart, so much as to effect even the outward members. Consequently, of all the passions, anger is the most manifest obstacle to the judgment of reason, according to *Ps. 30:10*: “*My eye is troubled with wrath.*”⁵

St. Thomas adds:

“The beginning of anger is in the reason, as regards the appetitive movement, which is the formal element of anger. But the passion of anger forestalls the perfect judgment of reason, as though it listened but imperfectly to reason, on account of the commotion of the heat urging to instant action, which commotion is the material element of anger. In this respect it hinders the judgment of reason.”⁶

St. Thomas gives us an additional explanation about reason being hindered by anger. He begins by quoting St. Gregory as saying, “*when anger does not vent itself outwardly by the lips, inwardly it burns the more fiercely.*”⁷

Then St. Thomas continues as follows:

As stated above (A. 3; Q. 46, A. 4), anger both follows an act of reason, and hinders the reason: and in both respects it may cause taciturnity [that is, being uncommunicative by speech]. On the part of the reason, when the judgment of

⁴ *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.48 a.3, *Sed Contra*.

⁵ *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.48, a.3, *Respondeo*.

⁶ *Summa Theologica*, Ia Iiae, Q.48, a.3, ad.1.

⁷ *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, Q.48, a.4, *Sed Contra* quote is from Pope St. Gregory the Great's *De Moralis*, vol. 30.

reason prevails so far, that although it does not curb the appetite in its inordinate desire for vengeance, yet it curbs the tongue from unbridled speech. Wherefore Gregory says (*Moral. v, 30*): *Sometimes when the mind is disturbed, anger, as if in judgment, commands silence.* On the part of the impediment to reason because, as stated above (A. 2), the disturbance of anger reaches to the outward members, and chiefly to those members which reflect more distinctly the emotions of the heart, such as the eyes, face, and tongue; wherefore, as observed above (A. 2), *the tongue stammers, the countenance takes fire, the eyes grow fierce.* Consequently, anger may cause such a disturbance, that the tongue is altogether deprived of speech; and taciturnity is the result.⁸

This is an ideal time to turn our attention to our next points of investigation. In our next lesson we will look at the dangers that may occur if one does not watch his anger closely and/or does not confirm if his anger is just.



***Catholic Candle* note:** Sedevacantism is wrong and is (material or formal) schism. *Catholic Candle* is not sedevacantist.

Below is the fifth article in a series which covers specific aspects of the error of sedevacantism. As context for this fifth article of this series against the error of sedevacantism, let us recall what we saw in the earlier four articles:

In the first article, we saw that we cannot know whether Pope Francis (or anyone else) is a formal heretic (rather than a material heretic only) – and thus whether he is outside the true Catholic Church – based simply on his persistent, public teaching of a heretical opinion.⁹

Then in the second article, we saw that we must not judge a man to be a formal heretic if he professes to be Catholic and says he believes what a Catholic must believe now, in order to be Catholic now. When a person professes a heretical opinion, we must judge him in the most favorable light (if we judge him at all). So, we must avoid rash judgment and we must not judge negatively the interior culpability of the pope and the

⁸ *Summa Theologica*. Ia IIae. Q.48. a.4. *Respondeo* (bracketed words added for clarity).

⁹ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/09/26/cc-in-brief-sedevacantist-questions/>

1.2 billion people who profess that they are Catholic. We must not judge they are not “real” Catholics if they tell us that they are Catholics.¹⁰

Thus, we must judge Pope Francis to be a material heretic, not a formal heretic, and that he *is* the pope. Regarding any of the world’s 1.2 billion self-described Catholics who hold heresy, we must judge them (if we judge them at all) to be material heretics only, unless they themselves tell us that they know they don’t qualify to be Catholics.¹¹

In the third article, we examined briefly the important difference between persons in authority who fulfill their duty to judge those under their charge in the *external forum*, as compared to a sedevacantist or *anyone else except God* who judges the *interior* culpability of other persons and (rashly) judges them to be formal heretics.¹²

In the fourth article, we saw that it does not help us to protect ourselves better from Pope Francis’ heresy by declaring that he is not the pope.¹³

Below, in this fifth part of this series of articles against the error of sedevacantism, we examine whether it is possible for a pope to teach (or believe) heresy.

Further Catholic Candle note explaining the origin of this part:

The following is a letter from a reader who was disturbed by a recent sedevacantist article (published elsewhere on the internet) that he read carefully. This reader wrote *Catholic Candle* to express his concern and to send *Catholic Candle* a copy of the disturbing article. He wrote seeking advice and help discerning the truth regarding that sedevacantist author’s claims.

¹⁰ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/are-we-allowed-to-decide-that-pope-francis-knows-he-is-not-catholic/>

¹¹ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/are-we-allowed-to-decide-that-pope-francis-knows-he-is-not-catholic/>

¹² Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/11/26/bishops-have-excommunicated-heretics-cant-we-judge-the-pope/>

¹³ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/12/30/protecting-ourselves-from-a-bad-pope-or-bad-superior/>

It is Possible for a Pope to Teach Heresy and Remain the Pope?

The Following is an Extended Email From a Reader (almost two pages):

Dear *Catholic Candle*: Help, please.

Recently, I read an article in which a sedevacantist author claimed that a pope “cannot teach error”. *Is that true?*

Note: for purposes of the rest of my email (below) to *Catholic Candle*, I will assume that this sedevacantist’s assertion means that the pope cannot teach *heresy*, as opposed to not being able to teach other errors about other matters, because I think the former is what the sedevacantist intended to say.

Let me add this: This sedevacantist author gave many quotes from authorities which he claimed to state that no pope can ever teach error (heresy). I have not checked the accuracy of any of those quotes.

First of all, I want to say that I view many of the sedevacantist’s quotes as *not* clearly supporting his position.

1. **There were some quotes** which did not seem to support this sedevacantist’s assertion at all, because they talked about the *Church* not failing in the Faith.

For example, he quoted a statement (which he attributed to Pope Saint Lucius I) saying that the Faith of the Roman Apostolic Church will not fail.

I think that it is plainly true that the Roman Catholic Church will not fail and that the Church will always have the Faith – otherwise the Church and the Faith would cease upon the earth. So, those quotes don’t support to his assertion that an individual pope could never teach heresy.

2. **Then there were other quotes** that this sedevacantist gave which were *much too vague* to really support his assertion that no pope could ever teach heresy.

For example, this sedevacantist gave a quote (which he attributed to Pope Damasus I) which said that the See of Peter has no stain or blemish. Plainly, however-much there might be no stain attributed to the *See of Peter as such*, no one can deny that throughout history, there have been many *individual* popes that have certainly stained themselves badly, in various ways.

Further, I note that the Pope Damasus quote (which is from the Fourth

Century) is in the *present* tense. In other words, he says that the See of Peter “has” no stain. Perhaps this quote could be taken to mean that, in the Fourth Century, no pope had stained himself in the many ways in which we know from history that popes stained themselves in later centuries.

The “bottom line” is that such quotes do not seem to clearly say that no pope can teach heresy.

The sedevacantist author would probably say that when Pope St. Lucius I used the phrase the “Roman Church”, he meant particular individual popes and that when Pope St. Lucius I said that the Faith of the Church won’t fail, he meant that no individual pope could ever teach heresy. To me, this seems like a doubtful interpretation.

But regardless of this, there are a few quotes which do seem to support the sedevacantist’s assertion that a pope cannot teach heresy.

1. He attributes a quote to Pope Innocent III saying that St. Peter’s successors “would never at any time deviate from the Catholic faith.”
2. The sedevacantist attributes a quote to St. Robert Bellarmine saying that “the Pope ... cannot preach heresy.”

Again, help please: **Is it true that no pope can ever preach heresy?**

Catholic Candle’s Analysis and Response

For the purpose of this article, *Catholic Candle* will take the sedevacantist’s quotes – regardless of the number of them – according to the sedevacantist own interpretation of them, *viz.*, as if they said that the pope cannot preach heresy. This is the question we address below.

But the sedevacantist’s position is much too superficial and fails to even go deep enough into the topic to make his own position clear. If we suppose that these quotes would say the pope cannot preach heresy, what does *that* mean? Does that mean that the pope cannot be a *material heretic* or that he cannot be a *formal heretic*?

Because the sedevacantist does not go deep enough to make his position clear, let us be thorough and examine his assertion according to *both* interpretations of his assertion.

But this requires that we first examine the difference between material heresy and formal heresy. To do this, let us use the guidance of the greatest Doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas.¹⁴

The Distinction Between *Material Heresy* and *Formal Heresy*.

It is true that many people who profess to be Catholics, hold grave objective errors against the Catholic Faith. This problem occurred in past centuries also, even if it is more common today than in (at least some) past centuries. For example, a child might believe that the Holy Ghost has the body of a dove. Or an adult might profess the Pelagian heresy (about grace and free will).

But we would not be forced to conclude that such a person (who professed himself Catholic) is not *really* Catholic. For a person ceases to be Catholic when he holds a position against the Catholic Faith *which he knows to be incompatible with what the Church teaches that he must believe in order to be Catholic*.

If a man held the Pelagian heresy, but wrongly believed that he held the Catholic Faith (concerning matters of grace and free will), then that man would be a *material heretic*. That is, the man would hold the “material” of heresy (*i.e.*, a heretical opinion) *not knowing* it was heresy. But this man would not be a *formal heretic* because he would not know that his position was against the teaching of the Catholic Church (and God). A material heretic does not deny this authority (of the Church and God) but “only” denies that a particular statement belongs to the deposit of the Faith.

By contrast, a formal heretic denies the *formal* aspect of Faith, which is the authority of the Church, which is the authority of God. In other words, a formal heretic denies the authority of the Church (God) concerning one or more statements of the Faith. He does not believe a statement of the Faith even though he knows that the Church (God) teach it.¹⁵

¹⁴ Read this article explaining why faithful and informed Catholics especially read the Doctors of the Church, most especially St. Thomas Aquinas:
<https://catholiccandle.neocities.org/faith/why-faithful-and-informed-catholics-especially-follow-the-doctors-of-the-church>

¹⁵ Here is how St. Thomas explains this distinction between the Faith’s formal and material aspects:

If we consider, in the Faith, the *formal aspect of the object*, it is nothing else than the First Truth. For the Faith of which we are speaking, does not *assent* to anything, except *because it is revealed by God*. Hence, the mean [*i.e.*, the middle term of the syllogism] on which Faith is based is the Divine Truth [*i.e.*, God’s authority].

Definitions – In summary:

- A person is a **formal heretic** if he denies the Catholic Faith in its formal aspect, *i.e.*, if he denies any statement which *he knows* is revealed by the infallible teaching authority of the Church (God). Such denial involves rejecting the Church's (God's) infallible authority itself.
- A person is only a **material heretic**, if he denies a part of the Catholic Faith in its material aspect only. In other words, a *material heretic* is a person who denies a statement of the Catholic Faith **without knowing** that the Church (God) teaches that this statement is infallibly true. A denial of the material of the Faith only, does not involve rejection of the Church's (God's) infallible authority, because the person errs (only) about *what* the Church (God) teaches.

Thus, a material heretic can be a Catholic. However, a formal heretic cannot be Catholic, because in order to be Catholic, one must submit to every single dogma of the Faith that one knows the Church teaches; and yet the formal heretic rejects the Church's (God's) authority by denying part of the Faith, **knowing** that the Church (God) teaches it.

So Now We Come to the Two Questions We Set Out to Examine

Having seen what it means to be a material heretic and what it means to be a formal heretic, these are the questions presented:

1. Can a pope ever become a material heretic?

and

If, however, we consider ***materially the things to which Faith assents, they include not only God, but also many other things***

Summa, III, Q.1, a.1, *Respondeo* (emphasis and bracketed words added).

In other words, the formal aspect of the Faith is God alone precisely in so far as God is the infallible authority on which depends the truth of the content of revealed Faith.

The material aspect includes many other things, *e.g.*, our Lady's Assumption into Heaven, because the material aspect of the Faith includes all the various revealed truths that are the content of our Faith.

2. Can a pope ever become a formal heretic?

Let us first ask if a pope can become a material heretic and then after that, let us ask whether a pope can become a formal heretic.

1. Can the Pope become a Material Heretic?

It is a very superficial supposition to think that a pope cannot be a material heretic (that is, the supposition that a pope cannot hold, even internally, an opinion contradictory to the Catholic Faith).¹⁶ Further, it is superficial to think the pope cannot then teach his heretical opinion (*e.g.*, through the pope teaching while he is ignorant). These (false) suppositions are superficial because they fail to take into account the basic truths of the catechism that even children know.

A. To Say that the Pope Cannot Make a Heretical Statement Means that He is Always Infallible When Making *Any* Statement about the Faith.

If the pope were unable to make heretical statements, then everything he said about religious matters would be infallible. In other words, Catholics would be sure that everything he said on religious matters was protected from error and must be true. In other words, under this supposition, the pope would *always* be infallible when making

¹⁶ Heresy is an error about the Catholic Faith. Here is how St. Thomas Aquinas explains this truth:

We are speaking of **heresy now as denoting a corruption of the Christian Faith**. Now it does not imply a corruption of the Christian faith, if a man has a false opinion in matters that are not of faith, for instance, in questions of geometry and so forth, which cannot belong to the faith by any means; **but only when a person has a false opinion about things belonging to the faith**.

[Catholic Candle note: because an opinion does not need to be spoken, we see that St. Thomas is teaching us (in the words above) that a person can fall into heresy even by *internally* holding a false opinion about the Faith. Nothing else is required, such as a person telling others his false opinion, or preaching it to them.]

[Continuing to quote St. Thomas:] Now a thing may be of the faith in two ways, as stated above, in one way, directly and principally, *e.g.*, the articles of faith; in another way, indirectly and secondarily, *e.g.*, those matters, the denial of which leads to the corruption of some article of faith; and there may be heresy in either way, even as there can be faith.

Summa, IIa IIae, Q.11, a.2, *respondeo* (emphasis and bracketed words added).

any statement about the Catholic Faith.

B. It is Basic Catechism that the Pope Can Indeed Teach Heresy (Error) When He Does Not Invoke His Special *Ex Cathedra* Authority.

But it is basic catechism (which even children know) that the pope only teaches infallibly under certain carefully-enumerated conditions.

For example, here is the *Catechism of Pope St. Pius X* showing *when* the pope is infallible, *viz.*, on matters of Faith and morals ***only under certain conditions***:

57 Q. When is the Pope infallible?

A. The Pope is infallible when, as Pastor and Teacher of all Christians and in virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by all the Church.¹⁷

Notice the narrow conditions under which the pope is infallible. All of these conditions must be fulfilled: he must be teaching ***all*** Christians (not just a subset, such as his own diocese of Rome or a certain nation); he must be using his ***full*** authority (not just partial authority); and he must be ***defining*** (not just commenting on or exploring) a ***doctrine*** regarding ***faith or morals*** (not Church discipline, Canon Law, or some other, lesser subject) to be held by ***all*** (not just some of) the Church.

The Baltimore Catechism teaches the same thing as does the *Catechism of Pope St. Pius X*, and elaborates further. Firstly, *The Baltimore Catechism* equates the pope speaking infallibly with his speaking *ex cathedra*:

Q. 531. What is necessary that the Pope may speak **infallibly or ex-cathedra**?

A. That the Pope may speak ***infallibly, or ex-cathedra***, (1) He must speak on a subject of faith or morals; (2) He must speak as the Vicar of Christ and to the whole Church; (3) He must indicate by certain words, such as, we define, we proclaim, *etc.*, that he intends to speak infallibly.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Catechism of Pope St. Pius X*, Ninth Article of the Creed.

¹⁸ *The Baltimore Catechism* #3, (emphasis added).

Then *The Baltimore Catechism* emphasizes the same thing that every Catholic child is taught, *viz.*, that the pope is **not** infallible on any other occasion when he speaks about Faith or morals:

Q. 532. Is the Pope infallible in everything he says and does?

A. *The Pope is not infallible in everything he says and does*, because the Holy Ghost was not promised to make him infallible in everything, ***but only in matters of faith and morals for the whole Church***. Nevertheless, the Pope's opinion on any subject deserves our greatest respect on account of his learning, experience and dignity.¹⁹

The Baltimore Catechism summarizes these truths, teaching that the pope is only infallible when speaking *ex cathedra*:

Q. 533. Can the Pope commit sin?

A. The Pope can commit sin and he must seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance as others do. ***Infallibility does not prevent him from sinning, but from teaching falsehood when he speaks ex-cathedra.***²⁰

Similarly, *The Catechism Explained* teaches that “the Pope is infallible in his solemn decisions”.²¹ Those “solemn decisions” are his *ex cathedra* pronouncements. Thus, *The Catechism Explained* tells us the same truth as the other catechisms, *viz.*, that the pope is not always infallible whenever he speaks about the Faith or morals but only when he speaks *ex cathedra*, *i.e.*, only “in his solemn decisions”.

Therefore, except when the pope is protected by the Holy Ghost under the conditions of his special *ex cathedra* authority, anything else that he says on matters of religion is not infallible and can be false (heresy).

So, we see that it is false to say that a pope cannot make heretical statements.

But what about the quote from St. Robert Bellarmine (referenced above, as quoted by the sedevacantist), namely, “the Pope ... cannot preach heresy”? We just saw that the Catholic catechisms concur that the Pope can indeed teach heresy. We must therefore interpret St. Robert Bellarmine as meaning that the pope cannot become a ***formal heretic***, as explained further below.

¹⁹ *The Baltimore Catechism* #3, (emphasis added).

²⁰ *The Baltimore Catechism* #3, (emphasis added).

²¹ *The Catechism Explained*, Francis Spirago, Benziger Bros., New York, 1921, p. 240.

The First Vatican Council's Definition of Papal Infallibility Shows the Same Truth as do These Catechisms Quoted Above: *viz.*, that the Pope's Infallibility is Limited to Those Times When He Speaks *Ex Cathedra*.

The dogmatic teaching of Vatican I on the subject of the pope's *ex cathedra* infallible authority shows that any other time – except when he invokes this *ex cathedra* infallible authority – the pope can indeed make a heretical statement because he is not then protected by the safeguard of this special promise of the Holy Ghost's protection against teaching heresy. Here is Vatican I's dogmatic declaration from the Council's Session IV, ch.4.:

- † We teach and **define** as a divinely revealed dogma that
- ❖ when the Roman pontiff speaks **EX CATHEDRA**,
 - that is, when,
 1. **in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians,**
 2. **in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority,**
 3. **he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church,**
 - ❖ he possesses,
 - by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter,
 - ❖ that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.
 - ❖ *Therefore*, such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the church, irrefragable.

All formatting and emphasis are in the original.

Notice that Vatican I's dogmatic definition teaches us **when** the pope is infallible, *viz.*, **when he speaks using the conditions of his *ex cathedra* authority**. The Council is teaching us that, when he teaches using these conditions, we know with complete certitude that what he teaches is true.

By contrast, at any other time (*viz.*, when the pope is not using his *ex cathedra* authority), the Council teaches us that we don't have infallible certitude that the pope's teaching is true. In other words, the absence of the *ex cathedra* conditions tells us the pope could be wrong, not that he could have ceased to be pope.

So, looking at the language of Vatican I's decree (above), we see that the pope is not always protected from making heretical statements. That is, the pope can teach heresy.

This same truth is also shown in a second way: *viz.*, by the fact that Vatican I even made the effort to solemnly define those *ex cathedra* conditions at all. Why would the Council "bother" clarifying those conditions if the pope could never teach heresy under any conditions (and thus is supposedly infallible *anytime* he speaks about the Faith or morals)?

C. Additional Reasons Why We Know that the Pope Can Teach Heresy When Not Speaking *Ex Cathedra*.

1. Contrary to fact, if it were true that a pope could never teach heresy, this would mean that the pope cannot err if he says something about the Faith or morals even at the dinner table or in a sermon or in private correspondence. Even if the sedevacantist (quoted above) did not realize the breadth of his own false assertion, nonetheless that is what he said, *viz.*, that a pope "cannot teach error" (or heresy).

By contrast, the dogma taught by Vatican I shows that the pope's infallibility requires specific conditions manifesting a fitting solemnity of the dogmatic declaration as well as the pope's deliberate and careful intent to teach an irreformable truth of the Faith or morals. Plainly, the sedevacantist is wrong that the pope can never teach heresy, *i.e.*, never make a heretical statement and become a material heretic.

2. If it were true the pope spoke infallibly every time he said something about the Faith, then it would be the duty of his dinner companions and anyone who talks with him to record everything he says about the Faith or morals because there would be a continual string of (supposedly) "infallible" things which would be coming out of his mouth.
3. The pope would have a sort of "Midas Touch". He would be unable to limit the continual stream of (supposedly) "infallible" dogmas coming out of his mouth, just as King Midas (in the children's story) was unable to touch anything without it turning to gold. Whereas King Midas was severely handicapped by being unable to live his life, *e.g.*, touch his own daughter without turning her into a golden statue, likewise the pope would be unable to carry on a normal conversation or preach a sermon without (supposedly) changing the world with a continual stream of (supposedly) irreformable "truths" that he utters. The pope would be afraid to share his thoughts with others (including his advisors) on a matter of the Faith or morals lest he (supposedly) "infallibly" "declare" a truth of the Faith. This would severely hamper the pope because he has great need of free and full discussions with his advisors and others.

Or, if we were to assume (contrary to fact) that the sedevacantists were correct, then the pope would not even *need* advisors because he would just say whatever he thought at the moment about Faith or morals, knowing whatever it was would be true.

4. The history of the Church shows that the quotes attributed to Pope Innocent III and to St. Robert Bellarmine cannot mean that the pope is unable to make a heretical statement (and to become a material heretic), because the history of the Church shows this to be false.

We see that various popes *have* been material heretics. Let us look at two examples that illustrate this:

- Pope John XXII (reigned 1316-1334) taught heresy insistently both before and during his papal reign. He was a material heretic and refused to be corrected until shortly before his death.²²
- Pope Nicholas the First wrote a letter to the Bulgarians, in which he spoke as if baptism were valid when administered simply in our Lord's Name, without mention of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. But he was not teaching *ex cathedra*. The question asked of Pope Nicholas was actually a different one: *viz.*, concerning the *minister* of baptism, *viz.*, whether a Jew or Pagan could validly baptize. He correctly answered in the affirmative. But Pope Nicholas then answered “that the baptism was valid, whether administered in the name of the three Persons or in the name of Christ only.” This is heresy! Cardinal Newman cites this example quoting St. Robert Bellarmine in *De Rom. Pont.*, iv. 12.²³

Note: In the second of these examples (above), Cardinal Newman relies on St. Robert Bellarmine’s account that Pope Nicholas I told the Bulgarians that they could validly baptize *without mentioning the Blessed Trinity*. This clearly shows that St. Robert Bellarmine well knew that Pope Nicholas I and other popes are capable of making heretical statements.

Thus, when the sedevacantist author (mentioned above) attributes to St. Robert Bellarmine a quote saying that “the Pope ... cannot preach heresy”, this does not mean

²² Read the biography of Pope John XXII here: *If a pope publicly preaches heresy, does he cease to be pope?*: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/09/26/cc-in-brief-sedevacantist-questions/>

²³ Cardinal Henry Newman’s treatise *On The True Notion of Papal Infallibility*.

that the pope cannot make a heretical statement, as is obvious by St. Robert Bellarmine himself pointing out Pope Nicholas's (non-infallible) heretical teaching to the Bulgarians.

If the sedevacantist author (see above) supposes that his own St. Robert Bellarmine quote (near the top of this article) refers to the pope being unable to preach material heresy, we don't interpret the sedevacantist as trying to deceive his readers. We think that he probably did not look deeply enough into the topic to know better.

D. Conclusion of this Part – a Pope Can Teach a Heretical Statement (Non-Infallibly) and Remain the Pope

We see it would be unreasonable to suppose that a pope cannot make a heretical statement. We see that a pope can teach heresy, based on:

- † Basic catechism that even children learn;
- † Two reasons based on the words of Vatican I's dogmatic definition of *ex cathedra* infallibility;
- † Considerations of reason; and
- † Considerations of Church history.

Thus, Catholics should not suppose that Pope Francis is not the pope because he makes heretical statements.

2. Can a Pope Ever Become a Formal Heretic?

A. The Pope Cannot Teach Heresy *Ex Cathedra*

From the first part of this article, we see clearly that popes can become material heretics, and in fact, that some popes have been so. But what about the quote the sedevacantist attributes to Pope Innocent III, saying that St. Peter's successors "would never at any time deviate from the Catholic faith"? Further, what about the statement (which the sedevacantist attributed to Pope Saint Lucius I) saying that the Faith of the Roman Apostolic Church will not fail? Do not these quotes contradict our claim that the popes can become material heretics?

The answer to this dilemma is that a distinction needs to be made between the pope (on the one hand) acting as a private individual (or "private theologian" as he is sometimes called), versus the pope (on the other hand) acting as the successor of St. Peter speaking with *ex cathedra* infallibility – that is, the pope acting in the See of Peter **as such**. Assuming the quote attributed to Pope Saint Lucius I is correct (that the See of Peter will

not fail in the Faith), this quote seems to mean that the See of Peter **as such** will not fail in the Faith. The pope teaches most properly as the successor of Peter and as pope when he speaks with *ex cathedra* infallibility and it would be impossible (and it has never happened) that the successor of Peter **as such**, that is, as the infallible head of the Church speaking *ex cathedra*, can teach any error.

Another way of stating this same truth is that the pope will never teach heresy utilizing the conditions of *ex cathedra* (extraordinary) infallibility.

This is indicated in one of the quotes received along with the above reader's question: The sedevacantist author quotes Francisco Suarez²⁴ as stating that:

in accord with His divine providence...[God] preserve[s] the pope from heresy in consequence of the promise that he shall never err in defining faith. Furthermore, as such a thing has never happened in the Church, we may conclude that, in the providence of God, it cannot happen.'

Thus, the sedevacantist attributes to Suarez the (true) statement that the pope cannot err when **defining the faith**, that is, when teaching infallibly. Indirectly, Suarez seems to acknowledge and teach that the pope **can** err when he teaches about the Faith or morals except when he meets the conditions laid out in the Vatican I definition of infallibility (which was already quoted above):

1. exercising his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians,
2. in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority,
3. he **defines a doctrine** concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church.

B. Another Possible Interpretation: the Pope Will Never Become a Formal Heretic

Above, the sedevacantist attributed to Pope Innocent III the statement that St. Peter's successors "would never at any time deviate from the Catholic faith". This could be taken as meaning that no pope would ever deviate from the Faith by rejecting the Faith in its

²⁴ Fransico Suarez was a Spanish Jesuit philosopher and theologian who did good work by defending Roman Catholic doctrine against the Protestant Revolution. He was an avid student of St. Thomas Aquinas, although Suarez deviated in many important ways from the sound methods, teachings, and conclusions of St. Thomas. Nevertheless, Suarez remains a respected thinker and commentator on some of St. Thomas' teachings. It is likely this importance and respect that the sedevacantist wishes to leverage, "adding Suarez's weight" to his (the sedevacantist's) false argument.

formal aspect. (Recall the distinction we made above concerning *formal* vs. *material* heresy.)

In the section immediately above (entitled “The Pope Cannot Teach Heresy Ex Cathedra”), the emphasis concerned the pope’s inability to teach heresy infallibly. In the present section, the emphasis will be on the pope’s inability to reject the formal aspect of the Faith, namely, the truth of the Faith ***based on God’s authority***.

One consequence of this interpretation is that we would avoid the possibility that the Church could ever suffer an interregnum due to a pope losing his papacy (and his membership in the Catholic Church) through (formal) heresy. This would be one God-given means through which the Church would always have successors, as Vatican I infallibly teaches.²⁵

As shown above, St. Robert Bellarmine was well aware of Pope Nicholas I’s material heresy when teaching the Bulgarians, yet (as attributed by the sedevacantist author above), St. Robert states that a pope cannot preach heresy. This would seem to indicate that St. Robert Bellarmine meant that a pope could never preach heresy as a ***formal*** heretic, resulting in his loss of the papal office and the creating of a papal interregnum.

C. How to Interpret Quotes About the See of Peter Remaining Unstained

The Catholic Church, in Her Divine element, is always unstained, although the pope and all other Catholics stain themselves.

We must distinguish between the Catholic Church as the Spotless Bride of Christ, in contrast to the human element of the Church. The Church Herself, Who possesses the Mark of Holiness, is perfect. The human element (*i.e.*, individual Catholics, including the pope insofar as he sins and errs), can and has gone wrong.

The Church is in no way blamable in Her Divine element for the heretical statements and sins of anyone, including the pope. Here is how that truth is taught in *The Catechism Explained*:

²⁵ Vatican I infallibly declares:

If anyone says that it is not by the institution of Christ the Lord Himself (that is to say, by Divine Law) that Blessed Peter should have ***perpetual*** successors in the primacy over the whole Church; or that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of Blessed Peter in this primacy, let him be ***anathema***.

Vatican I, Session 4, Ch. 2 (bold emphasis and parenthetical words are in the original, italic emphasis added).

The Catholic Church is Holy. ... The misdeeds of some members, or abuses occurring within the Church are due not to the Church, but to the perversity of men.²⁶

The sedevacantist author gave a quote (found above, which he attributed to Pope Damasus I) which said that the See of Peter has no stain or blemish, that quote would fit with the truth that the Church *in Her Divine element* can never make a heretical statement or commit the least sin, although (as we saw), an individual pope can do so.

When a pope is speaking *ex cathedra*, he is acting as the pure, stainless Bride of Christ. But when the pope errs or sins, including preaching heresy (non-infallibly, of course), he is not speaking or acting as the pure Bride of Christ, but rather, he is only speaking as part of the Church's human element and capable of error. This is like, *e.g.*, if the pope commits the sin of gluttony, he sullies himself but not the pure Bride of Christ *in Her Divine element*.

D. Why Isn't It More Frequently Stated Throughout the Centuries that the Pope Can Teach Heresy when Not Speaking *Ex Cathedra*?

When the human element of the Catholic Church is in times of spiritual health, it is unseemly to talk very much about the pope erring in matters of the Catholic Faith. When the human element of the Church is spiritually healthy, there is often a filial and pious (but potentially dangerous) tendency to attribute inerrancy to the pope.

This is like when a family is blessed with a father who is a good head, it seems unseemly to talk about the evils that this father *could* do.

Similarly, when the Church enjoys the reign of a good pope, it is unseemly to say very much about the pope's ability to teach heresy just like in a good family it is unseemly to say too much about the father's ability to deceive his children.

E. Conclusion

1. We see that a pope *is* able to teach heresy (that is, to make heretical statements) when he is *not* speaking *ex cathedra*. In other words, a pope can be a material heretic and some popes have been material heretics in the past. The sedevacantist's contrary assertion is merely a variation of the Protestant calumny that "you Catholics think that everything the pope says about religion must be

²⁶ *The Catechism Explained*, Rev. Francis Spirago, p.244, TAN Books and Publishers, Rockford, 1993 (reprinting the 1899 edition).

true”.

2. We know infallibly from Vatican I that a pope cannot teach heresy when teaching *ex cathedra*.
3. St. Robert Bellarmine seems to teach that no pope could ever become a *formal* heretic. If that is true, then that would be one reason (among many) why the sedevacantists are wrong in saying that we are presently in a long papal interregnum.²⁷
4. The Catholic Church, in Her Divine Element, as the unspotted Bride of Christ, can never sin and teach heresy but the human element of the Church – *i.e.*, all Catholics (including the pope) can and do sin and err – even sometimes teaching heresy.
5. Pope Francis has taught many heresies but never has he taught them using his *ex cathedra* authority. These heresies do not show that he is not the pope.



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²⁷ For other reasons why we cannot be in a long papal interregnum, read Chapter 2 of *Sedevacantism – Material or Formal Heresy*. This small book is available:

- ❖ Here, for free: <https://catholiccandle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/sedevacantism-material-or-formal-schism.pdf>
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