

On the Vicoration of Christ:
Part I: Interregnums - Defection in Disguise
By John C. Pontrello (2015)

Extract taken with the author's permission from:

[The Sedevacantist Delusion: Why Vatican II's Clash with Sedevacantism Supports Eastern Orthodoxy](#)

- by John C. Pontrello (August 2015 – pages 71-81)

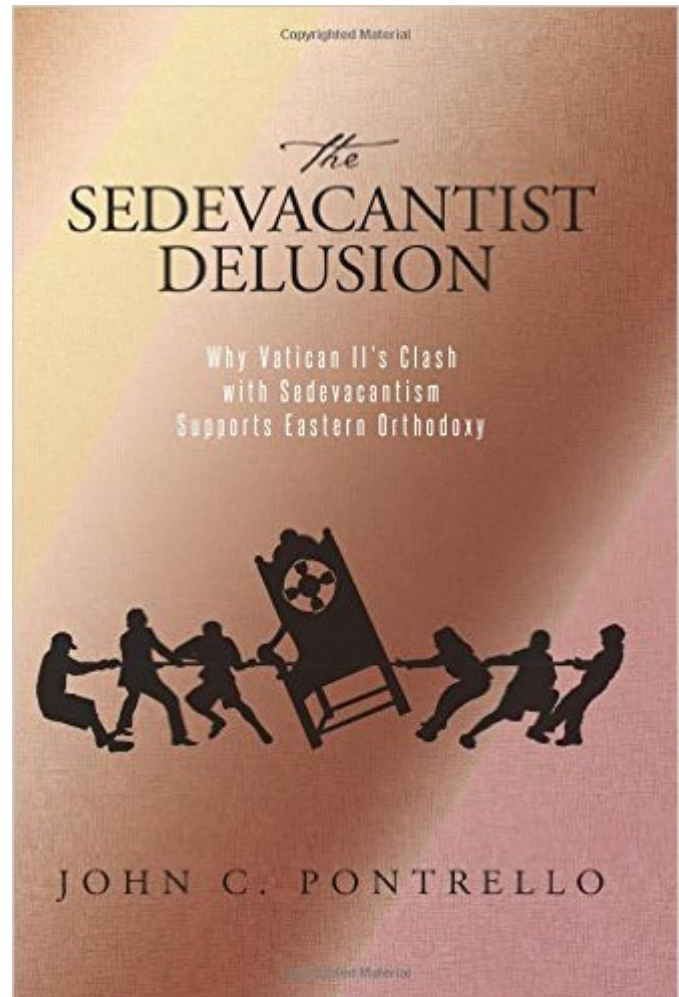
<https://youtu.be/clAyVxt6ZgE>

Objection 5: The Church cannot exist without a pope, or at least it cannot exist for forty years without a pope, as sedevacantists say ...

Note: The use of the word "Dimond" in the following video/text refers to Frederick 'Michael' and Robert 'Peter' Dimond (the Dimond Brothers) who own and operate a New York State not-for-profit corporation (# 1751088); which they purport as a "self-identified", Sedevacantist Order of St. Benedictine named the Most Holy Family Monastery (MHFM).

Sedevacantism rests entirely on the myth that the Catholic Church is presently enduring a papal interregnum that began approximately in 1958 (140). The Sedevacantists will argue that since there is nothing contradictory or abnormal about papal interregnums, which began and continued since the death of the first Roman pope, Sedevacantism is tenable – in fact the only tenable position. This is a clever strategy because Sedevacantists are somewhat correct; there is nothing contradictory about papal interregnums, historically speaking. If the Church were truly enduring a papal interregnum at present, even and extraordinarily long one, it is unlikely that the fact could be contested, especially without a serious rival contender to the office of Peter. Therefore Sedevacantists such as Dimond attempt to convince their opponents that Sedevacantism is essentially the same thing as a papal interregnum.

But there is a catch: The Sedevacantists are not really proposing that the Church is experiencing a papal interregnum; they just deceptively call it one. This strategy has been quite successful in winning converts to Sedevacantism because there is much truth in what Sedevacantists teach about papal vacancies. Let us look at how Dimond sells this concept in his opening reply to Objection Five (**The**



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Church cannot exist without a pope, or at least it cannot exist for 40 years without a pope, as Sedevacantists say ...):

“The Church has existed for years without a pope, and does so every time a pope dies. The Church has experienced a papal interregnum (i.e. period without a pope) over 200 times in Church history. The longest papal interregnum (before Vatican II apostasy) was between Pope St. Marcellinus (296-304) and Pope St. Marcellius (308-309). It lasted for more than three and a half years. Further, theologians teach that the Church can exist for even decades without a pope.” [\(141\)](#) [\(142\)](#)

Here we are seeing how a shrewd manipulator works. Dimond is correct about all of the above since they are historical facts. The manipulation involved, however, is to convince readers that one thing is the same as another thing when in reality they are two very different things. In fact Sedevacantism appears to work only because it misrepresents itself. You see, what the Sedevacantists are really proposing is by no stretch of the imagination a papal interregnum, and most Sedevacantists know it. Sedevacantism, in all of its shapes, sizes, and colors, is essentially a movement of traditional Catholics that recognizes the defection of the Church while attempting to hide the fact. In other words Sedevacantism is essentially a theory of defection, not a theory of papal interregnum.

Let the reader be advised of the clever manipulation on the part of Dimond and other Sedevacantists who attempt to pass heresy off as a legitimate theory of an extraordinarily long papal interregnum. For those who may be confused, or for those who may have skipped chapter one, it would be beneficial to go back and read that chapter before proceeding here in order to understand better the ways Sedevacantism necessarily entails a defection of the Church. Proposing that the Mystical Body of Christ has mutated into the end-times, apostate Church of the Antichrist cannot possibly be mistaken for a papal interregnum, but this has not stopped Sedevacantists from attempting to falsify this connection. Whatever else one might choose to call it, the Church is not enduring a papal interregnum.

For the sake of argument, let us ignore the fact that the Sedevacantists misrepresent themselves and pretend that the Roman See has been vacant for the past fifty-seven years. That hypothetical scenario, as imagined by the Sedevacantists today, always involves a defection of the Church. For instance a real interregnum does not disintegrate the hierarchical structure of the Church, as does Sedevacantism. One of many critical functions that must always remain in the Church is the capacity to elect the next pope. We know this because there must always be shepherds in Christ’s Church until the end of the world (de fide).

However, according to the Sedevacantists, the headless Church, wherever they imagine it to exist, is incapable of electing a pope; well, at least a real one. We know *that* because the history of the Sedevacantist movement records numerous failed attempts at electing popes, some of whom still dwell among us. There is no way around the fact that Sedevacantism is essentially a theory of defection, yet it has still served a valuable purpose in the grand scheme of things. This should become clearer as we progress and reach the end of this work.

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Still, Dimond and the Sedevacantists have defined their position clearly – the Catholic Church does not always need a Roman Pontiff. But now consider this: If the Catholic Church did not need a Roman Pontiff for the last fifty-seven years, then what could possibly make a Roman Pontiff necessary in the fifty-eighth year? The logical conclusion of the Sedevacantists position reveals what I have identified as the Sedevacantists' second principal heresy: The Vicar of Christ is accidental to the Roman Catholic Church.

Next Dimond makes an interesting point about what the Church does not teach about papal interregnums:

“Since there is no teaching which puts a limit on such a papal interregnum (a period without a pope) and since the definitions of Vatican I on the perpetuity of Papal Office make absolutely no mention of papal vacancies or how long they can last, if the definitions of Vatican I disprove the sedevacantist position (as some claim); then they also disprove the indefectibility of the Catholic Church – every single time the Church finds itself without a pope. But this is impossible and ridiculous, of course.” ⁽¹⁴³⁾

Granting that Dimond's assertion is true and no teaching exists that limits papal interregnums, it follows that he and the Sedevacantists must also believe that a papal interregnum can go on longer than fifty-seven years. But what would happen if we were to spin Dimond's statement around and propose it as a question to the Sedevacantists? For instance if it is true that there are no limitations on how long a papal interregnum can last, how long would Dimond and the Sedevacantists be willing to say a papal interregnum can last? For example can a papal interregnum last one hundred years? How about two hundred years? If eight hundred years were possible then what would preclude one thousand or more years.

If Dimond were to stop me at any of the arbitrarily selected durations for any reason whatsoever, he would have to be able to say why that duration would be untenable. Remember Dimond's own words: “There is no teaching that puts a limit on papal interregnums.” ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ Therefore he must agree that it is theoretically possible for a papal interregnum to last indefinitely. Furthermore, if Dimond were to stop me at any duration, his reason would have to be something other than “because that would be absurd” or “our Lord would never allow it to go on that long” because these are the same objections raised by non-sedevacantists today, which Dimond won't hear of.

Finally, if Dimond were to answer “an interregnum can last as long a God permits,” then let such a non-answer serve as an indirect admission that a papal interregnum could last indefinitely, perhaps one thousand or more years, because, as Sedevacantists are wont to say, no one can predict what God would or would not permit – oddly enough even when it contradicts infallible teachings of the Church.

Notwithstanding certain contradictions all papal interregnums pose to the papacy and that we will explore in part II, how can one determine that any given duration of papal vacancy is compatible with the doctrine of indefectibility of the Church? I am unaware of a teaching that answers this question, but it is reasonable to assume that if a papal interregnum has already persisted beyond the point where the

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structured means of electing a Roman Pontiff is incapacitated (e.g., if the College of Cardinals or the entire episcopacy defected or vanished from the face of the Earth), then indefectibility of the Church has been violated. If that is true, then it must be said that Sedevacantism was viable only *before* the defection but not after. In other words today's Sedevacantist movement came too late. Though reluctant to admit this, I think many Sedevacantists realize it, which is why some have abandoned hope for the restoration of the papacy or "resurrection of the Church" and direct their efforts towards promoting the end of the world instead. ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

In theory Sedevacantists must accept that there is nothing incompatible between the doctrine of indefectibility of the Church and a papal vacancy that last for one thousand or more years. The obvious implication is that the Vicar of Christ is nonessential to the existence and the perpetuation of the Roman Catholic Church; he is only an accessory. But if the Sedevacantists are right, and the Vicar of Christ is only an accessory, it must be explained why the Church made him the visible foundation of the unities of faith and communion. Would not Christ have known better than to make the unity of the Church contingent on an object that comes and goes, at times for three, fifty, one hundred, or perhaps one thousand years? ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Surely the Sedevacantists must agree that essential characteristics of the Church; such as visibility, unity, authority, infallibility, etc., are much too indispensable to rest upon a person who essentially amounts to an ornament.

So which is it? Is the Vicar of Christ accidental to the Church, as the Sedevacantist theory necessitates and in which case the papacy becomes suspect of an innovated doctrine? Alternatively, is the Vicar of Christ, as the Vatican Council states, "the perpetual principle and visible foundation of both unities (faith and communion ...) ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾, in which case the Vicar of Christ belongs to the essential constitution of the Church and therefore cannot be absent for fifty-seven years?

Let us now return to our earlier definition of essence, which described as "an attribute or set of attributes that make an entity or substance what it fundamentally is, which it has by necessity, and without which it loses its identity." ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ In the following excerpts from "Christ Founded a Visible Church," Catholic apologist Bryan Cross and Thomas Brown explain why the Roman Pontiff belongs to the essence of the Church (emphasis added):

"The Catholic position, on the other hand, is that visible hierarchical unity belongs to the essence of Christ's Mystical Body. For that reason, according to Catholic doctrine, hierarchical unity cannot be lost unless the Mystical Body ceases to exist ... For there to be a visible hierarchy, it is not enough for each member to be ordered to an invisible Head. Merely being ordered to an invisible Head is fully compatible with having no visible hierarchy. Yet for there to be a visible hierarchy, some visible human persons need to have an ecclesial authority that others do not. According to Catholic doctrine, the authority Christ gave to His Apostles and their successors is threefold: the authority to teach, the authority to lead men to holiness by way of the sacraments, and the authority to govern the Church. These also correspond to Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. Furthermore, for a visible hierarchy to be one, it must have a visible head. Only if each member of the visible hierarchy is ordered to one visible

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head can the visible hierarchy itself be one. And only if the visible head is essentially one can the visible hierarchy be essentially one. If the visible head of the hierarchy were plural, then the visible hierarchy would not be essentially unified, but at most only accidentally unified."

"Since Christ, having ascended into Heaven, is no longer visible to us ("and a cloud received Him out of their sight," Acts 1:9), therefore He appointed a visible steward (or "vicar") before His ascension, to be the visible head of His visible Body. The single visible head of the visible hierarchy is implied when Jesus says, "there shall be one fold..." ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

Here Cross and Brown insert Pope Pius XII's encyclical "Mystici Corporis Christi #40", which I will reference later, and Pope Leo XIII's encyclical "Satis Cognitum #10", and then continues:

"We see here that grace does not destroy nature, but builds on it and perfects it. This is why villages and cities have mayors, and even why our country has a president. Just as in a natural society there needs to be a unified hierarchy and a visible head, so in the society of the faithful there must be a unified hierarchy and a visible head. For the same reason that virtually every Protestant congregation has a head pastor, the entire visible Church also requires a visible head. The Church as a visible organism preserves the visible head established by Christ, and thus retains all three marks of unity. Without a visible head, the Mystical Body would be reduced to the ontological equivalent of visible pins invisibly connected to an invisible pin-cushion. That is because without a visible head, a visible hierarchy is only accidentally one, because intrinsically it is potentially many separate hierarchies. Many separate hierarchies are not a visible unity; they are a mere plurality, and not an actual unity."

"A 'visible Church' made up of separate visible hierarchies would be equivalent in its disunity to a merely invisible Church having some visible members. Therefore a visible head belongs to the essence of the Mystical Body, since a body cannot have mere accidental unity, but must have unity essentially. In other words, an ecclesiology that is analogous to visible pins invisibly connected to an invisible pin-cushion is equivalent to a denial of the visibility of Christ's Mystical Body because such an ecclesiology denies the essentially unified hierarchy necessary for a body to be a body. It makes no difference whether the pins are individual Christians or individual congregations. Without an essentially unified visible hierarchy, a composite whole cannot be a body, let alone a visible body. And when hierarchical unity is abandoned, nothing preserves unity of faith or unity of sacraments. In this way each one of the three 'bonds of unity' depends on the other two." ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾

We will revisit Cross and Brown's excellent article more than once in this work. What is most relevant to objection five is that Cross confirms that the Roman Pontiff belongs to the Church's essential constitution. If the Church's teachings coincided with reality, it would be impossible for the Church to exist for forty or fifty-seven years without the Vicar of Christ. Thus the Sedevacantists face another dilemma. The teachings on the papacy are either false, in which case something or someone other than the pope is responsible for the Roman Pontiff's functions during the past half century, or else Sedevacantists are mistaken in their conviction that Francis is not the real Roman Pontiff. Assuming the

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Sedevacantists will not concede the second proposition, they are forced to rework the dogmatic teachings on the papacy. Later we will see how Dimond attempts this feat by ascribing visible unity of the Church to an *unmanned* and *free-floating* office of the papacy instead of to the Roman Pontiff.

The reader is forewarned of Dimond's error, which will confound the First Vatican Council's teachings, that the primacy is the underlying basis for unity with the same council's unmistakable teaching that the Roman Pontiff realizes actual unity of the Church by exercising the primacy. We will explore this in more detail in objection six. The point is that if the Vicar of Christ were only accidental to the existence and perpetuation of the Roman Catholic Church, which belief is shared by most Sedevacantists whether or not they realize it, then the Roman Pontiff is nothing more than a bishop or a patriarch. This is worth serious consideration for all who hold the Sedevacantist position because it is unlikely that Sedevacantists have fully understood their theory's implication. In fact the Sedevacantists are more in agreement with Eastern Orthodox Christians, whom they consider schismatics, than they realize.

The problem that arises for Sedevacantists is that the Church's dogmatic teachings have made the Vicar of Christ necessary to the existence and perpetuation of the Church. Apparently the only Sedevacantists who understand this correctly are those who have attempted to elect their own popes. ⁽¹⁵¹⁾ As ludicrous or perhaps funny as it may seem that some Sedevacantists have attempted to elect their own popes, those who have attempted this feat should actually be commended for correctly understanding the relationship of Christ's Vicar to His Church. Their correct understanding is what compels them to elect one, albeit uncanonically, whereas most Sedevacantists remain imperviously oblivious to the fact that not having a Vicar of Christ in order to maintain at least a semblance of unity is a principal reason why they have failed to mount a formidable resistance to the Vatican II revolutionaries. Moreover, that the Sedevacantists have failed to produce a credible contender to the papacy in more than five decades is a solid piece of evidence that the Sedevacantist thesis is untenable, for as is proven in this work – *he is not accidental*. Hence there must be a Vicar of Christ. The question must be asked: Why haven't the Sedevacantists elected him? ⁽¹⁵²⁾ The answer is simple: They cannot.

Unfortunately the window of opportunity for Sedevacantists to elect a pope has long since passed, as a rival claimant to the Roman See was required *before* the Church defected, not after. Again, once a defection has been proven, there is nothing anyone can do to change the fact. No modernist conversion back to tradition, no prophecies, no miracle workers, no Sedevacantist bishops, and no Sedevacantist-elected popes can save the Church because the very fact of Rome's defection means that the Church failed to save itself when it was supposed to. Regardless of what happens to the Catholic Church in the future, real history has been recorded with much help from the Sedevacantists.

Let us for a moment consider the implication of the Sedevacantists' failure to elect a pope during the period where it was still possible to do so. What should we make of the fact that the *legitimate* papal contender did not materialize before Rome's defection? I believe this tells us two important things. First it tells us that the traditional Catholic movement was never to be trusted. Instigators of revolutions and wars know that the most serious threat to their success is an organized, unified resistance. They also

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understand that the best way to deal with the anticipated opposition is to lead it. ⁽¹⁵³⁾ This would explain why championed traditional Catholic leaders who burst onto the scene, ostensibly to oppose Vatican II, adamantly refused to initiate the most obvious and obligatory action for the safety of the Church and the salvation of souls – *elect a Roman Catholic to the chair of Peter without delay*. Instead these so-called heroes led the faithful on two very different paths that each ended with the same results: confusion, disunity, and impotency. Both paths effectively rendered Sedevacantism dead on arrival. Consequently today's generation of Sedevacantists have all the knowledge and information required to save the Church and not a shred of apostolic authority to use it. With hindsight it appears the revolutionaries' plan worked to perfection.

The second and far more important lesson we can learn from the Sedevacantist movement's failure to elect a Roman Pontiff is this: Francis is he. If this were no so, divine providence would have arranged for a Vicar of Christ to preserve the unity and indefectibility of the Church. We know this because the foundation of the Church is the Roman papacy, of which the Roman Pontiff is its essential human component.

In concluding part I, we can now reasonably understand why Dimond lists objection five as a most common objection against the Sedevacantists. The belief that the Church can exist for forty years without a Vicar of Christ is certainly incongruent with Roman Catholicism.

End Notes:

[140](#): The various Sedevacantist factions do not agree on the actual date the purported papal vacancy began.

[141](#): Dimond, *The Truth about What Happened to the Catholic Church after Vatican II*, p. 308.

[142](#): In his book Dimond begins his response to objection six by returning to the subject of objection five – papal interregnums. I have combined that portion of objection six into objection five.

[143](#): Dimond, *The Truth about What Happened to the Catholic Church after Vatican II*, p. 310.

[144](#): Ibid.

[145](#): The end-of-world mentality is seen repeatedly throughout the history of Christianity. For Sedevacantists it can be attributed to despair and desperation in holding a dead-end position.

[146](#): Remember, the Sedevacantists must agree that papal interregnums could be indefinite.

[147](#): Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 1821.

[148](#): "Essence."

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149: “Christ Founded a Visible Church,” last modified Monday, Dzczember 1, 2014,
<http://www.calledtocommunion.com/2009/06/christ-founded-a-visible-Church/>

150: Ibid.

151: These Sedevacantists are often referred to as *Conclavists*.

152: Interestingly the Vatican II revolutionaries understood something that today’s Sedevacantists do not – Roman ecclesiology made the Roman Pontiff essential to the existence and perpetual unity of the Church. Despite its numerous problems, the modern Church is at least nominally united under a visible head of Rome while headless Sedevacantists continue to splinter into sects at rates rivaling only the Protestants following the Reformation.

153: No one had a better feel for this than the late W.F. Strojie (1912-1987). Strojie was a retired chief aerographer of twenty years in the US Navy, a Roman Catholic layman, a husband, and a father. He wrote brilliantly on Vatican II, the post-Conciliar popes, and the traditional Catholic resistance, which includes ninety-three letters, several pamphlets, and books.