

# DEFENSE OF THE CHURCH'S TEACHING CONCERNING BAPTISM OF BLOOD AND BAPTISM OF DESIRE

OR

## THE ANTI-FEENEYITE CATECHISM

BY BISHOP DONALD SANBORN

---

---

### PREFACE

In the late 1940's, a certain Fr. Leonard Feeney, S.J., a priest functioning in the Archdiocese of Boston, published articles and books declaring that the Catholic Church never taught the doctrine of baptism of blood and baptism of desire. Reacting to the nascent ecumenism and liberalism of Cardinal Cushing, he held that unless someone were baptized with the baptism of water, he could not be saved. He and his followers also said that the Church's doctrine, that outside the Church there is no salvation, means that those who do not externally belong to the Catholic Church are necessarily going to hell.

The Catholic Church never said or taught the doctrines of Fr. Feeney. The Catholic Church has universally taught and teaches that there is a baptism of blood and a baptism of desire, and that those who are invincibly ignorant of the truth of the Catholic Faith are not guilty of the personal sin of infidelity in their failure to embrace the Catholic Faith.

Fr. Feeney's error was condemned by the Holy Office in 1949, under the reign of Pius XII.

Fr. Feeney did not recant, but was excommunicated. He founded a community where his followers gathered around him, and his error was confined mostly to the eastern section of the State of Massachusetts. They are commonly referred to as "Feeneyites."

In the past few years, however, many traditional Catholics have espoused this condemned error as if it were a Catholic doctrine. They falsely perceive the doctrine of baptism of desire and baptism of blood as a dilution of the Church's true doctrine in preparation for the era of ecumenism.

It should be noted that there are hardly any traditional priests who adhere to the doctrine of Fr. Feeney. It is a layman's error, and it arises out of an ignorance of the Church's true doctrine.

In this *Anti-Feeneyite Catechism*, therefore, I intend to point out to the faithful the traditional doctrine of the Church, against the condemned innovation of Fr. Feeney. I will draw mostly from texts of popes, saints, doctors of the Church, renowned theologians, and common catechisms in order to prove the point.

---

## INSTALLMENT NO. 1

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS TAKEN FROM *EXPOSITION OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE*, WITH AN IMPRIMATUR OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF PHILADELPHIA IN 1898, ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN FRENCH IN 1895, WHICH EDITION RECEIVED A LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIII.

### 1. Is Baptism necessary?

From the time of the first preaching of the Gospel, no one can be saved without receiving baptism. "*Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*" (John III: 5) "*As by the first man, death entered among all men, we cannot, as Truth itself has said, enter the kingdom of heaven, except by water and the Holy Ghost.* (Council of Florence) "*If anyone say that baptism is free, that is to say, that it is not necessary for salvation: let him be anathema.*" (Council of Trent)

### 2. How necessary is baptism?

Baptism is necessary for infants as a means of salvation; for adults, it is necessary both as a means of salvation and as being of divine precept.

### 3. What is meant by saying that baptism is necessary for infants as a means of salvation?

It means that infants who die without receiving it are not saved. Yet they do not sin, because they are ignorant of its necessity.

**4. What is meant by saying that for adults baptism is necessary both as a means and as being of precept?**

By this is meant not only that adults are not saved if they die without baptism, but that they are damned if they refuse to receive this sacrament when they know its necessity. For since Jesus Christ commanded His Apostles and their successors to baptize all nations, it follows that on every adult who has not been baptized, either because he was born of unbelievers, or because of the perverse will of his parents, there rests the grave obligation of receiving baptism as soon as he is sufficiently instructed.

**5. Is baptism absolutely necessary?**

Baptism is not absolutely necessary, since it may be supplied by two means: perfect love of God and martyrdom. Hence there are said to be three kinds of baptism: baptism of *water*, and only this kind is a sacrament; baptism of *fire* or of *desire*; and baptism of *blood*.

**6. How may it be proved that baptism of fire, or of desire, that is to say, perfect charity, supplies for the baptism of water?**

This may be proved

(1) from Holy Scripture. *“I love them that love Me.”* (Proverbs VIII: 17); *“He that loveth Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.”* (John XIV: 21)

(2) from the teaching of the Church. *“After the promulgation of the Gospel,”* say the Fathers of the Council of Trent, *“no one can pass from the state of the Old Adam to the state of grace, without the bath of regeneration, or without a desire for this bath.”* (Session VI, canon 4) Now, according to the same Council, this desire of baptism is *“an act of perfect charity or of perfect contrition.”* (Session XIV, canon 4)

(3) from the testimony of Tradition. *“If circumstances do not allow one to receive baptism of water, it may be supplied not only by sufferings borne in the name of Jesus Christ, but by faith and conversion of heart.”* (St. Augustine) — St. Ambrose, in speaking of Valentinian, who died a catechumen, said: *“I have lost him whom I was to regenerate; but he has not lost the grace which he had asked.”*

(4) from reason. “Baptism of water draws its efficacy from the passion of Christ, a likeness of which is imprinted by this sacrament, and ulteriorly, from the Holy Ghost, as from its first cause. Therefore the effect of baptism can be obtained directly by the power of the Holy Ghost, when He inclines the heart of man to faith, to the love of God, and to repentance for sin.” (St. Thomas)

**7. Is the *sacrament* of baptism inconsistent with the justification thus obtained by perfect charity?**

No; for at least an implicit desire of baptism is necessary, when a person cannot actually receive it; and this is true also of the baptism of blood.

**8. Does the baptism of desire produce all the effects of the baptism of water?**

No; it does not imprint a character, it does not confer sacramental grace, it does not remit all the temporal punishment due to sin, unless the charity is so intense as to merit its remission.

**9. How does the baptism of desire act?**

It acts *ex opere operantis*, that is, by virtue of the dispositions of the subject; and not *ex opere operato*, that is, by virtue of the work done: whence it follows that it can justify none but adults.

**10. How may it be shown that baptism of blood, or martyrdom, supplies for baptism of water?**

This may be shown from the belief of the Church, based on Holy Scripture.

Since baptism of water draws its efficacy from the passion of Jesus Christ and from the Holy Ghost, a person can, according to St. Thomas, even without receiving baptism, obtain the effect of the sacrament by virtue of the passion of Jesus Christ by conforming himself thereto, that is, by suffering for Christ.

“Whosoever dies to give testimony to Jesus Christ, thereby receives the remission of his sins just as if he had been cleansed in the sacred waters of baptism. For He who said: *‘Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,’* makes an exception when He says not less absolutely: *‘Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God,’* and again: *‘He that shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it.’*” (St. Augustine)

*Who are these that are clothed in white robes? and whence are they come?...These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* (Apoc. XIII: 14)

**11. Do children who are put to death out of hatred of Jesus Christ have any share in this privilege?**

Holy Scripture makes no distinction between children and adults. Both reap the fruits of Christ’s passion when they suffer for His sake. Moreover the Holy Innocents are honored as martyrs by the Church.

**12. What are the effects of the baptism of blood?**

It cleanses from all sin, and remits the temporal and eternal punishment due to sin; but, since it is not a sacrament, it imprints no character.

# DEFENSE OF THE CHURCH'S TEACHING CONCERNING BAPTISM OF BLOOD AND BAPTISM OF DESIRE

OR

## THE ANTI-FEENEYITE CATECHISM

BY BISHOP DONALD SANBORN

---

---

### PREFACE

In the late 1940's, a certain Fr. Leonard Feeney, S.J., a priest functioning in the Archdiocese of Boston, published articles and books declaring that the Catholic Church never taught the doctrine of baptism of blood and baptism of desire. Reacting to the nascent ecumenism and liberalism of Cardinal Cushing, he held that unless someone were baptized with the baptism of water, he could not be saved. He and his followers also said that the Church's doctrine, that outside the Church there is no salvation, means that those who do not externally belong to the Catholic Church are necessarily going to hell.

The Catholic Church never said or taught the doctrines of Fr. Feeney. The Catholic Church has universally taught and teaches that there is a baptism of blood and a baptism of desire, and that those who are invincibly ignorant of the truth of the Catholic Faith are not guilty of the personal sin of infidelity in their failure to embrace the Catholic Faith.

Fr. Feeney's error was condemned by the Holy Office in 1949, under the reign of Pius XII.

Fr. Feeney did not recant, but was excommunicated. He founded a community where his followers gathered around

him, and his error was confined mostly to the eastern section of the State of Massachusetts. They are commonly referred to as "Feeneyites."

In the past few years, however, many traditional Catholics have espoused this condemned error as if it were a Catholic doctrine. They falsely perceive the doctrine of baptism of desire and baptism of blood as a dilution of the Church's true doctrine in preparation for the era of ecumenism.

It should be noted that there are hardly any traditional priests who adhere to the doctrine of Fr. Feeney. It is a layman's error, and it arises out of an ignorance of the Church's true doctrine.

In this *Anti-Feeneyite Catechism*, therefore, I intend to point out to the faithful the traditional doctrine of the Church, against the condemned innovation of Fr. Feeney. I will draw mostly from texts of popes, saints, doctors of the Church, renowned theologians, and common catechisms in order to prove the point.

---

## INSTALLMENT NO. 2

TEACHINGS OF POPE PIUS IX AND OF THE HOLY OFFICE UNDER POPE PIUS XII

### I.

TEACHING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS IX, IN THE  
ALLOCUTION *SINGULARI QUADAM*  
OF DECEMBER 9<sup>TH</sup>, 1854

For it must be held by faith that outside the Apostolic Roman Church, no one can be saved; that this is the only ark of salvation; that he who shall not have entered therein will perish in the flood; but, on the other hand, it is necessary to hold for certain that they who labor in ignorance of the true religion, if this ignorance is invincible, are not stained by any guilt in this matter in the eyes of God. Now, in truth, who would arrogate so much to himself as to mark the limits of such an ignorance,

because of the nature and variety of peoples, regions, innate dispositions, and of so many other things?

### II.

TEACHING OF THE HOLY OFFICE UNDER  
POPE PIUS XII

*The following is a letter from the Holy Office to Archbishop  
Cushing of Boston in 1949,  
concerning the errors of Fr. Leonard Feeney*

THE SUPREME SACRED CONGREGATION OF  
THE HOLY OFFICE

From the Headquarters of the Holy Office

August 8, 1949

Protocol Number 122/49.

Your Excellency:

This Supreme Sacred Congregation has followed very attentively the rise and the course of the grave controversy stirred up by certain associates of "St. Benedict Center" and "Boston College" in regard to the interpretation of that axiom: "Outside Church there is no salvation."

After having examined all the documents that are necessary or useful in this matter, among them information from your Chancery, as well as appeals and reports in which the associates of "St. Benedict Center" explain their Opinions and complaints and also many other documents pertinent to the controversy, officially collected, same Sacred Congregation is convinced that the unfortunate controversy arose from, the fact that the axiom: "outside the Church there is no salvation," was not correctly understood and weighed, and that the same controversy was rendered more bitter by serious disturbance of discipline arising from the fact that some of the associates of the institutions mentioned above refused reverence and obedience to legitimate authorities.

Accordingly, the Most Eminent and Most Reverend Cardinals of this Supreme Congregation, in a plenary session, held on Wednesday, July 27, 1949, decreed, and the August Pontiff in an audience on the following Thursday, July 28, 1949, deigned to give his approval, that the following explanations pertinent to the doctrine, and also that invitations and exhortations relevant to discipline be given:

We are bound by divine and Catholic faith to believe all those things which are contained in the word of God, whether it be Scripture or Tradition, and are propose by the Church to be believed as divinely revealed, not only through solemn judgment but also through the ordinary and universal teaching office (Denzinger, n. 1792). Now, among those things which the Church has always preached and will never cease to preach is contained also that infallible statement by which we are taught that there is no salvation outside the Church.

However, this dogma must be understood in that sense in which the Church herself understands it. For, it was not to private judgments that Our Savior gave for explanation those things that are contained in the deposit of faith, but to the teaching authority' of the Church.

Now, in the first place, the Church teaches that in this matter there is question of a most strict command of Jesus Christ. For He explicitly enjoined on His apostles to teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever He Himself had commanded (Matt., 28:19-20).

Now, among the commandments of Christ, that one holds not the least place, by we are commanded to be incorporated by Baptism into the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, and to remain united to Christ and to His Vicar, through whom He Himself in a

visible manner governs the Church on earth.

Therefore, no one will be saved who, knowing the Church to have been divinely established by Christ, nevertheless refuses to submit to the Church or withholds obedience from the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth. Not only did the Savior command that all nations should enter the Church, but also decreed the Church to be a means of salvation, without which no one can enter the kingdom of eternal glory.

In His infinite mercy God has willed that the effects, necessary for one to be saved, of those helps to salvation which are directed toward man's final end, not by intrinsic necessity, but only by divine institution, can also be obtained in certain circumstances when those helps are used only in desire and longing. This we see clearly stated in the Sacred Council of Trent, both in reference to the Sacrament of Regeneration and in reference to the Sacrament of Penance.

The same in its own degree must be asserted of the Church, in as far as she is the general help to salvation. Therefore, that one may obtain eternal salvation, it is not always required that he be incorporated into the Church actually as a member, but it necessary that at least he be united to her by desire and longing.

However, this desire need not always be explicit, as it is in catechumens; but when person is involved in invincible ignorance, God accepts also an implicit desire, so called because it is included in that good disposition of soul whereby a person wishes will to be conformed to the will of God.

These things are clearly taught in that dogmatic letter which was issued by the Sovereign Pontiff, Pope Pius XII, on June 29, 1943, "On the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ" (AAS, Vol. 35, an. 1943, p. 193ff.). For in this letter the Sovereign Pontiff clearly distinguishes between those who are actually incorporated into the Church as members, and those who are united to the Church only by desire.

Discussing the members of which the Mystical Body is composed here on earth, same August Pontiff says: "Actually only those are to be included as members e Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed."

Toward the end of this same Encyclical Letter, when most affectionately inviting unity those who do not belong to the body of the Catholic Church, he mentions who "are related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer by a certain unconscious yearning and desire," and these he by no means excludes from eternal salvation, but the other hand states that they are in a condition "in which they cannot be sure their salvation" since "they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church" AAS,

loc. cit., 243).

With these wise words he reproves both those who exclude from eternal salvation united to the Church only by implicit desire, and those who falsely assert that men be saved equally well in every religion (cf. Pope Pius IX, Allocution *Singulari quadam*, in Denzinger, nn. 1641, ff. also Pope Pius IX in the Encyclical Letter *Quanto conficiamur moerore* in Denzinger, n. 1677).

But it must not be thought that any kind of desire of entering the Church suffices that one may be saved. It is necessary that the desire by which one is related to the Church be animated by perfect charity. Nor can an implicit desire produce its effect, unless a person has supernatural faith: "For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrew 11:6). The Council of Trent declares (Session VI, chap 8): Faith is the beginning of a man's salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God and attain to the fellowship of His children" (Denzinger, n. 801).

From what has been said it is evident that those things which are proposed in the periodical "From the Housetops," fascicle 3, as the genuine teaching of the Catholic Church are far from being such and are very harmful both to those within the Church and those without.

From these declarations which pertain to doctrine certain conclusions follow which regard discipline and conduct, and which cannot be unknown to those who vigorously defend the necessity by which all are bound of belonging to the true Church and of submitting to the authority of the Roman Pontiff and of the Bishops "whom the Holy Ghost has placed . . . to rule the Church" (Acts, 20:28).

Hence, one cannot understand how the St. Benedict Center can consistently claim to be a Catholic school and wish to be accounted such, and yet not conform to the prescriptions of Canons 1381 and 1382 of the Code of Canon Law, and continue to exist as a source of discord and rebellion against ecclesiastical authority and as a source of the disturbance of many consciences.

Furthermore, it is beyond understanding how a member of a religious institute, namely Father Feeney, presents himself as a "Defender of the faith," and at the same time does not hesitate to attack the catechetical instruction proposed by lawful authorities, and has not even feared to incur grave sanctions threatened by the sacred canons because of his serious violations of his duties as a religious, a priest and an ordinary member of the Church.

Finally, it is in no wise to be tolerated that certain Catholics shall claim for themselves the right to publish a periodical, for the purpose of spreading theological doctrines, without the permission of competent Church Authority; called the "imprimatur," which is prescribed by the sacred canons.

Therefore, let them who in grave peril are ranged against the Church seriously bear in mind that after "Rome has spoken" they cannot be excused even by reasons of good faith. Certainly, their bond and duty of obedience toward the Church is much graver than that of those who as yet are related to the Church "only by an unconscious desire." Let them realize that they are children of the Church, lovingly nourished by her with the milk of doctrine and the sacraments, and hence, having heard the clear voice of their Mother, they cannot be excused from culpable ignorance, and therefore to them applies without any restriction that principle: submission to the Catholic Church and to the Sovereign Pontiff is required as necessary for salvation.

In sending this letter, I declare my profound esteem, and remain Your Excellency's most devoted

Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani

A. Ottaviani Assessor

To His Excellency  
Most Reverend Richard James Cushing  
Archbishop of Boston