

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 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. 3

CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

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133. Principle I. After the promulgation of the gospel, the Sacrament of Baptism, by the positive

¹ Fr. Benedict Henry Merkelbach, a Dominican, who wrote the first edition of this work in the 1930's, is the most renowned moral theologian of the twentieth century. His massive three-volume work was the standard textbook for many, many seminaries throughout the whole world before Vatican II. It is the one which is used at Most Holy Trinity Seminary in Warren, Michigan.

order of God, is in itself and ordinarily necessary for all men, and is necessary by necessity of means for salvation. For adults, however, it is necessary also by necessity of natural and divine law, since this means must be accepted by them voluntarily.

134. Principle II. The Sacrament of Baptism extraordinarily or by accident can be supplied for by means of the baptism of blood, which is martyrdom, or by the baptism of flame, i.e., the act of perfect charity or contrition with at least the implicit desire for the very same sacrament. This principle is *certain* from the tradition of the Church.

Proof. A. *The baptism of blood* is martyrdom, that is, a death inflicted and tolerated for Christ, for the true Faith or some other Christian virtue.

It takes the place of the sacrament, as is clear from the words of Christ in Matthew X: 32, 39²; Luke IX: 24³; it is true *even in children*, which is evident from the fact that the innocents killed by Herod have always been venerated by the Church as martyrs, “who confessed [the Faith] not by speaking but by dying.” This is most fitting, for since the sacraments have their efficacy from the passion of Christ and His merits, it is necessary that the real imitation of the passion of Christ, by which man is most configured to Christ, obtain the application of the merits of the passion and the effect of the sacrament.

B. *The baptism of flame* or desire, which is not called so because there is a desire for Baptism, which is present in the other baptisms of adults, but because there is nothing but a desire for Baptism. It is an act of *perfect* charity or contrition, which includes at least implicitly a desire for Baptism, by desiring to do all things which God commands under pain of mortal sin, and to use all the means which are necessary for salvation, first among which is Baptism, “inasmuch as,” says St. Thomas in q. 66, art. 11, “the heart of someone is moved by the Holy Ghost to believe God and love God, and to do penance for his sins.”

It takes the place of Baptism in adults, because, since the sacraments have their power from the Holy Ghost as their first cause, someone can, through the power of the Holy Ghost, obtain the effect, not only without the Baptism of water but also without the baptism of blood. This is evident from all of the general assertions concerning the love of God (John XIV: 23)⁴ and penance (Ezekiel XVIII: 21)⁵. These proofs are confirmed by the case of Cornelius in whom, before he was baptized, the Holy Ghost visibly descended (Acts X: 33, 44)⁶. Likewise it is proved by the Council of Trent⁷ in Session 6, chapter

² “Every one therefore that shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven.” “He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for me shall find it.”

³ “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; for he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall save it.”

⁴ “If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.”

⁵ “But if the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgement, and justice, living he shall live and shall not die.”

⁶ The reader would do well to read the whole tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where the pagan Roman centurion Cornelius, as St. Peter was explaining the gospel to him, received the Holy Ghost before his baptism.

⁷ In these words a description of the justification of a sinner is given as being a translation from that state in which man is born a child of the first Adam to the state of grace and of the “adoption of sons” [Romans VIII:15] of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior; and this translation after the promulgation of the Gospel cannot be effected except through the laver of regeneration, **or a desire for it**, as it is written: “Unless a man be born again of water and

4, and by the doctrine of justification *ex opere operantis*, i.e., by the act of perfect contrition and charity, which is demonstrated in the tract on grace, and is drawn from the thirtieth condemned proposition of Baius.

Since, however, the *desire* for Baptism is required, it follows that those who have been justified by the baptism of flame or of blood remain obliged to receive the Sacrament of Baptism, when the opportunity presents itself. Therefore someone should be baptized who has already received a mortal wound, if he continues to live for a few moments.

135. Corollary. *There is a threefold Baptism: water, flame, and blood.*

1. *The Baptism of water*, that is, the Sacrament of Baptism is an external ceremonial sign. It is a sacred rite instituted by Christ and administered in His name, that it be His instrument in the remission of sins and of admission into the Church. It justifies *ex opere operato* with only imperfect contrition. It imprints the character and remits all punishment due to sin, as we have explained above in no. 130.

2. *The Baptism of flame or desire* is an act of perfect charity or contrition. It is not a sacrament, because it is not an external sign, and therefore does not imprint the character. Therefore, after such a baptism there remains the obligation of receiving the Sacrament of Baptism. It justifies *ex opere operantis*, and ordinarily does not remit all punishment for sin.

3. *The Baptism of blood* or martyrdom. It is not a sacrament, because it is not a ceremonial sign or a rite instituted by Christ, which is administered in His name in order that it be an instrument of sanctification. Therefore it does not imprint the character. It justifies in a manner like *ex opere operato*, not actively but passively, with only imperfect contrition, and in it all the punishment for sin is remitted. It is more eminent than the other two types of baptism since it gives a more perfect conformity with Christ, and therefore God grants a greater grace in it.

the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” [John III: 5]. [emphasis added]