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Baptism of Desire: An Exchange
Rev. Anthony Cekada

The fundamental error of the Feeney adherents: Rejecting the rules for belief laid down by Vatican I and Pius IX

Introductory Note: *The notes from my lecture "Baptism of Desire and Theological Principles" were posted on our Web-site in early 2001 and occasioned a lively discussion on the Sacred Heart List, an e-mail discussion group for the adherents of the St. Benedict Center, who follow the teachings of the late Rev. Leonard Feeney SJ. The following is an exchange of e-mails between myself and one St. Benedict Center adherent. – AC*

Is There True Unanimity Among Theologians?

Dear Fr. Cekada:

It would seem that remarks I made on our Sacred Heart List were passed on to you – as your proposal was passed on to the list. Fair enough. Without going through the other parties I thought I would contact you directly and will forward a copy of my response to our list. And, if you choose to respond in turn, I will post your response as well. I'm certainly not very competent in such things, but I will do the best I can.

To the matter: First of all, I was commenting upon your post as a simple layman and claim no expertise. That being said, I took the time to respond to your initial post because it didn't make sense to me – I can't make it work in reality. Thus, let me attempt to make myself clear – and then, if you choose, you can make yourself clear.

It is your contention (as I understand it – and I am more than willing to accept correction if it is needed) that you hold that those who do not believe in "Baptism of Blood" and "Baptism of Desire" commit sin in that disbelief. So, let's call that point no. 1.

1) Do you claim that people who do not believe in "Baptism of Blood" and "Baptism of Desire" commit sin in that disbelief?

As proof that BOB/BOD was a "dogmatic" matter, you offered a citation from a text by a Dominican theologian which states:

IV. Thesis: *The unanimous teaching of theologians in matters of faith and morals establishes certitude for the proof of a dogma.*

A. First Proof: The connection of theologians with the Church.

1. As men who study theological science, theologians have only a scientific and historical authority. But as servants, organs, and witness of the Church, they possess an authority that is both dogmatic and certain.

You then provided a list of 25 theologians (I no longer have the original post, not that it matters) who accept BOB/BOD to one degree of certainty or another – but not all are unanimous in the "way" they hold BOB/BOD, but are, by your accounting, all "believers" in BOB/BOD. I pray I have stated all of that correctly – lest there be any misunderstanding.

Thus, I would ask you:

2) If all of these theologians hold BOB/BOD as a doctrinal certainty (or, as the thesis above, which you have made your own by citation, calls "dogma") – why should there be any deviation in their "level" of acceptance? Are dogmas to be accepted by "level" of belief according to the mind of the particular theologian, or by some "degree" of certainty? How can that be so with a matter ("dogma"), which by definition – must be believed?

3) Because this thesis rests upon the phrase "the unanimous teaching of theologians of faith and morals, is a group of 25 the number which must be used to determine "dogma" according to the thesis you have provided?

4) If, as an example, we included within your number of theologians St. Francis Xavier, who did not accept BOB/BOD – is 25 out of 26 "unanimous"?

5) As a matter of fact, Fr. Leonard Feeney was a card-carrying theologian. If we add him to your group, and the number is now 25 to 2 – Is the teaching still "unanimous"?

6) What is the number? How many theologians must not agree before there is no longer a "unanimous teaching of theologians"? If the number is more than one, what is the definition of "unanimous" that you have (the one I have which means "to a man – all, everyone without exception," must be defective)?

7) What about the theologians at the Council of Trent – those who defined the canons regarding the Sacrament of Baptism: do they count or do they not count? They were theologians; they are dead – but they do not agree with your theory, do they? Because they do not agree, must they be eliminated? If they are not eliminated, how can you ever claim a "unanimous" teaching unless you hand pick the theologians and only consider the views of your hand-picked group? And if you hand pick the theologians just because they believe what you are trying to promote, of what value is that?

You proposed that I spend \$15 to find out how BOB/BOD are defined.¹[1] If you believe that BOB/BOD are dogmatic (and if you do not propose they are dogmatic, why use the citation above which deals with "certitude for the proof of a dogma") which requires assent of the intellect and will by the faithful, are they so complicated that it requires a \$15 essay to define them? What could possibly be so difficult? Perhaps, instead (and you can save me the money), you could please provide all of official Church pronouncements, conciliar documents, encyclicals, apostolic constitutions, instructions, etc., which: 6) a. define the terms "Baptism of Desire" and "Baptism of Blood." b. declare, define, and pronounce that "Baptism of Desire" and "Baptism of Blood" are sufficient unto salvation without the necessity of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Those items should clear up the matter so that all of those of us on the Sacred Heart List might be set straight in our thinking.

I pray that I have not confused "doctrinal" with issues of fact or ecclesiastical law as I previously did – that's the trouble with lay people, I know.

I'm sure our list would like to this matter pursued. I (and they) await your response to these simple questions. We can go from there.

Sincerely,

— N.N.

[1]. This refers to a 125-page dossier of photocopies from the works of the 25 theologians I cited. It is available from our office for \$15, which covers the cost of copying and binding.

A CATHOLIC'S OBLIGATIONS, UNANIMITY & MORTAL SIN

Dear N.N.:

Thank you for your e-mail.

Some correspondents have still not understood my point, so before addressing your questions, I will repeat it as simply as I can.

(Readers who are receiving this material for the first time should consult my article "Baptism of Desire and Theological Principles" [www.traditionalmass.org], where they will find my complete argument, together with quotes and citations to support my claims in Section I below.)

I. Your Obligations as a Catholic

A. Vatican I (Dz 1792) obliges you to **believe by divine and Catholic faith those things:**

1. Contained in Scripture or Tradition, AND
2. Proposed for belief as divinely revealed by the Church's authority, either through:
 - (a) **Solemn pronouncements** (by ecumenical councils, or popes *ex cathedra*) OR
 - (b) **Universal ordinary magisterium** (teaching of the bishops together with the pope, either in council, or spread throughout the world.)

B. Pius IX further specified (*Tuas Libenter* [1863], Dz 1683) that you must believe those teachings of the universal ordinary magisterium **held by theologians to belong to the faith.**

C. Pius IX specified still further (*ibid.* Dz 1684) that you must also adhere to:

1. Doctrinal decisions of Vatican Congregations (e.g., the Holy Office)
2. Forms of doctrine held as:
 - (a) **Theological truths and conclusions,**
 - (b) So certain **that opposition merits some theological censure** short of "heresy."

D. Conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing:

- Points A-C are the criteria Vatican I and the Roman Pontiff have laid down for judging a theological issue.
- Accordingly, no Catholic is free to reject them.
- They are, moreover, first principles in the science of theology.
- The teaching of theologians on baptism of desire and baptism of blood falls squarely into categories A-C.
- You must therefore adhere to this teaching.

II. Misc. Questions & Objections.

1. Is Rejection a Sin? As I demonstrated in my original article, the teaching on baptism of desire/blood falls into the categories mentioned above.

According to Cartechini (*De Valore Notarum Theologicarum*, [Rome: Gregorian University 1951], 134-5), rejecting a teaching so categorized is a mortal sin against the faith.

Those who reject baptism of blood or baptism of desire, therefore, commit mortal sin.

2. Different categories assigned by theologians? Some correspondents believe that ALL theologians would assign the same theological “categories” (“notes,” “qualifications,” etc.) to baptism of desire and baptism of blood if a Catholic were truly obliged to accept the teachings.

This is false.

Collectively, *all* the theologians cited agree that baptism of desire and baptism of blood are “in conformity with the truth presented in the Sources of Revelation and the Universal Magisterium” – otherwise, they would not teach the doctrines.

Individually, the theologians may indeed assign different categories to the doctrines – theologically certain, Catholic doctrine, *de fide*, etc. But *any* of these categories still place the teaching on baptism of desire and baptism of blood among those teachings Catholics must believe and adhere to. (See I.A-C.)

The specific category assigned is important for another reason. Each has a corresponding *theological censure* which indicates your degree of error if you deny the doctrines – whether your denial constitutes theological error, error in Catholic doctrine, or heresy.

3. Does one dissenting theologian destroy unanimity? I assume this is the point behind the questions about numbers and unanimity.

The answer is no. Salaverri explains that it is only necessary that the consensus of theologians be “*morally unanimous*,” (*Tractatus de Ecclesia*, 3rd ed. [BAC, 1955], 858), as distinguished from *physically* unanimous.

But I think the question is moot. Theologians generally cite adversaries to a doctrine they are defending. In the case of baptism of desire and baptism of blood, the adversaries seem to be few and disreputable.

The following is from Solà’s discussion of baptism of desire and baptism of blood: “*Adversaries: Certain heretics have affirmed that ‘no adult can be saved without receiving baptism itself before he dies, however much he would burn with desire for it, and that it would do him no good unless he were washed with water.’* Baius [in a proposition condemned by Pope St. Pius V] also taught that charity was not always joined to the remission of sins.

“Against the second part [baptism of blood] there are hardly any adversaries, save for a few theologians who disagree over the manner in which the martyrdom achieves its effect.” (*De Sacramentis*, [BAC 1954], 69. His emphasis.)

The heretics who denied baptism of desire were opposed by the Doctor and Father of the Church, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (ob. 1153), whom Solà also quotes.

4. St. Francis Xavier, Fr. Feeney: Theologians? As I explained in Section II of my original article, the term “theologian” connotes extensive research work, a distinguished teaching career at a Pontifical University, publication of multi-volume theological treatises, etc.

As far as I know, St. Francis Xavier would not meet these criteria. His writings, as I recall, were limited to letters.

Nor would Fr. Feeney. His earlier writings were popular religious works. And his later works would not meet the fourth criteria Salaverri lays down: “orthodoxy in doctrine acknowledged by the Church, at least insofar as [his] writings are used by the faithful and students knowingly and without reproof by the Magisterium of the Church.” (*de Ecclesia*, 857.)

5. Trent, Definitions, “Official” Pronouncements. Baptism of desire and baptism of blood are defined in essentially the same way in the works I cited.

A. Desire. St. Alphonsus Liguori defines baptism of desire (*flaminis*) as: “Perfect conversion to God through contrition or love of God above all things, with the explicit or implicit desire [*voto*] for true Baptism of water, in whose place it may supply, according to the Council of Trent.” He cites Session 14, on Penance, ch. 4.

St. Alphonsus further states: “It is *de fide* that men may be also be saved through baptism of desire – from the chapter *Apostolicam, de presb. non bapt.* and from the Council of Trent, where it is said that no one can be saved ‘without the washing of regeneration or the desire for it’.” (*Theologia Moralis*, ed. nova. [Rome: Vatican 1909] 3:96-7.)

The first citation is to an Epistle of Pope Innocent II (1130–43), who stated that a priest who “had died without the water of baptism, because he had persevered in the faith of Holy Mother the Church and in the confession of the name of Christ, was freed from original sin and attained the joy of the heavenly fatherland.” (Dz 388)2[2]

Other theologians also cite Trent and Innocent II for these definitions. They also cite Pope Innocent III’s decree in 1206 concerning a Jew who desired baptism but was not able to be validly baptized: “If, however, such a man had died immediately, he would have flown to his heavenly home at once, because of the faith of the sacrament, although not because of the sacrament of faith.” (Dz 413)3[3]

Some add Pope St. Pius V’s condemnation of the following proposition of Baius: “Perfect and sincere charity... can exist both in catechumens and in penitents without the remission of sins.” This is cited because: “The contradictory of this proposition is true. Therefore, charity cannot exist in unbaptized catechumens without the remission of their sins.” (McAuliffe, *Sacramental Theology*, 84.)

B. Blood. St. Alphonsus defines baptism of blood as: “The shedding of blood, or death tolerated, for the faith or for another Christian virtue.” As sources, he cites, among others, St. Thomas, St. Robert Bellarmine, Suarez and Cajetan. (*ibid.*)

As Solà noted (see above), opposition to this doctrine was virtually non-existent. The Magisterium does not usually intervene to issue a solemn definition for a common teaching unless it is widely attacked by heretics.

III. Summing Up.

Once again, before a Catholic can resolve a *specific* theological issue, he must first understand and accept the *general* theological principles the Church lays down as criteria for determining what must be believed.

Vatican I and the Roman Pontiff have unambiguously specified the type of teaching you must believe and adhere to:

- Solemn pronouncements of the extraordinary Magisterium.

2[2]. This citation was accidentally omitted from my original e-mail.

3[3]. Feeney adherents sometimes claim that this decision and that of Innocent II have no binding force for Catholics because they are “mere private letters.” This is false. The documents are *Epistolae*, which in Canon Law are classed among official Pontifical Acts. Both documents were included in the *Corpus Juris Canonici*, the official collection of church laws which preceded the 1917 Code of Canon Law. It is worth noting that the 1206 decree is the work of Innocent III, who also approved the 1215 decree of Lateran IV containing the phrase: “One indeed is the universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one at all is saved” – the axiom Feeney adherents try to cite *against* baptism of desire. Innocent III, it seems, saw no contradiction between one teaching and the other. It would be 700 years until his error would finally be discovered and corrected in Boston.

- Teachings of the universal ordinary Magisterium.
- Teachings held by theologians to belong to the faith.
- Doctrinal decisions of the Vatican congregations.
- Theological truths and conclusions so certain that opposition to them merits some theological censure short of “heresy.”

The standard teachings on baptism of desire and baptism of blood (as was amply documented in my original article) fall into these categories.

You must therefore adhere to these teachings.

Further, no matter *what* category theologians have assigned to these teachings – theologically certain, Catholic doctrine or *de fide* – rejecting them has the same consequences in the moral order: you commit a **mortal sin** against the faith.

And finally, you must reject the notion promoted in pro-Feeney circles that such teachings may be ignored because a Catholic’s obligation “is restricted to only those matters that the infallible judgment of the Church has proposed to be believed by all as dogmas of the faith” – for that is a principle the Church condemned in the *Syllabus of Errors*. (Dz 1722.)

Yours in Christ,

— The Rev. Anthony Cekada

BAPTISM OF DESIRE: CONTRADICTED BY TRENT?

Dear Fr. Cekada:

Thank you for your response.

As we progress, and reiterating the fact that I am not a theologian, I would like to take a little different tack here than normally one might see in such an exchange. Let me say first, that I while I believe that I am an open-minded individual, I am more than willing, and surely this is a result of God's grace, to submit to all of that which the Church has solemnly defined and declared that I must believe. However, as I mentioned in my previous post, that which you propose, i.e., that BOB/BOD (I hope you don't mind the shorthand) are "de fide" – is something about which you will have to convince me. Hopefully I will be able to make my simple approach understandable. And, if you don't mind, Father, perhaps we might approach this matter one point at a time. I'm a slow learner and have a short attention span. Thus, let's start at the top and move downward

You wrote:

I. YOUR OBLIGATIONS AS A CATHOLIC.

A. Vatican I (Dz 1792) obliges you to believe by divine and Catholic faith those things:

1. Contained in Scripture or Tradition, AND
2. Proposed for belief as divinely revealed by the Church’s authority, either through:
 - (a) Solemn pronouncements (by ecumenical councils, or popes *ex cathedra*) OR
 - (b) Universal ordinary magisterium (teaching of the bishops together with the pope, either in council, or spread throughout the world.)

The Council of Trent states: (Dz 858, 861)

Can. 2. **If anyone** shall say that **real and natural water is not necessary for baptism**, and on that account those words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit" (John 3:5), are distorted into some sort of metaphor: let him be anathema.

Can. 5. If anyone shall say that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation: let him be anathema.

Therefore, Father, I have six elementary questions I would pose to you:

1) Does your item "2(a) Solemn Pronouncements" by ecumenical councils include the solemn pronouncements of the ecumenical Council of Trent?

2) The answer, of course, is, "yes." Therefore, based upon your initial statement "A" which states one's obligation as a Catholic to believe by divine and Catholic faith those things which are... "(a) Solemn pronouncements (by ecumenical councils...)" does it not apply to the canons on the Sacrament of Baptism cited here?

3) In other words, how can one accept with divine and Catholic faith that which Trent has solemnly defined in the canon on the necessity of the Sacrament of Baptism for salvation (canon 5 above), and then deny the very canon by proposing that the Sacrament of Baptism is not necessary for salvation (which would carry an anathema according to the canon) – without incurring the anathema?

4) How can one accept with divine and Catholic faith that which Trent has solemnly defined in the canon on the necessity of "pure and natural water" for the Sacrament of Baptism (canon 2 above) and then deny that "real and natural water" are necessary for baptism (which, likewise, carries an anathema according to the canon)?

5) While you have stated that one is obligated to believe these canons by "divine and Catholic faith" (because they are solemn pronouncements of an ecumenical council) – do you now propose that one does *not* have to believe these canons?

6) If one accepts these canons as they are written (which Vatican I's *Dei Filius*, chapter 4 declares we must), and, for that matter the whole of the pronouncements of the Council of Trent, as they are written, does one, in any way, fall into error?

That should get us off to a smashing start, don't you think!

In union with His Holiness,

Pope John Paul II

— N.N.

FIRST ASK: WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR OUR BELIEF?

Dear N.N.:

Thank you for your e-mail.

Unfortunately, by going directly to a series of questions about the *particular* issue of baptism of desire, you pass over the key to this discussion: Ascertaining all the *general criteria* by which a particular issue such as this must be judged.

My original article, "Baptism of Desire and Theological Principles," began by setting forth the "**general rules for belief**" that the Church imposes upon Catholics. What *kinds* of teaching are we obliged to adhere to?

Answering this question establishes the *general* principles, or the rules of evidence, for discussing *any* point of Catholic teaching. Only when all these principles are established can one then look at a *particular* issue.

Vatican I and Pius IX laid down these general principles by establishing **all** the following as the types of teaching that a Catholic must believe and adhere to:

1. Solemn pronouncements of the extraordinary Magisterium.
2. Teachings of the universal ordinary Magisterium.
3. Teachings of the universal ordinary Magisterium held by the universal and common consent of theologians to belong to the faith.
4. Doctrinal decisions of the Vatican congregations.
5. Theological truths and conclusions so certain that opposition to them merits some theological censure short of "heresy."

Fr. Feeney's followers (and many traditionalists) seem to have the impression that a Catholic's obligation is pretty much limited to point 1 on the list. Your letter stops after point 2 and then asks a series of questions.

But a Catholic has to accept **all** these criteria, and consequently also believe or adhere to all the teachings which fall under points 2-5.

Otherwise, a reasonable discussion of almost any theological point among Catholics becomes entirely impossible, because some of the Church's standards have been set aside.

So, I ask you to reread Section I of my original article, with particular attention to the quotes from *Tuas Libenter* and the *Syllabus of Errors*, in order to verify that points 2-5 above do in fact accurately represent the obligations that Pius IX laid down.

I think that if you carefully study the issue, you will come to understand and accept the Church's requirements as regards points 2-5.

Acknowledging these as first principles would go a long way towards resolving any difficulties over the specific issue of baptism of desire and baptism of blood.

Please take your time in replying. I'll be away for about two weeks (seminary teaching and missions) and I won't have access to e-mail.

Yours in Christ,

— **The Rev. Anthony Cekada**

BAPTISM OF DESIRE IS THE REAL POINT

Dear Fr. Cekada:

Thank you for your e-mail. You wrote:

Unfortunately, by going directly to a series of questions about the *particular* issue of baptism of desire, you pass over the key to this discussion: Ascertaining all the *general criteria* by which a particular issue such as this must be judged.

Actually, Father, it was not my intent to cause confusion in this matter, but merely my intent to go directly to the points which you presented — in the order you presented them. I understand what you believe the "key" to the discussion is — but I also know what the "point" of the discussion is. Therefore, I will do this again — hopefully it will be clearer. When we have resolved the first 2 points we can get on to those which follow.

You wrote:

I. YOUR OBLIGATIONS AS A CATHOLIC.

A. Vatican I (Dz 1792) obliges you to believe by divine and Catholic faith those things:

1. Contained in Scripture or Tradition, AND
2. Proposed for belief as divinely revealed by the Church's authority, either through:
 - (a) Solemn pronouncements (by ecumenical councils, or popes *ex cathedra*) OR
 - (b) Universal ordinary magisterium (teaching of the bishops together with the pope, either in council, or spread throughout the world.)

I accept that a Catholic is obliged to believe by divine and Catholic faith these mentioned above (this is not meant to exclude others, but at this point, taking your post point by point, this is what I am addressing).

Therefore, we are in complete agreement regarding point (1) and I accept that Vatican I obliges a Catholic to believe by divine and Catholic faith those things which are contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

Further, we are in complete agreement that Catholics are obliged to believe by divine and Catholic faith those things which are "Proposed for belief as divinely revealed by the Church's authority, either through: (a) solemn pronouncements (by ecumenical councils (by ecumenical councils, or popes (*ex cathedra*) or (b) through the universal ordinary Magisterium" (as the Magisterium is defined by Holy Mother Church).

Now: back to the point I was making in my second post. Two questions:

- 1) Are the "solemn pronouncements" of the Council of Trent included in 2. (a)?
- 2) If you hold that the solemn pronouncements of the Council of Trent are to be included in category of "solemn pronouncements by ecumenical councils," are Catholics obliged to believe in them with a "divine and Catholic faith"?

If Catholics are obliged to believe in the solemn pronouncements of the Council of Trent with a "divine and Catholic faith," are the following canons on the Sacrament of Baptism, shown below, (Dz 858, 861) included in the solemn pronouncements of the Council of Trent:

Can. 2. **If anyone** shall say that **real and natural water is not necessary for baptism**, and on that account those words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit" (John 3:5), are distorted into some sort of metaphor: let him be anathema.

Can. 5. If anyone shall say that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation: let him be anathema.

If the canons cited here on the Sacrament of Baptism are included in the solemn pronouncements of the Council of Trent, and therefore must be believed by a Catholic with divine and Catholic faith, would you please respond to the questions below, which – tied directly to the second point in your inclusion – respond, in context, to your thesis that anyone who does not accept BOB/BOD commits sin – then we can go on to the next point.

[Questions 2-6 from previous e-mail repeated]

I pray this added explanation suffices.

In union with His Holiness,

Pope John Paul II

— N.N.

YOUR FUNDAMENTAL ERROR: A REFUSAL OF SUBMISSION

Dear N.N:

Thank you for your March 10th e-mail. It was awaiting me when I returned from the seminary.

The discussion must always come back to the principles or the criteria that determine what a Catholic is obliged to believe.

You ask me a series of questions, for instance, aimed at demonstrating that (1) belief in baptism of desire or blood contradicts Trent's canons 2 and 5 on the sacrament of baptism, and that (2) this supposed contradiction nullifies the obligations that Vatican I and Pius IX imposed upon Catholics to submit to teachings of the universal ordinary magisterium.

We could, of course, trade quotes over the specific issue in point (1). Other priests, it seems, have spent a long time doing this.

I myself would begin with passages from St. Alphonsus' *Theologia Moralis* explicitly affirming both canon 2 **and** baptism of desire as *de fide*. I would then follow with a raft of material from other post-Tridentine theologians, and then perhaps throw in something from the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* about the specific heresies (Luther's teaching that beer or milk could be used to confer the sacrament of baptism; Calvin's, that "water" in John 3:5 was only a metaphor for the Holy Ghost) that canon 2 was formulated to condemn.

But this would be a waste of time. None of it would even register. Why?

The real problem still boils down to point (2): **You and I do not follow the same *criteria* for determining what a Catholic is obliged to believe.**

I submit to the criteria Vatican I and Pius IX laid down for the teachings that Catholics must believe and adhere to:

1. Solemn pronouncements of the extraordinary Magisterium.
2. Teachings of the universal ordinary Magisterium.
3. Teachings of the universal ordinary Magisterium held by the universal and common consent of theologians to belong to the faith.
4. Doctrinal decisions of the Vatican congregations.
5. Theological truths and conclusions so certain that opposition to them merits some theological censure short of "heresy."

None of these should surprise anyone – all were standard principles in pre-Vatican II theology manuals. In my original article, I reproduced the passages from Vatican I, *Tuas Libenter* and the *Syllabus of Errors* that imposed these obligations.

The tenor of your questions, however, makes it clear that you do not submit to these obligations.

Rather, you wish to debate them somehow, by implying that baptism of desire or blood contradict canons 2 and 5, and that those who reject your position must now defend or justify Vatican I and Pius IX's criteria.

But these criteria are *not* open to debate – not among Catholics, anyway.

In practice, your criteria (and those of the typical Feeney adherent) appear to be these:

- 1. No anathema, no belief.** A Catholic's obligation to adhere to Church teaching is restricted to only those matters that the infallible judgment of the Church has solemnly proposed for belief as dogmas of the faith.

2. Free interpretation of magisterial texts. The individual lay Catholic is free to determine for himself the “literal meaning” of these (few) solemn infallible pronouncements, and contradict what popes, bishops, and approved theological manuals have taught about them for centuries.

The first principle was condemned by Pius IX in the *Syllabus of Errors* (Dz 1722).

The second is the Protestant principle of unmediated free interpretation – but instead of a Bible, each lay believer examines a vernacular Denzinger.

So, when you ask me, “If one accepts these canons [on baptism] as they are written... does one, in any way, fall into error?” my response is: If someone accepts them as *you* think they were written, he falls in *every* way into error.

For you approach these canons, and indeed all pronouncements of the magisterium, without having first submitted to *all the obligations* for belief or adherence that Vatican I and Pius IX imposed.

This refusal of submission – and not the particular issue of *extra Ecclesiam* – is the fundamental error from which all the other errors of Feeneyism flow.

The Church’s requirements are a package. You accept and submit to them *all*, or you can’t honestly call yourself a Catholic.

And no matter what category theologians may attach to baptism of desire or baptism of blood – *de fide*, Catholic doctrine, or just “theologically certain” – to refuse adherence to a teaching in *any* of these categories is still a **mortal sin** against the faith.

Fr. Feeney’s adherents spill oceans of ink answering the question “who shall ascend.” Better they should first accept Vatican I and Pius IX’s answer to the question “what must I believe.”

Instead, they proclaim that the universal ordinary magisterium taught errors for centuries, and that Catholics have no duty to submit to it.

This is heresy pure and simple, putting them firmly *extra Ecclesiam* – where there is, as we know, *nulla salus*.

Yours in Christ,

— **The Rev. Anthony Cekada**

March 22, 2001

(E-mail exchange, Feb-Mar 2001).
