

# Baptism of Desire and Theological Principles

(2000)

by Rev. Anthony Cekada

## What principles must Catholics follow to arrive at the truth?

OVER THE YEARS I have occasionally encountered traditionalists, both lay and clerical, who followed the teachings of the late Rev. Leonard Feeney and the St. Benedict Center concerning the axiom “Outside the Church there is no salvation.” Those who fully embrace the Feeneyite position reject the common Catholic teaching about baptism of desire and baptism of blood.

Catholics, however, are not free to reject this teaching, because it comes from the Church’s **universal ordinary magisterium**. Pius IX stated that Catholics are required to believe those teachings that theologians hold “belong to the faith,” and to subject themselves to those forms of doctrine commonly held as “theological truths and conclusions.”

In 1998, I photocopied material on baptism of desire and baptism of blood from the works of twenty-five pre-Vatican II theologians (including two Doctors of the Church), and assembled it into a dossier. All, of course, teach the same doctrine.

Behind the Feeneyite rejection of this doctrine lies a rejection of the **principles** that Pius IX laid down, principles that form the basis for the whole science of theology. He who rejects these criteria rejects the foundations of Catholic theology and constructs a peculiar theology of his own — one where his own interpretation of papal pronouncements is every bit as arbitrary and idiosyncratic as a free-thinking Baptist’s interpretation of the Bible. It is utterly pointless to argue with such a person over baptism of blood and baptism of desire, because he does not accept the only criteria on which a theological issue must be judged.

What follows are notes from a July 15, 2000 conference I gave addressing the principles to be applied in examining the issues of baptism of desire and baptism of blood. The photocopied dossier mentioned is available from our office for a nominal charge.

### *Section I*

## What Principles Does the Church Require You to Follow?

### I. You must believe the teachings of both the solemn and the universal ordinary magisterium of the Church (Vatican I).

#### A. General Principle:

- “Further, by divine and Catholic faith, all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition, and those which are proposed by the Church, either in a solemn pronouncement **or IN HER ORDINARY AND UNIVERSAL TEACHING POWER** [*magisterium*], to be believed as divinely revealed.” Vatican Council I, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Faith* (1870), DZ 1792.

**B. The Code of Canon Law imposes the same obligation.**  
(Canon 1323.1)

**C. Therefore, you must 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.)

**D. This is not "optional," or "a matter of opinion."**

- It defines the *object of faith* — what you are obliged to believe.
- Further, it is *de fide definita* — an infallible, unchangeable, solemn pronouncement.

**II. You must believe those teachings of the universal ordinary magisterium held by theologians to belong to the faith (Pius IX).**

- "For even if it were a matter concerning that subjection which is to be manifested by an act of divine faith, nevertheless, it would not have to be limited to those matters which have been defined by express decrees of the ecumenical Councils, or of the Roman Pontiffs and of this See, but would have to be **extended also to those matters which are handed down as divinely revealed by the ordinary teaching power of the whole Church spread throughout the world, and therefore, by universal and common consent are held by Catholic theologians to belong to faith.**" *Tuas Libenter* (1863), DZ 1683.

**III. You must also subject yourself to the Holy See's doctrinal decisions and to other forms of doctrine commonly held as theological truths and conclusions. (Pius IX).**

**A. General Principle.**

- "But, since it is a matter of that subjection by which in conscience all those Catholics are bound who work in the speculative sciences, in order that they may bring new advantage to the Church by their writings, on that account, then, the men of that same convention should realize that it is **not sufficient for learned Catholics to accept and revere the aforesaid dogmas of the Church**, but that it is also necessary to subject themselves to the decisions pertaining to doctrine which are issued by the Pontifical Congregations, and also to those forms of doctrine which are held by the common and constant consent of Catholics as **theological truths and conclusions, so certain that opinions opposed to these same forms of doctrine, although they cannot be called heretical, nevertheless deserve some theological censure.**" *Tuas Libenter* (1863), DZ 1684.

**B. You must therefore adhere to the following:**

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."

#### IV. You must reject these condemned positions on this issue:

**A. Theologians have “obscured” the more important truths of our faith.** (Condemned by Pius VI.)

- “The proposition which asserts ‘that in these later times there has been spread a general obscuring of the more important truths pertaining to religion, which are the basis of faith and of the moral teachings of Jesus Christ,’ HERETICAL.” *Auctorem Fidei* (1794) DZ 1501.

**B. Catholics are obliged to believe only those matters infallibly proposed as dogmas.** (Condemned by Pius IX.)

- “And so all and each evil opinion and doctrine individually mentioned in this letter, by Our Apostolic authority We reject, proscribe, and condemn: and We wish and command that they be considered as absolutely rejected, proscribed and condemned by all the sons of the Catholic Church...”

“22. The obligation by which Catholic teachers and writers are absolutely bound is restricted to those matters only which are proposed by the infallible judgement of the Church, to be believed by all as dogmas of the faith.” CONDEMNED PROPOSITION. Encyclical *Quanta Cura* and *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), DZ 1699, 1722.

**C. Encyclicals do not demand assent, because popes are not exercising their supreme power.** (Condemned by Pius XII.)

- “It is not to be thought that what is set down in Encyclical Letters does not demand assent in itself, because in these the popes do not exercise the supreme powers of their *magisterium*. For these matters are taught by the ordinary *magisterium*, regarding which the following is pertinent ‘He who heareth you, heareth me.’; and usually what is set forth and inculcated in Encyclical Letters, already pertains to Catholic doctrine.” *Humani Generis* (1950), DZ 2313.

#### Section II

### Why the Church Requires You to Believe or Adhere to Doctrines Commonly Taught by her Theologians.

Résumé translated by Fr. Cekada from Fr. Reginald-Maria SCHULTES OP, *De Ecclesia Catholica: Praelectiones Apologeticae* [*Apologetic Lectures on the Catholic Church*], 2nd. ed., Paris: Lethielleux 1931, pp. 667ff. This book was used by students for Doctoral degrees in theology in Roman Universities in the early 1900s. Fr. Schultes held the highest theological degree in the Dominican Order (OPS ThMagister), and was a Professor at the Pontifical University of the Angelicum in Rome. Sections marked with asterisks (\*) = additional comments by Fr. Cekada.

#### I. Introductory Concepts.

**A. Definition of Theologian** = “learned men who after the time of the Church Fathers scientifically taught sacred doctrine in the Church.”

1. *in the Church* = in union with the Church, either with: (a) a Specific mission from the Church or (b) the Consent of the Church, either express or tacit.
2. *doctrine* = either dogma or moral.

**B. General Types of Theology.**

1. *Positive* = investigates and expounds the contents of Scripture and the Fathers.
2. *Scholastic* = seeks understanding of the faith through use of Scripture, the Fathers, reason (syllogisms), philosophic

principles (in explaining revelation, drawing conclusions and formulating definitions).

**C. \*The Education and Career of a Theologian.\***

- *Minor Seminary*: 6 years. Latin, liberal arts.
- *Philosophy*: 2–3 years. Logic, Metaphysics, Cosmology, Psychology, Criteriology, etc.
- *Theology*, studied at a Pontifical University: Dogmatic, Moral, Pastoral courses studied by ordinary clergy, 4-5 years. (In 1st year, the *criteria* for settling theological issues.) S.T.L. degree. Ordination at about age 25. Doctoral studies, 2-4 years. Research, dissertation, public defense of dissertation before examiners of a Pontifical University. S.T.D. degree.
- *Early Career*: Teaching undergraduate university courses. Assisting senior professors with research. Writing and researching own articles. Publication of articles in journals. (All are scrutinized by professors, and must be reviewed by ecclesiastical superiors, and given an Imprimatur.) Review by senior faculty.
- *Middle Career*: (If successful.) Assistant Professorship in Pontifical University. Selection as associate author of a major work by a recognized theologian. Continued research, and publication of articles in journals. (All with peer review and ecclesiastical approval.)
- *Later Career*: (If successful.) Full Professorship at a Pontifical University. Authorship of a work considered a significant contribution in a particular field. Continued research, and publication of articles in journals. (All with peer review and ecclesiastical approval.)
- *The Top of the Heap*: (Only the very best.) Head of a department at a Pontifical University. Authorship of a multi-volume manual in dogmatic or moral theology that is considered an outstanding contribution in its field, and used in seminaries and universities throughout the world. Appointment by pope as a Consultor to one of the departments of the Roman Curia. Invitation to draft an Encyclical or papal legislation. The Cardinal's hat. Canonization as a saint. The title "Doctor of the Church."
- *Conclusion to Be Drawn*: The theologians who were acknowledged as the best in their fields before Vatican II possessed a knowledge and expertise in Catholic doctrine that was overwhelmingly superior to that of a layman or the average parish priest.

**II. Opponents to Authority of Theologians.**

- A. Humanists.** (Rejected supernatural principles. Put man at center of universe.)
- B. Protestants.** (Rejected doctrines theologians defended.)
  1. *Luther*. Scholastic theology is "ignorance of the truth and inane falsehood."
  2. *Melancthon*. Scholastic theology is "the Gospel obscured, the faith extinguished."
- C. Jansenists.** (Claimed that theologians "obscured revealed doctrine.")
- D. Modernists, liberals rationalists.** (Reject the immutable nature of truth.)

**III. Church Doctrine on the Issue.**

**A. Papal Pronouncements.**

1. **Pius VI.** *Condemns the following propositions of the Synod of Pistoia (1794):*

a. That the scholastic method “opened the way for inventing new systems discordant with one another with respect to truths of a greater value, and which finally led to probabilism and laxism.” DZ 1576.

b. “The assertion which attacks with slanderous charges the opinions discussed in Catholic schools about which the Apostolic See has thought that nothing yet needs to be defined or pronounced.” DZ 1578.

c. “The proposition which asserts ‘**that in these later times there has been spread a general obscuring of the more important truths pertaining to religion**, which are the basis of faith and of the moral teachings of Jesus Christ’, **heretical**.” DZ 1501.

2. **Pius IX.** *Reproof to those who reject the teachings of scholastic theology*:

- “Nor are we ignorant that in Germany there also prevailed a false opinion against the old school, and against the teaching of those supreme Doctors, whom the universal Church venerates because of their admirable wisdom and sanctity of life. **But by this false opinion the authority of the Church itself is called into danger**, especially since the Church, not only through so many continuous centuries has permitted that theological science be cultivated according to the method and the principles of these same Doctors, sanctioned by the common consent of all Catholic schools, but it [the Church] also very often extolled their theological doctrine with the highest praises, and strongly recommended it as a very strong buttress of faith and a formidable armory against its enemies.” *Tuas libenter*, 1863, DZ 1680.

3. **Leo XIII.** *Prescribes use of St. Thomas and his methods*.

#### **B. Practice of Church.**

1. Condemning doctrines contrary to the teaching of theologians.
2. Applying scholastic doctrine and methods in her pronouncements.
3. Declaring theologians Doctors of the Church. (*Ss. Thomas, Bonaventure, etc.*)

#### **C. The Code of Canon Law.**

- “Instructors in conducting the study of the subjects of rational philosophy and of theology and in the training of the seminarians in these subjects shall follow the Angelic Doctor’s method, doctrine and principles, and steadfastly adhere to them.” (Canon 1366.2)

### **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.

2. Church doctrine on matters of faith and morals possesses an authority that is dogmatic and certain. (a) The unanimous teaching of theologians *testifies and expresses* the doctrine of the Church, because the Church accepts the common teaching of theologians as true and as her own when she either tacitly or expressly approves it. (b) Theologians as *ministers and organs of the Church* instruct the

faithful in the doctrines of the faith. So, in fact those things preached, taught, held and believed are those same things the theologians propose and teach.

3. And so, because of the theologians' connection with the Church, their agreement on a doctrine has an authority that is both dogmatic and certain, because otherwise the authority of the Church herself would be endangered, because she admitted, fostered or approved the [false] doctrine of theologians.

4. This proof is confirmed because the dogmatic authority of theologians is denied by all those and only those who: (a) Deny or refuse to admit the dogmatic authority of the Church; or (b) At least refuse to consider the connection of theologians with the Church. It is no wonder that all enemies of the Church or Catholic truth are likewise enemies of Catholic theology.

**B. Second Proof: False principles behind opposing arguments.**

- Opponents deny the dogmatic authority of theologians by: (1) Breaking the link between the Church and theologians, or by at least denying or diminishing the dogmatic authority of the Church herself. (2) Directly opposing Catholic doctrine which theologians propose and defend. (3) Attempting to introduce erroneous philosophy or other false concepts incompatible with the teaching of the faith.

**C. Third Proof: The Effects**

- The teaching of the theologians, especially the scholastics, best explains and defends the doctrine of the faith, nourishes and begets faith, and helps and perfects the Christian life. On the contrary, whenever and insofar as the doctrine of the theologians is abandoned, especially that of the scholastic theologians, theological errors, indeed heresies, rise up, and the Christian life falls. All ecclesiastical history bears witness to this, from the Middle Ages to our own time. On one hand, the magnificent explanation and elucidation of Christian doctrine by the scholastic theologians, approved and acclaimed by the Church — whose job it is to judge the truth of theological doctrine — and faith and exemplary Christian life. On the other hand, heresies, theological errors, declining Christian life — all is proved by the history of the Protestants, Baianists, Jansenists, Modernists, and other opponents of recent theological schools.

**V. Objections and Responses.** (A-C: Fr. Schultes; D-E: Fr. Cekada)

**A. Theologians, then, “create” doctrines.** *“It is not the job of theologians to determine whether some doctrine is ‘de fide’ or ‘certain’ or ‘Catholic.’”*

- *Response:* Theologians do not ‘determine’ whether some doctrine is ‘de fide’ or ‘certain’ or ‘Catholic.’ They merely demonstrate, or manifest or give witness that a particular doctrine is ‘de fide’ or ‘certain’ or ‘Catholic.’

**B. But theologians erred in the past...** *“Throughout history, theologians held various errors, and then disputed about grave issues amongst themselves.”*

- *Response:* I let pass the accusation that scholastic theologians erred in certain questions of the faith. They did not, however, unanimously defend an error as a doctrine of the faith.

**C. They cannot reliably explain the meaning of defined doctrine.** *“Theologians are reliable witnesses to a doctrine as defined by the Church. But they are not reliable witnesses to the meaning of a doctrine they propose. In this they must be considered only private teachers, interpreting dogma and applying it according to their own philosophy.”*

- *Response:* Theologians are witnesses not only to whether a doctrine is defined, but also to its *meaning*. (a) In explaining and determining the meaning of dogmas, theologians are considered private teachers with regard to the *methods* they use (arguments, etc.), but *not* when they propose a doctrine as a doctrine of the faith or the Church, even though they express its meaning to other persons using other concepts and formulas. (b) The opposite opinion obviously sins against the teaching of the Church regarding the authority of theologians. (c) Furthermore, it is absurd to claim that the Fathers of the Church and her theologians erred in setting forth and explaining the meaning of the doctrine of the faith. This opinion involves the Jansenist error that the faith has been “obscured” in the Church.

D. **\*Theologians and Vatican II.\*** *“The teachings of theologians were responsible for the doctrinal errors of Vatican II. Because these theologians erred and we reject their teachings, we are also therefore free to reject the teaching of earlier theologians if a teaching ‘does not make sense’ to us.”*

- *Response:* The group of European modernist theologians primarily responsible for the Vatican II errors were enemies of traditional scholastic theology and had been censured or silenced by Church authority: Murray, Schillebeeckx, Congar, de Lubac, Teilhard, etc. When the strictures were removed under John XXIII, they were able to spread their errors freely. If anything, **the fact that they had been previously silenced demonstrates the Church’s vigilance against error in the writings of her theologians.**

E. **\*Private Interpretation of Magisterial Pronouncements.\*** *“I think the infallible pronouncements of the Church are all pretty clear. I don’t need ‘interpretations’ or explanations from theologians. I just take everything literally.”*

- *Response:* Do-it-yourself interpretations and explanation of texts are for Protestants, not Catholics. Theology is a science which operates under the watchful eye of the Church, not a free-for-all for every Catholic with an English translation of Denziger. Like any other science, theology operates according to recognized and objective criteria which experts use to arrive at the truth about various propositions. So, if you are not trained in the science, you have no business coming up with your own interpretations for the pronouncements of the magisterium. At best, you’ll end up looking ignorant; at worst, you’ll end up a heretic.

### *Additional Explanation from Another Theologian*

Résumé translated by Fr. Cekada from material in  
I. Salaverri SJ. *Tractatus de Ecclesia*, 3rd ed., Madrid, BAC 1955, 846ff.

#### **Thesis 21. The consensus of theologians in matters of faith and morals is a certain criteria of divine Tradition.**

##### **A. Dogmatic Value of this Thesis.** It is:

1. *Catholic Doctrine.* (From the teaching of Pius IX quoted above.)
2. *Theologically Certain.* (From the practice of Trent & Vatican I.)

## B. Proof of the Thesis.

1. *Major Premise.* The consent of theologians in matters of faith and morals is so intimately connected with the teaching Church that an error in the consensus of theologians would necessarily lead the whole Church into error.
2. *Minor Premise.* But the whole Church cannot err in faith and morals. (The Church is infallible.)
3. *Conclusion.* The consensus of theologians in matters of faith and morals is a certain criteria of divine Tradition.

## C. Proofs of the Major Premise.

1. **Citation of Theological Works.** Popes, bishops, etc., from the 8th century onwards taught material which they drew from the teaching of theologians.
2. **Supervision.** From the 12-16th centuries, the Church founded, directed, and watched over all theological schools.
3. **Legislation.** From the time of Trent, theological works were used in seminaries which were supervised by bishops and popes.
4. **Consultation.** Church used theologians as her consultants for doctrinal matters.
5. **Implicit Approval.** The Church implicitly approves the contents of theologians' works by not censuring them, which she is obliged to do in case of theological errors.
6. **Recommendation.** The writings of various theological schools are praised by popes and held out as examples to imitate.

### Section III

## Pre-Vatican II Theologians Who Teach Baptism of Desire, Baptism of Blood.

*From dossier with 122 pages of photocopied material.*

The accompanying table contains a list of pre-Vatican II theologians who teach baptism of desire (=desiderii, flaminis, in voto, etc.) and baptism of blood (=sanguinis, martyrii, etc.), together with a page reference to the photocopied dossier I prepared. Two, St. Alphonsus de Ligouri and St. Robert Bellarmine, are **Doctors of the Church**. Many more such theologians can easily be found. These were merely the works in my private library.

Also given is the **theological category** (if any) each theologian has assigned to the teaching on baptism of blood and baptism of desire. This "category" in theology (also called a theological "note," "qualification," etc.) indicates how close a teaching is to the truths God has revealed and obliges us to believe — whether it is "theologically certain," "Catholic doctrine," *de fide* (of the faith), etc. (Some theologians simply teach the doctrines, and do not assign categories.)

### Table of Theological Categories

Theologian or Canonist	Page in Dossier	Theol. Category Bapt. of Desire	Theol. Category Bapt. of Blood
1. Abarzuza	2	<i>de fide</i> , theol. cert	theol. cert.
2. Aertnys	7	<i>de fide</i>	teaches
3. Billot	10-20	teaches	teaches
4. Cappello	23	teaches	certain
5. Coronata	28	<i>de fide</i>	teaches
6. Davis	32	teaches	teaches
7. Herrmann	35	<i>de fide</i>	pertains to faith
8. Hervé	38	theol. cert.	theol. cert. at least
9. Hurter	44	teaches	teaches
10. Iorio	47	teaches	teaches
11. Lennerz	49-59	teaches	teaches
12. Ligouri	61-62	<i>de fide</i>	teaches
13. McAuliffe	67	cath. doctrine	comm. cert. teaching
14. Merkelbach	71	certain	certain
15. Noldin	74	teaches	teaches
16. Ott	77	<i>fidei proxima</i>	<i>fidei proxima</i>
17. Pohle	81	cath. doctrine	cert. doctrine
18. Prümmer	89	<i>de fide</i>	constant doctrine
19. Regatillo.	91, 96	<i>de fide</i>	teaches
20. Sabetti	98	teaches	teaches
21. Sola	102	<i>fidei proxima</i>	theol. certain
22. Tanquerey	107,111	certain	certain
23. Zalba	114	teaches	teaches
24. Zubizarreta	118	teaches	teaches
25. Bellarmine	120	teaches	teaches

Résumé of Theological Categories	Bapt. of Desire	Bapt. of Blood
Common teaching of the doctrines	25 (all)	25 (all)
Theologically certain, certain	3	8
Catholic doctrine, constant	2	1
<i>fidei proxima</i> , pertains to faith	2	2
<i>de fide</i> (of the faith)	7	0

*Section IV*

**Conclusions from the Foregoing  
about Baptism of Desire and Baptism of Blood**

1. All twenty-five theologians teach baptism of blood and baptism of desire, and none reject the teaching, so **both doctrines are held by common consent**.
2. Some theologians categorize the doctrines as **theologically certain**.
3. Some theologians categorize the doctrines as **Catholic doctrine**.
4. Some theologians categorize the doctrines as *de fide* (of the faith).

*Section V*

**Application of Pope Pius IX's Principle  
to the Teaching of these Theologians**

1. **General Principle** (from Pius IX, sect. I: II-III above):  
All Catholics are obliged to adhere to a teaching if Catholic theologians hold it by common consent, or hold it as *de fide*, or Catholic doctrine, or theologically certain.
2. **Particular Fact** (from sects. III, IV above, as documented in dossier):  
But, Catholic theologians do hold the teaching on baptism of desire and baptism of blood by common consent, or hold it as *de fide*, or Catholic doctrine, or theologically certain.
3. **Conclusion** (1 + 2):  
**Therefore, all Catholics are obliged to adhere to the teaching on baptism of desire and baptism of blood.**

Section VI

**Degree of Error and the Gravity of the Sin  
if You Reject Baptism of Desire, Baptism of Blood**

Each theological “category” has a corresponding **theological censure** attached to it which expresses the degree of error into which someone has fallen by denying a particular teaching.

Below are the various categories theologians attributed to baptism of desire and baptism of blood, along with the corresponding censures and a note on the **gravity of the sin** committed.

<i>Theologians categorize the teachings on the baptisms of desire and blood as one of the following:</i>	<b>YOUR DEGREE OF ERROR</b> <i>(the censure) if you deny the teaching:</i>	<b>GRAVITY OF SIN</b> <i>against the Faith if you deny the teaching:</i>
<b>Theologically certain</b>	<b>Theological error</b>	<b>Mortal sin</b> Indirectly against the faith.
<b>Catholic doctrine</b>	<b>Error in Catholic doctrine</b>	<b>Mortal</b> Indirectly against the faith
<b>De fide</b>	<b>Heresy</b>	<b>Mortal</b> Directly against the faith.

Section VII

**General Conclusion**

All Catholics are obliged to adhere to the common teaching on baptism of blood and baptism of desire.

According to the norms outlined above, the Feeneyite position represents either theological error, error in Catholic doctrine or heresy.

Those Catholics who adhere to the Feeneyite position on baptism of desire and baptism of blood commit a mortal sin against the faith.