

The Case of Fr. Leonard Feeney

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Part I

The Excommunication

Introduction

In the recent past there has been a resurgence of interest in the late Fr. Leonard Feeney. The number of his supporters seems to be growing at a rapid pace. The popularity of his ideas is on the upswing. More and more we see his name presented in a favorable light in traditionally oriented publications. More and more, it seems, he is looked upon as a hero of the Faith and a defender of Catholic orthodoxy.

We are told that his excommunication in 1953 was unjust and invalid. It was invalid, they say, because of a defect of form. It was unjust, we are told, because he was excommunicated for his defense of Catholic orthodoxy in general and of the doctrine “outside the Church there is no salvation” in particular. Fr. Feeney stirred up the wrath of the liberals, his supporters say. And the liberals used all the forces at their disposal to persecute him. Thus was he excommunicated, they say, for his defense of the Church as the only means of salvation established by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The secular press, in some cases, has echoed the cry that Fr. Feeney was excommunicated for teaching that there is no salvation outside the Church. For example, the obituary that appeared in The New York Times on February 1, 1978, under the headline, “Leonard Feeney, Jesuit Priest, 80; Ousted in Dispute Over Salvation” said this: “AYER, Mass., Jan. 31 (AP) - The Rev. Leonard Feeney, a Jesuit priest who was excommunicated for nearly 20 years for preaching that there was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church, died yesterday. He was 80 years old.” [The New York Times, Feb. 1, 1978, p. B2.]

So we ask, was Fr. Feeney “excommunicated . . . for preaching that there was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church?” Was he a great defender of Catholic orthodoxy and a hero of the Faith? Or was he a disobedient priest who deviated from sound Catholic doctrine? These are the questions that need to be answered. It is, therefore, my intention to answer them. And I propose to do this in two conferences — one this evening and one tomorrow morning. This evening we will consider the question of Fr. Feeney’s excommunication and the reason for it.

Tomorrow we will deal with the question: Was Fr. Feeney a great defender of Catholic orthodoxy and a hero of the Faith; or was he a priest who deviated from sound Catholic doctrine? We will begin with some background.

Background

Fr. Leonard Feeney was born in Lynn, Massachusetts on February 15, 1897. He was the oldest of four children. There were three boys and one girl in his family. All the boys became priests. Fr. Feeney entered the seminary at an early age and was ordained in 1927. After ordination, he studied at Oxford University for a time, and upon his return to America, he taught at Boston College.

Fr. Feeney was a very gifted writer and the author of many books. In 1934 he published a collection of essays entitled *Fish on Fridays* which became a best seller. In one of the essays that appears in this book he made it quite plain that at that time he believed a well intentioned Protestant could be saved. In the mid-1930's, Fr. Feeney was the literary editor of *America* magazine. He published a biography of Mother Seton and other works as well. In 1952 *Bread of Life* appeared. This is a collection of lectures that were given by Fr. Feeney at St. Benedict Center from 1942 to 1952. In the Foreword to the first edition, Fr. Feeney wrote: "I have been persuaded by the members of my Order, The Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to publish some of the talks I have been giving on Thursday evenings at Saint Benedict Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the past ten years." *Bread of Life* is a significant work because in it, Fr. Feeney sets forth his theological position with regard to Justification, Salvation and Baptism. We will return to this work and to these terms when we consider the doctrinal teaching of Fr. Feeney.

St. Benedict Center

The name of Fr. Leonard Feeney is, of course, bound up with that of St. Benedict Center. In fact it is so identified with St. Benedict Center that one can hardly think of one without the other. This is true even though Fr. Feeney was not the founder of St. Benedict Center. The Center was established by three lay persons in Cambridge, Massachusetts in March of 1940.

The founders were: Mrs. Catherine Clarke, Christopher Huntington and Avery Dulles. This is the same Avery Dulles whose father was the late John Foster Dulles — Secretary of State under President Eisenhower. Avery Dulles was a convert to the Catholic Church and went on to become a Jesuit priest. The mission of St. Benedict Center was to provide a safe haven for Catholic university students. It was to be a place where these young people could go to learn about the Faith and to be bolstered in its practice. It was also to be a place where interested non-Catholics could go to find out about the Catholic Church.

We have already alluded to the fact that support for Fr. Feeney and his theological views seems to be growing at a rapid pace in certain circles of traditionally-minded people. Among the supporters of Fr. Feeney is the journalist, Mr. Gary Potter. Mr. Potter was a founding editor of *Triumph* magazine. His articles have appeared in *National Review*, *Human Events*, *The New York Times*, *The Wanderer*, *The Remnant* and in many other publications. He recently published a book about Fr. Feeney and the controversy surrounding him. The title of the book is *After the Boston Heresy Case*. I personally believe that Mr. Potter made a sincere effort to present the facts about Fr. Feeney in an objective manner. Yet, at the same time, there is no doubt that he is a strong supporter of the man

and his cause.

According to Mr. Potter, Fr. Feeney was introduced to St. Benedict Center in 1942 by a friend of Mrs. Catherine Clarke. He was later asked to become spiritual director at the Center. This he agreed to do with the permission of his Jesuit superior. At first, Fr. Feeney worked at the Center on a part-time basis. But by 1945 his work at the Center was so time consuming that he sought and received permission from his superior to work there full time.

It was about this same time, as well, that Fr. Feeney began his search for what may be called the doctrinal missing link that would explain the corruption of the Catholic Faith in America, as he perceived it. By 1945, Fr. Feeney apparently considered that the Faith, as it was practiced in this country, was essentially defective. He reasoned, it seems, that this condition was caused by the neglect of a particular truth of the Catholic Faith.

And so he sought to find this “displaced” doctrine. This missing link, he believed, would explain the transition from the teaching of sound Catholic doctrine to doctrinal corruption. His search lasted two years until he discovered the missing doctrine in 1947. In July of 1947, he announced “to the center that surely extra ecclesiam nulla salus [outside the Church there is no salvation] was [to quote Gary Potter] the ‘displaced’ linch-pin doctrine they sought and which the Church needed to reaffirm.” [Gary Potter, *After the Boston Heresy Case* (Monrovia, CA: Catholic Treasures Books, 1995), p. 48.]

The doctrine, extra ecclesiam nulla salus (outside the Church there is no salvation), thus became the celebrated cause of Fr. Feeney. In time, his name was so closely associated with it that many came to believe that his eventual excommunication was due to his fidelity to this doctrine. As we have already pointed out, even *The New York Times* reported that Fr. Feeney was “excommunicated . . . for preaching that there was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church.” [*The New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1978, p. B2.]

Trouble Preceded the Discovery

It was in July of 1947 that Fr. Feeney announced his discovery of “the ‘displaced’ linchpin doctrine,” as Gary Potter put it. But contrary to a fairly common perception, Fr. Feeney’s troubles did not begin with the discovery of the doctrine. There were already problems between Fr. Feeney and his Jesuit superiors and between St. Benedict Center and the Archdiocese of Boston even before Fr. Feeney’s “great” discovery that the Catholic Church taught that she was the one institution established by Our Lord for the salvation of mankind. One source of difficulty was the spirit of independence that prevailed at the Center. Gary Potter says: “When St. Benedict Center transformed its lecture program into St. Benedict Center School, neither the Society of Jesus nor the Archdiocese of Boston was consulted.” [Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 85.]

For the Center and Fr. Feeney to do such a thing without consulting the Archdiocese or his Jesuit superiors, would quite understandably cause difficulties. We are talking about the 1940’s. In the 1940’s, bishops ruled their dioceses with authority according to the provisions of the Code of Canon

Law. Since the Code of Canon Law gave them authority over schools, it is not hard to understand that establishing a school in the 1940's without the permission of the local ordinary would cause problems. In their commentary on Canon 1381 of the Code of Canon Law, the canonists Abbo and Hannan say this:

“The religious training of youth in all schools whatever is subject to the authority and the supervision of the Church . . . In a similar way they [i.e, local ordinaries] have the right to approve the instructors in religion and the textbooks of religion; and even, to protect religion and morals, to demand that both the instructors and the textbooks be removed. The rights and duties set forth in this canon are not restricted to schools established by the Church.” [John A. Abbo, S.T.L., J.C.D. and Jerome D. Hannan, A.M., LL.B., S.T.D., J.C.D., *The Sacred Canons* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1960), vol. II, p. 611.]

Furthermore, Fr. Feeney also refused to allow other Jesuits to help out at the Center. This refusal did not go over well with his Jesuit superior who had allowed him to work at the Center in the first place. After making it clear that Fr. Feeney's Jesuit superiors supported his work at the center, Gary Potter says of his superiors: “Their view would only begin to change when the man [i.e., Fr. Feeney] denied other Jesuits — those enrolled at Harvard — the opportunity to ‘help’ at the center.” [Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 84.]

Then, of course, there came the great controversy which followed Fr. Feeney's so-called discovery of the doctrine, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Speaking of Fr. Feeney's Jesuit superiors, Gary Potter says: “Their changed view sharpened in the summer of 1947. It was that summer when Fr. Feeney, constantly discussing the matter with other center faculty and members, determined which was the ‘displaced’ doctrine.” [Ibid.]

Transfer to Holy Cross College

The following summer — on August 25, 1948, to be exact — Fr. Feeney was informed by his Jesuit superior that he was being transferred from St. Benedict Center in Cambridge to Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA. Though Fr. Feeney was not happy about the transfer, he nevertheless obeyed. He was a Jesuit. He had a vow of obedience. He had been assigned to the Center by his superior. Now his superior was assigning him some place else, which he had every right to do.

Fr. Feeney, for his part, packed his bags and left St. Benedict Center for his new assignment. But shortly after his departure from the Center he was visited at Holy Cross College by two young men from the Center. They pleaded with him to return. They wanted him to at least hear what the others at the Center had to say about the subject of why he should remain with them. Fr. Feeney agreed to go back to hear what they had to say. He met with the people at the Center. He listened to their plea that he stay. And he made his decision. His decision was to remain at St. Benedict Center in spite of the command of his Provincial Superior to leave. He would disobey.

Fr. Feeney's decision to stay was communicated to his Provincial Superior by the members of the

Center. “ ‘We are hereby informing you,’ they wrote, ‘that by our unanimous request Father Feeney will continue to lead our work until we get a fair hearing from higher authorities.’ “ [Ibid., p. 93.] The letter to Fr. Feeney’s Provincial was dated September 9, 1948. Gary Potter says that the Provincial “did not deign to answer the letter from St. Benedict Center, but he wrote Fr. Feeney the next day. His letter began: ‘For your sake and for the Society’s, I plead with you to end all connection with St. Benedict’s Center at once and to report to Holy Cross next Monday.’” [Ibid., p. 94.]

The following month on December 29, 1948, Fr. Feeney’s superior wrote to him again ordering him to leave St. Benedict Center and to report to his new assignment. He was told that another priest would be sent to the Center to replace him. He was also informed that his priestly faculties to hear confessions would cease on December 31 of that year. Again Fr. Feeney disobeyed.

Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Fr. Feeney’s refusal to obey was followed by the establishment of the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary which he would later refer to as “my Order.” This took place on January 17, 1949. The founders of the “order” were Fr. Feeney and Mrs. Catherine Clarke. Mrs. Clarke became a member of the order and took the name “Sr. Catherine.” But she continued to live with her husband “Hank.” At first the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart made a vow of obedience. Later they added a vow of chastity. This presented a major difficulty because many of the members were married with children. Their marital status and their children presented two serious problems.

As for the marriage problem, Canon 542 of the Code of Canon Law makes it very plain that “Married persons for the duration of their marriage” “are invalidly admitted to the novitiate.” [Abbo and Hannan, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 559, 558.] This means that they cannot become religious as long as their spouse is alive even though they may be “separated” and even if “the other spouse consents that his spouse may enter religion.” [Ibid., vol. I, p. 560.]

Communal Raising of Children

The other problem was the children. What were they to do with the children? The solution they adopted was a strange one by any standard. It was to raise the children communally. Gary Potter, who, as we mentioned, is very sympathetic to the cause of Fr. Feeney, explains:

“Besides their farming, another of the Slaves’ main activities after the move to Still River was the rearing of the community’s children.” [Potter, op. cit., p. 170.] The decision to raise them communally was made while everyone still lived in Cambridge. The center’s married couples, it seems, wanted to live as religious. But how could they in light of the fact that they had children to raise?

Mr. Potter says: “The decision to raise the children communally was the solution to that problem, it is what lay behind the decision. It also launched the Slaves into uncharted waters. In modern times, no Catholic religious association has attempted anything like it. If someone in the historical past has

tried it, the example does not come to mind — apart from heretical movements like the Cathars [emphasis added]. In any event, once the zeal and earnestness of the married couples and other younger center members prevailed over the caution of Fr. Feeney and Sr. Catherine, some procedure had to be adopted.” [Ibid.]

For those who are not familiar with the group referred to by Mr. Potter, we would point out what the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia says in this regard: “The Catharist system [the word Cathari comes from a Greek word which means pure] was a simultaneous attack upon the Catholic Church and the then-existing State. The Church was directly assailed in its doctrine and hierarchy . . . But the worst danger was that the triumph of the heretical principles meant the extinction of the human race . . . For the Cathari, no salvation was possible without previous renunciation of marriage.” [N.A. Weber, “Cathari,” The Catholic Encyclopedia (NY: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913), vol. III, p. 437.]

Mr. Potter goes on to say of Fr. Feeney’s group and the communal raising of children: “The children’s parents effectively ceased to exist as parents to the children, and more so as a child grew from three to five to ten and older. Care was taken that the children had no direct or special contact with their parents [emphasis added], save on a half-dozen major feast days during each year when the entire community would gather for socializing. On these occasions the children might chat with their parents, but after a certain time, the parents were seen by the children as scarcely more than another Big Brother or Big Sister.” [Potter, op. cit., p. 171.] That a Catholic priest would sanction such a thing is nothing less than astonishing and raises very serious questions about his prudence, common sense and the soundness of his judgment.

Suspension and Excommunication

On April 18, 1949, Fr. Feeney was suspended from his priestly duties and Catholics were forbidden to take part in the activities of St. Benedict Center. Fr. Feeney responded the next day by saying that his removal from St. Benedict Center was invalid. One of his superiors, Fr. Louis Gallagher, called Fr. Feeney to tell him that the sanctions would be lifted if he left St. Benedict Center and went to Holy Cross College. But Fr. Feeney refused to leave. He invoked his conscience as a justification for remaining at St. Benedict Center. He said in a statement prepared for the press: “ ‘IT WAS AND IS A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE to me in the sanctity of my priesthood, as I openly declared to every superior I could contact.’ ” [Ibid., p. 125.] A few days later, on April 21, 1949, Fr. Feeney received another command from his Provincial Superior to go to Holy Cross College. This command was given to him in virtue of Fr. Feeney’s vow of obedience. It was therefore binding under pain of mortal sin. Fr. Feeney again refused to go.

Three and a half months later, on August 8, 1949, the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office wrote to Archbishop Cushing on the subject of the necessity of the Church for salvation. [NB: The full text of the letter was published in October of 1952 in The American Ecclesiastical Review CXXVII, 4 (Oct., 1952), pp. 307-315.] This decree of the Holy Office was voted on in plenary session on Wednesday, July 27, 1949. The Prefect of the Holy Office, Pope Pius XII, approved the decree on Thursday, July 28, 1949. T

This decree was a response to the controversy that arose in the wake of Fr. Feeney's interpretation of the doctrine "outside the Church there is no salvation." Even though this decree was approved by Pope Pius XII who, as we mentioned, was the Prefect of the Holy Office, Fr. Feeney would later refer to it as "'This heretical letter....'" [Ibid.]

Considering that the acts of disobedience on the part of Fr. Feeney were both grave and numerous and that he intended to persevere in the dispositions that produced these acts and thus had no intention of amending his ways, Fr. Feeney was expelled from the Jesuit Order on October 10, 1949. On September 4, 1952, Archbishop Cushing summoned Fr. Feeney to appear before him no later than October 4, 1952. He called upon Fr. Feeney to make his submission to the local ordinary and to the Holy See. Fr. Feeney was informed that the Congregation of the Holy Office, with the approval of Pope Pius XII, had put him, Fr. Feeney, and St. Benedict Center under interdict.

On September 24, 1952, a letter was sent from St. Benedict Center to Pope Pius XII in which the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office was charged with heresy. The heresy, the letter said, was contained in the August 8, 1949, letter entitled "Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston."

On October 25, 1952, Cardinal Pizzardo, who was then the Secretary of the Holy Office, wrote to Fr. Feeney from Rome, and in the name of the Holy Office. He said:

"The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has been obliged repeatedly to make your teaching and conduct in the Church the object of its special care and attention, and recently, after having again carefully examined and calmly weighed all the evidence collected in your cause, it has found it necessary to bring this question to a conclusion. "However, His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, in His tender regard and paternal solicitude for the eternal welfare of souls committed to His supreme charge, has decreed that, before any other measure be carried into effect, you be summoned to Rome for a hearing. Therefore, in accordance with the express bidding and by the special authority of the Supreme Pontiff, you are hereby ordered to proceed to Rome forthwith and there to appear before the Authorities of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office as soon as possible" [Ibid., p. 150.]

Fr. Feeney did not obey this summons. He responded instead with a letter dated October 30, 1952. The following month, in November of 1952, Fr. Feeney received a second letter summoning him to Rome. He was ordered to present himself before the Holy Office no later than December 31, 1952. He was told that if he failed to obey, his disobedience would be made public along with the canonical penalties. Fr. Feeney was also informed that his expenses for the trip to Rome would be paid by the Apostolic Delegate. But Fr. Feeney refused to comply with this second command to appear before the Holy Office. Instead he responded with a long letter dated December 2, 1952. In early January 1953, Fr. Feeney received yet a third letter from Rome. By this letter he was ordered to appear before the Holy Office no later than January 31, 1953, under pain of excommunication for failure to appear.

Fr. Feeney refused to go. Once again he disobeyed the command of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, and this for the third time. He responded with another letter, dated January 13, 1953, in which he accused the Holy Office of outrageous, barbarous behavior and with heresy. On February 4, 1953, the Holy Office met in Plenary Session and declared Fr. Leonard Feeney to be excommunicated. The decree of excommunication was dated February 13, 1953. The text is as follows:

“Since the priest Leonard Feeney, a resident of Boston (Saint Benedict Center), who for a long time has been suspended from his priestly duties on account of grave disobedience of Church Authority, being unmoved by repeated warnings and threats of incurring excommunication ipso facto, has not submitted, the Most Eminent and Reverend Fathers, charged with safeguarding matters of faith and morals, in a Plenary Session held on Wednesday, 4 February 1953, declared him excommunicated with all the effects of the law. “On Thursday, 12 February 1953, Our Most Holy Lord Pius XII, by Divine Providence Pope, approved and confirmed the decree of the Most Eminent Fathers, and ordered that it be made a matter of public law. “Given at Rome, at the Headquarters of the Holy Office, 13 February 1953.” [Ibid., p. 158.]

The Authority of the Holy Office

Fr. Feeney was ordered in virtue of his vow of obedience — and thus under pain of mortal sin — to move from St. Benedict Center to Holy Cross College. He disobeyed. Subsequently he was ordered by the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office to appear before it. Three times he was summoned. Three times he disobeyed. And in response to the third summons he accused the Holy Office of outrageous, barbarous and heretical behavior. Fr. Feeney accused the Holy Office of heresy despite the fact that the Prefect of the Holy Office was Pope Pius XII.

The Holy Office, of course, had every right to summon Fr. Feeney. And he, for his part, was obliged under pain of mortal sin to obey the summons. But he chose not to do so. First he chose to disobey his Jesuit superiors. Then he chose to disobey the Holy Office. And in response to the third summons he received from the Holy Office, he charged the Holy Office with heresy, and thereby implicitly charged its Prefect, Pope Pius XII, with the same crime.

Why the Excommunication?

In light of the facts it is not hard to understand why Fr. Feeney was excommunicated. Indeed in this case Rome was quite indulgent. Clearly, Fr. Leonard Feeney was excommunicated for a disobedience that was both grave and scandalous. He was not excommunicated for upholding Catholic doctrine or “for preaching that there was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church.” He remained “unmoved” in the face of “repeated warnings and threats of incurring excommunication ipso facto.” He refused to submit to the legitimate authority of the Church as exercised by the Holy Office, whose Prefect was Pope Pius XII and was thus excommunicated.

And what is so strange about the whole thing is that when Fr. Feeney was given the opportunity to appear before the Holy Office, where he could defend his charge of heresy and his interpretation of

the doctrine “outside the Church there is no salvation,” he refused to take it. Is that the behavior of a great defender of Catholic orthodoxy? Would not a great defender of Catholic truth welcome such an opportunity to defend the truth? But Fr. Feeney did not defend the truth as he saw it. He did not rise to the occasion. Instead he stayed home. He stayed home and was excommunicated for it. Finally, I would like to point out that to conclude that Fr. Feeney was excommunicated for grave disobedience is not to say that disobedience was the only problem. For it was not.

There was another problem which was far more serious. It was the problem of unsound doctrine. For Fr. Feeney — as we will see tomorrow — was guilty of grave doctrinal errors related to Baptism, Justification and Sanctifying Grace.

Part II

The Doctrinal Teaching of Fr. Leonard Feeney

In Part I of this talk we considered the question of Fr. Feeney’s excommunication. We saw that he was not “excommunicated . . . for preaching that there was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church.” [The New York Times, Feb. 1, 1978, p. B2.] He was excommunicated for a disobedience that was most grave and scandalous. Three times he was summoned to appear before the Holy Office. Three times he disobeyed. And in response to his third order to appear before the Holy Office, he accused the Holy Office of heresy.

In accusing the Holy Office, he implicitly accused Pius XII of heresy as well, for as we have noted, Pope Pius XII was the Prefect of the Holy Office at the time. We now proceed to the question: Was Fr. Feeney, in his disobedience, a great defender of Catholic orthodoxy and a hero of the Faith? Was he then like traditional priests today who refuse to go along with the Modernist changes? Or was he a man who not only disobeyed but also deviated from sound Catholic doctrine? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the theological teaching of Fr. Feeney and to evaluate it in the light of Catholic doctrine. This we will do.

The Linch-Pin Doctrine

As we mentioned in the first part of this presentation, it was in 1945 that Fr. Feeney began his search for the missing doctrine the abandonment of which would explain the decay of the Faith in this country as he saw it. In 1947, he discovered it. And in July of 1947, he announced it to the people at St. Benedict Center. He announced, as Gary Potter writes in his book, *After the Boston Heresy Case*, “that surely *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* [outside the Church there is no salvation] was the ‘displaced’ linch-pin doctrine they sought and which the Church needed to reaffirm.” [Gary Potter, *After the Boston Heresy Case* (Monrovia, CA: Catholic Treasures Books, 1995), p. 48.]

From that point forward, the doctrine, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, became the celebrated cause of Fr. Feeney and St. Benedict Center. The theological dispute that followed revolved around this doctrine. It did not revolve around the existence of the doctrine. Rather, it revolved around the

meaning of the doctrine.

For Fr. Feeney, the doctrine meant very simply that to be saved one must actually be baptized member of the Catholic Church. That is to say, one must have been incorporated into the Church by Baptism of Water. The position of Fr. Feeney could be summed up by saying: Without Baptism of Water there is no salvation. And this is so even though, contrary to a popular impression, Fr. Feeney did believe in Baptism of Desire. He quite readily admitted that a person could be justified and put into the State of Sanctifying Grace by desire for Baptism before he actually received the waters of Baptism. But while admitting this, he emphatically denied that such a person, in the State of Sanctifying Grace, as a result of the desire for Baptism, could be saved. In his book, *Bread of Life*, Fr. Feeney stated:

In the New Testament, you cannot be justified unless you want the water Jesus bequeathed us on the Mount of Olives; and you cannot be saved until that water is poured on your head! . . . It is now: Baptism of Water, or damnation! If you do not desire that Water, you cannot be justified. And if you do not get it, you cannot be saved. [Emphasis in the original] [Fr. Leonard Feeney, *Bread of Life*, (Still River: Saint Benedict Center, 1952), p. 25.]

From these words of Fr. Feeney, three things are clear. The first is that an unbaptized person can be justified by Baptism of Desire. The second is that a person justified by Baptism of Desire can never be saved without Baptism of Water. And the third is that there is an essential distinction between Justification and Salvation.

In these three points we have the fundamental position of Fr. Feeney. We will now consider each point in some detail. Then we will compare what Fr. Feeney taught with the teaching of the Catholic Church to see if Fr. Feeney was a defender of Catholic orthodoxy and a hero of the Faith, or a man who deviated from sound Catholic doctrine.

1. Justified by Desire

The first point that we will consider is Justification by desire for Baptism. I have no doubt that it comes as a surprise to some that Fr. Feeney believed in Baptism of Desire, as mentioned. For it is quite commonly thought that he did not. Nor is it any wonder. For he did, after all, accuse Cardinal Gibbons and the Baltimore Catechism of heresy for teaching that “ ‘There are three kinds of Baptism: Baptism of Water, Baptism of Desire, and Baptism of Blood.’ ” [Ibid., p. 117.]

In light of this accusation one must wonder what Fr. Feeney would say about St. Thomas Aquinas who cites St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews chapter 6, verse 2 to the effect that St. Paul speaks “of the doctrine of baptisms.” And St. Thomas says of this passage by St. Paul:

“He uses the plural, [that is, ‘Baptisms’] because there is Baptism of Water, of Repentance, and of Blood.” [St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. III, Q. 66, Art. 11, On the contrary, vol. II, English Dominican translation, p. 2390.]

In Bread of Life, Fr. Feeney says: “A man in the Old Testament waiting and wanting Baptism to be instituted, and a man in the New Testament waiting and wanting Baptism to be administered could both be justified.” [Feeney, op. cit., p. 40.]

And by justified, Fr. Feeney correctly understands “getting into” the State of Sanctifying Grace. He makes this very clear where he says: “Getting into the state of sanctifying grace is justification.” [Ibid., p. 18.]

Clearly then, Fr. Feeney admitted that desire for Baptism was sufficient for Justification and that by Justification he meant “getting into the state of sanctifying grace.”

So what does Justification mean? It means the remission of original sin and actual sin and getting into the State of Sanctifying Grace. Yet, while he admitted that a man could be justified and thereby put into the State of Sanctifying Grace by desire for Baptism, Fr. Feeney absolutely insisted that such a person could never be saved. In other words, such a person could never get into heaven. And this brings us to the second point.

2. No Salvation Without Baptism of Water

The second point is that a person justified by Baptism of Desire could never be saved without Baptism of Water. Fr. Feeney presents a series of questions and answers to express his position on this matter:

Q. What does “Baptism of Desire” mean?

A. It means the belief in the necessity of Baptism of Water for salvation, and a full intent to receive it.

Q. Can “Baptism of Desire” save you?

A. Never.

Q. Could “Baptism of Desire” save you if you really believed it could?

A. It could not.

Q. Could it possibly suffice for you to pass into a state of justification?

A. It could.

Q. If you got into the state of justification with the aid of “Baptism of Desire,” and then failed to receive Baptism of Water, could you be saved?

A. Never. [Ibid., p. 121.]

For Fr. Feeney a man could be justified by desire for Baptism. He could get into the State of Sanctifying Grace in this fashion. But even though he was in the State of Grace he could “never” be saved; he could never get to heaven unless and until he was baptized with water. Nor did it matter to Fr. Feeney whether the person failed to receive Baptism of Water through his own fault or not. He said: “If you do not receive Baptism of Water, you cannot be saved, whether you are guilty or not guilty for not having received it. If it was not your fault that you did not receive it, then you just do not go to Heaven. You are lacking something required for Heaven. You did not add your own

positive rejection of the requirement so as to give you a positive deficiency. Yours is a permanent lack of something required for eternal salvation.” [Ibid., pp. 126-127.]

But what happens to a person who is justified by desire for Baptism and who is thus in the State of Sanctifying Grace if that person dies before receiving Baptism of Water through no fault of his own? Fr. Feeney says: “I myself would say, my dear children, that a catechumen who dies before Baptism, is punished.” [Ibid., p. 125.]

Recall his words already quoted: “It is now: Baptism of Water, or damnation! If you do not desire that Water, you cannot be justified. And if you do not get it, you cannot be saved.” [Emphasis in the original] [Ibid., p. 25.]

Just think of the implications of Fr. Feeney’s teaching. Here is a man who is justified by desire for Baptism. He is in the State of Sanctifying Grace. He, therefore, has within him a created participation in the very life of God. He is a child of God. He has the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. He believes in the Catholic Faith. He loves God above all things. He relies on the merits of Jesus Christ for his salvation. He has perfect contrition for his sins. He is devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and says her Rosary every day. He is preparing for Baptism. But before he receives it, he dies. Fr. Feeney would say that such a man cannot go to heaven because he was not baptized with water. Where does this man in the State of Sanctifying Grace go? Fr. Feeney says: “It is now: Baptism of Water, or damnation! If you do not desire that Water, you cannot be justified. And if you do not get it, you cannot be saved.” [Ibid.]

3. Justification and Salvation According to Fr. Feeney

We now come to the third point in Fr. Feeney’s position. This is his distinction between Justification and Salvation. For Fr. Feeney, there is an essential difference between Justification and Salvation. For him, as we have shown, a person could be justified and could get into the State of Sanctifying Grace by desire for Baptism but such a person could never be saved without Baptism of Water. Recall his words:

In the New Testament, you cannot be justified unless you want the water Jesus bequeathed us on the Mount of Olives; and you cannot be saved until that water is poured on your head! . . . It is now: Baptism of Water, or damnation! If you do not desire that Water, you cannot be justified. And if you do not get it, you cannot be saved. [Emphasis in the original] [Ibid.]

Justification and Salvation, for Fr. Feeney, are essentially different things.

Nor is this difference simply a question of the fact that a justified person in the State of Grace is still capable of committing a mortal sin before death, and hence of falling from grace. We all know that. We know that until a person dies in the State of Grace, he is capable of falling from grace by mortal sin. But that is not what Fr. Feeney is talking about. He clearly teaches that a person who is justified and in the State of Sanctifying Grace can never be saved unless and until he is baptized with water.

Therefore, for Fr. Feeney, there is an essential difference between Justification and Salvation in that Justification is not sufficient for Salvation.

Here is what he says early on in *Bread of Life*: “Justification is only the divine courtyard of salvation: the preparation field, where you are given the grace to be tried out, as you move Godwards Do you see clearly that justification and salvation are not the same thing? . . . Justification is a divine probation. . . Is getting into the state of sanctifying grace salvation? No! What is it? Getting into the state of sanctifying grace is justification.” [Ibid., pp. 17-18.]

And finally he says: “But justification and salvation are two different things! Justification is the road to salvation, but it is not it. It is the journey, but not the goal.” [Ibid., p. 19.]

Now we certainly do agree with Fr. Feeney that: “We achieve salvation after our death.” [Ibid., p. 39.] But we must reject the notion that Justification and Sanctifying Grace are not sufficient for Salvation. For such a notion, as we will show, is contrary to the teaching of the Church.

This is not to say that there is no difference between a soul that is justified by desire for Baptism and one that is justified by Baptism of Water. It is simply to say that the difference is not sufficient to deprive a person of heaven who is justified by desire for Baptism.

What then is the difference between a person justified by Baptism of Water and one justified by Baptism of Desire or of Blood? The difference is that a person who is justified by Baptism of Desire or of Blood does not receive the character which is imprinted on the soul by Baptism of Water. St. Thomas Aquinas says: “. . . Baptism imprints a character, which is indelible, and is conferred with a certain consecration.” [Aquinas, op. cit., Pt. III, Q. 66, Art. 9, On the contrary, vol. II, English Dominican translation, p. 2388.]

Baptism of Desire does not imprint this character — this indelible mark — on the soul even though the sins of the person are forgiven and the person is in the State of Sanctifying Grace. This is true as regards Baptism of Desire and Baptism of Blood. For neither is properly speaking a Sacrament; thus, neither imprints the character. St. Thomas, speaking of Baptism of Desire and of Blood, says that they “. . . are like Baptism of Water, not, indeed, in the nature of sign, but in the baptismal effect. Consequently they are not sacraments.” [Ibid., Pt. III, Q. 66, Art. 11, Reply Obj. 2, vol. II, English Dominican translation, p. 2391.]

It is precisely because they are not sacraments that they do not imprint the baptismal character on the soul. But otherwise they do produce “the baptismal effect.” Thus “Baptism of desire . . . bestows Sanctifying Grace, which remits original sin, all actual sins, and the eternal punishments for sin.” [Fr. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, (St. Louis, MO: B Herder Book Company), 7 October 1954, p. 357.]

Now Fr. Feeney would, of course, object to the notion that there are three Baptisms. He would say that such a thing is contrary to the teaching of St. Paul who speaks of “One Faith” and “One

Baptism” in his Epistle to the Ephesians (4:5). But St. Thomas Aquinas anticipated this objection. Thus, he writes in the Summa Theologica: “The other two Baptisms are included in the Baptism of Water, which derives its efficacy, both from Christ’s Passion and from the Holy Ghost. Consequently for this reason the unity of Baptism is not destroyed.” [Aquinas, op. cit., Pt. III, Q. 66, Art. 11, Reply Obj. I, vol. II, p. 2391.]

In other words, Baptism of Blood and Desire are not outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. They are not Sacraments properly speaking. But they are like the Sacrament of Baptism in “the baptismal effect” that is produced in the soul, namely: the remission of original sin and actual sin and the infusion of Sanctifying Grace into the soul.

Now this is not the teaching of 20th century liberals in Boston, Mass. It is the teaching of the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas himself. And it was upheld by the infallible teaching of the Council of Trent. The doctrine of Fr. Feeney and his distinction between Justification and Salvation thus flies in the face of the teachings of St. Thomas and of Holy Mother Church.

Recall, if you will, the questions and answers of Fr. Feeney which we have already quoted:

Q. Could “Baptism of Desire” save you if you really believed it could?

A. It could not.

Q. Could it possibly suffice for you to pass into a state of justification?

A. It could.

Q. If you got into the state of justification with the aid of “Baptism of Desire,” and then failed to receive Baptism of Water, could you be saved?

A. Never. [Feeney, op. cit., p. 121.]

The essential error of Fr. Feeney, then, is rooted in his novel distinction between Justification and Salvation which involves errors touching both Justification and Sanctifying Grace. In these matters, Fr. Feeney departs from the doctrine of the Catholic Church. He does this in order to foster and to protect his own doctrine of no Salvation without Baptism of Water. To further demonstrate this we will now proceed to a consideration of the teaching of the Catholic Church on Justification and Sanctifying Grace.

The Catholic Doctrine on Justification

The Protestant Reformation was rooted in a rejection of the teaching of the Catholic Church on Justification. Martin Luther held that human nature was completely corrupted by original sin. He taught that the Redemption did not bring about a restoration of human nature from this state of corruption. For Luther Justification was, therefore, nothing more than “a juridical act (actus forensis) by which God declares the sinner to be justified, although he remains intrinsically unjust and sinful.” [Ott, op. cit., p. 250.]

For Martin Luther, Justification did not effect an inner sanctification of man. For him the justified

man remained inwardly corrupt although outwardly he was declared justified. Fr. Ludwig Ott in his *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* explains it this way. For Martin Luther, he says: “On the negative side, Justification is not a real eradication of sin, but merely a nonimputation or covering of sin.

On the positive side, it is not an inner renewal and sanctification, but merely an external imputation of Christ’s justice. The subjective condition of Justification is fiducial faith, that is, the confidence of man, which is associated with the certainty of salvation, that the merciful God will forgive him his sins for Christ’s sake.” [Ibid.]

The Catholic doctrine on Justification is radically different from that of Martin Luther. In Catholic teaching, on the negative side, when a man is justified a “real eradication of sin” takes place. Sin is really and truly taken away. It is not just covered up. On the positive side, an “inner renewal and sanctification” of the soul occurs. This renewal and sanctification is caused by Sanctifying Grace.

Thus a man in the State of Grace is truly sanctified. He is made in his soul supernaturally beautiful. He is a friend of God. He is a child of God. And he is an heir of heaven. He is all these things for one reason. That reason is Sanctifying Grace, which is a created participation in the life of God.

And so it is that if a man dies in the State of Grace he must be saved. For he is a child of God by Grace and by Grace he has a right to heaven. And God could no more deprive him of heaven than He could bestow the beatific vision on the devil. To do so would be contrary to God’s own nature and His own divine order. Nor does it matter how the person got into the State of Grace and became a child of God and an heir of heaven. If he is in the State of Grace when he dies he is a child of God, an heir of heaven and thus he is necessarily saved. To deny this is to deny the teaching of the Church on Justification and Grace. One has only to consider the infallible teaching of the Council of Trent on Justification to understand this.

The Council of Trent on Justification

The Council of Trent was convened to counteract the errors of the Protestant Reformation. It opened on December 13, 1545, and closed on December 4, 1563. The Catholic Encyclopedia of 1913 says this in its article on the Council: “Its main object was the definitive determination of the doctrines of the Church in answer to the heresies of the Protestants...” [J.P. Kirsch, “Trent, Council of,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (NY: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913), vol. XV, p. 30.]

On January 13, 1547, the Council of Trent issued its “Decree on Justification.” In the opening paragraph of the decree, the Council said:

Whereas there is, at this time, not without the shipwreck of many souls and grievous detriment to the unity of the Church, a certain erroneous doctrine disseminated touching justification [emphasis added]; the sacred and holy, ecumenical and general Synod of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost . . . purposes, unto the praise and glory of Almighty God, the tranquillizing of the Church, and the salvation of souls, to expound to all the faithful of Christ the true and sound doctrine touching

the said justification; which (doctrine) the Sun of Justice, Christ Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, taught, which the Apostles transmitted, and which the Catholic Church, the Holy Ghost reminding her thereof, has always retained, most strictly forbidding that any henceforth presume to believe, preach, or teach otherwise than as by this present decree is defined and declared. [Dogmatic Canons and Decrees (NY: The Devin-Adair Company, 1912), pp. 21-22.]

The decree of the Council proceeded, in sixteen chapters and thirty-three Canons, to present the infallible teaching of the Catholic Church on Justification. In the previous year, on June 17, 1546, the Council had issued its “Decree Concerning Original Sin.” In that decree the Council declared that “Adam, when he had transgressed the commandment of God in Paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice wherein he had been constituted; and that he incurred . . . the wrath and indignation of God, and consequently death, with which God had previously threatened him, and together with death, captivity under his power who thence forth had the empire of death, that is to say the devil. . . .” [Ibid., p. 16.]

Thus, the Council said that by original sin Adam had lost “holiness and justice.” He “incurred the wrath and indignation of God.” He was made subject to “death” and was a captive under the power of the devil.

Jesus Christ came into this world to deliver man from this bondage, which deliverance was prefigured by the deliverance of the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt by Moses. Thus, Christ came to eradicate sin and to restore man to “holiness and justice.” He came to conquer death and to deliver man from the power of the devil. In other words, He came to move man from that state in which he was a child of Adam and under the dominion of the devil to a State of Grace and adoption as a child of God. The movement from the first state to the second state is called Justification.

Thus the Council of Trent infallibly defined Justification “as being a translation from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam to the State of Grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour.” [Ibid., pp. 25-26.]

Hence, those who are justified have been translated from the state of sin to the State of Grace and are thus adopted children of God by the merits of Jesus Christ. Clearly then, Justification is not “a divine probation,” as Fr. Feeney taught. It is the translation of a person from the state of being a child of “Adam to the State of Grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior.” A person who is justified is a child of God and an heir of heaven, whether he is justified by Baptism of Water or by the desire for the Sacrament. If he is in the State of Grace, he is a child of God whether he has or does not have the indelible mark of the Sacrament of Baptism on his soul.

St. Emerentiana — An Unbaptised Saint

There are, therefore, many saints in heaven who never received Baptism of Water and who have not,

therefore, upon their souls, the indelible mark of the Sacrament of Baptism. For they were justified not by Baptism of Water but by Baptism of Desire or of Blood. Since they died in the State of Grace they were saved. The fact that they did not have the indelible mark on their souls which is placed there by the Sacrament of Baptism did not prevent them from entering heaven. They were justified. They died in the State of Grace. And they were saved. An example is St. Emerentiana, virgin and martyr. While still an unbaptised catechumen she was martyred at the grave of St. Agnes. Her feastday is January 23.

Martin Luther denied that Justification brought about “an inner renewal and sanctification.” Fr. Feeney admitted the “inner renewal and sanctification”; but denied an essential effect of the inner renewal and sanctification. For he held that a soul justified and in a State of Sanctifying Grace by means of desire for Baptism could “never” be saved without Baptism of Water. Recall his words: “It is now: Baptism of Water, or damnation! If you do not desire that Water, you cannot be justified. And if you do not get it, you cannot be saved.” [Emphasis in the original] [Feeney, op. cit., p. 25.] St. Emerentiana did not “get it” and is yet a saint in heaven.

The Council of Trent and Baptism of Desire

Thus the Council of Trent infallibly taught that Justification was “a translation from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam to the State of Grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour.” [Dogmatic Canons and Decrees, pp. 25-26.] The Decree of the Council says: “... and this translation, since the promulgation of the Gospel, cannot be effected without the laver of regeneration, or the desire thereof [emphasis added], as it is written: ‘Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’” [Ibid., p. 26.]

Please note that the Decree of the Council of Trent, which was infallible, did not distinguish between two kinds of Justification — one brought about by Baptism of Water and one brought about by desire for Baptism. It speaks of only one Justification which is “effected” by “the laver of regeneration [i.e., Baptism of Water], or the desire thereof...” That Justification is effected by “desire” for “the laver of regeneration” is an infallible truth.

It is, therefore, the same State of Justification and the same State of Grace that results whether the person is put into that state by Baptism of Water or by Baptism of Desire. Justification by Baptism of Desire is the infallible teaching of the Church. It is not a mere theological opinion that Catholics are free to reject.

Therefore, a person who dies in the State of Justification, whether justified by the waters of Baptism or the desire for them, would be saved. The status of two souls — one justified by Baptism of Water and the other by Baptism of Desire — as regards salvation is the same. And again — this is true even though a person justified by desire for Baptism does not have upon his soul the character of Baptism which is the indelible mark put there by the Baptism of Water. As regards Justification and Grace, the baptismal effect is the same whether one is justified by the Sacrament of Baptism or the desire

for the Sacrament.

But until the reception of Baptism of Water “the Character of Baptism, is [not] imprinted” upon the soul. [Ott, op. cit., p. 310.] And that is why the person who has not received Baptism of Water cannot be admitted to the other Sacraments. He cannot be admitted because Baptism of Desire and Baptism of Blood are not Sacraments properly speaking and the Sacrament of Baptism — properly speaking, i.e. Baptism of Water — must be received before the other Sacraments may be administered to a person. For by the Sacrament of Baptism one is actually incorporated into the Church.

As Fr. Ott puts it in his *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*: “The so-called Baptism by blood and Baptism of desire, it is true, replace Sacramental Baptism in so far as the communication of grace is concerned, but do not effect incorporation into the Church, as they do not bestow the sacramental character by which a person becomes attached formally to the Church. In spite of the opinion of Suarez, catechumens are not to be counted among the members of the Church. Even if they have the desire (votum) to belong to the Church, they are not really (actu) accepted into it.” [Ibid., p. 311.]

From the teaching of the Council of Trent we see clearly the erroneous character of Fr. Feeney’s doctrine touching Baptism of Water, Justification and Sanctifying Grace. Fr. Feeney substantially deviated from the teaching of the Church. Since his interpretation of the doctrine “outside the Church there is no salvation” involved the claim that one could never be saved without Baptism of Water, Fr. Feeney necessarily had to reject the teaching of the Church on Justification and Sanctifying Grace. He knew that one could be justified by the desire for Baptism. He also knew that a justified soul is one in the State of Sanctifying Grace. Admitting these things he nevertheless rejected the consequences of Justification and Grace in order to protect his own teaching on the absolute necessity of Baptism of Water for salvation. Recall his words in *Bread of Life*:

Q. If you got into the State of Justification with the aid of “Baptism of Desire,” and then failed to receive Baptism of Water, could you be saved?

A. Never. [Feeney, op. cit., p. 121.]

The essential error, therefore, of Fr. Leonard Feeney is not that he taught that there is no salvation outside the Church. It is rather his rejection of the teaching of the Church on Grace and Justification in the service of his doctrine that Baptism of Water was absolutely necessary for salvation. That he was wrong there is no doubt. Indeed his insistence that a justified person who has not been baptized with water could “never” be saved is essentially heretical.

The Sacramental Effect Without the Sacrament

In Part III of the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas, speaking first of Baptism of Blood and then of Desire or Repentance says: “I answer that, As stated above (Q. 62, A.5), Baptism of Water has its efficacy from Christ’s Passion, to which a man is conformed by Baptism, and also from the Holy Ghost, as first cause. Now although the effect [i.e., the efficacy of Baptism of Water] depends

on the first cause, [i.e., the Passion of Christ and the Holy Ghost] the cause far surpasses the effect, nor does it depend on it.” [Aquinas, op. cit., Pt. III, Q. 66, Art. 11, On the contrary, p. 2390.]

In other words, the power of Christ’s Passion and that of the Holy Ghost far surpass the power of the Sacrament of Baptism. This power is not limited by the outward sign of the Sacrament of Baptism. As St. Thomas says:

Consequently, a man may, without Baptism of Water, receive the sacramental effect [i.e., Justification and Sanctifying Grace] from Christ’s Passion, in so far as he is conformed to Christ by suffering for Him. Hence it is written (Apoc. vii. 14): 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.

In like manner, a man receives the effect of Baptism by the power of the Holy Ghost, not only without Baptism of Water, but also without Baptism of Blood: forasmuch as his heart is moved by the Holy Ghost to believe in and love God and to repent of his sins: wherefore this is also called Baptism of Repentance Thus, therefore, each of these other Baptisms is called Baptism, forasmuch as it takes the place of Baptism. Wherefore Augustine says (De Unico Baptismo Parvulorum, iv):

The Blessed Cyprian argues with considerable reason from the thief to whom, though not baptized, it was said: ‘Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise’ that suffering can take the place of Baptism. Having weighed this in my mind again and again, I perceive that not only can suffering for the name of Christ supply for what was lacking in Baptism, but even faith and conversion of heart, if perchance on account of the stress of the times the celebration of the mystery of Baptism is not practicable.” [Ibid., pp. 2390 - 2391.]

This teaching of St. Cyprian, St. Augustine and St. Thomas is reflected in the teaching of the Council of Trent and is found, as well, in the Catechism of the Council of Trent which says: “. . . should any unforeseen accident make it impossible for adults to be washed in the salutary waters, their intention and determination to receive Baptism and their repentance for past sins, will avail them to grace and righteousness.” [Catechism of the Council of Trent, Translated into English by John A. McHugh, O.P. and Charles J. Callan, O.P., (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1936, p.179.)

Fr. Feeney’s accusation of heresy, therefore, against Cardinal Gibbons and the Baltimore Catechism for their teaching on Baptism of Desire and Blood is an outrage and an absurdity. For in this accusation of heresy he would have to include St. Cyprian, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, not to mention the Council of Trent and the Catechism of the Council of Trent. It may be that at one time Fr. Feeney had a valid point to make in opposing the liberal tendencies of his day which sought to water down the doctrine of the necessity of the Church for salvation so as to make it almost meaningless. But that is no excuse for him to deviate from Catholic Tradition and the infallible teaching of the Church on Baptism, Justification and Sanctifying Grace. His errors are most grave. For they involve the implicit denial of certain dogmas of the Faith — which is the very meaning of heresy.

The Heresy in Fr. Feeney's Position

A dogma in the strict sense of the term is a truth that has been divinely revealed and infallibly taught by the Church — the denial of which constitutes heresy. Here is how Fr. Ludwig Ott explains it in his *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. He says: “Dogma in its strict signification is the object of both Divine Faith (Fides Divina) and Catholic Faith (Fides Catholica); it is the object of the Divine Faith (Fides Divina) by reason of its Divine Revelation; it is the object of Catholic Faith (Fides Catholica) on account of its infallible doctrinal definition by the Church. If a baptized person deliberately denies or doubts a dogma properly so-called, he is guilty of the sin of heresy (CIC 1325, Par. 2), and automatically becomes subject to the punishment of excommunication (CIC 2314, Par. 1).” [Ott, op. cit., p. 5.]

Now the following truths are taught by the Council of Trent as dogmas of Faith in the strict sense — the denial of which would constitute heresy: One: “Sanctifying Grace sanctifies the soul. (De fide.) According to the teaching of the Council of Trent justification is ‘a sanctifying and renewal of the inner man.’ “ [Ibid., p. 257.]

Two: “Sanctifying Grace makes the just man a friend of God. (De fide.) According to the teaching of the Council of Trent, one is changed by justification ‘from an unjust person into a just person and from an enemy into a friend (of God).’ “ [Ibid., p. 258.]

And Three: “Sanctifying Grace makes the just man a child of God and gives him a claim to the inheritance of Heaven. (De fide.) According to the teaching of the Council of Trent, justification is ‘a translation into the State of Grace and of acceptance into the kinship of God.’ “ [Ibid.]

A person who is justified is in the State of Grace — as Fr. Feeney himself admits. Such a soul is therefore truly sanctified; is a friend of God; and is a person who has “a claim to the inheritance of Heaven.” Thus one who dies in the State of Grace must be saved, as we have already pointed out, whether that person is justified by Baptism of Water or by Baptism of Desire. For “Sanctifying Grace makes the just man a child of God and gives him a claim to the inheritance of Heaven.”

Fr. Feeney denied that claim unless a man was baptized with water. He explicitly admitted that desire for Baptism was sufficient for Justification; and that a justified soul was one in the State of Sanctifying Grace: “Getting into the state of grace is justification.” [Feeney, op. cit., p. 18.] But he went on to most emphatically declare that such a justified person did not have “a claim to the inheritance of Heaven.”

Fr. Feeney wrote:

“Q. If you got into the State of Justification with the aid of ‘Baptism of Desire,’ and then failed to receive Baptism of Water, could you be saved?

A. Never.” [Ibid., p. 121.] To say such a thing is to deny or doubt “a dogma properly so-called . . .

[which] is . . . the sin of heresy.”

Conclusion

And so we return to the place where we began. For now we are in a position to answer the question that we posed at the beginning: Was Fr. Feeney a great defender of Catholic orthodoxy and a hero of the Faith? Or was he a man who deviated from sound Catholic doctrine? Clearly he was a man who deviated from sound Catholic doctrine. It is impossible therefore that he was a great defender of Catholic orthodoxy and a hero of the Faith. Fr. Feeney was a gifted writer and a zealous soul. But so was Martin Luther. And while they are not equivalent men, they did similar things. Luther sacrificed Catholic Truth on the altar of his own doctrine of salvation by Faith alone.

Fr. Feeney sacrificed Catholic Truth on the altar of his doctrine of No Salvation Without Baptism of Water. For traditional Catholic people, however, Fr. Feeney is actually a greater danger than Martin Luther. For while Lutheranism poses no threat to the remnant of faithful Catholics; the teaching of Fr. Feeney certainly does as is evidenced by his growing popularity among traditionally minded Catholics.

It is my belief that the rising popularity of Fr. Feeney and his teaching is little more than the latest assault of the devil on the remnant of faithful Catholics. First, there were the Modernists. Then came the dubious Thuc bishops and the Mount St. Michael sect imposing doubtful Sacraments and an unholy alliance on the faithful.

Now it is Fr. Feeney and his doctrinal errors on Baptism, Justification and Grace. Let us not be fooled. In his Second Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul said: “I charge thee, before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead, by his coming, and his kingdom: Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine. For there shall be a time, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears: And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, . . . unto fables. But be thou vigilant. . . .” (2 Timothy 4:1-5.)

Let us then, my dear people, be vigilant. Let us hold fast to “sound doctrine.” Let us reject the “teachers” with “itching ears.” Let us have nothing to do with the religion of the Modernists; the dubious and sacrilegious sacraments of the so-called Thuc bishops; or the grave doctrinal errors of Fr. Feeney. Rather, let us, as St. Paul says, hold fast to the traditions that we have received.

God bless you.

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