

Feeneyism

I. St. Benedict Center

Origin of St. Benedict Center – Contrary to popular opinion, St. Benedict Center (SBC) was not started by Fr. Feeney but by Catherine Goddard Clarke and two laymen in 1940. It was to be a place where Catholic university students could come to learn about and be bolstered in the Faith. Fr. Feeney was introduced to the place in 1942 and later became its spiritual director with the permission of his Jesuit superior. Later, in 1945, he received permission to work there full time.

Slide into rebellion – Unfortunately, it seems that a spirit of independence prevailed at SBC. They transformed their work into a school without consulting the Jesuits or the diocese. Fr. Feeney also denied other Jesuits the opportunity to help at the Center. Fr. Feeney was, at this time, looking for a "displaced" doctrine that would explain the doctrinal corruption that he witnessed all around him. In 1947, he announced that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, "The Dogma" as SBC refers to it (implying that the other dogmas are less important), was the 'displaced' lynch-pin doctrine and it became his celebrated cause.

There is no doubt that Fr. Feeney was a brilliant poet, writer, and speaker. His name pops up fairly frequently in literature from his times. He was also very zealous for souls. He would often speak in the middle of the Boston Common to whoever would listen and succeeded in converting many.

The break and the founding of the Slaves – Unfortunately, however, the germ of trouble that began at SBC came to full flower in 1948, when Fr. Feeney's superiors transferred him to Holy Cross College in Worcester. At first, he obeyed; he was a Jesuit with a vow of obedience. But shortly thereafter two young men from SBC came and persuaded him to come back to the center and listen to their pleas for him to stay. He listened and he stayed. His superiors wrote him several times, begging him and ordering him to obey. He refused and his faculty to hear confessions was suspended the last day of 1948. Seventeen days later, Fr. Feeney founded the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This is where things get a little bizarre. Fr. Feeney founded what he called "his Order" without any approval from anyone, Jesuit, Bishop, Pope, etc... Catherine Clarke became one of its first members under the name of Sr. Catherine. This was while she was still living with her husband Hank. Many other members were added who were married with children. These members took a vow of obedience and later a vow of chastity was added. It was obviously a bit of a problem to try to lead a religious life and yet have young children. The solution for SBC: raise the children communally. Gary Potter, in his book *After the Boston Heresy Case* (apologetic work for SBC), says, "The children's parents effectively ceased to exist as parents to the children, and more so as a child grew from 3 to 5 to 10 and older. Care was taken that the children had no direct or special contact with their parents, save on a half-dozen major feast days during each

year when the entire community would gather for socializing. . . The parents were seen by the children as scarcely more than another Big Brother or Big Sister." Needless to say, no Catholic religious association has ever attempted anything like this.

Condemnation by the Church – It all went very much downhill from there. Fr. Feeney was suspended on 4/18/1949. The Holy Office, whose prefect was Pope Pius XII at the time, issued a decree on the proper meaning of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* on July 28, 1949 in response to a request of Abp. Cushing of Boston. Fr. Feeney referred to this as a "heretical letter." He was expelled from the Jesuits on October 10 of that year. In 1952, SBC was put under interdict. On September 24, 1952, SBC sent a letter to Pius XII accusing the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office of heresy. As a result, Fr. Feeney was summoned to Rome by Pius XII for a hearing . . . three times. Each time he responded with a letter while refusing to go. He was excommunicated on Feb. 13, 1953. Today SBC has splintered into 4 different groups, one in NH, two in MA, and one in OH.

As happens in so many cases, the first act of disobedience of Fr. Feeney led an admirable priest to ruin. There is no doubt that the Jesuits were infected by liberalism in the 40s and 50s and there were quite a few who did not like Fr. Feeney preaching "no salvation outside the Church." His response to this, however, was disastrous. It led him to disobedience, the establishment of an order with highly questionable practices, and doctrinal aberration. For Fr. Feeney ended up by emphasizing *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* to the point of exaggeration, coming up with a notion contradicting the constant Tradition of the Church found in the statements of the Fathers, catechisms, councils, and Popes. The teaching of the Church regarding the so-called baptisms of blood and desire is part of the ordinary magisterium. Questioning it would be like questioning the doctrine of the Assumption before it was defined in 1950. This is made clear in *Is Feeneyism Catholic?* by Fr. Laisney.

Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston

Your Excellency:

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

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

(the letter goes on...)

F. Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani.
A. Ottaviani, Assessor.
Holy Office, 8 Aug., 1949.

Theology on this question

The Article of St Thomas

Resp: Baptism has its efficacy from the Holy Ghost (principal cause) and from Our Lord's Passion (instrumental cause).

But the principal cause is not constrained to use a given means to produce the effect.

Thus, the Holy Ghost can produce the effect—a conformity to Christ's Passion—without the sacrament, in martyrdom, i.e.

- death or at least pains which should have been mortal even if *de facto* death did not follow
- *in odium fidei vel exercitium virtutis* (e.g. St Maria Goretti)
- with the death having been accepted (not on the occasion of a war but by being a victim). Jn 15:13: no one can have greater love than dying for his friends: martyrdom is the supreme act of charity.

The Holy Ghost can also move the heart to believe, love God and repent, and communicate grace in a situation where there is no 'real' conformation to Christ's Passion yet grace is given through His merits. This is called baptism of the Spirit or of repentance or of desire.

→ Baptism of blood and baptism of desire are called "baptisms" metaphorically, insofar as they produce an *effect* of baptism, i.e. grace.

N.B. – The essence of baptism of desire is not merely a desire of baptism but an act of perfect contrition and charity which includes the desire of baptism either explicitly (e.g. a catechumen awaiting baptism) or implicitly (ignorance or better nescience with regard to the sacrament of Baptism but the soul is disposed to conform to whatever God wants in such a way that if he were to know about Baptism he would ask for it immediately and explicitly. Such a disposition is a consequence of the presence of charity in his soul). cf. III q.69 a.4 ad 2, and the Holy Office's letter to the Archbishop of Boston DS 3866-3873 below.

Analogy: in the case of penance, Trent (Dz 898) says that even an act of perfect contrition reconciles man to God without the sacrament being received; nevertheless, that reconciliation should not be ascribed to contrition apart from the desire of the sacrament which it includes (but perfect contrition is more than the simple desire of going to confession). Hence, baptism of desire is an act of perfect contrition which at least implicitly contains the desire of baptism.

Father Feeney believed that baptism of desire gives grace ("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" *Bread of Life* p.40; "Getting into the state of sanctifying grace is justification" *id.* p.18) but did not believe that this sufficed for

salvation. He created a new dogma of faith: 'no salvation without baptism of water.' To avoid the condemnation of the Council of Trent, he declared that justification and salvation are distinct, that one could be justified and have no "claim to the inheritance of Heaven"...but this is heretical. **Sanctifying grace makes the just man a child of God and gives him a claim to the inheritance of Heaven (*de fide*):**

- (Condemnation of Baius, who said that you could have charity without your sins being remitted)
- Dz 1069-70: true contrition (with charity) remits sin and someone who has charity cannot be damned
- (Trent) Dz 799: the final cause of justification is eternal life.

→ the existence of the baptism of desire is *proxima fidei* (in particular because of Trent).

Abp. Lefebvre on the subject (*The Spiritual Life*, pp.362-363):

Beyond baptism of water, there is baptism of blood, which is the baptism of martyrs. Those who were not baptized in water, but by martyrdom, also received in themselves the grace and the charity of our Lord. And then there is baptism of desire, which can be explicit or implicit. Explicit baptism of desire is what catechumens have. If they have the interior conditions of regret of their sins and of detachment from mortal sin, they have grace.

Finally, Pope Pius XII spoke of implicit desire, as regards the salvation of infidels, of those who have neither baptism of water nor baptism of blood, and who are not catechumens. And God knows that there are infidels in the world today! It is the vast majority of men. Can they be saved? Can they receive the charity of God in them, and so return to God? Well, the Church teaches us that souls have the implicit desire of baptism if they are disposed to do the will of God, making an act of charity as perfect as possible within the conditions where they find themselves, and if they do not know the Catholic Church, but in such an action manifest a desire to conform themselves interiorly and exteriorly to the will of God.

So, think of a Muslim woman or a Buddhist woman who receives an actual grace from God to make an act of perfect charity. In that act is contained the implicit desire for baptism, because in choosing that act, she submits her will to the will of God. She says interiorly, "I love God, and if He asked me for something right now, I would be ready to do it." If someone said to her, "God asks that you be baptized," "Ah! Alright," she would say, "I'm ready to be baptized." Such a soul is well disposed. But she would not be saved by error. No one is saved by a false religion, by a religion which is invented by Satan.

So there can be people who have a well disposed heart, who truly make an act of perfect charity. That implicit desire of baptism confers sanctifying grace on them, but it is through the Church that they are saved. No one can be saved outside the Church, outside of our Lord, outside of baptism.

And then that person receives sanctifying grace through the implicit desire of baptism, so that charity comes into her. That is why she, too, is united to our Lord Jesus Christ, united to the Church, even though she does not know it.

But we have to recognize that those conditions are normally very difficult, because false religions are so permissive as regards sin, as regards vice, and so those people generally have vices.

Positive Theology on the Three Baptisms

Scripture:

- Acts 10: Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before baptism (it is the very argument of St Peter to have them baptized).
- As for martyrdom: Our Lord promised heaven to anyone who would die for Him, cf. Matt. 5:10; 10: 39; 16: 24).

Fathers:

- St Ambrose RJ 1328 (concerning the death of a catechumen Valentinian II, a young emperor who died in 375; it is because of the intimate knowledge that St Ambrose had of this man that he had such confidence) "*Sed audio vos dolore quod non acceperit sacramenta baptismatis...Atqui...hoc voto habuit...et proxime baptizari se a me velle significavit...Non habet ergo gratiam quam desideravit? Non habet quam poposcit? Certe quia poposcit accepit. Et unde illud est (Wisdom IV,7) 'Justus si morte præoccupatus fuerit in refrigerium erit'*" ("but the just man, though he die early, shall be in rest").
- And St Ambrose quoted by St Thomas in q.68 a.2 "I lost him whom I was to regenerate but he did not lose the grace he prayed for" [it was not just the asking for baptism which justified the man but his visible holiness is what made St Ambrose think that he was in the state of grace].
- St Augustine (*De Baptismo* RJ 1629-1630, quoted at the end of the corpus of our article and in q.68 a.2 SC & ad 3): if there is not enough time he says that '*fidem conversionemque cordis*' can supply.
- St Bernard (epist 77): baptism of desire may be enough as long as "*aquam non contemptus, sed sola prohibeat impossibilitas.*"
- As for martyrdom there is a great number of quotations possible: Tertullian RJ 309 St Cyprian RJ 598, St Cyril of Jerusalem RJ 811 "*si quis baptismum non recipiat, salutem non habet, solis martyribus exceptis, qui etiam sine aqua regnum recipiunt.*"

According to Suarez, all theologians agree (Abelard may have been the only exception).

Magisterium:

- Dz 388 Innocent II (1130-1147): about a "priest" [Feeneyites will argue that this expression proves that this text is not trustworthy!] who had never been baptized and died: there is no fear about his eternal salvation (quotes St Ambrose): public prayer should be offered for him.
- Dz 413 Innocent III (1198-1216): a Jew who died after having baptized himself was saved "*propter sacramenti fidem, etsi non propter fidei sacramentum.*"
- Dz 796 Council of Trent: the translation from the state of Adam to the state of grace is only possible, since the promulgation of the Gospel, by baptism or "*vel eius voto*" (the desire for it).

- Dz 847: the sacraments or the desire of them are necessary for salvation.
- Dz 1677 Encyclical *Quanto conficiamus moerore* of Pius IX on indifferentism: “they who labour in invincible ignorance of our most holy religion and who, zealously keeping the natural law and its precepts engraved in the hearts of all by God, and being ready to obey God, live an honest and upright life, since God who clearly beholds, searches, and knows the minds, souls, thoughts, and habits of all men, because of His great goodness and mercy, will by no means suffer anyone to be punished with eternal torment who has not the guilt of deliberate sin.”
- DS 3821 (not in Dz) *Mystici Corporis*: prayer for those who are not yet members of the Church: “we ask each and every one of them to correspond to the interior movements of grace, and to seek to withdraw from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.”
- DS 3869 Pius XII against Fr Feeney: to obtain eternal salvation it is necessary at least to be united to the Church by desire and longing.

1 cf. books of Father Laisney and of Father Rulleau