

Catholicity & Baptism
are *Necessary* for *Salvation*

Comprised of Two Articles:

The Dogma of Faith *Outside the Church There is No Salvation*
Defended Against Right-Wing Liberals
by Brother Francis Maluf, M.I.C.M.

&

Baptism of Desire:
Its Origin and Abandonment in the Thought of Saint Augustine
by Brian Kelly



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Section One

The Dogma of Faith

Outside the Church

There is No Salvation

Defended Against Right-Wing Liberals

by

Brother Francis Maluf, M.I.C.M

The Dogma of Salvation Under Attack

The doctrinal crusade of Saint Benedict Center dates back to the early 1940s when we began to attack, albeit in their incipient form, the very evils that conservative Catholics are so concerned about now. It was not long before we realized, however, that these troubles afflicting the Church were but symptoms of a much more fundamental one, a deadly heresy responsible for them all. Very few people saw the warning signals at that early stage, for the heresy itself had not taken full form and its fruits had not yet appeared.

It became more and more evident what this underlying evil was. It was the denial of the necessity of belonging to the Catholic Church for salvation. The whole collapse in the Church today can be traced to the silencing or weakening of this one doctrine. Most so-called conservatives are not aware of this fact. We are convinced that they will never win one single victory until they are.

Not until this fundamental truth is preached again from every Catholic pulpit shall we see again the triumph of Catholic values and Christian morals. It is only then that we shall see a resurgence of Catholic life—preaching, education, vocations, missions. Only then shall we see the restoration of orthodoxy and tradition, pre-eminently in the restoration of the traditional Mass.

From the start we proclaimed the dogma of Faith: “Outside the Church there is no salvation.” We vowed to defend it. It is our duty not to stop our fight until we have succeeded in rousing the sleeping giant—the Church Militant! Others might observe the effects of the present-day apostasy; it is our vocation to proclaim the cause. There can be no Christian civilization without this most fundamental of all Catholic truths, the belief of innumerable multitudes who have gone before us: Outside the Church there is no salvation.

In waging our crusade, even our most determined opponents admit that we have fought courageously and that we have paid the usual price in terms of humiliations and sufferings. Even the most extreme liberals have been willing to grant us the dubious honor of being sincere. We have never sought, we hope, any compensation for our labor on this earth; but we should be able to expect from conservative fellow Catholics, who at the present share most of our worries, the decent consideration due to pioneers in the conservative campaign. We ourselves extend that courtesy to anyone fighting, let it be confusedly, for faith and tradition.

Professional Wailers

Some conservative journals remind one of professional wailers at the bedside of a very sick man. While awaiting the crucial moment when their services will be in order, namely, the demise of the unfortunate sufferer, they occupy themselves with the wringing of their hands as they proclaim their prophecies of doom. What is more necessary, of course, is a medical man who can interpret the symptoms, name the disease, and prescribe the remedy.

One such professional wailer is the Catholic periodical, *The Remnant**. Its editor, Walter L. Matt, knows, of course, as the whole world knows by now, that the Catholic Church

is very sick. But Mr. Matt cannot name the disease, nor does he have a prescription. He cannot name the disease because Mr. Matt also has it in common with his very opponents. The disease is the heresy of Liberalism; and Liberalism is the belief, so overwhelmingly prevalent in our day, that men are absolutely free to choose their religion. The truth is that men are physically free to choose their religion, but they must make the right choice in order to be saved. In other words, when it is a question of religion, men are free to choose, but in choosing, salvation itself is the thing at stake.

No Christian in the catacombs ever held the belief of the liberals; no martyr in history ever died for it. This includes, of course, the recently canonized martyrs of the English Deformation (the misspelling is intentional). No saint ever departed from this life believing that a man could be saved without the Faith, the sacraments or obedience to God through the authority He established in the Church. All the great preachers preached the opposite doctrine; all the great missionaries undertook their labors in terms of exactly the opposite belief.

But this is not only true of saints. All ordinary Catholics, of all nations, in all the ages previous to this age of liberalism, always believed “that there is one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all can be saved.” These are the exact words by which pope Innocent III defined this dogma in 1215. As is always the case, the pope was defining, not an innovation, but a truth already held. The Pope was also proclaiming that truth as coming down from the tradition of the Apostles. The usual occasion for a papal definition is that the doctrine in question is being challenged and denied, perhaps for the first time, by some heretics.

Certainly those Catholics of the “Dark Ages” (to use the language of this wonderfully enlightened age) believed that there was no salvation outside the Church. Certainly

the Catholics who fought in the Crusades believed that there was no salvation outside the Church; and so did the Catholics who approved and upheld the Inquisition. (It might be fitting to remind ourselves that even some inquisitors and some crusaders are named among the saints.) And the Catholic poet who sang in his *Chanson de Roland*, “The Christians are right and the pagans are wrong”, did not think that man can be saved in any religion, nor did the countless generations of the faithful who echoed his verses. But the editors of *The Remnant* do so believe, and in so believing they reflect the spirit of our times—a most un-Catholic spirit which is the fruit of the Jewish and Masonic domination of contemporary thought.

Father Stepanich: A Right-Wing Liberal

In two recent issues of *The Remnant* (November 3, and November 15, 1973) we are singled out for attack. After twenty-five years of meeting punches coming at us from every direction, we should be immune to shock. Still, there was, for us, an element of surprise in this uncalled-for attack. One would expect the editors of *The Remnant*, in the present circumstances of the Church and of the world, to be at least distracted by other evils which, if not as wicked as our doctrinal crusade, are certainly more urgent!

The two articles in *The Remnant* attacking us were signed by a Franciscan, Father Martin Stepanich, O.F.M. The writer, while naming us in the opening sentence as the target of his attack, proves to be very little acquainted with our own books and documents, but rather concerned with publications for which he mistakenly holds us responsible. However, since Father Stepanich does deal with the dogma for which we stand, we feel obliged to answer.

It has been over a quarter of a century since we first hurled the challenge at the liberals: “Produce one infallible

statement in favor of salvation outside the Church!” The challenge has not been met, nor was it met in the two articles by Father Stepanich. In fact, this priest merely goes on to repeat the same two ambiguous statements—the only ones that our liberal opponents ever discovered. One of these statements is by Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) and the other by Pope Pius XII (1939-1958). Neither of these statements is infallible, but both statements come from encyclicals the express purpose of which was to combat the very conclusions that the liberals want to draw.

Before we go a little more deeply into these two documents, let us first enunciate the following Catholic principle: when a statement from the Ordinary Magisterium of the Church seems to conflict with the Solemn Magisterium, it is the Ordinary Magisterium that must give way, or be interpreted in a sense agreeable to the Solemn Magisterium.

Let us establish, therefore, the standard by giving the three infallible pronouncements which fix, for all time, the teaching of the Church, in the Solemn Magisterium, on the necessity of the Church for salvation.

Ex Cathedra: “There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all can be saved” (Pope Innocent III, Fourth Lateran Council, 1215).

Ex Cathedra: “We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff” (Pope Boniface VIII, the Bull *Unam Sanctam*, 1302).

Ex Cathedra: “The most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes, and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, can have a share in life eternal; but that they will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before death they are joined with Her; and that so important is the unity

of this ecclesiastical body that only those remaining within this unity can profit by the Sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, their almsgiving, their other works of Christian piety, and the duties of a Christian soldier. No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, even if he pour out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remain within the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church” (Pope Eugene IV, the Bull *Cantate Domino*, 1441).

May we remind our readers that when the pope defines *ex cathedra* a doctrine of faith, he defines it for the faithful, not for the theologians as such. Every individual Catholic must conform his mind to the infallible definition or suffer the “shipwreck” of his faith, to borrow a figure from Pope Pius IX when defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Now let us address ourselves to Father Stepanich. Do you really find, Father Stepanich, that you can affirm these three statements without subterfuge or mental reservation? We understand them to mean exactly what they say, but you call our understanding of them “warped” and “erroneous”. If the popes had intended to define the dogma in our sense, what terms would you have suggested more emphatic than the ones they actually used?

And will you please notice that the successive definitions increase in definiteness and in emphasis rather than the other way round?

Notice also that the date of the first definition is the date of the founding of the Franciscan Order. So for the sake of Franciscan honesty, please, Father Stepanich, admit that Saint Francis must have believed that doctrine, and you do not.

The Authority of Pope Pius XII

Trying to understand the mind of Father Stepanich concerning salvation and where it is to be found, we do not think it unfair to say that, according to him, every man, regardless of what religion he professes, has a chance to be saved. If that man does not belong visibly to the Church by baptism, he may, according to Father Stepanich, be “in an invisible and mysterious way connected with the Church or ‘related’ to her”.

Indeed, one wonders if anybody is really outside the Church—whether he knows it or not, or whether he wills it or not. For, again to quote the exact words of the father, “It should now be clear that those living in ‘invincible ignorance’ outside visible membership in the Catholic Church are really *not totally* (emphasis in the original) ‘outside’ the Church.”

This remarkable statement by Father Stepanich could obviously be said of any unbaptized pagan and, therefore, *a fortiori*, of every Jew, heretic and schismatic. According to this opinion, no one is totally outside the Church, and the dogma “Outside the Church no one can be saved” is one that the logicians call “lacking suppositum” or just plain silly. If that is all that the popes intended to say they certainly did a very poor job of expressing themselves.

But where does Father Stepanich find authority for this manner of belonging invisibly to the Church? He thinks that he finds it in the encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Mystici corporis*, 1943. In that document the pope speaks of those “who do not belong to the *visible* Body of the Catholic Church” and adds that “by an unconscious desire and longing *they have a certain relationship with the mystical body of the Redeemer*”. (Emphasis throughout is by Father Stepanich.)

This is a curious way to use, or rather abuse, a papal document, for the same encyclical condemns this presumption of invisible membership in the Church.

If the Church is a body, it must be an unbroken unity according to those words of Paul: “Though many, we are one body in Christ.” But it is not enough that the body of the Church be an unbroken unity; it must also be something definite and perceptible to the senses, as our predecessor of happy memory, Leo XIII, in his Encyclical *Satis cognitum* asserts: “The Church is visible because she is a body.” Hence they err in a matter of divine truth, who imagine the Church to be invisible, intangible, a something merely “pneumatological,” as they say, by which many Christian communities, though they differ from each other in their profession of faith, are united by a bond that eludes the senses.”

We give this long quotation from the Encyclical *Mystici corporis* of Pope Pius XII to show that the pope, far from condoning Father Stepanich’s jellyfish conception of the Church—whereby we do not know where it begins nor where it ends, and whereby, in addition to its visible members, it has all kinds of invisible parts of varied “professions of faith”—was actually condemning this very way of thinking. The pope speaks of the “visible body of the Church” as we speak of the “the living God”, namely, in order to emphasize visibility as an attribute of the Church.

At the very opening of this same encyclical Pope Pius XII speaks “with gratitude to God” of “many who, though outside the fold of Jesus Christ, look to the Church as the only haven of salvation”. This can only mean that many non-Catholics know where to find salvation, if they ever intend to seek it seriously.

Would that not only many, but all mankind knew this simple truth! Yet how would they know it unless it were preached to them—unless it were proclaimed to all men from the housetops?

We might say to Father Stepanich: And is this not the very purpose for which the Church exists, and for which

you, Father Martin Stepanich, were ordained a priest? Or are you just an apostle of invincible ignorance? If the majority of men are going to be saved, not by the light of faith, but by the darkness of invincible ignorance, then let us close our seminaries and call off the missions!

The Authority of Pope Pius IX

Father Stepanich was even less original, and at least equally unsuccessful, in trying to make of Pope Pius IX a patron of his own twentieth-century brand of liberalism. The passage from Pope Pius IX’s Encyclical *Quanto conficiamur moerore* of 1863, which contemporary liberals insist repeatedly on quoting or misquoting (it is to the credit of Father Stepanich that he did not misquote), ought to be considered as either retracted or, at least, reconciled to the infallible teaching of the Solemn Magisterium by the later document of the same pope, the famous *Syllabus of Modern Errors* of 1864.

Let us watch Father Stepanich dealing with Pope Pius IX in *The Remnant* of November 3, 1973:

Like so many other popes, Pius IX was most emphatic—jarringly emphatic—in maintaining that outside the Church there is no salvation. An example of his teaching is found in his Encyclical *Quanto conficiamur moerore* (“With what sorrow We are consumed”) of August 10, 1863. He first condemns as “absolutely contrary to Catholic teaching” the notion that “persons living in error and outside the true faith and Catholic unity can reach eternal life”.

Let us stop here for a minute. Pope Pius IX will go on, in the encyclical just referred to, to raise the objections typical of the liberals of his day. The liberals of the nineteenth century, those disciples of Jean Jacques Rousseau, had idealized, romanticized, and all but canonized, the noble savage the invincibly ignorant native on a desert island,

entirely out of reach of Church or civil society. The pope will try to rationalize to the liberals of his day the fate of this poor savage as being consonant with the justice and mercy of God.

But before we proceed to study the pope's answer to these objections, let us consider the first affirmation he just made. Is not the position that Pope Pius IX called "absolutely contrary to Catholic teaching" exactly the one held by Father Stepanich in his two articles?

If the two articles in *The Remnant* do not lead inevitably to the conclusion that those living in error and outside the true Faith and Catholic unity can reach eternal life, what in the name of sheer sanity is the real meaning of his message? Was not the message those two articles carried exactly what the pope issued his "jarring" encyclical to condemn? Pope Pius IX condemned it even more jarringly, the year following, in his glorious *Syllabus!* Was not that kind of theology the reason why the opening words of his encyclical are: "With what sorrow we are consumed"?

No wonder Father Stepanich finds the pope's words jarring to his ears. Pious ears are jarred only by the sound of heresy uttered. But Saint Paul prophesied another kind of ear that would show up in the latter times—itching ears that cannot endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3).

The Invincibly Ignorant Native

The liberals are not interested, as you know, Father Stepanich, in the pagans and savages who have never heard the Faith preached to them. It is men like the Jesuit, Saint John de Brebeuf, or your fellow Franciscan, Saint Francis of Solano, who are truly interested in the "noble" savage and in his soul.

The liberals want to see the "invincibly ignorant" native in their neighbors—the Episcopalians, the Quakers,

the Unitarians, the Christian Scientists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. And why are all these “invincibly ignorant”? (What a compliment to them or to us!) It is either on account of our cowardice and human respect—failing them in charity whereby every Catholic is meant to love his neighbor as himself by helping him to seek his real and lasting good—or, perhaps, it may be on account of the obstacles that our neighbor places in the way—pride, ancestor worship, foolish concern about temporal advantages or, finally, sheer bad will.

But how about the genuine case—the true and original invincibly ignorant native? Pope Pius IX never says anywhere that he can get to heaven without the Faith or the sacraments of the Church. (Once more, it is not the darkness of invincible ignorance but the light of faith that the Church Militant must spread upon this earth.) Pope Pius IX merely affirms another Catholic truth which we cheerfully believe and which we also proclaim with equal enthusiasm. This truth is that although the native savage on the desert island is apparently out of man’s reach, he cannot be out of God’s reach because, to use the words of Scripture, “nothing is impossible with God”. The grace of God can reach that man with all the means necessary for salvation.

The only case on record of an invincibly ignorant native (of good will, of course) is the story of the minister of Candace told in Chapter 8 of the *Acts of the Apostles*. The grace of God did reach this poor native in the desert by means of Saint Philip the Deacon who, brought by an angel, taught him the Faith and baptized him with water (Acts 8:26-39).

How does God do it in each and every case? I do not know, nor do I need or want to know. We have all eternity to find out. The Holy Ghost forbids such curiosity: “In unnecessary matters be not over curious” (Eccus. 3:24). Our Lord calls it “the idle word” for which every man must give account on the Day of Judgment.

Other Liberals on the Issue

Although we have restricted our attention in this work to right-wing opponents, our arguments apply *a fortiori* to liberals of other shades. So, while we are on the subject of that notorious quotation from Pope Pius IX, we might discuss its appearance in a recent issue of another right-wing periodical.

Catholic Currents, a Triumph publication, in its issue of October 15, 1973, misquoted Pope Pius IX in the same encyclical referred to above.

“For God, who reads comprehensively in every detail the minds and souls, the thoughts and habits of all men, will not permit, in accordance with His infinite goodness and mercy, anyone who is not guilty of a voluntary fault to suffer eternal punishment.”

The same passage is more correctly rendered by Father Stepanich: “For God, who has perfect knowledge, examines and judges the minds, the souls, the thoughts and the deeds of all men, and He does not permit, in His sovereign Goodness and Mercy, any men *not culpable of wilful sin* to be punished with eternal torment (The Remnant, Nov. 3, 1973, p. 3).

A comparison of these two translations, with each other and with the Latin original, could lead one to make a vehement attack on that unbelievable catastrophe of our time—the discarding of the Latin traditional liturgy, the breaking down of a hedge meant to guard both orthodoxy and tradition. But that would be a distraction.

We will concentrate on the point of interest to us at the present. The word *suppliciis* in the Latin original is translated correctly as “torment” (although “torments” would have been more accurate) in the article by Father Stepanich. It was translated wrongly by the word “punishment” in *Catholic Currents*.

This might sound merely pedantic, but a very great deal depends on this difference. The very nature of hell depends on it. Belief or disbelief in original sin depends on it. The whole Catholic Faith could stand or fall, depending on it. According to the erroneous translation in *Catholic Currents*, the pope would be denying the limbo of the unbaptized, or sending the souls of unbaptized infants to heaven.

We may affirm in the spirit of the traditional faith that the loss of the Beatific Vision is a punishment but not a torment. The souls of unbaptized infants can enjoy a perfect natural happiness in limbo (which, by the way, is part of hell, not of heaven), but still they are suffering a punishment: they are deprived of an infinite good not due to nature. In the face of such mysteries we can go no further than accept what is revealed, with the simplicity of a child, with the simplicity of the saints, with the simplicity of all our ancestors in the Faith.

In the face of such deep mysteries even Saint Paul gives us no more help than to say:

“Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it: ‘Why hast thou made me thus?’ Or hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?” (Rom. 9: 20-21).

Of course, even Saint Paul’s authority will not be sufficient to convince the rationalists until they begin to think with their faith, and not merely with their reason.

Rationalism and the Problem of Hell

But why is that notorious passage from Pope Pius IX so popular with liberals—even liberals of the right-wing variety? This passage gave Pope Pius IX so much sorrow and pain when he began to discover the meaning attributed to it that he spent the rest of his long pontificate trying to retract it or, at least, to show the way it must be understood. What

makes that passage so popular with liberals is that it seems to render the Catholic Faith more reasonable—especially when the liberals can get away with mistranslating it.

Is our Faith reasonable? No. Our Faith is not absurd, but it is not absolutely reasonable either. Reason is natural human intelligence, but the Faith proceeds from divine intelligence. When the objects of the faith reach our minds they have, inevitably, the aspect of mystery about them. Hell, one of the many objects of faith, is not absurd, but hell cannot be fully rationalized. By trying to overrationalize hell, the liberals today have ended by making the dogma that “there is no salvation outside the Church” almost mean that “there is no such thing as being outside the Church”. This is the religion of humanity, rampant in the postconciliar Church.

Hell is not being preached in the postconciliar Church (even where preaching has not been entirely replaced by dialogue). The liberals now preach only love—not the fear of God. Still, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Some of the greatest saints rose to the heights of sanctity by the thought of hell; e.g., Saint Benedict, Saint Jerome, Saint Frances of Rome, Saint Teresa of Avila (See *Le Ciel ou L'Enfer* by Chanoine Georges Panneton, vol. II, pgs. 10-12.). Even at the summits of divine charity the saints never lose the fear of God. When the fear of God is not being preached there is no divine charity, but rather generic human love.

Pope Pius XII had something to say on this subject:

“We do not have much time to lose if we are to stop the landslide towards irreligion in our own ranks. . . . It is becoming more than ever necessary to preach even about Hell. . . .” (From an allocution to the clergy of Rome, March 23, 1949.)

In our Lady’s message at Fatima, the part that left the deepest impression on the minds and lives of the seers was the vision of hell. Obviously, the Mother of God is equally

anxious that the modern world should know that hell is a reality. She commanded the three children to add to every decade of the rosary a short prayer, now fast becoming a regular part of the rosary with all those who still practice that preconiliar devotion:

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell.

The sense of this little addition was already implicit in every Hail Mary, the climax of which is the phrase; “Pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death.” That is the hour that will decide for each one of us our eternal destiny—heaven or hell.

Are the Liberals Rationalists?

Whether they like it or not, all the liberals, even those of the right-wing variety, are tinged with the heresy of rationalism. This is why they prove to be so ineffectual in trying to oppose the rationalistic trends which are fast destroying the catholicity of the postconciliar Church. The essence of rationalism is the negation of all mystery. When all the mysteries of our holy religion become eventually fully rationalized, the Catholic Church will then have adjusted itself to the Masonic norm. It will have become an acceptable variety of the humanistic superchurch. The *Novus Ordo Missae* will have done its assigned duty for the *Novus Ordo Saeclorum* (the Masonic motto we read on every dollar bill).

The liberals of our time are unquestionably Rationalists and like their brothers of any time they cannot accept any of the mysteries of our Faith. “Adam’s sin hurt only himself,” said the Rationalists of the fifth century whom we sometimes call Pelagians. The Christians retorted, “If that were true, then Christ’s sufferings benefited only Himself.” Now, who is the loser in this bargain—the Christian or the Rationalist?

The Rationalist denies all mystery, the Christian believer balances one mystery against another.

Let us return to Pope Pius XII and his Encyclical *Mystici corporis* to see what he is teaching us about rationalism, in the very document the Rationalists use in their favor. The pope there speaks of “false rationalism, which ridicules anything that transcends and defies the power of human genius”. Concerning this rationalism, the pontiff goes on to say:

As the Vatican Council teaches, “if the human reason enlightened by faith seeks earnestly, piously, and wisely, it is enabled by the grace of God to attain a partial and even profitable understanding of mysteries, both by comparing them with what it knows naturally and also through the connection of mysteries with each other and with the last end of man”; although, as the same Holy Synod warns us, even reason thus enlightened “never becomes capable of understanding those mysteries as it does those truths which form its proper object” (From the encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ by Pope Pius XII).

The Hell of Faith

All the truths about hell belong to those mysteries which are not the proper object of reason. The best that we can do with hell rationally is to show that it is not absurd. The Rationalists make hell absurd to begin with, and then they try to make it empty—or to make believe that it is empty. In a preconciliar book on Catholic doctrine by the Very Rev. William Byrne, D.D., published in 1892, hell is defined as “the state or place of those condemned to eternal punishment”.

It is very hard for us to see from reason how any crime of man can ever deserve eternal punishment. “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is reasonable. When a man kills

another man, kill him, but why send him to eternal fire? Why send the unbaptized baby to an everlasting punishment of loss, and for a crime he did not personally commit? What a prize case for the addicts of sentimental theology!

But the hell of faith is not a punishment for crime, but for sin; and sin adds to crime an entirely new aspect—the aspect of contempt or even hatred of God. It is because the everlasting God commanded “Thou shalt not kill” that murder becomes more than a crime—a sin.

The State can change its definition of crime even as regards murder, as our very State has done in the law of abortion, but the State cannot remove the aspect of sin. Even missing Mass on Sunday, or exceeding the limit allowed for servile work on the Lord’s day if it remains forever unconfessed and unrepented, deserves eternal punishment; that is, in its aspect of contempt for God. Even the guilt of original sin, by which we inherit a nature lacking the supernatural desire for the Beatific Vision, carries with it the loss of that infinite good which, naturally speaking, can neither be desired nor missed by any mere creature not reborn by grace. So much for what concerns the essence of hell, which according to sound Catholic theology consists in the loss of the Beatific Vision, a punishment common to hell (proper) and to the limbo of the unbaptized.

The torments of hell belong to the accidental part of the eternal punishment. They are completely absent from limbo. With regard to these, the same Father Byrne we have already quoted says:

All the damned do not suffer alike. The punishment is proportioned to the malice and gravity of their sins. “Give unto her double according to her works” (Apoc. 18:6).

Thus, a careless housewife who missed Mass on Sunday is not punished equally with a justice of the Supreme Court who approved abortion.

The Souls of Unbaptized Infants in Limbo

The souls of unbaptized infants can be naturally happy. Part of their natural happiness consists in a connatural love of God, their Creator—a love and happiness not forfeited as a result of original sin. But these souls have not inherited the primordial state of grace which belonged to Adam before the fall, nor were they regenerated (born again) by the waters of Baptism. Therefore, those souls would not be happier in the Beatific Vision for which they cannot have any supernatural desire.

However, men who have made themselves personal enemies of God by personal sins involving contempt and hatred of the divine majesty would be even more unhappy in the divine presence than they are in hell. Did not George Bernard Shaw say that he never heard a heaven described where he would want to spend half an hour? (The Irish wit must have heard about the Catholic heaven.) Do not worry, Mr. Shaw; you will not have to endure any such inconvenience.

And now I can hear the sentimental theologians shouting back at me, “How do you know that George Bernard Shaw is in hell?” My answer is that I do not know if George Bernard Shaw is in hell any more than I know that Justice Brennan is going to be in hell. I do not know fully how the first man died nor how the other man will die. I talk about the public man according to the evidence which has come to us. God knows everything, and it is He who gives definitive judgment. I certainly know that he was on the path that God has told us leads to hell.

Do We Know What Hell Is?

We have, as we might say, an imperfect knowledge of hell which comes from the virtue of faith. But, just as no man knows darkness who has not seen the light, no man fully knows hell until he has the Beatific Vision. We cannot know hell now any more perfectly than we can know heaven; and we know about heaven merely because He who came down from heaven has deigned to reveal that truth to us.

If you ask the natural man to describe what to him would be heaven, he can at best describe a hell, more or less comfortable. For Jesus, our Savior, revealed to us not merely the way to salvation, but the reality itself, and we have to take salvation on His terms.

Here are our Savior’s own words:

“Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5).

And again:

“Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned” (Mk. 16:15-16)

The liberals, even those of the right-wing variety, would rather have those divine utterances changed so as to read: “Even a man not born again of water and the Holy Ghost has a chance of going to heaven;” or “Even a man who believeth not, if he hath not heard the Faith, or, if having heard the Gospel preached, he can still sincerely say that he is not convinced, can yet be saved.”

Such liberals—Father Stepanich, for example—would render a great service to honesty and to the clarity of plain English were they to come right out and say: “We disagree with the Church; we think that outside the Church there is salvation.”

The Hell of Father Stepanich

In the great ages of faith, which the superficial “scholars” of our times call the “Dark Ages”, hell was one of the great objects of meditation. Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell were called the Four Last Things. Those things were real at that time. In those days confession was meaningful, and so was preaching. Most men had the fear of God and many even loved God in addition. A goodly proportion of people were saving their souls in those “Dark Ages”, which, at least, had the light of true wisdom: the knowledge of where salvation could be found.

Father Stepanich is not going to like my calling him a Rationalist any more than my calling him a Liberal. But the symptoms of both infections are evident everywhere in his two articles. Men reading them are not going to be meditating on the *Four Last Things*, nor are they going to have in their hearts the virtue of the fear of God.

Neither those outside the Church nor those Catholics who fail to live up to its teachings will be convinced that hell is meant for them. Non-Catholics will remain outside our Holy Mother the Church, resting securely in their sincerity and their ignorance, and will be perfectly satisfied to remain in their “invisible relationship” with her. Liberal Catholic religious will still find excuses to abandon their vows, and bishops and priests will continue to exchange pulpits with Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis.

Neither will the fear of God enter into the hearts of the sacrilegious vandals who have torn down the altars of our churches, nor of those nominally Catholic theologians who, in cooperation with ones not even nominally Catholic, have Communized, Protestantized, Masonized, Judaized and all but invalidated our supreme act of worship, our greatest source of blessings—the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

No! None of all these need fear the hell of Father Stepanich. It is not for them.

What is this liberal doctrine of salvation doing to “the remnant”, to those who still want to remain good and loyal Catholics? It is undermining the very foundations of their faith and causing the collapse of all their well-meaning efforts to preserve it. Yes, even what is left of the remnant is fast melting away, and the tide will not turn back until such priests as Father Stepanich again start preaching in its integrity the great dogma of salvation!

Father Stepanich turned preacher only once in his two articles: he was preaching to us who still believe in hell and the dogma of salvation. The priest knew instinctively that we are the only kind of people he still can admonish, and he did towards the end (and climax) of his article of November 3.

“By conscious and wilful heresy, a Catholic is automatically excommunicated from the Catholic Church, outside of which there is no salvation.”

Thank you, Father, for thus finally professing the Faith. Thank you also for the admonition and for the implied compliment: You know that we still have the Faith and the fear of God. Thank God!

But your readers had thought by then that those two ogres, hell and the dogma of salvation, were long since dead and buried.

It must have given your thoughtful readers quite a jolt. Yes, the hell of Father Stepanich is just for us!

An Afterthought

There was, however, one note of originality in the friar’s articles—a rather humorous passage, if levity could be allowed in a matter of such sacredness. Let us quote it at length:

“And now, before we conclude, we must point out the awful implications of the denial of baptism of desire and of blood.

Just imagine a prospective convert, “burning with love of God”, intensely desiring baptism and well-instructed in the true Faith, being overtaken by death through some “unforeseen accident”, before baptism of water could be administered to him. He comes before the judgment seat of God, only to hear the Most High say to him: “I’m sorry about that accident that kept you from baptism of water. It was so nice of you to prepare for baptism and for the true Faith with such great love for Me, but you weren’t baptized with water, so down to hell you must go!”

I hope that Father Stepanich has enough Franciscan sense of humor to realize the irony of the situation. The friar shares the same deistic conception of God common to all the Rationalists and Liberals of our time. He thinks that accidents are just as “unforeseen” to God as to us. Father Stepanich simply does not know of the particular Providence of God — or is that merely a Dominican belief!

Believe me, Father Stepanich, the joke is really on you. Imagine the omniscient and almighty God saying to His ministering spirits: “This poor man is really meant for heaven, but what can I do about that truck which is just about to hit him?”

Section Two

Baptism of Desire: Its Origin and Abandonment in the Thought of Saint Augustine

by
Brian Kelly

“Perish the thought that a person
predestined to eternal life could be allowed to end this life
without the sacrament of the mediator.”

—Saint Augustine

This article will focus on the question of explicit baptism of desire—as it was understood by most western doctors of the Church from the time of Saint Augustine (+430) until Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori (+1787), the last declared theological doctor who wrote in favor of its saving efficacy. The subject matter will deal specifically with the origin of the theological speculation, as given by Saint Augustine in one of his early doctrinal letters, and then move on to prove from authoritative testimony that the African doctor reversed his opinion in his later anti-Pelagian writing.

Go Ye, Preach the Gospel to Every Creature, and Baptize

Let us preface the following with an affirmation of the extreme importance of this issue in that the conversion of non-Christians to the Catholic Faith, in our day, is no longer considered a mission necessary for their salvation. The mandate of our Savior to “Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned” (Mk. 16:15-16), has been supplanted by a new gospel of salvation by sincerity through invincible ignorance. It is my intention to restore at least an appreciation for the zeal of the holy missionaries that went forth to convert the nations to Christ and to baptize the pagans and infidels who accepted the good news that is the gospel. These missionaries, whose exemplar since the sixteenth century is Saint Francis Xavier, were not distracted by any speculation

about a baptism of desire. Xavier baptized three million pagans with his own hand. Biographers write that there were so many catechumens waiting to be baptized that assistants had to help him to lift his arm to perform the rite. Saint Francis Xavier never wrote a word about baptism of desire. Rather, he wrote these words from the Far East hoping to reach students aspiring for degrees: “How I would like to go to the universities of Paris and the Sorbonne and address many men who are richer in learning than in zeal, to let them know the great number of souls who, because of their neglect, are deprived of grace and are apt to go to hell. There are millions of nonbelievers who would become Christian if there were missionaries.” Was this missionary, considered the greatest after Saint Paul, misinformed?

***Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* Can’t Possibly Mean What It Says! This Doctrine is Too Hard! Who Can Hear it?**

Among traditional Catholics who oppose the doctrinal cause of Saint Benedict Center, the vast majority maintain that their opposition is over Father Feeney’s rejection of baptism of desire. This has not always been the case, but it has become so more in the past twenty to thirty years. Prior to that, it was the defined doctrine itself, *No salvation outside the Church*, which disturbed those whom Brother Francis, in his treatise, *The Dogma of Faith Defended*, called “right-wing liberals.” These are the theologians who believed in the infallible authority of the Church, but were embarrassed over the literal sense of the doctrine. “God is all-merciful,” they stressed, “most men, surely, will be saved.”

In their efforts to drain the thrice-defined dogma of its literal sense, these overly optimistic theologians insisted that the dogma needed to be “interpreted” according to the sense of the living ordinary magisterium of our time.

Even Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, postulated that what *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* really meant was that there is no salvation without the Church:

“The doctrine of the Church also recognizes implicit baptism of desire. This consists in doing the will of God. God knows all men and He knows that amongst Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists and in the whole of humanity there are men of good will. They receive the grace of baptism without knowing it, but in an effective way. In this way they become part of the Church. The error consists in thinking that they are saved by their religion. They are saved in their religion but not by it. . . .” (*Open Letter to Confused Catholics*)

Then, too, there are those theologians (mostly connected with the SSPX) who insist that what *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* really means is that that the only thing necessary for salvation is to die in the state of grace, and this rebirth is not limited for its accomplishment to the visible means of grace provided by the visible Church because God, they say, is not bound by His sacraments. (I will address this last opinion at the end of this article where I briefly cover the teaching of the Council of Trent on justification.)

These re-formulations of the dogma have been even further eviscerated by more liberal elements to a redaction devoid of any challenge: “No one can be saved outside the Catholic Church who knows that the Catholic Church is the true Church but refuses to enter it.” Many priests and theologians draw this inference, rightly or wrongly, from a passage in Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*: “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation” (#16).

Accordingly, the class of people who cannot be saved, if they die in the bad state that they are in, has been reduced to the rare and hardly identifiable set of obstinants who know the Catholic Church is the true Church, but refuse to enter it. The belief in the possibility of salvation for those who die with only an implicit desire for baptism and for those who die invincibly ignorant of the truths necessary to be believed for salvation, is now capable of accommodating all who are sincere in their erroneous beliefs and try to live whatever a good life means for them.

What are we to do then as members of the Church Militant? Provide a softer cushion for those outside the Church by inventing loopholes to the salvation doctrine; or, rather, ought we not to affirm the clear infallible teaching, using whatever words seem appropriate for the occasion, lest we give false hope to our neighbor? I can think of no greater offense against charity than to tell a non-Catholic that he can be saved without converting to the true Church and/or without being baptized. In a recent *Ad Rem* March 16, 2011 [<http://catholicism.org/ad-rem-no-154.html#more-21763>], Brother André dealt with this theme of true charity and our obligation to challenge those outside the Church, with whatever gifts of noble persuasion we have, to enter the one ark of salvation.

Baptism of Desire

Baptism of desire is the belief that a catechumen, or an unbaptized believer awaiting baptism, could be saved if he died unexpectedly prior to receiving the sacrament, provided that he had an ardent desire to be baptized, along with the true Faith and perfect sorrow for his sins. Two fathers are commonly offered as authorities who proposed this belief: Saints Augustine and Ambrose. I will first write about Saint Augustine, then Saint Ambrose, then, lastly, Saint Bernard

who raised the issue again in the twelfth century, citing the two early fathers as authorities. After this, I will return to Saint Augustine to provide the evidence that he recanted his once-held speculation concerning baptism of desire.

Saint Augustine's First Speculation

It is in one of his seven books that he wrote against the Donatists that we first find Augustine speculating on this question. He first picked up the pen to refute the Donatists, in their schism and heresy, in 391, after his ordination as a priest and before he was consecrated a bishop. So, the following quote is from his earlier days as a Catholic theologian, perhaps shortly after his episcopal consecration: "That the place of baptism can sometimes assuredly be taken by suffering, the Blessed Cyprian takes as no mean proof the words addressed to the thief who was not baptized. . . . In considering which again and again, I find that not only suffering for the Name of Christ can make up for the lack of baptism, but also the Faith and conversion of heart, if it happens that lack of time prevents the celebration of the sacrament of baptism." And, a few sentences later in the same book, "Baptism is ministered invisibly to one whom not contempt of religion but death excludes." (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists, Bk. IV, Chap. 22, Rouet de Journal, Enchiridion Patristicum # 1630*)

Early on in his writings, Augustine laid great emphasis on the natural power of the will under the influence of actual graces but, as yet, unaided by sanctifying grace. Later, in his battle against the Pelagians, he put all the emphasis on grace, which no man can merit. Even the most virtuous of unbaptized believers, he would later argue, could not merit the gift of grace that comes with the sacrament. God will call whom He will. More on this further on. For now, I would like to quote from *Augustine the Theologian by Eugene*

Teselle, where the author makes a most revealing insight that could explain why the African doctor favored a baptism in desire, at least at one point after his conversion: “Augustine asserts that nothing is more within the power of the will than the will itself, so that whoever wishes to love rightly and honorably, can achieve it simply by willing it; the *velle* is already the *habere*.” (*Teselle cites Augustine’s De Libero Arbitrio. I, 12, 26, & 13, 29 as a source for his assertion.*)

Saint Gregory Nazianzen’s Contrary Opinion

Saint Gregory Nazianzen, an eastern father and doctor of the Church, wrote in opposition to this theorizing about the efficacy of a catechumen’s desire for baptism. After demonstrating four different states of conviction possible in a catechumen, he says, concerning the most ardent of them, that they are neither worthy of punishment nor glory, but still they are at a loss. I only need to quote his conclusion as regards the latter in terms of the salvific efficacy of their will:

“If you were able to judge a man who intends to commit murder solely by his intention and without any act of murder, then you could likewise reckon as baptized one who desired baptism. But, since you cannot do the former, how can you do the latter? If you prefer, we will put it this way: If, in your opinion, desire has equal power with actual baptism, then make the same judgment in regard to glory. You would then be satisfied to desire glory, as though that longing itself were glory. Do you suffer any damage by not attaining the actual glory, as long as you have a desire for it? I cannot see it!” (*Oration on Divine Light, XL, #23*)

Whoever it was that Saint Gregory was contending with, we know that it could not have been Saint Augustine. Saint Gregory died in 389, only two years after Augustine’s conversion.

More on Saint Augustine

What Saint Augustine expressed about baptism of desire in his treatise against the Donatists was not his conviction when he wrote his commentary on the Gospel of Saint John. Therein, he states that “no matter what progress a catechumen may make, he still carries the burden of iniquity, and it is not taken away until he has been baptized.” (Chapter 13, Tract 7) Again, Father van der Meer, in his book, *Augustine the Bishop*, cites a like passage from the doctor: “How many rascals are saved by being baptized on their deathbeds? And how many sincere catechumens die unbaptized and are lost forever” (Page 150). Note here that Augustine was not referring to hesitant catechumens who presumptuously put off their baptism, but to “sincere catechumens.”

Moreover, when Saint Augustine speculated about baptism of desire he offered no authority for his view, as he did with Saint Cyprian in favoring baptism of blood. But, beginning with Saint Bernard, those western doctors who opined in favor of baptism of desire usually cite both Saint Augustine and Saint Ambrose as their authorities. Saint Thomas Aquinas is a perfect example.

Saint Ambrose’s Actual Teaching on Baptism

It would seem that, at least with Saint Ambrose, there should be a question here, especially when considering his definitive writing on the subject. Father Jacques Paul Migne (+1875) seems to think so. One of the great, if not the greatest authority on patristic teaching, he doesn’t see a warrant for this optimism in the writings of the doctor from Milan: “From among the Catholic Fathers perhaps no one insists more than Ambrose on the absolute necessity of receiving Baptism, in various places, but especially in Book II *De Abraham*; *Sermon 2 In Psalm.*; and the book *De*

Mysteriis.” (Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 16, 394, translated in *Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 10, p. 319)

Writing about the sacrament of baptism in his book, *De Mysteriis*, Ambrose affirms: “One is the Baptism which the Church administers: the Baptism of water and the Holy Ghost, with which catechumens need to be baptized . . . Nor does the mystery of regeneration exist at all without water, for ‘Unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom.’ Now, even the catechumen believes in the cross of the Lord Jesus, with which he also signs himself; but, unless he be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, he cannot receive remission of his sins nor the gift of spiritual grace.” (4,4: 4,20 *Patrologia Latina*, 16, 394)

The Imperial Catechumen and the Eulogy

Saint Ambrose was the bishop to whom Saint Augustine came for knowledge, under the inspiration of actual grace, while studying in Milan. The holy bishop also regenerated him in Christ. If Saint Ambrose held such a view on baptism of desire, surely Augustine would have cited him as an authority. What is offered by Saint Thomas (and Saint Bernard implicitly) as proof that the Bishop of Milan believed in baptism of desire is his oration in 393 at the funeral of the young Emperor Valentinian II, who was a catechumen, recently converted from Arian influences.

The western Emperor, at the time of his death, was dealing with a rebellion within his ranks led by a pagan general, named Eugenius, and Arbogast, the Count of Vienne. Eugenius wanted to outlaw Christianity in the West and restore Roman paganism. When Valentinian, through the efforts of Theodosius, Catholic Emperor of the East, requested Bishop Ambrose to come to Vienne

and baptize him, Eugenius revolted and had the Emperor assassinated in his quarters. Ambrose was deeply pained and delivered a hopeful eulogy at the funeral in which he compared the deceased catechumen to a “martyr,” slain for the Faith, and “baptized in his own blood.” He said nothing about a baptism of desire, but merely asked the faithful not to grieve over the fact that Valentinian died before he could baptize him. Then, he asked the question: “Did he not obtain the grace which he desired? Did he not obtain what he asked for?” And then he concludes, “Certainly, because he asked for it, he obtained it.” This could easily be an expression of hope that, knowing the danger he was in, the Emperor asked someone to baptize him secretly. Or, it could also mean that the royal catechumen received the grace of salvation because he died a martyr for Christ. Ambrose, apparently, had no proof of the former supposition, for he never mentioned it publicly, but he did have hope that Valentinian’s holy resolve was the cause of his being killed by this murderous usurper who hated the Faith. And that is part of the qualification for martyrdom, along with true repentance for sin. This is what the saint prayed as he ended the eulogy:

“Grant, therefore, to Thy servant the gift of Thy grace which he never rejected, who on the day before his death refused to restore the privileges of the temples although he was pressed by those whom he could well have feared. A crowd of pagans was present, the Senate entreated, but he was not afraid to displease men so long as he pleased Thee alone in Christ. He who had Thy Spirit, how has he not received Thy grace? Or, if the fact disturbs you that the mysteries have not been solemnly celebrated, then you should realize that not even martyrs are crowned if they are catechumens, for they are not crowned if they are not initiated. But if they are washed in their own blood, his piety also and his desire have washed him.” (*De Consolatione*

in obitu Valentiniani, 51-54 = PL 16, 1374-75. Translated by Roy J. Deferrari, Ph.D., in Funeral Orations by St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Ambrose, pp. 287-288)

The translation is not the problem here. The last two sentences, which seem contradictory, are exactly accurate from the Latin of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. In the next to the last sentence Saint Ambrose says "that not even martyrs are crowned if they are catechumens, for they are not crowned if they are not initiated." Does he mean that they are saved, but not crowned? Then, in the last sentence, he says that "if they [martyrs] are washed in their own blood, his piety also and his desire have washed him." I cannot understand what the holy doctor is affirming or denying in these sentences. Perhaps something is missing from the original transcription itself.

Father Joseph Pfeiffer of the SSPX, in his article "The Three Baptisms" (*The Angelus, March 1998*), asserts that Saint Augustine heard the eulogy of Valentinian and, consequently, that is why the African doctor believed in baptism of desire.

"One would think, however," writes Father Pfeiffer, "from reading some of the recent works of the followers of Fr. Feeney that the doctrine of the baptism of desire was held as an obscure opinion amongst some misguided Catholic theologians and saints—saints who got it wrong in deference to Saint Thomas, who believed the doctrine only in deference to Saint Augustine, who held it because he once heard a sermon of Saint Ambrose, "*On the Death of Valentinian*" . . . Are we to assume that Mr. Hutchinson and like-minded followers of Fr. Feeney have a better understanding of Ambrose than Augustine, his own disciple, who was baptized by the same Ambrose?"

Four quick points: 1) No one supportive of Saint Benedict Center would venture to assume that they would know the mind of Saint Ambrose better than Saint Augustine.

That is absurd. 2) As I already noted, if the doctor from Milan intended to identify himself with the speculation concerning baptism of desire, Augustine would have cited his authority, especially if, as Father Pfeiffer assumes, he was “his disciple.” 3) There is no mention of Saint Ambrose’s eulogy for Valentinian in Saint Augustine’s writings, nor are there any known letters of correspondence between them. 4) Saint Augustine began his work against the Pelagians after the death of Saint Ambrose (+397). Again, it would seem likely that in changing his opinion on baptism of desire when confronting the anti-sacramentalism of the Pelagians, he would respectfully at least have made reference to Bishop Ambrose’s alleged contrary view.

Who are the Hosts of Doctors Before Aquinas Who Taught Baptism of Desire?

Saint Cyprian?

From the time of Saint Augustine to that of Saint Bernard (+1153) in the twelfth century, I could discover no doctor of the Church who affirmed a belief in baptism of desire. Father Pfeiffer asserts in his article that there are “a host of other saints and Doctors before and after Aquinas,” who taught baptism of desire. “After Aquinas?” Granted. “Before?” With Augustine’s recantation (full text supplied later on), I do not know of any, other than Saint Bernard.

Rev. Father Jean Marc Rulleau in his booklet, *Baptism of Desire: A Patristic Commentary*, attempts to defend the same point as Father Pfeiffer concerning the fathers’ approval of baptism of desire, but he provides only the flimsiest of evidence from the fathers. He maintains that Saint Cyprian (+258) believed in baptism of desire—not for catechumens (Cyprian does not raise that question), but for those converts who he thought were invalidly baptized in a heretical sect. The question Cyprian raised was this: if they converted and

were received into the Church without being re-baptized, could they be saved? He believed that they could be saved.

I agree with Father Rulleau that this opinion could be translated into a baptism of desire. In any event, the historical fact is that Saint Cyprian refused to accept Pope Stephen's correction (including the threat of excommunication in case of non-compliance) of his teaching concerning the invalidity of baptisms in heretical sects that used the correct matter and form. He even summoned a council at Carthage in 256 to gather the support of a synod of African bishops. The decision of that council, to which Cyprian acquiesced, was that the question of re-baptizing converted heretics was a disciplinary issue reserved for the local bishop. In this, he had what appears to be the support of the eastern Catholic bishops whom he had also solicited. In a letter he wrote to one Jubaianus, the bishop of Carthage explained that he makes no laws for others, but retains his own liberty. (Epp. lxx, lxxi, lxxii) Then, again, in a later letter to one Pompeius, to whom he sent his work, *De Bono Patientiae*, he is virulent in his attack on Pope's Stephen's orthodoxy. Pompeius had asked for a copy of Stephen's decree. "As you read it," Cyprian writes, "you will note his error more and more clearly: in approving the baptism of all the heresies, he has heaped into his own breast the sins of all of them; a fine tradition indeed! What blindness of mind, what depravity!" (See New Advent's 1917 *Catholic Encyclopedia* on Saint Cyprian.) In the end, after the martyrdom of Saint Cyprian and under the pontificate of Pope Sixtus II, the Church in Carthage fell in line with the pope.

Point being: If the Bishop of Carthage was wrong on the bigger question, speaking and writing in ignorant opposition to the apostolic tradition (and, be it noted, following the opinion of the heretic Tertullian on the subject) and questioning the pope's authority, are we to hold that he was correctly handing on traditional teaching on a

subsidiary issue related to the original error? Reading the insulting language Cyprian employs against the pope in his letter to Pompeius one can understand why Saint Augustine, with great respect and prudence, would say over a century later, in his treatise *De Baptismo*, that Bishop Cyprian had atoned for his “excess” by his martyrdom.

Father Francois Laisney, in a letter written to me in 1999 on this issue, labored much to convince me that Saint Cyprian favored baptism of desire. Regarding those converted heretics who were received back into the Church by the western bishops and the head of the Church himself without being rebaptized, he proved his point. But these converts were in a different category than catechumens—after all, they were accepted as members of the Church by the pope, and Cyprian himself, at least in council, was not denying the pope the right to admit these converts without rebaptizing them. Remember, in the previously-cited letter to Jubaianus he was arguing that this decision should be left to each individual bishop. His contention, therefore, if one looks at the logic of the actual argument and not his excessive vitriol, was not that the “deposit of faith” was being compromised by Pope Stephen, but that, for certainty sake, when the validity of heretical baptisms was questionable (as it was in his mind) the matter fell to one of discipline. To quote Saint Cyprian: “God is powerful in His mercy to give forgiveness also to those who were admitted into the Church in simplicity [of heart] and who died in the Church and not to separate them from the gifts of the Church” (*Letter to Jubaianus*, n. 23, *Patrologia Latina* 3, 1125). I put the emphasis on “died in the Church” to prove my point. If Saint Cyprian definitely believed that the Faith itself was being compromised, and that to accept the validity of heretical baptisms was itself “heretical,” then he would not have said that the deceased converts, who were not rebaptized, “died in the Church.” If Fathers Rulleau and Laisney wish to believe

that Saint Cyprian was transmitting an apostolic tradition concerning baptism of desire, fine; but they certainly should not insist that fellow Catholics are obligated to believe that. They should also take note that Saint Augustine did not cite Cyprian as an authority when he first proposed baptism of desire as his own personal opinion.

All the Fathers From the First Centuries Favored Baptism of Desire? Untrue

With just two fathers of the Church (seemingly so, in the case of Saint Ambrose) favoring baptism of desire for pious catechumens who died before baptism, Father Rulleau asserts that “all the Fathers” from the “first centuries” favored baptism of desire. Yet, in his own treatise, he cites several, like Cyril of Jerusalem, who “seem” opposed to baptism of desire. Father Francois Laisney will not even go that far. For him, as he expressed it in the letter he wrote to me in 1999, no matter how much a father insists on “no exceptions except unbaptized martyrs,” unless they explicitly reject baptism of desire, one cannot say they were opposed to it. And even if a father did explicitly oppose it, as did Saint Gregory Nazianzen, they, Father Laisney and others, will not accept the literalness of the rejection. I am surprised that, in his treatise, Father Rulleau does not quote from Saint Gregory Nazianzen who, as you read above, could not have been more specific in his rejection of baptism of desire. Saint Benedict Center has provided that quotation in numerous of its publications, but I can only assume Father Rulleau was unaware of it or he would have cited it. Here is what Rulleau writes in his study:

“Martyrdom can be spiritual, in the sense that salvation can be achieved by a purely interior conversion. This baptism of desire makes up for the want of sacramental baptism. Baptism is thus received *“in voto.”* The existence of

this mode of salvation is a truth taught by the Magisterium of the Church and held from the first centuries by all the Fathers. No Catholic theologian has contested it. . . .”

Quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur (What is gratuitously asserted, is gratuitously denied). Baptism of desire was not “held from the first centuries by all the Fathers,” nor is it the teaching of “the *Magisterium of the Church*.”

The Letters of Popes Innocent II and Innocent III

The second contention, regarding the Magisterium, is the subject for another article. Suffice it to say that neither of the two popes, Innocent II and Innocent III, whom Father Rulleau cites in favor of baptism of desire, were issuing a decree for the universal Church. They had written personal letters, invoking, yes, a doctrinal matter, but in response to two particular disciplinary questions. The one attributed to Innocent II in Denzinger’s *Enchiridion*, written to the bishop of Cremona, Italy, is attributed rather to Innocent III in a canon law book, *The Corpus of Canon Law*, published in 1881 in Freidberg. The question involved offering Masses for a deceased priest who, it was discovered afterwards, had no record of being baptized. The pope gave permission for it. The other letter, also attributed to Innocent III, is so theologically novel that I really doubt that Father Rulleau would himself subscribe to it. I find it incredible that a bishop would even ask the question that is proposed, which was whether or not a Jew who attempted to baptize himself when he was in danger of death should be “re-baptized” after his recovery to health?

How is it that a presumably educated shepherd of the Church—this is a bishop, after all—Bishop Berthold of Germany in this case, could ask such a question? And the pope’s answer, as we have it from the *Enchiridion*, is

more than problematic; its uncritical gratuitousness could have led to other Jews doing the same when near death, or catechumens holding off baptism until near death and then doing a self-baptism. The letter attributed to Pope Innocent says that if the Jew died after his attempted self-baptism he would have “flown straight to heaven.” Is this the “teaching of the Magisterium” Father Rulleau is offering in his favor? I see no reason why either of these papal letters should have been included in Denzinger’s *Enchiridion*, which was originally intended to be, after all, a collection of supreme magisterial teaching (first published with only 128 documents in 1854); hence its full title, as given by its compiler, Father Heinrich Joseph Dominicus Denzinger: *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum* (Collection of symbols [i.e., creeds] and definitions).

Let us note, however, regarding Innocent III, that Saint Thomas Aquinas had to cite another error of his in the *Summa* wherein the pope was shown to have held that Christ consecrated by His divine power without words: “ ‘In good sooth it can be said that Christ accomplished this sacrament by His Divine power, and subsequently expressed the form under which those who came after were to consecrate.’ But in opposition to this view are the words of the Gospel in which it is said that Christ ‘blessed,’ and this blessing was effected by certain words. Accordingly those words of Innocent are to be considered as expressing an opinion, rather than determining the point” (*Summa*, III, Q. 78, Art. 1, reply to objection 1).

The Book of Sentences and Saint Bernard

Citing the authorities of Saints Augustine and Ambrose, Baptism of desire is promoted by Bishop Peter Lombard in his great work, written near the end of the twelfth century, *The Four Books of Sentences*, which text Saint Thomas

studied and commented upon a century later. (*Book IV, Part II*) The *Sentences* would continue to be the theology textbook for all Catholic universities until the *Summa Theologica* gradually replaced it in the seventeenth century. Until that time, for almost five centuries, it was a standard requirement for a theology degree to write a commentary of the famous *Sentences*. Peter Lombard had taught in Paris at the Cathedral University of Notre Dame, at about the same time the Sorbonne was being founded. Interesting in this connection is that Lombard, the great Master of the *Sentences*, studied under Peter Abelard, who rejected the idea of a baptism of desire, and Hugh of St. Victor, who opted in favor of it, before he began teaching in Paris. Both of these men were renowned intellectual giants of the twelfth century: the latter crowned his theological acumen with a holy life, while the former, a master dialectician, was plagued by a remorseful conscience for a good part of his life and, finally, was moved to spend his last days as a penitent in the monastery of Cluny.

In a letter to Master Hugh, who had asked for his opinion about the question of baptism of desire, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (+1153) also cited the two fathers, Ambrose and Augustine, as his authorities in favoring it. But he clearly spoke of it as a matter of opinion:

“We adduce only the opinions and words of the fathers and not our own; for we are not wiser than our fathers. . . . Believe me, it will be difficult to separate me from these two pillars, by which I refer to Augustine and Ambrose. I confess that with them *I am either right or wrong in believing that people can be saved by faith alone and the desire to receive the sacrament, even if untimely death or some insuperable force keep them from fulfilling their pious desire.*” (*my italic*)

Peter Abelard

In his *Theologia Christiana* Peter Abelard specifically rejected baptism of desire (2, *Patrologia Latina* 178, 1205), arguing that the speculation on the subject offered by Saint Ambrose in the Valentinian eulogy contradicted the fathers. Not this, but certain other of Abelard's propositions were condemned in 1141 at the Council of Sens, which was presided over by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. And, although Master Lombard disagreed with Abelard on several of his propositions, he always held him in high esteem, and the former's *Four Books of Sentences* were heavily influenced by the scriptural commentary of the latter, which lay heavily on the literal, historical, and grammatical sense. When one looks at this scenario, it appears likely that Hugh of St. Victor read Abelard's specific rejection of baptism of desire in his *Theologia Christiana*, and, noting that his friend Peter Lombard was teaching in favor of it, he was prompted to write to Saint Bernard for his opinion.

Concerning Abelard and his denial of baptism of desire, I could not express any reason nearly as insightful and poignant as that of Dr. Robert Hickson: “[T]he keen mind of Abelard saw grave troubles and violations of the Law of Non-Contradiction, IF one were temerarily trying to find exceptional substitutes for the Sacrament of Baptism in the realm of ‘Intention’ or ‘Desire’ or in the dubious, if not presumptuous, ‘hope of PERFECT Contrition’—not a very good or certain foundation for one’s attainment of *Vita Aeterna*.”

Another thing must be added in Abelard's favor, who, following the teaching of Saint Anselm, he took issue with Saint Augustine's opinion that the essence of inherited original sin is concupiscence of the flesh. Anselm taught that original sin is not concupiscence but the absence of original justice; however, oddly enough, he agreed with

Augustine that unbaptized infants would share in the positive punishments of hell in the most minimal way. Abelard accepted Anselm's teaching on original sin being the deprivation of sanctifying grace at conception, but he rejected the idea of positive punishment of sense for those who die in original sin only; in fact, he was one of the first to do so, as also did Saint Thomas Aquinas a century later.

The Catholic Encyclopedia: "After enjoying several centuries of undisputed supremacy, St. Augustine's teaching on original sin was first successfully challenged by St. Anselm, who maintained that it was not concupiscence, but the privation of original justice, that constituted the essence of inherited sin. On the special question, however, of the punishment of original sin after death, St. Anselm was at one with St. Augustine in holding that unbaptized infants share in the positive sufferings of the damned; and Abelard was the first to rebel against the severity of the Augustinian tradition on this point" (Vol. 9, *Limbo*, p. 257).

Fifth Century Theological Manual: *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus*

In addition to these influences on the early schoolmen in Paris, there was the question, current at the time, as to the authorship of a fifth century theological manual, which specifically denied baptism of desire. It was *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus*. In chapter 74 we find the curious profession: "We believe that only the baptized are on the road of salvation. We believe that no catechumen has life everlasting, although he has died in good works, excepting martyrdom, in which all the sacred elements (sacraments) of Baptism are contained." It was commonly believed, until the thirteenth century, that Saint Augustine was the author of this theological work. Saint Thomas (+1274) challenged the belief in his commentary on the first chapter of Matthew

(*Catena Aurea*). The Angelic Doctor denied Augustine's authorship, attributing the work, rather, to a semi-Pelagian named Gennadius of Marseilles. But, on the other hand, when Peter Lombard was composing his *Book of Sentences*, he referred to the work as Augustine's in several places. (*Lib. II, dist. 35, cap. "Quocirca"; Lib. III, dist. 1, cap. "Diligenter"; Lib IV, dist. 12, cap. "Institutum."*)

Finally, before I bring to light an extremely important discovery regarding Saint Augustine's view on this point, I raise the question again: If there were any fathers other than Augustine and Ambrose for Saint Bernard to cite as authorities for his opinion, would he not have mentioned them? As I said before, I was unable to discover any doctors who argued in favor of a baptism in desire during the seven hundred years from Saint Augustine to Saint Bernard. It is true, however, that fathers and doctors, both in the East and the West, who spoke or wrote on the issue of unbaptized martyrs, granted an exception for the necessity of receiving the sacrament, but none, as far as I could discover, allowed for any other exceptions.

Testimony of Three Theologians

Before supplying Saint Augustine's retractions I will quote three modern theologians to demonstrate the lack of unanimity among the fathers who raised the question directly or indirectly concerning baptism of desire: Fathers William A. Jurgens, Bernard Otten, S.J., and Karl Rahner, S.J.

Father Jurgens: "If there were not a constant tradition in the Fathers that the Gospel message of 'Unless a man be born again . . . etc.' is to be taken absolutely, it would be easy to say that Our Savior simply did not see fit to mention the obvious exceptions of invincible ignorance and physical impossibility. But the tradition in fact is there, and it is likely enough to be so constant *as to constitute*

revelation.” (Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. 3, pp. 14-15, footnote 31, my italics)

Next, Rev. Bernard Otten, S.J., one-time professor of both Dogmatic Theology and the History of Dogma at the University of St. Louis, Missouri, in his *Manual of the History of Dogma* wrote: “Baptism of water, although ordinarily necessary for salvation, may be supplied by martyrdom, and under certain conditions also by the baptism of desire. The former was universally admitted, but the latter was apparently denied by Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem.” (Vol. I, pg 351) Abbot Jerome Theisen, O.S.B., in his book, *The Ultimate Church and the Promise of Salvation*, affirms the same of Saint Gregory Nazianzen and adds Saint Basil as being opposed to the speculation.

And, lastly, Rahner:

“. . . we have to admit . . . that the testimony of the Fathers, with regard to the possibility of salvation for someone outside the Church, is very weak. Certainly even the ancient Church knew that the grace of God can be found also outside the Church and even before Faith. But the view that such divine grace can lead man to his final salvation without leading him first into the visible Church, is something, at any rate, which met with very little approval in the ancient Church. For, with reference to the optimistic views on the salvation of catechumens as found in many of the Fathers, it must be noted that such a candidate for baptism was regarded in some sense or other as already ‘Christianus,’ and also that certain Fathers, such as Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa deny altogether the justifying power of love or of the desire for baptism. Hence it will be impossible to speak of a *consensus dogmaticus* in the early Church regarding the possibility of salvation for the non-baptized, and especially for someone who is not even a catechumen. In fact, even St. Augustine, in his last (anti-pelagian) period, no longer maintained the possibility of a

baptism by desire.” (Rahner, Karl, *Theological Investigations, Volume II, Man in the Church*, translated by Karl H. Kruger, pp.40, 41, 57)

Rahner might also have included others among the fathers who denied the possibility of salvation for the unbaptized catechumen who died before receiving the sacrament.

Historical Testimony: Saint Augustine’s Recantation of Baptism of Desire

The following extracts are taken from Fritz Hoffman’s work, *Das Kirchenbegriff des hl Augustinus. (Saint Augustine’s Concept of the Church, Fritz Hoffmann, 2. Part, 2. Chapter, The relation of the Mystical Body of Christ to the Visible Catholic Church)* They were translated from German by Dr. Leonard Maluf, S.S.L, S.T.D., who once was a translator for *L’Osservatore Romano* and now translates for a Biblical journal called *Dei Verbum*. The German author uses these passages to demonstrate that, in his anti-Pelagian writings, Saint Augustine recanted his earlier opinion on the saving efficacy of baptism of desire. I will leave the Latin text in italics for those who wish to check Dr. Maluf’s English translation (in brackets) from the Latin citations of Dr. Hoffman.

The Concept of the Church in St. Augustine, Fritz Hoffmann:

“[p. 464, c] Over against the efforts of the Pelagians, and their African following, to locate, and thus to secure, the salvation of human beings in their own free choice, Augustine’s efforts went ever more in the direction of grounding salvation and the certainty of salvation entirely in God and in the sacramental, saving mediation of the Church

as given by God. Just as belonging to the *corpus Adam* and therewith to the *massa damnata* rests on the objective fact of human birth, so belonging to the *Corpus Christi* rests on the no-less objective reality of sacramental rebirth *operante gratia spirituali*, quae data est per secundum hominem, qui est Christus (Aug. ep. 187, 31) [under the influence of the spiritual grace which is given through the second man, who is Christ.] The ecclesiastical teacher was convinced of the all-powerful will of God for the salvation of man, of the supernatural and grace character of Christianity, and of the powerlessness of any ethical striving that remains in the sphere of the purely human.

“Nowhere could Augustine bring this conviction to stronger expression than in the way he attached Christian rebirth, justification, and grace ever more exclusively to the outward sacramental [p. 465] signs of salvation, thereby insuring against all human inadequacy. This represents the end-point of a development, which at an earlier time had already led from an over-stress on the subjective side of justification, to an equal ordering of sacrament and conversion; and finally to elevating sacrament over conversion. In order to exclude any possibility of self-redemption on the part of human beings, Augustine came out strongly for the indispensable necessity for salvation of the two primary sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist: Just as for the pre-Christian era, faith in the mediator was necessary, so for the Christian era the reception of the sacraments of faith is also necessary by a necessity of means (*necessitate medii*). Without this sacramental reception there is no liberation from original sin or from personal sins: *Animas non liberat sive ab originalibus sive a propriis peccatis nisi in ecclesia Christi baptismus Christi (de Nat. et orig. an. 1, 13, 16; cf. ibid. 4, 11, 16)* [It is only Christ’s baptism, in the Church of Christ, that frees from both original sin and from personal sins]. Whoever denies this necessity empties

the cross of Christ, whose honor Augustine wishes to champion, of its value: *Evacuatur autem (scil. crux Christi) si aliquo modo praeter illius sacramentum ad iustitiam vitamque aeternam pervenire posse dicatur* (*Aug. de nat. et grat. 7. 7*). [Whoever thinks that one can arrive at justification and eternal life in any other way than through the sacrament of the cross of Christ empties it of value].

“ ‘*Crucem Christi evacuare*’ and ‘*baptismum evacuare*’ thus mean one and the same thing for the ecclesiastical teacher: *Gratiam Christi simul oppugnant (scil. Manichaei et Pelagiani), baptismum eius simul evacuant carnem eius simul exhonorant* (*c. duas ep. Pel. 2, 2, 3*) [They (the Manicheans and the Pelagians) at once assail the grace of Christ, empty his baptism of value, and dishonor his flesh.] Punic linguistic usage well expresses the absolute necessity of Baptism (immediately following which even underage children were regularly given the Eucharist): “In a happy turn of phrase, Punic Christians call Baptism simply ‘salvation’ and the sacrament of the Body of Christ ‘life.’ Where could this come from if not from an old, in my opinion, even apostolic tradition, according to which Christians hold fast to the belief that outside Baptism and the participation in the Lord’s table no human being can attain either to God’s kingdom or to salvation and eternal life” (*Aug. de pecc. mer. et rem 1, 24, 34*).

“To one who held such a strict view, even the doctrine of baptism of desire must have already seemed scandalous. [p. 466] Augustine did not hesitate to withdraw from his earlier opinion on this topic [see pp. 381 ff. of Hoffman’s book]. Even on the subject of the good thief, whom he had earlier thought of as the classic example of baptism of desire, he would now prefer to assume that the man was perhaps baptized after all, or that his death could be viewed as a kind of martyrdom. (*Aug. Retr. 2, 18* [Knöll 2, 44, 3]; *de nat. et orig. an 1, 9, 11; 3, 9, 12*) So, too, he now considers

even a good catechumen who dies before Baptism as lost, whereas a bad man, who (naturally not without inner conversion) is baptized just before death, is saved: *Quare iste adductus est a gubernatione Dei, ut baptizaretur; ille autem cum bene catechumenus vixerit, subita ruina mortuus est et ad baptismum non pervenit? Ille autem cum scelerate vixerit, cum luxuriosus, cum moechus, cum scenicus, cum venator aegrotavit, baptizatus est, discessit,...* *Peccatum in eo deletum est? Quaere merita! Non invenies nisi poenam. Quaere gratiam: O altitudo divitiarum! (de nat. et orig. an p. 27, 6)* [Why is it that the latter (the evil man) was led by divine providence to be baptized, while the former died by sudden catastrophe, although he lived well as a catechumen, without arriving at baptism? (Why is it that) the evil man although he had lived the life of a villain, although he displayed the weaknesses of the wanton, of an adulterer, of a stage artist, of a hunter, was nevertheless baptized before he died, ... and his sins were wiped out? If you are looking for what people properly deserve, you will find only punishment. If you are looking for grace: O the depths of the riches of God...!]

“[Augustine] [pages 466-467] would even go so far as to say that since the time of Christ there has not been one predestined person who has not received baptism before his death: *Absit enim, ut praedestinatus ad vitam sine sacramento mediatoris finire permittatur hanc vitam (Aug. c. Julianum. 5, 4, 14)* [Perish the thought that a person predestined to eternal life could be allowed to end this life without the sacrament of the mediator]; to wish to assume that people whom God has predestined, could be whisked off by death before being baptized amounts to setting a power over God which prevents him from carrying out what he had intended. *An eos et ipse praedestinat baptizari et ipse quod praedestinavit non sinit fieri? (Aug. de nat. et orig. an. 2, 9, 13).* [Is it possible that (God) himself predestines people to be baptized and

then he himself does not allow to happen what he has predestined?]) But in another sense too, the heightened sacramentalism shows itself with Augustine in this period: While earlier the forgiveness of sins appears simply as the effect of Baptism, against the Pelagian narrowing of the baptismal effect to the remission of sins, he now also stresses the communication of new, positive vital forces which he had previously attributed to the moral efforts of human beings supported by grace, without bringing them into direct causal [p. 468] relationship with the sacrament. It is now Baptism itself that gives the disciple the necessary grace for the victorious struggle against passion, according to *de Gen. ad litt.* 10, 14, 25.”

Skipping now to the bottom of page 472, Hoffman concludes: “It has thus been shown that the Pelagian controversy, which caused the ecclesiastical teacher to look for as objective a basis for salvation as possible, drove Augustine toward a sacramentalism that was foreign to his way of thinking in his youth, and even well into his time as bishop, and that was capable of strengthening him still further in his belief in the necessity of the visible Church for salvation.”

As I stated at the start, this article is focused on the issue of baptism of desire in its origins. Concerning baptism of blood, Saint Augustine continued to believe, as did Saint Cyprian, that an unbaptized martyr went straight to heaven. While not every father of the Church identified with this belief, there is none that I am aware of who wrote anything contrary to it. Baptism of desire, on the other hand, owes its formal genesis to Saint Augustine, as is clear from the passage already quoted from his Fourth Book against the Donatists: “In considering which again and again, I find [that] also the Faith and conversion of heart, if it happens that lack of time prevents the celebration of the sacrament of baptism,” can make up for the lack of baptism. The fact

that he recanted this opinion would remove the foundation stone of the argument from the authority of the fathers concerning baptism of desire.

Conception in Justice and Rebirth in the Body of Christ

Lastly, in another letter, to a Bishop Simplicianus, that he wrote against the Pelagians, the great African Doctor compared the desire of a catechumen to a certain conception, awaiting birth in the sacrament: “But the grace of faith in some is such that it is insufficient for obtaining the kingdom of heaven, as in the catechumens and in Cornelius himself before he was incorporated into the Church by receiving the sacraments; in others, the grace of faith is such as to make them the body of Christ and the holy temple of God. As the Apostle says: ‘know you not, that you are the holy temple of God’ (1 Cor. 3:16); and also the Lord Himself: ‘Unless a man be born of water and the Holy Ghost, he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ Therefore, the beginnings of faith have a certain similarity to conceptions, for in order to attain life eternal, it is not enough to be conceived, but one must be born. And none of these is without the grace of the mercy of God, because when works are good, they follow that grace, as was said, they do not precede it.”

A Word About Trent

I did not raise the issue of the teaching of the Council of Trent, although the Council is usually brought up by writers who oppose Saint Benedict Center’s position. Because it is so often cited to this purpose, I insert a brief excursus here, even though it is not directly relevant to my thesis. That august synod, in its Decree on Justification, defined that the state of justification can only be conferred

by the sacrament of baptism *in re or in voto* — in actual reception or in vowed intent to receive. (Session VI, c. IV) The state of justification is the state of sanctifying grace. The Council did not define that a catechumen, unbaptized but justified, could be saved if he died in that state. This question, as a hypothetical possibility, was not raised at the Council. Some have argued that our position on baptism of desire is, nevertheless, condemned by Trent in the same Session, chapter sixteen, where the Council teaches that nothing further is needed for the justified to enter heaven than to maintain the state of grace. However, it is with regard to the baptized that the Council taught that the maintaining of the state of sanctifying grace after baptism, or after regaining it in confession, is all that is absolutely necessary for salvation.

First, I will quote from Session six, chapter IX, which precedes and introduces the material treated in the following chapters:

“For even as no pious person ought to doubt of the mercy of God, of the merit of Christ, *and of the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, even so each one, when he regards himself, and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension touching his own grace; seeing that no one can know with a certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.*” (*my italics*)

The Council fathers are teaching here that the pious should never doubt the mercy of God, or the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments. Clearly, in this chapter, and in chapters XIV, XV, and XVI of the same Session, it is the members of the Church who are being addressed, i.e., the baptized. At the moment of baptism, the initiate knows with absolute certitude, if he has approached the sacrament with faith and at least attrition for his sins, that all of his sins are washed away and the temporal punishment due them. Afterwards, however, as he works out his faith in daily trials,

he ought to be confident that he has the grace of God and not doubt it, if he has not sinned mortally. And, if he falls into sin, and confesses with sorrow and firm purpose of amendment, he ought to be confident in God's forgiveness and mercy. Yet this confidence, the Council affirms, holy and right as it is, falls short of the certitude that comes in believing the revealed truths, which are the object of the theological virtue of Faith.

Catechumens, on the other hand, no matter how pious, cannot have this confidence that they are in God's grace. True, they should firmly believe and hope in God's mercy and providence, but they would be presumptuous to assume that, prior to baptism, their sins are forgiven.

And again, in Session Six, chapter XVI, where the Council was addressing the grace received in baptism, or regained after confession, the teaching is more to the point:

“Before men, therefore, who have been justified in this manner [through baptism or confession]—whether they have preserved uninterruptedly the grace received, or whether they have recovered it when lost—are to be set the words of the Apostle: Abound in every good work, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord; for God is not unjust, that he should forget your work, and the love which you have shown in his name; and, do not lose your confidence, which hath a great reward. And, for this cause, life eternal is to be proposed to those working well unto the end, and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ, and as a reward which is according to the promise of God Himself, to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits. For this is that crown of justice which the Apostle declared was, after his fight and course, laid up for him, to be rendered to him by the just judge, and not only to him, but also to all that love his coming. For, whereas Jesus Christ Himself continually infuses his virtue into the said justified, as the head into the members, and the vine into the branches,

and this virtue always precedes and accompanies and follows their good works, which without it could not in any wise be pleasing and meritorious before God, we must believe that nothing further is wanting to the justified, to prevent their being accounted to have, by those very works which have been done in God, fully satisfied the divine law according to the state of this life, and to have truly merited eternal life, to be obtained also in its (due) time, if so be, however, that they depart in grace: seeing that Christ, our Saviour, saith: 'If any one shall drink of the water that I will give him, he shall not thirst for ever; but it shall become in him a fountain of water springing up unto life everlasting.' ” (my italics)

Saint Augustine taught, as is clear from this article's epigram, that the providence of God would see to it that a justified catechumen would be baptized before death. God alone, in any event, knows which of those, with a *votum* for baptism and perfect contrition, He has justified. The Church can only assume, as the arm of Christ, the Principal Agent in baptism, that all are in need of receiving the sacrament in order to not only have all sin forgiven and abolished, but to be a member of the Church, the Body of Christ. Anticipating the rejoinder that no one is lost who dies in the state of grace, let me just affirm that I agree. Not only that I agree, but that I submit to this truth as I would a dogma of Faith. The Church, however, allows the faithful the freedom to believe that the providence of God will see to it that every person dying in the state of grace will also be baptized. This preserves the literal sense of Christ's teaching in John 3:5: "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" and His apostolic mandate to preach and baptize all nations in Mark 16: 15-16.

Summary of Points

I will end with this summation:

1. I have not found any father of the Church who taught that there was an apostolic tradition favoring a saving efficacy of a baptism of desire. If anyone can supply me with quotes indicating otherwise, I will correct my assertion.

2. Saint Ambrose's eulogy for the slain Emperor Valentinian is easily capable of interpretations other than baptism of desire.

3. There is no speculation concerning baptism of desire in Saint Ambrose's definitive writing on the sacraments, as in *De Mysteriis*.

4. Saint Gregory Nazianzen, eastern doctor of the Church, explicitly rejected the idea of a baptism in desire.

5. Saint Augustine was the only father of the Church, whom I could discover, to speculate *specifically about the saving efficacy of baptism of desire*. I invite correction if I am wrong.

6. Saint Augustine recanted his earlier position on this subject in his later anti-Pelagian writings.

7. From the time of Saint Augustine's anti-Donatist writings in the 390s, until the twelfth century, I was unable to find any doctor of the Church who wrote in favor of a baptism of desire. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) was the first. Again, I would be happy to receive correction.

8. Saint Bernard used the authorities of Saints Augustine and Ambrose to support his position. Had he had more information on their more mature or more definitive positions on the absolute necessity of the sacrament of baptism, then, I believe that this great saint would not have cited either of "these two pillars" as an authority favoring baptism of desire. Furthermore, had he considered the opinion as part of apostolic tradition would he have qualified his support by saying "with them I am either right or wrong"?

9. Father Laisney also made the point in his 1999 letter that baptism of blood is the most perfect form of baptism of desire. Therefore, if Saint Benedict Center admits unanimity among those fathers and doctors who have spoken about baptism of *blood, then, implicitly, SBC is admitting that there is, for unbaptized martyrs, a perfect baptism of desire. This is certainly a valid point. However, again, I do not think it takes into proper consideration the dogma of the particular providence of God and the “fulfillment of all justice” in sacramental baptism. For this reason did Saint Paul instruct the Philippians to always be confident: “God who has begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6). In my 1999 open letter to Father Laisney, I devoted five pages out of eighty-nine to just this issue; however, it will have to be left alone for a future article. Suffice it for now to end with a postulate offered by Father Sylvester J. Hunter, S.J., in his Outlines of Dogmatic Theology:*

We have seen that in certain cases the existence of this unanimous consent can be inferred even where few writers have treated of the matter, and we must carefully distinguish between the witness of the Fathers to the tradition that they have received, and their judgment as critics, on points as to which, they have received no tradition. In the former case their unanimous consent is decisive; in the latter it is possible for more recent criticism to have discovered reasons for adopting a different view. (page 223)