

Who is a Member of the Church?

Fr. Harrison Challenges John Salza

Editor, *The Remnant*: It is sad to see *The Remnant* leading its readers astray by promoting a doctrinal error that has been censured by the Church's magisterium. (And I'm talking here about the pre- as well as post-Vatican II magisterium.) John Salza apparently assumes that all those who are not **members** of the Catholic Church must necessarily be **outside** of her. Accordingly, he assures us that even "those Protestants who are inculpably ignorant for their heresies...lack divine faith, charity, and remission of sin" ("Who is a Member of the Church?", *The Remnant*, 9/30/14, p.11). Now, if that were true, then all those who die as Protestants would necessarily be doomed to Hell, since divine faith and charity are absolutely essential for salvation. But this excessively severe position espoused by Mr. Salza is contrary to what was taught to seminarians in approved traditional Latin theology manuals long before Vatican II. (Archbishop Lefebvre and the SSPX, for instance, have never espoused your columnist's position.)

More importantly, Mr. Salza's view is not in harmony with what Pope Pius XII taught implicitly in his 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, nor with the more explicit *Letter to the Archbishop of Boston* issued in 1949 by the Holy Office – which was then under that same Pontiff's direct control. The original Latin text of the *Letter* is in Denzinger-Schoenmetzer, 3866-3873 and an English translation can be found in *The Companion to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ignatius Press, 1994), pp. 360-362.

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John Salza Responds to Fr. Harrison

In his October 25, 2014 Letter to the Editor, Fr. Brian Harrison accused me of "promoting a doctrinal error that has been censured by the Church's magisterium," namely, that *one must profess the Catholic Faith to be a member of the Catholic Church*. Either we are not understanding each other's terminology, or Fr. Harrison does not understand Church teaching. But either way, his contention that Protestants (those who do not hold the Catholic Faith) are also members of the Catholic Church and thus saved is erroneous in faith.

He says: "John Salza apparently assumes that all those who are not **members** of the Catholic Church must necessarily be **outside** of her" (emphasis in original). Well, that depends upon what Fr. Harrison means by "member" and "outside." According to Pope Pius XII's teaching in *Mystici Corporis*, a "member" is one who professes the true faith,

is admitted to the sacraments, and is in union with the Pope (faith, worship, governance). If a person does not possess all three of these external bonds of unity, he is not a member of the Catholic Church. However, as I stated in my article, the Council of Trent teaches that one can be joined to the Church actually (*in re*) or in desire (*in voto*), through a baptism of desire. If a person desires to be a member of the Church (e.g., the catechumen who professes the true faith and seeks baptism), he is joined to the Catholic Church by that desire (*in voto*) and is thus not “outside” her (although the person is still *not* a member of the Church *as such*). My point was to rebut the modernist heresy that one can be a member of the true Church by being invisibly united to the “soul” of the Church, without true faith.

However, Fr. Harrison appears to go beyond Church teaching by holding that even those who *do not desire* to belong to the Church *are still inside the Church (and thus saved)*. He continues: “Now, if that were true, then all those who die as Protestants would necessarily be doomed to Hell, since divine faith and charity are absolutely essential for salvation” (he even calls the truth that Protestants are damned an “excessively severe position”). Thus, Fr. Harrison affirms the truth that divine faith and charity are absolutely necessary for salvation, and then contradicts himself in the very same sentence by saying that “those who die as Protestants” (who do *not* have divine faith and charity) are also saved (they are not “doomed to Hell”).

In his rush to judgment, Fr. Harrison fails to make the proper distinction between those who have the interior virtue of faith (and are thus joined to the Church at least in desire) and those who do not, but remain “Protestant.” If Fr. Harrison is referring to material heretics who may have the interior virtue of faith (which necessarily joins them to the Church by desire), then we do not disagree with each other. But if Fr. Harrison is referring to those “who die Protestants” – assuming they do not have the interior virtue of faith – then they are outside the Church and “doomed to Hell,” using Fr. Harrison’s words.

Fr. Harrison closes by saying my “view” (that is, the teaching of the Catholic Church) is “not in harmony with what Pope Pius XII taught implicitly in his 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis*...” Well, Fr. Harrison does not tell us what Pius XII taught “implicitly,” but I will tell Fr. Harrison what the Pope taught *explicitly*, and which I cite in my article: “Actually only those are to be numbered among the members of the Church who have received the laver of regeneration and profess the true faith and have not separated themselves from the unity of the body or excluded by legitimate authority.” Again, “only those” who “profess the true faith” are “members” of the Catholic Church. Protestants are not members of the Church, even if they have the interior virtue of faith in their state of invincible ignorance, because they do not have the three external bonds of unity (faith, worship and governance) which are required for actual Church membership.

Finally, Fr. Harrison says my “view” contradicts the 1949 letter from the Holy Office. Quite the contrary, as I demonstrated in my article, the 1949 letter expressly confirms my conclusions, not those of Fr. Harrison. Putting aside the question of the letter’s level of Magisterial authority, the document states that a person may be joined to the Church by a “desire and longing” through “supernatural faith” (that means the Catholic faith) and “perfect charity” (that excludes the Protestant “faith”). Thus, this letter confirms my “view” (as well as that of Pope Pius XII, among many other Popes) that one may be imperfectly joined to the Church through the interior virtue of faith, but such a person is not a member of the Catholic Church as such because he lacks the external bonds of unity.

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