

John Salza Responds to Fr. Harrison and His Theory on Salvation for Protestants

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In his latest article entitled “Can Some Protestants Be Saved?,” Fr. Harrison once again creates an opportunity to mischaracterize my views on salvation and demonstrate his heterodox views that some Protestants are saved because they are on the “borderline” of the Church, even though according to him they are “neither inside nor outside of her” [the Church] and yet outside the Church there is no salvation. Needless to say, it is difficult to respond to Fr. Harrison’s theory because the Church doesn’t teach it. The Magisterium does not teach there is a “borderline” state for Protestant souls (an earthly limbo?) where the soul is “neither inside nor outside” the Church (which only begs the question of what happens to these souls after death). No, the Church teaches that one must belong to the Catholic Church in reality (*in re*) or in desire (*in voto*) on Earth to be saved for Heaven (the martyrdom of non-baptized children being the *only* exception to the principle that implicit desire to enter the Church is absolutely necessary for salvation – but certainly not a “borderline” state for “on-the-margin” Protestants).¹

The Remnant readership should understand the genesis of this exchange, specifically, how Fr. Harrison “jumped the gun” in criticizing my four-part article “Who is a Member of the Church?” before he had all the facts (that is, before all four parts were published). I published this article in last year’s August/September/October issues of *The Remnant*, in which I explained that one must belong to the Catholic Church *in re* or *in voto* to be saved. In the first three installments, I addressed the use of the analogical terms of “Body” and “Soul” as applied to the Church, and stated that one must be joined to *both* the Body and Soul of the Church to be saved (which is the teaching of St. Bellarmine, Leo XIII and Pius XII). In doing so, I was attempting to rebut the modern heresy that Protestants are saved by an alleged union with the “Soul” of the Church but not the “Body” of the Church.” I addressed the Church’s teaching on explicit or implicit desire (that some are saved by being joined to the Church in desire) in the *fourth and final* installment that was published on October 25, 2014.

Yet, Fr. Harrison chose to write a rebuttal before the entire article was published and my analysis completely presented (he critiqued the September 30 installment even though

¹ See, for example, Van Noort’s *Christ’s Church*, p. 264.

the last installment was published October 25).² And in his preemptory critique of the incomplete article, Fr. Harrison effectively claimed that I denied the Church's teaching that one can be joined to the Church in *desire* outside of *formal* membership, even though in my last installment I *did specifically* address the doctrine of desire as a means of union with the Church and salvation, the very doctrine he rashly and falsely accuses me of rejecting! (and even though Fr. Harrison knew, or should have known, that the final installment remained to be published, which the third installment made clear).

Now, instead of admitting that he made a rash judgment (falsely accusing me of rejecting a doctrine which I not only promoted in the article in question but have also publicly defended in other articles over the years), Fr. Harrison tries to cover up his mistake by further mischaracterizing my work in his latest article (where he says Protestants are saved). Ever since I exposed Fr. Harrison's blatant errors on religious liberty nearly five years ago (he obstinately believes man has a God-given right not to be prevented by the State from doing evil, such as worshiping in a false religion), he has sought out opportunities to discredit me and my work (e.g., my articles on religious liberty, the New Mass, the canonizations of John XXIII and John Paul II, Fatima, No Salvation Outside the Church). I wonder whether this has become a personal issue with him. Whatever the case may be, based on his rush to judgment before my entire piece was published, I no longer presume Fr. Harrison is acting in good faith.

In his "jump the gun" rebuttal (which was published on October 25, 2014, in the very same issue in which my installment on "desire" was published!), Fr. Harrison said: "John Salza apparently assumes that all those who are not **members** of the Catholic Church must necessarily be **outside** of her" (emphasis in original). If Fr. Harrison would have waited for the entire article to be published, he would have known that I believe no such thing. As the October 25 installment of my article made clear, "God can infuse the internal bonds of unity of faith, hope and charity" in a person's soul based on his *desire* for salvation, which "joins him" to "the Body of the Church based on that same desire."³

Now, to give Fr. Harrison the benefit of the doubt (which he has not done with me), his most recent statement that "our dispute over this particular point may boil down to nothing more than a disagreement over the meaning of words" may in fact be the case. For when Fr. Harrison says "those who die as Protestants" are not "doomed to Hell," I as a Catholic understand his use of the term "Protestants" to mean those who have not

² I requested that the entire article be published in one issue to prevent potential misunderstandings of the material (especially on so delicate a topic), but this understandably could not be done due to space limitations in the paper, although in each of the first three installments we alerted the reader to the subsequent installments.

³ One with supernatural faith is joined to the Church by either an explicit desire (i.e., the catechumen who believes the Catholic Church is the true Church and is preparing for baptism) or an implicit desire (i.e., the person who is ignorant of the Catholic Church and thus "does not explicitly believe all, while he is prepared to believe all.") ST, II-II, q. 5, a. 4, ad. 1.

accepted the Catholic Faith after it has been sufficiently proposed to them, such that they now have a moral obligation to believe (in which case they have no relationship with the Church they are resisting and are thus “doomed to Hell”). In his latest article, Fr. Harrison now explains he is using the term “Protestant” based on the definition from, in his words, “mere secular dictionaries.”

But the term “Protestant” is primarily a theological, not secular, term which describes one who “protests” against the true Faith (and thus does not have the interior virtue of faith). I am certainly not alone here, for two priest friends of mine also understood Fr. Harrison’s article to mean that Protestants (those who reject the Catholic Faith) may still be saved, perhaps by virtue of some union with the “Soul” of the Church (or, in Fr. Harrison’s novel theory, by being on the “borderline” of the Church). As he rushed to critique my (not yet entirely published) article, Fr. Harrison in his use of the term “Protestant” failed 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 have supernatural faith, but remain “Protestant.”

If Fr. Harrison is referring to the presumably rare case of material heretics who have the interior virtue of faith (which necessarily joins them to the Church by desire), then we do not disagree with each other on that point. But such people, according to the Catholic (not secular) understanding of the term, are not “Protestants” (at least interiorly, which is how I understood his terminology). Moreover, these people are not, in the words of Fr. Harrison, “on the ‘borderline’ of the Church, neither inside nor outside of her,” but actually joined to the Church in desire. Such an earthly “limbo” for Protestant souls is a novelty of his own making, and not the terminology that has been used by the Magisterium (and for Fr. Harrison to say that such people are “saved” even though they are not “inside” the Church gives the impression that he is, at a minimum, reinterpreting the dogma *No Salvation Outside the Church* in a completely novel way).

In his strained effort to discredit me, Fr. Harrison creates a straw man out of the Holy Office’s 1949 Letter to the Archbishop of Boston, just because in a *footnote* I questioned the *level* of Magisterial authority of the document (simply because it is debated whether Pius XII actually approved the letter *in forma specifica*). Even more troubling, however, is Fr. Harrison’s false allegation that I disagree with the Letter, even though in my article I used the Letter to *support* my thesis that union with the Body (*in re* or *in voto*) was absolutely necessary for salvation! As I stated in my article, the Letter rightly states that “supernatural faith” and “perfect charity” are absolutely necessary for salvation, which the Protestant – the one who resists the Church – does *not* have. In other words, I completely agreed with the Letter and said it reiterates Catholic teaching, and yet Fr. Harrison now claims the Letter “says the exact opposite” of my position and that I disagree with it! How Fr. Harrison comes to these conclusions in good faith, I don’t know.

In what might be even stranger than his “Borderline for Protestant Souls” theory (only he and God knows what happens to such souls after death) is Fr. Harrison’s accusation that I said “inculpably ignorant adult adherents of non-Catholic communities” are “members” of the Catholic Church (and which Fr. Harrison calls the “anonymous Catholics” theory). One will scan my entire article in vain for such a ridiculous assertion. I have said *just the opposite* – that one needs the three external bonds of unity with the Catholic Church to be a *member* of the Church, and which I repeated *in all four installments of my article!* (which proves the absurdity of Fr. Harrison’s claim and why I raise the issue of Fr. Harrison’s good faith). For example:

In the first installment (August 31, 2014), I say:

“In order to be a member of the Roman Catholic Church – outside of which there is no salvation – one must be baptized into that visible communion of men in which all (1) profess the same divine faith, (2) share the same seven sacraments, and (3) are subject to the Roman Pontiff. These are the external bonds of unity of the true Church of Christ, which is necessarily visible, and whose members are known. Hence, only those who are united to the Church through these three visible, external bonds of unity are members of the true Church.”

In the second installment (September 20, 2014), I say:

“In our last installment, we saw that only those who have the true faith, the seven sacraments and union with the Pope can be members of the true Church of Christ.”

In the third installment (September 30, 2014), I say:

“...the [three] external bonds of unity are required for membership in the Church” (emphasis in original).

In the fourth and final installment (October 25, 2014), I say:

“Again, to be a member of the true Church of Christ, one must be united to her by the three external bonds of unity (unity in the true faith and sacraments, and united with the Pope” (emphasis in original).

Needless to say, there is nothing about “anonymous Catholics” or “inculpably ignorant adult adherents of non-Catholic communities” who don’t have the three external bonds of unity and yet are “members” of the Church in this article, or in any article I have ever written.

In fact, Fr. Harrison in his latest rant demonstrates that he does not understand the foregoing teaching on the external bonds of unity, which comes from the doctrine of St. Bellarmine and Pope Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis*. Fr. Harrison said he agrees with my statement that “one must have the Catholic Faith to be a member of the Catholic Church,” even saying “I myself firmly hold that belief.” However, I was imprecise in my statement; I should have said “one must *profess* the Catholic Faith to be a member of the Church,” because having the interior virtues alone (faith, hope and charity) does not make one a *member* of the Church, even though Fr. Harrison “firmly” believes that it does (and presumably why he believes “borderline” Protestants with invisible faith are saved, but “neither inside nor outside” the Church). Conversely, one is still a *member* of the Church if he has the three external bonds of unity, *even if he has lost the interior virtue of faith*. Fr. Harrison also does not believe that “the supernatural *virtue* of faith is the same thing as ‘the Catholic faith,’” even though this interior virtue is, according to St. Thomas, precisely what makes a man believe (or disposed to believe) all that the Catholic Church teaches, and what *joins* a person to the Catholic Church through *desire* (the “desire” that Fr. Harrison falsely accuses me of denying).

It has been said that Fr. Harrison maintains that Protestants are commonly saved because most of his family has remained Protestant and he worries about their salvation (and I don’t blame him at all for this; I have the same worries about certain members of my own family). But this is not a reason for Fr. Harrison to publicly teach that “Protestants” are commonly saved because they have the interior virtue of faith. In fact, Fr. Harrison has stated that the salvation of Protestants by interior faith is “not too rare” an occurrence (in his own words). But to reach such a conclusion, Fr. Harrison must presume that most Protestants are in a state of invincible ignorance and thus maintain the grace of their baptism (assuming their baptism was even valid in the first place).

Evidently, for Fr. Harrison, Protestants can live in our wicked world in a state of sanctifying grace quite easily, without the relative necessity of the sacraments, even though it would appear that many (most?) of them don’t even follow the natural law (they contracept, they fornicate). If St. Thomas Aquinas says that most adult Catholics are damned, then what happens to these poor Protestants? Are more Protestants saved than Catholics? Does Fr. Harrison make the “exception” (desire) to be the “rule” (actual Church membership)? It would seem that Fr. Harrison’s theology does well to keep Protestants in their false religions and bondage to the devil, for the devil created these Protestant religions to keep souls out of the Catholic Church (and you hear none of that in Fr. Harrison’s articles). One of the greatest deceits of the devil is to have these poor souls believe they are saved in their false religions, by some invisible tie to the true Church of Christ (which is why I chose to address this issue; to combat the errors that people like Fr. Harrison promote).

Contrary to Fr. Harrison's "not too rare" theory of salvation for Protestants, the Catholic reasonably maintains that salvation by implicit desire to enter the Church *is* a rare occurrence, due to the narrow scope of invincible ignorance, which St. Thomas says "cannot be overcome by study" (ST, I-II, q. 76, a. 2). While we don't presume to set the boundaries of invincible ignorance for individual persons, overcoming ignorance of the Church through study would seem to be possible for the majority. Moreover, because St. Thomas teaches that "there is a select few who are saved," and Vatican I declares that "not at all equal is the condition" of Catholics and non-Catholics (*cf.* Denz., 1794), it follows that those saved by implicit desire to enter the Church as members (and, thus, who live without the relative necessity of the sacraments) are in the minority, contrary to the theology of Fr. Brian Harrison. See, ST, I, q. 23, a. 7.

I will conclude with the words of my critic: "When a writer demonstrates such astonishing incapacity to present his opponent's position correctly and fairly, the latter can be tempted to just wash his hands of the whole debate..." This is indeed "the pot calling the kettle black," even though Fr. Harrison and I may have misunderstood some of each other's terminology. As he has done many times in the past, Fr. Harrison has mischaracterized my position and even accused me of making statements I have not made (when in fact I have stated the *opposite* of what he claims I said, which I have shown above), all the while he creates his own novel theology of "borderline" Protestants who are saved "neither inside nor outside the Church." I would like to think this exchange is a mere disagreement about terminology, and will grant that the terminology employed in this exchange (not only by Fr. Harrison but by me as well) has been imprecise at times. But given Fr. Harrison's gross misrepresentations of my position, it seems to be more than that. This is also my last word in this exchange.