

John Salza v. Warren Goddard
On
Baptism of Desire

J. Salza: Many traditional Catholics have fallen into the error of rejecting “baptism of desire.” They incorrectly believe that baptism of desire compromises the infallible dogma “No Salvation Outside the Church” (it does not, for both those baptized in water or desire are members of the Church). In short, baptism of desire refers to the means by which God gives a person the effects of baptism (e.g., infusion of sanctifying grace in the soul) without a water baptism where such person has supernatural faith in God and desires baptism but is prevented from receiving it (e.g., a catechumen who unexpectedly dies before being baptized).

Both supporters and opponents of baptism of desire refer to the following teaching from the Council of Trent which says:

“And this translation [to the state of justification], since the promulgation of the Gospel, cannot be effected, without the laver of regeneration, **or its desire** [*aut eius voto*], as it is written; “unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”” (Dz 796)

While supporters of baptism of desire argue that the “or” in Trent’s statement literally means “or”, opponents of baptism of desire argue that the “or” really means “and” (meaning both the “laver” of water and the “desire” for it are required, thereby eliminating “baptism of desire”). While arguing that “or” really means “and” may seem silly to those who do not understand Latin, it is true that, on a purely grammatical basis, the Latin “aut” *could* mean either “or” (disjunctive use) or “and” (conjunctive use; this can also be the case in English). Therefore, to understand the true meaning of “or,” one must look at the context in light of Trent’s other usages of “or” as well as the constant teaching of the Church.

In the other instances in Trent's teaching where “or” is used in the context of the sacraments, the meaning of “or” is, in fact, “or” and not “and.” For example, in Chapter 14, when referring to the sacrament of Confession, the council says sins are “remitted together with the guilt either by the sacrament or the desire of the sacrament...” (Dz 807). Since man is forgiven of sin outside of the sacrament of Confession when he makes a perfect act of contrition, the “or” in this case means “or,” not “and.”

Similarly, Trent teaches that man can receive the fruits of Holy Communion through the actual reception of the sacrament or its desire through spiritual communion: “For they have taught that some receive it sacramental only, to wit sinners; others spiritually only, those to wit who eating in desire [*voto*]...” (Dz 881). Consequently, in regard to the sacraments, Trent says man cannot be saved “without them or without the desire of

them..." Therefore, on a contextual basis, the "or" in Trent's teaching on baptism (as with its teaching on Confession and the sacraments in general) strongly favors the meaning "or" and not "and" (thereby indicating that "desire" [*voto*] is sufficient to receive the effects of the "laver of regeneration").

I was recently confronted with a new, contextual argument concerning Trent's teaching by a Mr. Warren Goddard, a self-proclaimed "traditional Catholic," who rejects baptism of desire and has accused me and other Catholic apologists of heresy for believing in same. He claims that there is a direct, one-to-one correspondence between Trent's "laver of regeneration" + "desire" with John 3:5's "water" + "Holy Ghost." He argues that Trent's "laver of regeneration" refers exclusively to John 3:5's "water" at the exclusion of the Holy Ghost, and then says that, consequently, Trent's "desire" (*voto*) must refer exclusively to John 3:5's "Holy Ghost" (because, even though Trent is referring to man's "desire," the Holy Ghost is the one acting upon man's will - which, by the way, means it's really not a direct correspondence). With this exegesis, Mr. Goddard concludes that the "or" in Trent must be "and" and, as such, "desire" cannot stand alone without "water" baptism. Note that not a single pope, council, saint or doctor of the Church ever advanced this novel argument, and for obvious reasons.

First, one of the problems with Goddard's exegesis is that "laver of regeneration" includes both the "water" and "Spirit" of John 3:5. There is no "regeneration" without the "Holy Spirit." When the Church uses the term "laver of regeneration," it is referring to being born again through "water and Spirit" in the sacrament of baptism, not by water alone at the *exclusion* of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the exegesis is erroneous or, at best, lacking sufficient foundation to be proven.

Second, Mr. Goddard's argument fails to comprehend the Church's teaching on necessity (as Mr. Goddard's own correspondence to me reveals which I provide at the end of this article). The three types of necessity are absolute necessity, necessity of means, and necessity of precept. The Church teaches that being "born again" is an absolute necessity for salvation (with which God cannot dispense), and that "water baptism" is a necessity of means (with which God can dispense).

We can even use John 3:5, the very verse used to advance Goddard's novel contextual exegesis, to demonstrate the same. In John 3:5, the "unless" acts directly upon "born again" and only indirectly upon "water" and "Holy Ghost." We see this in John 3:3 where Jesus says "unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We also see Jesus referring to being born again without reference to "water" in the three verses in John 3:6,7,8 (as well as many other Scripture verses that deal with spiritual rebirth without mentioning water).

In the Greek of John 3:5, the conditional *ean* for "unless", or more literally "if ever", refers directly to the aorist passive *gennethe* for "may be being generated" (absolute

necessity), which is separated from *hudatos* (water) and *pneumatos* (Spirit) by the preposition *ex* (out) in reference to the necessity of means. A contextual and grammatical exegesis of John 3:3-8 demonstrates that being "born again" is an absolute necessity, but the same cannot be applied to the means by which being "born again" is brought about, namely, "water," for Jesus does not establish that connection and neither does Trent.

Third, Trent reveals the Church's distinction between absolute necessity and necessity of means in its very teaching on Confession and the sacraments. As we pointed out, Trent teaches that sin may be forgiven either "by the sacrament [of Confession] or the desire of the sacrament." Here Trent is talking about one who has perfect contrition but is unable to sacramentally confess his sins. This means a spiritual "rebirth" (here, through love of God and sorrow/repentance for sins) is an absolute necessity for justification, and that the external reception of the sacrament is only a necessity of means. This provides further evidence that the "or" in Trent's teaching on baptism means "or" and not "and."

If Mr. Goddard concedes that one can be forgiven of sin outside of the usual means of the sacrament of Confession, which he surely must (auricular confession to a priest), then he should also concede that one can be born again outside of the usual means of the sacrament of baptism (water). In both cases, man is spared from mortal/original sin by the absolute necessity of a spiritual rebirth (interior change of heart, love of God, desire for the sacrament, repentance, etc.) and not the necessity of means (exterior reception of the sacrament). In short, perfect contrition (in the case of mortal sin/confession) and desire (in the case of original sin/baptism) can join one to the Mystical Body of Christ and bestow the effects of Christ's Passion.

Fourth, speaking of another sacrament, Holy Communion, Jesus teaches that "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you" (John 6:54). As with John 3:5, Jesus in John 6:54 is revealing the necessity of means to achieving His life of grace (we saw the same in Trent's teaching on Holy Communion). As with John 3, Jesus in John 6 requires faith in Him and a spiritual rebirth to receive His grace (e.g., v.64 "it is the Spirit that quickeneth") as the absolute necessity, with His flesh and blood being only a necessity of means. If rejecters of baptism of desire like Mr. Goddard were consistent in their exegesis, they would view receiving the Eucharist as an absolute necessity just like they view water baptism as an absolute necessity, for Jesus said "unless" we do both of them (be born of water and eat His flesh), we have no life in us.

However, eating Christ's flesh (the external reception of the sacrament) is only a necessity of means, just like receiving water baptism (the external reception of the sacrament) is only a necessity of means. Note also the similar Greek construction between John 6:51 and John 3:5, namely, the conditional *ean* "if ever" refers to the aorist

active *phage* "may be eating." But, again, if eating the Eucharist is only a necessity of means, then the same can be said for water baptism, based on an exegesis of the Greek.

Fifth, Goddard's argument does not address the many other references to baptism of desire in Church teaching. For example, St. Cyprian (bishop of the 3rd century) explicitly refers to baptism of desire that those catechumens who die before receiving baptism "are certainly not deprived of the sacrament of baptism" (Epistle No. 74,1). St. Ambrose (3rd century) also explicitly taught baptism of desire, specifically, that Valentinian, the catechumen who died before receiving baptism, received the effects of the sacrament through his desire: "Did he, then, not have the grace which he desired? Did he not have what he eagerly sought? Certainly, because he sought it he received it" (RJ, No. 1328).

St. Augustine teaches baptism of desire, for example, when referring to Cornelius as being filled with the Holy Ghost before his baptism (*De Baptismo*, IV, 21,28). St. Augustine also taught baptism of desire in *City of God*. Many other saints also taught baptism of desire, including Sts. Gregory Nazianzen, Bernard, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Alphonsus Liguori who said "it is *de fide* that there are some men saved by baptism of desire."

In attempting to understand Trent's teachings, it is important to recall that St. Thomas Aquinas greatly influenced the theology of the Tridentine Fathers. The council not only referred to the teachings of St. Thomas but also placed his *Summa Theologica* alongside the Holy Scriptures on the sacred Altar. Regarding baptism of desire, St. Thomas teaches the following:

Objection: the sacrament of Baptism is necessary for salvation. Now that is necessary "without which something cannot be" (Aristotle's *Metaphysics* V). Therefore it seems that none can obtain salvation without Baptism.

Reply: The sacrament of baptism is said to be necessary for salvation in so far as there can be no salvation for man unless he at least have it in desire which, with God, counts for the deed." (*Summa Theologica* III, 68, 2)

Hence, St. Thomas explicitly teaches that a sacrament that is "necessary for salvation" may be received either "actually" or "in desire." He says:

"Moreover, the sacraments of grace are ordained in order that man may receive the infusion of grace, and before he receives them, either actually or in his desire, he does not receive grace. This is evident in the case of Baptism, and applies to penance likewise." (*Summa Theologica*, Supplement 6, 1)

Note also that St. Thomas promoted his teachings on baptism of desire after the Fourth Ecumenical Lateran council declared that there is “No Salvation Outside the Church.” Therefore, if baptism of desire were incompatible with the dogma “No Salvation Outside the Church,” then St. Thomas, the Universal Doctor of the Church, would have been a formal heretic, and the many popes who publicly promoted St. Thomas in their papal teachings would have also been suspected of heresy! (Those would include Popes St. Pius V, Urban V, Innocent VI, Leo XIII, St. Pius X, Pius XI, Benedict XV and St. Pius X.)

And guess what? This is precisely what Mr. Goddard says about St. Thomas Aquinas. He writes:

W. Goddard: “Pope St. Pius X elevated the teachings of St. Thomas in the seminaries to a height previously unknown thus detracting from those of the Doctor of Grace. Also, St. Thomas was an enthusiastic and avid fan of John Cassian, a publically known and outspoken semipelagian. Cassian was heavily influenced by his teacher Evagrius who taught universal salvation. There is a viable connection between this historical fact and the fact that it was Aquinas who, primarily, turned the Church to embrace, to a major degree, the semipelagian concept of salvation without the Sacrament of Salvation. This epoch was a softening, a turning away from the stridency of the Catholic Faith. Pope St. Pius did attack the Modernists, but obviously, with little lasting effect due to the softening effect of St. Thomas upon the thinking of the Church at large” (Emphasis mine; Email, 14 July 2011, from Warren Goddard).

J. Salza: Hence, in his vain effort to deny baptism of desire, Mr. Goddard, the “traditional Catholic apologist,” accuses St. Thomas of the heresy of semipelagianism, and also of turning “the Church to embrace” the semipelagian heresy. In other words, St. Thomas Aquinas – the Universal Doctor of the Church – was a heretic, and the gates of hell have prevailed against the Roman Catholic Church for she also “embraced” heresy by promoting St. Thomas’ teaching on baptism of desire! These are incredible statements from a so-called Catholic apologist, but nevertheless the logical consequence of rejecting the Church’s teaching on baptism of desire.

Note also Goddard’s other error in his critique of St. Thomas. He says, “Pope St. Pius X elevated the teachings of St. Thomas in the seminaries to a height previously unknown thus detracting from those of the Doctor of Grace.” (So St. Pius X “detracted” from Augustine’s teachings?! And how could he have when St. Augustine also taught baptism of desire!) Actually, St. Pius X, one of the greatest popes in the history of the Church, “elevated” St. Thomas’ teaching not only in the seminaries but *for the Church proper*, by including the teaching of baptism of desire in his Catechism and canon law (see below). Moreover, this “elevation” of St. Thomas’ teachings was not “to a height previously unknown” to the Church, for Popes John XXII, St. Pius V, Urban V, Innocent

VI, and Leo XIII had *already* implemented the “elevation” of Thomas’ teachings long before St. Pius X!

For example:

- “He alone enlightened the Church more than all other doctors; a man can derive more profit in a year from his books than from pondering all his life the teaching of others.” Pope John XXII (Consistorial address, 1318).
- “But inasmuch as, by the providence of Almighty God, the power and truth of the philosophy of the Angelic Doctor... have confounded, refuted and routed many subsequent heresies... We order that the memory of the Doctor by whose valour the world is daily delivered from pestilential errors be cultivated more than ever before.” Pope St. Pius V (*Mirabilis Deus*, 1567).
- “It is our will, and by the authority of these letters we enjoin on you, that you follow the doctrine of Blessed Thomas as true and Catholic, and strive to unfold it with your whole strength.” Pope Urban V (quoted in *Aeterni Patris*, 1879).
- “His doctrine above all other doctrine, with the one exception of the Holy Scriptures, has such a propriety of words, such a method of explanation, such a truth of opinions, that no one who holds it will ever be found to have strayed from the path of truth; whereas anyone who has attacked it has always been suspected as to the truth.” Pope Innocent VI (quoted in *Aeterni Patris*, 1879).
- “Now far above all other Scholastic Doctors towers Thomas Aquinas, their master and prince...that rightly and deservedly he is reckoned a singular safeguard and glory of the Catholic Church.” Pope Leo XIII (*Aeterni Patris*, 1879).
- “Thomas reigned as a ruler in his own kingdom. The minds of all, both teachers and hearers, with wondrous consent found rest in the guidance and authority of one Angelic Doctor.” Pope Leo XIII (*Aeterni Patris*, 1879).
- “But we now come to the greatest glory of Thomas – a glory which is altogether his own, and shared with no other Catholic Doctor. In the midst of the Council of Trent, the assembled Fathers so willing it, the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas lay open on the altar, with the Holy Scriptures and the decrees of the Supreme Pontiffs, that from it might be sought counsel and reasons and answers.” Pope Leo XIII (*Aeterni Patris*, 1879).

But Warren Goddard thinks he knows better than St. Pius X, not to mention the foregoing popes, and the great saints and doctors who preceded St. Thomas in teaching baptism of desire.

Finally and most importantly, the popes of the Catholic Church *have explicitly taught baptism of desire*. For example, only a few years before Lateran IV, Pope Innocent wrote that a certain one "who had died without the water of baptism, because he persevered in the faith of holy mother Church and in the confession of the name of Christ, was freed from original sin and attained the joy of heavenly fatherhood" (*Apostolic sedem*, letter to the bishop of Cremona, Dz 388).

Pope Innocent, on another occasion, also taught baptism of desire in the case of a Jew who, when at the point of death and surrounded only by Jews, immersed himself in water and baptized himself. Even though this baptism was invalid, Pope Innocent said, "If, however, such a one had died immediately, he would have rushed to his heavenly home without delay because of the faith of the sacrament, though not because of the sacrament of the Faith" (*Debitum pastoralis officii*, letter to the bishop of Metz, August 28, 1206, Dz 413). In other words, the Jew received the effect of the sacrament by the absolute necessity of spiritual rebirth and desire for the sacrament, even though he did not receive the necessity of means. Moreover, by referring to Sts. Augustine and Ambrose and the "learned Fathers," Pope Innocent also affirmed baptism of desire as a constant teaching of the Church.

Pope St. Pius V also taught baptism of desire through the Catechism of Trent, which is considered by many to be the greatest catechism the Church has ever produced. In regard to adult baptism, the Catechism says, "should any unforeseen accident make it impossible for adults to be washed in the salutary waters [JS: necessity of means], their intention and determination to receive Baptism and their repentance for past sins [JS: absolute necessity], will avail them to grace and righteousness" (p.179). Obviously, the Catechism of Trent - ordered by the Council to interpret its doctrine - affirms the position that the "or" means "or" and explicitly rejects the position that the "or" means "and." Pope Clement XIII even declared that the Catechism of Trent contains "the common doctrine of the Church, from which all danger of doctrinal error is absent," and Pope Leo XIII confirmed "the exactness of its doctrine."

Pope St. Pius X likewise issued a Catechism which explicitly teaches baptism of desire: "Question: Can the absence of Baptism be supplied in any other way? Answer: The absence of Baptism can be supplied by martyrdom, which is called Baptism of Blood, or by an act of perfect love of God, or of contrition, along with the desire, at least implicit, of Baptism, and this is called Baptism of Desire" (Instauratio Press, p.71). Further, St. Pius X had baptism of desire defined in canon law which was promulgated by his successor, Pope Benedict XV. Canon 737.1 says "Baptism, the door and foundation of the Sacraments, in fact *or at least in desire* necessary unto salvation for all is not validly conferred except through the ablution of true and natural water with the prescribed form of words." Moreover, while canon 1239.1 prohibits those who died without baptism from receiving ecclesiastical burial, canon 1239.2 states: "The catechumens who

with no fault of their own die without baptism, *should be treated as the baptized*" (Emphases added).

In summary, Warren Goddard and the rest of the opponents of baptism of desire confuse the necessity of means with absolute necessity and hence make the means (water) the end (grace). They also confuse the interior (spiritual) union with the Mystical Body with the exterior (material) means of the sacrament to achieve that end. They often think that baptism of desire somehow compromises the Church's teaching "No Salvation outside the Church." But it clearly does not, for those who are joined to the Mystical Body through Baptism (water or desire) are obviously members of the Church. Baptism of desire is not some modernist heresy like, for example, the salvation of those who reject Christ and His Church. Those who are baptized by desire have been brought out of their ignorance by "divine light and grace" as taught by Blessed Pius IX. Indeed, God can bypass the means He has established to achieve the end that He wills (for the Church has never declared that all the elect receive water baptism). This teaching comes from some of the greatest popes, saints and doctors of the Church.

W. Goddard: In responding to John Salza's articles on Baptism of Desire, which have appeared in *The Remnant Newspaper*, *The Bellarmine Report*, and in Italy by Lionel Andrades, Goddard wrote the following to Robert Sungenis and John Salza: "Saying baptism of desire makes one a member of the Church contradicts Florence and *Mystici Corporis*. The charge of heresy stands" (Email, 1 October 2011, Warren Goddard).

J. Salza: Warren acknowledges (does he?) the theological distinction between absolute necessity and necessity of means. For example, faith in the Real Presence of Christ is an absolute necessity for salvation, but actually receiving the Eucharist is only a necessity of means (one can be saved outside the means). This same distinction applies to the sacraments of baptism and confession. If Warren cannot prove that Trent and *Mystici* are referring to absolute necessity (just like he cannot prove Trent's AUT means AND), then he fails to meet his burden of proof (which, of course, can also be demonstrated by the various popes who taught baptism of desire). Warren fails to engage in contextual exegesis and harmonize Trent/*Mystici* with all of the other authorities that I have provided which prove the Church teaches baptism of desire (Pope Innocent, St Pius V's Catechism, St Pius X's Catechism, 1917 Code of Canon Law, etc). But such harmonization is an "absolute necessity" if one wants to know what the Church really teaches. His error is precisely what the Protestants do with Scripture, and the sedevacantists do with Magisterial texts.

W. Goddard: Wrong! Aut can only mean and because without the Sacrament of Baptism no one is ever justified. Session 6 Chapter 7. "the instrumental cause [of justification] is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified.."

John doesn't know correct theological expressions for there are two kinds of necessities and he gets both wrong. We distinguish the two as the necessity of means and the necessity of precept. In the first sense a thing or action is necessary because without it a given end cannot be attained; the eye, e.g. is necessary for vision. the second sort of necessity is that which is imposed by the free will of a superior; e.g. the necessity of fasting. Necessity of means is of an absolute nature, precept is not. Furthermore, he doesn't know that qualifying a dogma is an act of heresy.

Confiteor unam baptisma
Warren

J. Salza: Warren, you are dead wrong regarding necessity. First, there are three kinds of necessity, not two. They are: absolute necessity, necessity of means, and necessity of precept (you would know this if you read my article carefully, where I identify all three). Second, you confuse absolute necessity with necessity of means. Necessity of means, as the theological phrase suggests, can be dispensed with by God where the absolute necessity is already present. My example of both Confession and the Eucharist proves the distinction (where internal disposition can produce the fruits without exterior reception of the sacrament). Same thing with Baptism. You have failed to even identify, much less understand, this most basic theological distinction. And in failing to understand the correct terminology and the meaning thereof, you fall headlong into error.

W. Goddard: John, I don't know how you make this stuff up but it certainly is not from a Catholic perspective.

Here are two good sources on the definition of necessity.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10733a.htm> (CE article on Necessity by Fr. George Sauvage, CSC, BA, PHD, DD, Litt Phil. L, who was professor of dogmatic theology at Holy Cross College)

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05584a.htm> [CE article on the Eucharist by Fr. Joseph Pohle STD, PHD, STL, professor of moral theology and dogmatic theology]

"Baptism, in fact, is the door through which men enter the Church". Lumen Gentium
It is error to say there is a way in besides being

"regenerated in the WATERS OF BAPTISM". Mystici Corporis

J. Salza: Warren, thank you for citing articles that conclusively prove my point and categorically refute yours. This should put an end to the debate.

In the first entry you cite from the Catholic Encyclopedia, the last paragraph says:

“Again, in relation to the means necessary to salvation theologians divide necessity into *necessity of means* and *necessity of precept*. In the first case the means is so necessary to salvation that without it (absolute necessity) **or its substitute** (relative necessity), even if the omission is guiltless, the end cannot be reached. Thus faith and baptism of water are necessary by a necessity of means, the former absolutely, **the latter relatively**, for salvation.” (Bold is mine).

As you can see, the Catholic Encyclopedia says that faith is an absolute necessity for salvation, and water baptism is only a relative necessity. Water baptism is a “relative necessity” because, as the Encyclopedia says, something may “substitute” for it (which is the definition of “relative necessity”). As applied here, faith and desire for baptism may substitute for water baptism because water baptism is only a relative necessity and not an absolute necessity. Water baptism is never described as an “absolute” necessity, ever.

Some theologians create three categories of necessity: absolute necessity, necessity of means and necessity of precept (such as Fr. Francois Laisney, in his book “*Is Feeneyism Catholic?*”; see below). Other theologians, such as the ones you refer to, have two categories: necessity of means and necessity of precept, but have two categories within necessity of means: absolute and relative. But the categories result in the exact same distinctions. Something is either necessary absolutely, or necessary relatively. Faith is an absolute necessity for salvation. Water baptism is a relative necessity only.

In the second entry, we find the same distinctions between necessity of means being either absolute or relative, and the necessity of precept. For example, it says:

“On the other hand, Communion is prescribed for adults, not only by the law of the Church, but also by a Divine command (John 6:50 sqq.), though for its **absolute necessity** as a means to salvation there is no more evidence than in the case of infants.”

Again, we see the distinction within the “necessity of means” as either “absolute” or “relative.” As applied here, receiving the Eucharist is a relative, not an absolute necessity.

It goes on to further make the distinction between absolute and relative necessity by referring to Suarez:

“Eminent divines, like Francisco Suárez, claim that the Eucharist, if not **absolutely necessary**, is at least a **relatively** and morally necessary means to salvation, in the sense

that no adult can long sustain his spiritual, supernatural life who neglects on principle to approach Holy Communion."

Once again, receiving the Eucharist is a relative, not an absolute necessity, just like receiving water baptism or sacramental absolution of sin is a relative, not an absolute necessity, where desire and contrition serve as "its substitute." To boil it down to its most basic level, grace is an absolute necessity for salvation, but the means by which we obtain grace regards relative necessity only. We can stop right here. The debate is over.

*"St. Thomas rightfully teaches that, both in baptism and in the Eucharist, the reality of the sacrament (res sacramenti, i.e., the grace of the sacrament) is **absolutely necessary**: to have the life of Christ in us (grace of baptism) and to be united with the Mystical Body of Christ (grace of the Eucharist) are of the essence of salvation; however the exterior sacrament (sacramentum tantum) is necessary of a **necessity of means**[55] as the normal mean for obtaining the grace of the sacrament." Is Feeneyism Catholic, Fr. Laisney, p.39*