

A Letter to Bedfordshire

(A Reply to Mr. Thomas Sparks)

By Brother André Marie, M.I.C.M.

Introduction. Mr. Thomas Sparks, of Bedfordshire, England, has posted an “Open Letter” to me on his web site. The present offering is my reply. I gladly grant Mr. Sparks’ request to avoid “*ad hominem* distractions.” All will be *ad rem*; nothing will be *ad hominem*. His further request — that I link my response to his web site — is something I have not done. Those familiar with the history of Mr. Sparks’ web site may realize why.

In lieu of exchanging reciprocal links with Mr. Sparks, I have taken the liberty to post the entirety of his Open Letter on our site (noting that I am not violating copyright law). His text will be slightly offset from the left margin, and in blue, while mine has wider margins and is in black, a purely arbitrary schema to differentiate the two polemicists.

I am taking Mr. Sparks’ “Open Letter” seriously primarily because some of the issues he brings up are worthy of being addressed in public. Secondarily, there is the fact that we were friends at one time, though we never met in person. I try not to forget my friends.

Before proceeding, I would like to protest Mr. Sparks’ use of the word “Feeneyite.” It is a demeaning and pejorative use of our Founder’s name and we do not like it.

One last introductory note: I am writing my response as a letter to Thomas Sparks. This makes it *personal* in the good sense and (hopefully) more readable.

Dear Thomas,

Laudetur Iesus Christus! I hope that my introductory comments have made it clear that I want this exchange to be fruitful and charitable. It is my sincere hope that this reply to your “Open Letter” will show that a deeper reading of the Council of Trent and of St. Thomas will answer your objections. Further, I hope to set the record straight regarding what the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary really believe in this matter of sacrament of Baptism and the justifying power of the *votum* (vow) for the sacrament. Lastly I wish to clarify that we do not regard our theological opinion (which is Father Feeney’s) on this point as equal to the Church’s Magisterium.

Here I begin by presenting your text:

Baptism of Desire and the Council of Trent

An Open Letter to Br. André MICM

We present a brief summary of why the teaching of the Council of Trent is not contrary to the doctrine of baptism of desire. Feeneyites tend to misuse Trent more than any other source to deny the doctrine so it is important to be clear about why they are wrong about it.

This is an open letter to Br. André who is the prior of the “Feeneyite” Saint Benedict Center in New Hampshire and the nominated successor of the present head of that group. I challenge André to address these issues publicly and to link to this essay from his reply so that his readers can read both sides; I will link to his reply from this essay.

It will be observed that I have avoided going into any personal issues and I implore André to focus purely on the theological issues without any *ad hominem* distractions. The issue here is purely *whether the teaching of the Council of Trent supports their denial of baptism of desire as they have long given Catholics to believe.*

Thomas Sparks, 21st August 2006

Very good, Thomas. You have issued the challenge and shown the limits of the argument: *“whether the teaching of the Council of Trent supports their denial of baptism of desire as they have long given Catholics to believe.”*

I state openly, at the outset, a very clear proposition: Father Feeney submitted all his writings — especially *Bread of Life* — to the Holy See for the pope’s definitive judgment. The ramifications of this include the following: *Father Feeney could have been wrong in some of his theological conclusions* and he was lucidly, humbly, and realistically aware of that. Where he could *not* be wrong was where he simply reiterated what has been solemnly defined by the Church. Being fallible, Father could draw invalid inferences from solemn judgments of the Holy See; any theologian can do the same.

So, it is strictly possible that Father Feeney’s theological opinion regarding the proper interpretation of the Tridentine canons concerning Baptism is indeed wrong.

As you know, not everyone who defends “no salvation outside the Church” or claims loyalty to Father Feeney would say that. Those especially who try to outdo Father Feeney, claiming that a non-baptized person cannot enter the state of grace at all (a *ridiculous* position), would certainly disagree with me most strenuously. However, speaking for Brother Francis, with whom I have discussed this issue for many hours over the years, and for the rest of my community here in Richmond, and for Brother Thomas Mary Sennott, the good and faithful servant who went to his reward from Still River just over a year ago, I can say this: *The conclusion which denies the salvific efficacy of the so-called “Baptism of Desire” is our theological opinion and not Church dogma per se.*

Providentially, only days ago I was on the telephone with one of the founding members of our community, a venerable and intelligent sister at St. Ann’s House in Still River. She agreed with the last sentence of the above paragraph wholeheartedly.

Therefore, while we promote a certain reading of Trent as consistent with other magisterial texts, as well as scriptural and patristic monuments; and while we think it conforms to right reason

enlightened by Faith, we know that we have no authority to bind the consciences of Catholics to follow our conclusions. Anyone who speaks or acts as if he does have that authority (unless he is the pope!), is wrong.

So, Thomas, what we are discussing is not “no salvation outside the Church” *simpliciter*. I assume you still believe this to be an infallibly defined dogma that cannot be denied. We are looking at the issue *secundum quid*, under a certain specific formality. The subject being considered is limited to the proper reading of the Council of Trent as concerns the necessity of the sacrament of Baptism, both for making one a member of the Church and for entrance into Heaven.

Continuing with your text:

Trent must be read carefully and preferably with reference to the teaching of Aquinas

It will suffice for us to read Trent carefully and logically in order to see how the Feeneyites misrepresent its teaching.

But it is very helpful to read Trent with reference to the teaching of Aquinas. His *Summa Theologica* was placed on the altar at Trent alongside the Bible. We shall see that Trent’s teaching on baptism of desire is quite in keeping with his.

In particular, we will need to understand what Trent meant when it said that a sacrament is “necessary for salvation”.

Here, you have laid down two principles: (1) “Trent must be read carefully...” and (2) “Trent must be read... preferably with reference to the teaching of Aquinas.” The first principle is perfectly true and merits no further comment. The second is vague and almost meaningless. To command (“must be”) that something be read “preferably” in light of something else is not a clear command.

Let me explain: “You must read the Divine Comedy, and preferably in the original Italian.” What does this mean? If I were a college student in a Dante class, I would shrug off such a professorial mandate and read the Ciardi translation in English, since I am functionally illiterate in Fourteenth-Century Florentine. I say this not to be flippant or pedantic, but to be clear. A vague principal will make for a vague application.

Another problem with “Trent must be read... preferably with reference to the teaching of Aquinas” is the prepositional phrase “with reference to.” The phrase is ambiguous. If I read St. Thomas “with reference to” Aristotle, does that mean (1) that I read him as a moderate realist whose hylomorphic metaphysics agrees with the great peripatetic? Or (2) does it mean that I read all of Aristotle’s pagan ideas into St. Thomas’ theology? These are extremes. In point of fact, the ambiguous phrase could mean either of these or a whole range of shades of gray in between.

What you have written could have multiplex meanings. Among them are the following: (1) One must be steeped in, or at least acquainted with, Aristotleo-Thomistic philosophy (*hylomorphism*, moderate realism, conceptual rootedness in such notions as form, matter, substance, accident, etc.) to read the language of Trent properly. (2) **Wherever the Tridentine texts treat of an**

issue that is also covered in the *Summa*, the conclusions St. Thomas reaches in the *Summa* must be read into the texts of the Council of Trent.

Without being clear on which is your meaning, I provisionally conclude that you have in mind the second (which is why I emboldened it), or something close to it. The reason I say this is that you are most emphatic that we are wrong for disagreeing with St. Thomas *in a matter the Council itself did not explicitly clarify*. If this second interpretation is truly your approach, then you are advancing a false, freely posited, and unreliable hermeneutic for reading the Council of Trent, a hermeneutic which proves nothing because it proves too much. In its fifth session, the Council treated the subject of Original Sin, specifying that it was not applying what it said to the Mother of God, but that the decrees of Sixtus IV were still in force, which prevented both disputants in the Immaculate Conception debate from calling each other heretics. St. Thomas' conclusions in the *Summa* were otherwise inasmuch as the Angelic Doctor included Our Lady in the universal dispensation of Original Sin. Proof positive that a great man, and even a saint, can be wrong.

So, we cannot read St. Thomas' conclusions into the Council where the Council contradicts him explicitly, but must we read St. Thomas into the Council *in every other area*? I say no, and the burden of proof is not on me, for you, Thomas, have imposed a moral imperative, not I. Among the Council Fathers and *periti* were Thomists, Scotists, Augustinians, and Jesuits. I don't think it reasonable that all were implicitly agreeing with every conclusion in the *Summa* in the acts of the Council. I am well aware of the veneration given to the *Summa* at Trent, but let us not read too much into that act.

Now, you do narrow the meaning of your Thomistic rule for interpretation somewhat when you say: [“In particular, we will need to understand what Trent meant when it said that a sacrament is ‘necessary for salvation.’”](#)

Apparently you are saying this: Because St. Thomas used a certain meaning of “necessary for salvation,” we are obliged to read that meaning into Trent. Several questions come to mind here: Who says? On what authority? I believe we have a classic case of *ipse dixit*: “he himself [on his own authority] said it.” If St. Thomas' meaning is something we are obliged to read into Trent (and Trent did not say this), then Ludwig Ott, who believes baptism of desire is salvific, would be wrong when he identifies this doctrine as *sententia fidei proxima*, a note which Ott himself defines as “a doctrine which is regarded by theologians generally as a truth of Revelation, but which has not yet been finally promulgated by the Church.” (Ott's assigning of this note is, of course, on his own authority). Father Pohle, in his volume on Baptism, assigns the salvific efficacy of Baptism of Desire the note *doctrina catholica*, which is higher than Ott's label, but which is not a *de fide definita* teaching. The fact is that theologians, while mostly agreeing on baptism of desire being sufficient for salvation, do not all agree on its binding character or dogmatic authority. Neither do they agree on its exact efficacy.

(I point out as an aside that this majority agreement of theologians is not in itself a demonstration of the truth of a given proposition. Most theologians were in agreement *against* the dogma of the Immaculate Conception at one time.)

Thomas, if you are correct concerning how Trent must be read, then those theologians who do not hold baptism of desire to be *de fide definita* (the vast majority of them) are wrong. This would include many Thomists who are aware of the various Thomistic notions of “necessary.”

Besides this, there are at least two passages of Trent which reference the necessity of Faith for salvation:

Session twenty-three, Chapter XIV: "...those things which it is necessary for all to know unto salvation..."

Session Five, Chapter II: "...by teaching them the things which it is necessary for all to know unto salvation..."

Are we forced to believe that "necessary for [or unto] salvation" is similarly qualified here, too? In light of what you will say later of the potentially *vicarious* nature of the desire [or *votum*] for baptism, faith does not seem so necessary in your thinking as it is manifestly shown to be in the Tridentine decrees themselves, the Teaching of Vatican I, or in the Teaching of the Angelic Doctor (Cf. *The Disputed Questions on Truth, Vol. II, Q. 14, a. 11*).

The necessity of the sacraments

Trent told us that baptism is "necessary for salvation". Aquinas explains that it is necessary "at least in desire".

"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 3, 68, 2)

That is, a sacrament that is "necessary for salvation" may be received unto salvation "actually or in desire".

"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)

Trent used the phrase "necessary for salvation" about the sacrament of penance too and we all admit that one can be saved by desiring to confess if one has perfect contrition and cannot actually confess.

Trent: "And this SACRAMENT OF PENANCE is, for those who have fallen after baptism, NECESSARY FOR SALVATION, AS BAPTISM ITSELF IS for those who have not as yet been regenerated." (Denz. 895)

This alone is sufficient to refute Feeneyites when they claim that it is proof that no one can be saved without water baptism simply because Trent said that baptism is "necessary for salvation".

This last paragraph would perhaps be correct if it were not for what the Council went on to say about Penance. I believe, Thomas, that far from proving your point, the Council's specifications in regard to the latter sacrament militate in our favor.

Sacraments received through desire

Although the sacrament of penance is “necessary for salvation”, it may be received unto salvation “in desire” as well as “actually”.

Trent: “Whence it is to be taught, that the penitence of a Christian, after his fall, is very different from that at (his) baptism; and that therein are included not only a cessation from sins, and a detestation thereof, or, a contrite and humble heart, but also THE SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION OF THE SAID SINS, AT LEAST IN DESIRE [saltem in voto], and to be made in its season, and sacerdotal absolution and likewise satisfaction by fasts, alms, prayers, and the other pious exercises of a spiritual life; not indeed for the eternal punishment,-which is, together with the guilt, REMITTED, EITHER BY THE SACRAMENT, OR BY THE DESIRE OF THE SACRAMENT,-but for the temporal punishment, which, as the sacred writings teach, is not always wholly remitted, as is done in baptism.” (Denz 807)

Trent: “The Synod teaches moreover, that, although it sometimes happen that this CONTRITION IS PERFECT through charity, and reconciles man with God BEFORE THIS SACRAMENT BE ACTUALLY RECEIVED, the said reconciliation, nevertheless, is not to be ascribed to that contrition, independently of THE DESIRE OF THE SACRAMENT which is included therein.” (Denz. 898)

You have shown that the Council specified what it meant of the necessity of Penance for salvation. The Council Fathers stated explicitly (in the Decree on Justification) that it is necessary “at least in desire [*saltem in voto*]” for the sinner's post-baptismal restoration to grace. The Fathers also explicitly taught that a perfect act of contrition is sufficient to reconcile the baptized sinner to God prior to sacramental confession. In both cases, it is explicit that the justifying efficacy of this extra-sacramental penance be in some way related to the sacrament. Here, then, we have two passages in which the Council Fathers have specified that, under certain conditions, the penitent, baptized Christian may be restored to God's grace prior to receiving a priest's absolution. *The Council itself introduced a qualifier into the concept of Penance's necessity.*

But no such specific qualifiers — no further “notes,” to use the language of epistemology — were attached to the concept of *necessity* as it applies to the sacrament of Baptism vis-à-vis salvation.

In other words, the Council Fathers, in explaining the necessity of penance, did not similarly explain the necessity of Baptism, for they did not say that “*necessary for salvation* uniformly means necessary in desire only” or any such thing.

I postulate that, in light of these explicit Tridentine stipulations regarding Penance, the unqualified mention of Baptism's necessity stands out in contrast, especially considering Trent's declaration that the sacraments of the New Law are “necessary for the salvation of mankind, *though all are not necessary for each individual*” (Denz. 847). The Fathers were careful to note

differences between the sacraments of Penance and Baptism (cf. Denz. 807) and it is unwarranted to claim that what is said of the necessity of the one applies uniformly to the other. At any rate, were one to make such a claim, the burden of proof would be upon him.

Aquinas likewise, as we have seen.

“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)

Yes, Thomas, but this does not prove your point, namely, that we are obliged to apply the Thomistic idea of “desire counts for the deed” to Baptism’s necessity for salvation as that doctrine is stated in the Council of Trent. As we will see later, not all the graces of baptism come with the so-called baptism of desire. It would be the fallacy of equivocation to interpret St. Thomas’ statement here to mean that “whatever graces are received in the sacrament are also received with the supernatural act called baptism of desire.”

Trent told us that the sacrament of the Eucharist can be received in desire, too.

Trent: “Now as to the use of this holy SACRAMENT [of the Eucharist], the Fathers have rightly and wisely distinguished THREE WAYS OF RECEIVING IT. For they have taught that some receive it SACRAMENTALLY ONLY, to wit sinners; OTHERS SPIRITUALLY ONLY, those to wit who EATING IN DESIRE [voto] that heavenly bread which is set before them, are, by a lively faith which worketh by charity, made sensible of the fruit and usefulness thereof; whereas the third (class) receive it both SACRAMENTALLY AND SPIRITUALLY, and these are they who so prove and prepare themselves beforehand, as to approach to this divine table clothed with the wedding garment.” (Denz. 881)

Aquinas likewise.

Trent: [sic.] “In another way one may eat Christ spiritually, as He is under the sacramental species, inasmuch as a man believes in Christ, WHILE DESIRING TO RECEIVE THIS SACRAMENT; and this is NOT MERELY TO EAT CHRIST SPIRITUALLY, BUT LIKEWISE TO EAT THIS SACRAMENT.” (Summa Theologica 3, 80, 2)

As with the previous passage, these excerpts do not support your thesis. In fact, I think here you have “overplayed your hand” as they say. Yes, the Eucharist can be received “in desire,” as in a spiritual communion; but, to make such a communion radically equivalent to the actual worthy reception of the sacrament would be contrary to the Incarnational theology of St. Thomas.

We should recall that St. Thomas’ love for Aristotle was based in large part on the Philosopher’s moderate realist respect for matter. St. Thomas saw this system as more useful than Platonism to express the Church’s doctrine. This is perhaps especially true in the case of the sacraments. Man is a composite of form and matter; therefore, the sacramental economy — which uses form and matter — is perfectly adapted to his being. The Aristotelian notions of “first substance” and “second substance” — the ontological priority of the *ens mobile* over the universal — make

Aristotle's system a better *ancilla theologiae* ("handmaid of theology") in sacramental theology as well as in Christology and theological psychology. Platonism was too "spiritualistic," too disparaging of matter, to accommodate these incarnational mysteries. Knowing that St. Thomas, therefore, would not have made the sacraments mere enticements to interior volitional acts, but important realities *in themselves*, I was curious to read the larger context of St. Thomas's remarks you cite here.

Sure enough, I found that, once again, my own position was strengthened by the saintly Friar's *Summa*. He poses the objection that "sacramental eating would be to no purpose, if the spiritual eating could be had without it." After explaining at length the benefits of receiving these sacraments "in desire", he proceeds to answer that the "sacramental eating is not without avail, *because the actual receiving of the sacrament produces more fully the effect of the sacrament than does the desire thereof, as stated above of Baptism (69 , 4, ad 2)*" ([*Summa Theologiae IIIa, Q. 80, A. 1 ad 3*](#)). This is why I wrote earlier that not *all the graces* of baptism come with the so-called baptism of desire. The same is true of a spiritual communion.

If we are to interpret it with the mind of St. Thomas, then, the Council of Trent evidently listed the "three ways" of receiving the Eucharist in ascending order, from bad (sacramentally but unworthily) to good (spiritually but not sacramentally) to better (spiritually and sacramentally). All things being equal, the actual reception of the sacrament is superior to a spiritual communion. What this shows us is that not all the effects of a sacrament are received when some of the effects are received "by desire." St. Thomas says this even about Baptism (*Summa Theologiae IIIa, Q. 69, A. 4 ad 2*).

Moreover, Trent can be read to tell us that baptism too, may be received "in desire."

Trent: "And this translation [to the state of justification], since the promulgation of the Gospel, cannot be EFFECTED, WITHOUT THE LAVER OF REGENERATION, AT LEAST IN THE DESIRE THEREOF [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."" (Denz. 796)

That sentence is usually translated as "baptism or its desire", though either translation is literal and makes the point. The Latin "aut" means simply "at least" as well as "or", and the ablative "eius voto" can mean "(in/ by)" its desire. We feel this is a fair reading, because it is literal, it is just what Trent said about the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist and it is the teaching of Aquinas as we have just seen, which Trent reflected throughout its discussions of the sacraments.

Regardless of which reading one follows, it is generally admitted that one can receive the grace of baptism through desire, which is the forgiveness of sins and the infusion of the grace of justification with God. That is what is meant by "receive in desire" in any case.

Feeneyites are wont to reply that even so none can be saved without water baptism because one is added to the Church – outside of which no one is saved – only through the baptismal character that is impressed on the soul only in water baptism; but Trent never said that and, as we shall see soon, it rather taught that one is incorporated into the Church through the grace of justification.

I agree with everything in the above passage until the last paragraph, which I will address soon. Perhaps this is a good place to repeat that we are not in agreement with those who wish to deny that justification is possible for those who are not yet baptized. It is this passage that proves them wrong. No matter how many linguistic gymnastics they do to make the word *aut* in this context mean “and,” such a reading does violence to the text.

The last paragraph sets up something of a straw man, Thomas. You claim that we make incorporation into the Church contingent on the reception of the *baptismal character*. You go on to state that such a truth is not taught by Trent and (therefore) must be wrong. The conclusion is that we are wrong in what we say about the necessity of sacramental Baptism. I say this is a straw man because we do not make membership in the Church contingent on the baptismal character, but *on the reception of the sacrament itself*. There is a difference. I agree very much with Brother Thomas Mary in his discerning criticisms of some defenders of the dogma who majored in proving the necessity of the character. Brother Thomas Mary’s thought was that they erred by making the invisible (non-tangible) reality the important thing, whereas Father Feeney, as you know, loved to emphasize the very visibility and tangibility of the sacrament.

Yes, there are theologians who say that the character makes one a member of the Church, but we have not made our position rest on this speculative point.

Msgr. Pohle, for one, says that the Character “distinguishes those who are baptized from those who have not been baptized. *No one can belong to the Church unless he wear the Character of Baptism*. Without this Character, no one has the power to receive the other Sacraments, to participate in all the rights and duties of a child of the true Church, *or to be a member of the Mystical Body of Christ*.”

That is Msgr. Pohle’s theological opinion and one that I am attracted to, but it is not dogma and I do not rest my argument on it. The theology surrounding the character of the sacraments is highly speculative and quite short on certitudes. Often times, incorporation into the Church (the Mystical Body) is listed as a distinct effect of the sacrament — distinct, that is, from the character. This is so in the [*Catechism of the Council of Trent*](#) (the *Roman Catechism*), which lists incorporation with Christ as one effect of the sacramental Baptism, and the character as another. (The “Grace Of Regeneration” — justification or infusion with sanctifying grace — is yet another.)

Further on, I will address the claim that Trent “[taught that one is incorporated into the Church through the grace of justification](#).”

Implicit desire

[We can see the concept of implicit desire at Trent too.](#)

[Aquinas tells us that baptism can be received “in desire” when the desire is “implicit”.](#)

[“Man receives the forgiveness of sins before baptism in so far as he has BAPTISM IN DESIRE, EXPLICITLY OR IMPLICITLY; and yet when he actually receives baptism, he receives a fuller remission, as to the remission of the entire punishment. So also before baptism Cornelius and others like him receive grace and virtues through their faith in](#)

Christ and THEIR DESIRE FOR BAPTISM, IMPLICIT OR EXPLICIT: but afterwards when baptized, they receive a yet greater fullness of grace and virtues.” (Summa Theologica 3, 69, 4)

He gave the definition of “implicit” as when something is “contained” in something else.

“Properly speaking, that is called IMPLICIT in which many things are CONTAINED AS IN ONE, and that is called explicit in which each of the things is considered in itself.” (Of Truth 14, 11)

We can see Trent employ this definition of implicit desire with reference to the reception of the sacrament of confession through desire.

Trent: “The Synod teaches moreover, that, although it sometimes happen that this CONTRITION IS PERFECT THROUGH CHARITY, and reconciles man with God BEFORE THIS SACRAMENT BE ACTUALLY RECEIVED, the said reconciliation, nevertheless, is not to be ascribed to that contrition, independently of THE DESIRE [voto] OF THE SACRAMENT WHICH IS INCLUDED THEREIN.” (Denz. 898)

The desire for the sacrament is “included” in the perfect contrition of charity.

When Trent said that the sacrament may be received through desire, that does not exclude the possibility that the desire may be implicit. So there is no reason to conclude that the desire cannot be implicit in the case of baptism too just because Trent said that there must be a desire, as Feeneyites are wont to claim.

For the record, I am in complete agreement with all that was said in this last passage up to the italicized text of the last paragraph. Regardless of what “Feeneyites [sic] are [supposedly] wont to claim,” I have long explained to anyone that would listen what I learned from Brother Francis on this point. That is, one who has Faith, and, by the promptings of actual grace, makes a perfect act of the love of God, *can* have a desire for the sacrament implicit in this infused supernatural Charity. This is because Charity is the summit of all the virtues and, as it were, contains all of them. In Thomistic language, the desire of the sacrament would be a “commanded act” of Charity (or *affective charity*) as distinguished from an “elicited act” (or *effective charity*). (See, for instance, [IIa IIae, Q. 32, A. 1](#) for St. Thomas’ use of this distinction.) I believe that such an act can be included (implicit) in any supernatural act of the Love of God.) Of course, because something “implicit” is “contained in” something else (as St. Thomas admirably points out in the passage of *De Veritate* you cited) then the *supernatural* desire for the sacrament must contained in another *supernatural* act — in this case, Charity.

The same is said in regard to the virtue of Faith. We are not against the notion of “implicit Faith.” A child with a knowledge of the catechism may easily be tricked into professing the Christological heresies of Monophysitism or Monotheletism (I’ve known adults to be!), but in professing to believe “these and all the truths of the Holy Catholic Church...” that child has true Faith in all the articles *implicit* in the ones he has assented to explicitly.

For the sake of clarity, I must emphasize that the Charity which I spoke of above can exist *only* in someone who has Divine and Catholic Faith, for Faith, as the Council of Trent taught — citing St. Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533) — is the *initium salutis*, “the *beginning* of salvation.”

All notions of “implicit faith” or “implicit desire” which postulate a supernatural act being implicit in something natural are heretical and would certainly be stridently opposed by St. Thomas. In 1679 Pope Innocent XI condemned the proposition that, “A faith amply indicated from the testimony of creation, or from a similar motive, suffices for justification” (Denz. 1173). Faith, to be Divine and Catholic, must come from Revelation.

While there are many who attempt to defend no salvation outside the Church with only a rudimentary knowledge of theology — whose “zeal is not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2) — those of us who have had the joy to study under Brother Francis know these sound theological principles and do not consider it a betrayal of our “hard line” to accept that one supernatural act can be implicit in another.

Moreover, when Trent said that we can be justified by baptism “or the desire thereof” (aut ejus voto) it practically used a phrase used by Aquinas to indicate that infants may receive the Eucharist unto salvation through the desire of the Church.

“This sacrament [of the Eucharist] has, of itself, the power of bestowing grace; nor does anyone possess grace before receiving this sacrament except from some DESIRE THEREOF [ipsius voto]; from his own desire, as in the case of the adult, OR FROM THE CHURCH'S DESIRE IN THE CASE OF CHILDREN.” (Summa Theologica III, 79, 1)

If we go just by what Trent said, there is no reason to believe that the desire of baptism even has to be personal and cannot be vicarious in the desire of the Church. Trent did not say that it can be vicarious but the possibility is not excluded by what it said.

We are happy to use both readings of Trent for baptism regarding “at least through desire” and “or the desire thereof” because both are literal readings, Aquinas discusses the sacraments in both sets of terms and Trent reflects his use of these sets throughout.

The telling point here is that Trent said nothing that excludes any of this or that supports the Feeneyites [sic] denial of baptism of desire, be it explicit, implicit or vicarious.

Thomas, I was a bit alarmed when I read this: *If we go just by what Trent said, there is no reason to believe that the desire of baptism even has to be personal and cannot be vicarious in the desire of the Church. Trent did not say that it can be vicarious but the possibility is not excluded by what it said.*

In all charity, and in all truth, this paragraph and the one that ends this section constitute a logician’s nightmare. They are four things in one: (1) an *argumentum a silentio*, (2) a distortion of St. Thomas’ sacramental theology (therefore,) (3) a violation of your guiding principle: “Trent must be read carefully and preferably *with reference to the teaching of Aquinas,*” and (4) an unreliable hermeneutic for reading Church documents, one that the Modernists would love.

I will take these one at a time, numbering them for clarity.

I. The *argumentum a silentio* (argument from silence) is patent, Thomas. The logic is this: “Trent didn’t say that we can’t believe it, so we can believe it. Moreover, Father Feeney was wrong for

denying it, even though Trent didn't say it." If you will excuse the levity — it's getting late! — this reminds me of a story Father Feeney used to tell about a Jesuit who had a pet snake in his room. When he was rebuked for his manifest violation of religious discipline, he retorted: "Show me in the Constitutions of St. Ignatius where it says we can't have snakes in our rooms!" A classic *a silentio*.

Trent did not condemn the notion that a Jew could be saved through implicit vicarious faith in the Blessed Trinity while explicitly adhering to the Talmud's blasphemies. Yet, does this *a silentio* allow me to assume such a one can be saved? It is *not* childish parody to point this out.

The two italicized paragraphs in the above section of your Letter use the argument from silence twice. What's worse, you are not simply arguing the point from silence, you are arguing that we are wrong for denying what you have argued from silence.

II. The "vicarious" baptism of desire you aver is a distortion of St. Thomas' sacramental theology. It is not found in the opuscula of the Angelic Doctor. In fact, in the case of Baptism, St. Thomas denies that infants can *desire* in this vicarious way: "But they [children] are not disposed for Baptism by any previous sacrament, and consequently before receiving Baptism, *in no way have they Baptism in desire*; but adults alone have: consequently, they cannot have the reality of the sacrament without receiving the sacrament itself. Therefore this sacrament [the Eucharist] is not necessary for salvation in the same way as Baptism is." ([IIIa, Q. 73, A. 3](#))

The vicarious baptism of desire for infants, which St. Thomas rejects, is found (though in a *very limited sense*) in Cardinal Cajetan, who is known among purist Dominican Thomists to have corrupted much of what St. Thomas taught (e.g., the eminent interpreter of St. Thomas taught the error of the "two ends," i.e., that man has a natural end and a supernatural end. St. Thomas taught that man has only one end and it is supernatural). Cajetan's "vicarious baptism of desire" for infants was almost condemned by Trent, but the Fathers were convinced to drop the issue out of respect for the accomplished theologian. (See the book *Limbo, the Unsettled Question* by George J. Dyer, S.T.D. for a treatment of this.) Of all people, it was Girolamo Cardinal Seripando, O.S.A., the superior general of the Augustinian Order, who defended Cajetan, his old teacher. The reason I say "of all people" is because the Augustinians (as you are well aware) had long defended St. Augustine's teaching that unbaptized infants go to the hell of torment. In other words, not only did the Augustinians reject any notion of the Beatific Vision for certain unbaptized babies (as in Cajetan's theory), but they also rejected the doctrine of Limbo, which, at that time, most theologians were professing.

What St. Thomas mentions in the passage you cite is the implicit desire of a baptized infant for the Eucharist. It would be a contradiction of St. Thomas' explicit teachings to apply this vicarious desire to Baptism in the case of an adult, and for a good reason. Adults can have faith, hope, and Charity, and can desire the sacrament with their will. For their part, infants are supplied with a vicarious desire for the Eucharist (in St. Thomas' view) *by virtue of the fact that they belong to the Church*, which is intrinsically ordered to the Eucharist.

In the context of expounding on the Eucharist's necessity for salvation, the Angel of the Schools explains that, because the infant is a member of the Church, which is the reality signified in the Eucharist, he desires the Eucharist: "[B]y Baptism a man is ordained to the Eucharist, and therefore from the fact of children being baptized, they are destined by the Church to the

Eucharist; and just as they believe through the Church's faith, so they desire the Eucharist through the Church's intention, and, as a result, receive its reality" ([IIIa, Q. 73, A. 3](#)).

It is noteworthy that the Dominican Doctor bases his discussion of the necessity of the Eucharist for salvation on *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: "Now it was stated above (1, Objection 2) that the reality of the sacrament is the unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation; for there is no entering into salvation outside the Church, just as in the time of the deluge there was none outside the Ark, which denotes the Church, according to 1 Pt. 3:20,21. And it has been said above (68, 2), that before receiving a sacrament, the reality of the sacrament can be had through the very desire of receiving the sacrament. Accordingly, before actual reception of this sacrament, a man can obtain salvation through the desire of receiving it, just as he can before Baptism through the desire of Baptism, as stated above (68, 2)."

There are real subtleties to the way St. Thomas employs "desire" at times. Sometimes he does not even use the word in terms of a volitional act. This is so when he discusses the "natural desire" for God that is native to each human being. Here, the desire is not in the will but in the intellect. "'The natural desire is an inclination: the ordering of potency [in this case, the intellect] to its act, to its object, a tendency.' Every potency has a natural desire of its act." (Mullady, O.P., S.T.D., Fr. Brian, *Man's Desire for God* [Bloomington: 1stBooks, 2003], 12.) This is not an appetitive motion or an act of the intellect. The intellect "desires" heavenly beatitude as a rock "desires" the ground when lifted above it.

In conclusion, St. Thomas distinctly rules out an infant's desiring the sacrament of Baptism, but says that the baptized infant desires the Eucharist "through the Church's intention," because the infant belongs to the Church. This is hardly the wide open concept of "vicarious desire" you have allowed.

III. This whole line of argumentation constitutes a logical double-standard. Your guiding principle has been violated: "[Trent must be read carefully and preferably with reference to the teaching of Aquinas.](#)" St. Thomas did not posit any of this vicarious business except for the limited case of a baptized infant "desiring" the Eucharist. These ideas are not found in St. Thomas, so why are you interpolating them into the Council?

IV. The fourth difficulty with the passage is that it introduces a very unreliable (even dangerous) hermeneutic for reading Church documents, one that the Modernists would love. "[If we go just by what Trent said, there is no reason to believe that the desire of baptism even has to be personal and cannot be vicarious in the desire of the Church.](#)" The passage you are parsing, Thomas, is the excerpt from the decree on justification, which discusses how one gets into the state of grace. What is being said here and what are its limits? If the Church *desires* people to go to Heaven (which She ardently does), what keeps us from concluding universal salvation? It seems that you would commute someone's need of a "personal" desire because he benefits from what is "[vicarious in the desire of the Church.](#)" But how does an unbaptized person benefit from the desire of the Church? In St. Thomas' thinking, only the baptized could, because they are members of the Church. Would you apply this to infants? To adults? Again, what are the limits?

I fear that in your system, there are now there are no hedges, no borders for the Church, no objective criteria for salvation for us to preach. This is exactly the vagary the neo-modernists so love. It is this "vicarious" reasoning, applied to God's universal salvific will, that has lead many of them to espouse universal salvation. All of this so contrary to the letter and spirit of St.

Thomas. The relatively small measure of Father Feeney's disagreement with St. Thomas on the question of Baptism is insignificant compared to the *chasm* between you and St. Thomas.

Necessity of sacramental matter

Nor is it contrary to the doctrine of baptism of desire that Trent said that water is "necessary" for baptism.

That does not alter the fact that it doesn't mean that no one can be saved without actual reception of a sacrament just because Trent said that it is "necessary for salvation". We have demonstrated that above with reference to the sacrament of penance.

Moreover, there is no reason to conclude from the necessity of matter to a sacrament that baptism may not be received in desire. We may see this from that Trent said that the confession of sins individually is "necessary" for penance, yet as we have seen, it may be received in desire as well as in act.

Trent: "From the institution of the sacrament of Penance as already explained, the universal Church has always understood, that THE ENTIRE CONFESSION OF SINS WAS ALSO INSTITUTED BY THE LORD, AND IS OF DIVINE LAW NECESSARY for all who have fallen after baptism; because that our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to ascend from earth to heaven, left priests His own vicars, as presidents and judges, unto whom all the mortal crimes, into which the faithful of Christ may have fallen, should be carried, in order that, in accordance with the power of the keys, they may pronounce the sentence of forgiveness or retention of sins. For it is manifest, that PRIESTS COULD NOT HAVE EXERCISED THIS JUDGMENT without knowledge of the cause; neither indeed could they have observed equity in enjoining punishments, if the said faithful should have declared their sins in general only, and not rather SPECIFICALLY, AND ONE BY ONE. Whence it is gathered that ALL MORTAL SINS, of which, after a diligent examination of themselves, they are conscious, MUST be by penitents enumerated in confession. [...] But, whereas all mortal sins, even those of thought, render men children of wrath, and enemies of God, it is NECESSARY TO SEEK ALSO FOR THE PARDON OF THEM ALL from God, with an open and humble confession. Wherefore, while the faithful of Christ are careful to confess all the sins which occur to their memory, they without doubt lay them all bare before the mercy of God to be pardoned." (Denz. 899)

Feeneyites are wont to claim that baptism and its matter have some necessity over and above that of penance and its matter for those who have fallen, but Trent did not say that.

What was said above regarding the sacrament of Penance is applicable to this section too, at least as applicable to the relative necessity of these sacraments.

But it brings me to some interesting considerations when you introduce the subject of the necessity of the *matter* for the sacrament of Penance. According to the Council of Trent, the matter (or "quasi-matter") for Penance consists in "the acts of the penitent himself, namely contrition, confession, and satisfaction" (Denz 896). In the section you just cited, the Council expounds further upon the second of these requirements, confession.

Thomas, you have not drawn the conclusions implicit in your selection of which words to put in ALL CAPS. You leave that to the reader, so I have to do a little guesswork here. The argument *seems* to be this: While the Council specified that the confession of each and every sin is “necessary” for the sacrament, but we know that not every sin needs be confessed, therefore, we have yet another example of the word “necessary” having a nuanced meaning in the texts of the Council.

Well, *necessary* here does have a more nuanced meaning, or, rather, a clearly specified meaning once we take into account all that the Fathers have said on the issue at hand. Again, as in the earlier passages regarding Penance, the Council Fathers *themselves* fixed the meaning concretely. They did so in two passages which follow in the Chapter you cite:

“While, therefore, the faithful of Christ strive to confess all sins which occur to their memory, they undoubtedly lay all of them before the divine mercy to be forgiven. While those who do otherwise and knowingly conceal certain sins, lay nothing before the divine bounty for forgiveness by the priest. ‘for if one who is ill is ashamed to make known his wound to the physician, the physician does not remedy what he does not know’ [the quote is from St. Jerome]” (Denz. 899).

“[M]oreover, the other sins which do not occur to him after diligent thought, are understood to be included in a general way in the same confession; for these sins we trustingly say with the Prophet: ‘From my hidden sins cleanse me, O Lord’ [Ps. 18:13]” (Denz. 900).

We must recall what is being discussed here: It is the necessity of the sacramental matter *for the integrity of the sacrament*, not whether or not the sacrament is necessary for salvation. The Council has shown the necessity of the matter (which is comprised of the “acts of the penitent”), and then it goes on to explain this necessity further. It should be noted here that these “acts of the penitent,” which comprise the matter of Penance, put that sacrament in a unique category. All the other sacraments have some material substance (e.g., water, bread, oil) which comprise the matter. Here the matter is a series of acts, one of which is purely interior (contrition). The sacrament of Orders, with its laying on of hands, and matrimony, wherein the contract between the two parties comprises the matter, are closest to penance inasmuch as the external sign is not a clearly-recognized inanimate material.

Penance is in a category of its own, and for that reason these three acts of the penitent are called the “quasi-matter” (*quasi materia*) or “parts of penance” (*partes poenitentiae*), distinguishing them from the kind of matter found in most sacraments. This is a subject of much speculation, especially given the essentially *dispositive* nature of these “parts” of Penance. The pastoral practice of the Church has long been to give conditional absolution to those who are unconscious. In such a case, contrition (at least *virtual* or *habitual* contrition) and a *willingness* to make satisfaction ontologically necessary for those in mortal sin to receive the sacrament, while confession and the actual accomplishing of the satisfaction are dispensable.

These last two paragraphs may seem to constitute a meandering path away from our subject, but they are not. It was all background for me to make the following conclusion: *On this score of matter not being strictly necessary there is no comparison to Baptism, which has a clear-cut matter of divine institution: water.* The Council did not specify that this element is not necessary in certain instances. The Church has always regarded dogmatically, morally, and pastorally, that if water is not used, there is no sacrament.

Again, you would prove too much if you drew a strict parallel between what the Council says of these two sacraments. Nobody claims that baptism of desire is a sacrament and nobody claims the sacrament can be administered without water. Penance, on the other hand, can still be a sacrament without certain parts of its quasi-matter.

Once again, Thomas, your “necessary does not always mean absolutely necessary” reasoning does not hold, and this because, in the one place (concerning Penance) the Council Fathers further qualified the necessity, while in the other (concerning Baptism) they did not.

Incorporation into the Church through desire

As we mentioned above, Feeneyites are wont to argue that none can be saved without water baptism because baptism is the entrance to the Church. *But it is the teaching of Trent that we are incorporated into the Church through the grace that is received in baptism, which is also received through desire.*

A man is united perfectly with Christ, and becomes a living member of His Mystical Body, when he receives the habitual graces of faith, hope and charity in justification. If a man were to lose his justification through sin, and yet retain the virtue of faith, he would remain imperfectly united with Christ as a ‘dead’ member in the order of grace. And so St. Thomas.

“Nevertheless, there are some, viz. mortal, sins from which they are free who are MEMBERS OF CHRIST BY THE ACTUAL UNION OF CHARITY; but such as are tainted with these sins are not members of Christ actually, but potentially; except, perhaps, IMPERFECTLY, BY FORMLESS FAITH [i.e. without hope and charity added to it,] WHICH UNITES TO GOD, RELATIVELY BUT NOT SIMPLY, viz. so that man partake of the life of grace. For, as is written (James 2:20): “Faith without works is dead.” Yet such as these receive from Christ a certain vital act, i.e. to believe, as if a lifeless limb were moved by a man to some extent.” (Summa Theologica 3, 8, 3)

Trent likewise.

Trent: “Whence, man, through Jesus Christ, in whom he is ingrafted, receives, IN THE SAID JUSTIFICATION, together with the remission of sins, all these gifts infused at once, faith, hope, and charity. For FAITH, UNLESS HOPE AND CHARITY BE ADDED THERETO, NEITHER UNITES A MAN PERFECTLY WITH CHRIST, NOR MAKES HIM A LIVING MEMBER OF HIS BODY.” (Denz. 800)

Again, Trent told us that Christ is, to the justified without distinction, the “head” to the “members” and the “vine” to the “branches”, which clearly indicates that the justified are members of the Mystical Body.

Trent: “For, whereas Jesus Christ Himself continually infuses his virtue into THE 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 [...]” (Denz. 809)

Again, Trent spoke of the justified without distinction, as “members” of Christ.

Trent: “If any one saith, that the good works of ONE THAT IS JUSTIFIED are in such manner the gifts of God, as that they are not also the good merits of the same justified; or, that THE SAME JUSTIFIED, by the good works which he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, WHOSE LIVING MEMBER HE IS, does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of that eternal life,-if so be, however, that he depart in grace,-and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema.”

Aquinas again:

“We must needs say that in some way [that is, instrumentally,] the sacraments of the New Law cause grace. For it is evident that through the sacraments of the New Law man is incorporated with Christ: thus the Apostle says of Baptism (Gal. 3:27): “As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ.” And MAN IS MADE A MEMBER OF CHRIST THROUGH GRACE ALONE.” (Summa Theologica 3, 62, 1)

We have here what amounts to a series of baseless claims and invalid inferences. I will begin with the claim that *“it is the teaching of Trent that we are incorporated into the Church through the grace that is received in baptism, which is also received through desire.”* Your supposed proof texts say nothing to support this. You have compiled passages of the Conciliar decrees which reference interior union with Christ through justification (and Charity), equated this internal union of Charity with incorporation into the Church, and concluded that it is justification that makes one a member of the Church *and that this conclusion is the teaching of the Council of Trent.* However, the Council Fathers did not teach or imply this.

To conclude as you do about incorporation into the Church is to do exactly what our critics accuse us of doing: exegeting the Tridentine texts syllogistically and giving our conclusion the same infallible status as the documents from which we draw our major and minor premises. As I granted at the beginning of this response, such an approach is not allowable. It is facile and amateurish, for we cannot give our inferences the status of dogma. However, what goes for us also goes for you, Thomas.

In order to get this interpretation out of the Decree on Justification, you cited a passage from the *Summa* (IIIa, Q. 8, A. 3) which is *supposed* to prove that “A man is united perfectly with Christ, and becomes a living member of His Mystical Body, when he receives the habitual graces of faith, hope and charity in justification.” The article in the *Summa*, however, does not say that. It does, in fact, contradict your conclusion. The great Doctor is *not* addressing the very narrow question under discussion, namely, what is the distinction between the justified unbaptized person and the justified baptized person and how they both stand vis-à-vis membership in the Church. This is a legitimate question and one we hope the infallible magisterium will address in order to clarify the issue authoritatively.

That St. Thomas did not draw the same inference you did becomes evident in his reply to the first Objection of that very [same article](#), where he says, “Those who are unbaptized, *though not actually in the Church*, are in the Church potentially.” Important to note in this article is that St. Thomas has *all living men* being potential members of Christ, *even those who are not predestined.* He does this in the context of giving an affirmative answer to the question: “Whether Christ is Head of *all men*?”.

Here again, your hermeneutic which mandates reading Trent with St. Thomas in mind militates against you. It would lead us to conclude that the Tridentine Fathers did not believe justification alone makes one a member of the Church.

I pointed out that St. Thomas was not addressing the question of the unbaptized as actual members of the Mystical Body. The same is true for the passages you selected from the Council of Trent. It is here that you have drawn inferences which, it seems, you would oblige us to hold as the teachings of the Council. This we cannot do, especially given the context of each and every one of the excerpts you have cited.

The context cannot be overlooked. It is in the beautiful Decree on Justification, Chapter Seven, the heading of which is “In what the Justification of the Sinner Consists, and What are its Causes.” What you excerpted comes roughly two thirds into that Chapter. In discussing the different causes of justification, the Fathers say, “the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the ‘sacrament of faith,’ without which [faith] no one is ever justified.” From this point forward, it is reasonable to assert that the decree, in referencing a justified person, speaks at the same time of a baptized person. In other words, Trent is not discussing the case of a justified but unbaptized person; rather, it is speaking of someone who has been justified through the sacrament.

A further proof of this is that the passage which follows what you cited goes on to speak in terms of the Baptismal rite itself, wherein the catechumen begs faith of the Church: “Therefore, on receiving true and Christian Justice, they are commanded immediately on being reborn, to preserve it pure and spotless as the ‘first robe’...” (Denz. 800). Anyone familiar with the Roman Rite of Baptism will recognize the passage; it is right out of the *Rituale Romanum*.

In another passage of Trent, when the question of membership in the Church is being touched upon, the Council would seem to contradict your conclusion. It is Chapter Two of the Decree on Penance, a passage you cited elsewhere. The Council is addressing “The Difference Between the Sacrament of Penance and that of Baptism”:

“Moreover, it is clear that this sacrament differs in many respects from baptism. For aside from the fact that in the matter and form, by which the essence of a sacrament is effected, it differs very widely, it is certainly clear that the minister of baptism need not be a judge, since *the Church exercises judgment on no one who has not first entered it through the gateway of baptism*. ‘For what have I to do,’ says St. Paul, ‘to judge them that are without?’ [1 Cor. 5:12]. *It is otherwise with those of the household of the faith, whom Christ the Lord by the laver of ‘baptism’ has once made ‘members of his own body’* [1 Cor. 12:13].” (Denz. 895)

As opposed to those not baptized, the baptized must submit to the Church’s tribunal of penance to have their sins forgiven. Note the contrast: The baptized are “of the household of the faith,” and “members of [Christ’s] own body,” while all others (including catechumens who may well have “baptism of desire”) are “without” and have not “entered [the Church] through the gateway of baptism.”

You cite another passage from the Decree on Justification which speaks of the justified as “members” of Christ. Again, the Council Fathers were not taking up the question of one justified prior to the reception of Baptism. In the context, we are led to assume that Trent’s notion of “the

Justified” is coextensive with “the Baptized who remain in grace,” because, as we have said, near the beginning of that same decree, Trent has listed the sacrament as the “instrumental cause” of Justification and cited the very words of the ceremony for Baptism contained in the *Rituale Romanum*. It is not baseless for me to posit that Trent is speaking of a baptized person here, for the sacrament and its liturgical rite have been explicitly mentioned in the decree.

The same can be said for the Canon you reference, Canon 32 on Justification (Denz. 842).

Here I will bring in one source external to the Council and to St. Thomas. It is the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*.

In the section treating of the ninth article of the Apostles Creed, that catechism explains the ark of Noe as a figure of the Church: “Among these figures the ark of Noah holds a conspicuous place. It was built by the command of God, in order that there might be no doubt that it was a symbol of the Church, which God has so constituted that *all who enter therein through Baptism, may be safe from danger of eternal death, while such as are outside the Church*, like those who were not in the ark, are overwhelmed by their own crimes.”

Baptism, here, is the entrance of the Church.

Further, in explaining how the “Communion of Saints” is a communion of sacraments, the same *Catechism* says: “The fruit of all the Sacraments is common to all the faithful, and these Sacraments, particularly *Baptism, the door, as it were, by which we are admitted into the Church*, are so many sacred bonds which bind and unite them to Christ. *That this communion of Saints implies a communion of Sacraments, the Fathers declare in these words of the Creed: I confess one Baptism*. After Baptism, the Eucharist holds the first place in reference to this communion, and after that the other Sacraments; for although this name (communion) is applicable to all the Sacraments, inasmuch as they unite us to God, and render us partakers of Him whose grace we receive, yet it belongs in a peculiar manner to the Eucharist which actually produces this communion.”

Neither of these passages represents a Q.E.D. proof that baptism of desire is not salvific, but they do demonstrate what the compilers of the *Catechism* believed was the entrance to the Church.

Finally, we come to one last reference from the *Summa Theologiae*. I will quote the text again so that it will be fresh on the reader’s mind. First, let us recall that what is being asserted here is, in your words, “A man is united perfectly with Christ, and becomes a living member of His Mystical Body, when he receives the habitual graces of faith, hope and charity in justification [*with or without the sacrament of Baptism -BAM*]. ... And so St. Thomas.”

Here is the passage from the *Summa*:

“We must needs say that in some way [that is, instrumentally,] the sacraments of the New Law cause grace. For it is evident that through the sacraments of the New Law man is incorporated with Christ: thus the Apostle says of Baptism (Gal. 3:27): “As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ.” And MAN IS MADE A MEMBER OF CHRIST THROUGH GRACE ALONE.” (Summa Theologica 3, 62, 1)

Assuming, as I must, that you consider this passage a proof of your point, what you impose upon your reader is a mutilated rendering of the text. The question here for St. Thomas is “[Whether the sacraments are the cause of grace?](#)” to which he answers in the affirmative. He addresses three objections which assert (1) that the sacraments are mere signs of grace, (2) that material things cannot effect a spiritual reality, and (3) that God’s work (sanctification) cannot be attributed to a creature such as a sacrament. *The Master of Aquino makes the point that the sacraments are instrumental causes of grace.* It is grace which sanctifies man, and, since sacraments sanctify man, then the sacraments must effect grace as instruments in God’s employ.

By your use of ALL CAPS, it seems that you would have us read that “man is made a member of Christ through [*sanctifying*] grace alone.” But, by “grace alone” here is not meant the grace of justification, but grace in its widest sense as any motion originating in God by which He elevates man to Himself. This could include sanctifying grace, actual grace, and, yes, *sacramental* graces. “Membership in Christ” is clearly one of the sacramental graces of Baptism.

The *Sed Contra* gives the pith and marrow of this entire article of the *Summa*: “Augustine says (Tract. lxxx in Joan.) that the baptismal water ‘touches the body and cleanses the heart.’ But the heart is not cleansed save through grace. Therefore it causes grace: and for like reason so do the other sacraments of the Church.”

The very end of St. Thomas’ *respondeo* is particularly noteworthy in the present context. “[T]he sacraments of the New Law cause grace: for they are instituted by God to be employed for the purpose of conferring grace. Hence Augustine says (Contra Faust. xix): ‘All these things,’ viz. pertaining to the sacraments, ‘are done and pass away, but the power,’ viz. of God, ‘which works by them, remains ever.’ Now that is, properly speaking, an instrument by which someone works: wherefore it is written (Titus 3:5): ‘He saved us by the laver of regeneration.’”

Your claim concerning sanctifying grace *alone* incorporating us into the Mystical Body provides me as good an opportunity as any to address a *lacuna* in your dialectical method. The approach you employ is to consider the Council of Trent alone, with no other magisterial points of reference. Your sole extra-Tridentine source is St. Thomas’ *Summa*, which, I believe, you have misinterpreted. I think I have shown the inadequacy of this hermeneutic. But there is another reality that looms large as I consider your arguments; it is that any theological approach to a Magisterial text must be done *within the whole gamut of Catholic teaching*, incorporating especially whatever “positive theology” (magisterial pronouncements) has to say about the matter. Such an approach, besides being *traditional* is also *rational*. It would also go a long way to limit your usage of the *argumentum a silentio*.

Had you not used the “Trent alone” method, you would perhaps have taken into account other documents of the ecclesiastical Magisterium to explore this question of incorporation into the Mystical Body. They are not wanting.

The Council of Florence said of Baptism, that “*per ipsum enim membra Christi ac de corpore efficimur Ecclesiae* (through it we are made members of Christ and of the body of the Church)” (Denz. 696). This should be included in any discussion of what it is that constitutes membership in the Church. So, too, should the *Mystici Corporis* (No. 22) of Pope Pius XII:

“Actually *only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the*

unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed. ‘For in one spirit’ says the Apostle, ‘were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free.’ As therefore in the true Christian community there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith. And therefore if a man refuse to hear the Church let him be considered — so the Lord commands — as a heathen and a publican. It follows that those are divided in faith or government cannot be living in the unity of such a Body, nor can they be living the life of its one Divine Spirit.”

The Florentine decree, cited above, led Ludwig Ott to conclude, as nearly all theologians do, that “The so-called Baptism by blood and Baptism of desire, it is true, replace Sacramental Baptism *in so far as the communication of grace is concerned, but do not effect incorporation into the Church,* as they do not bestow the sacramental character by which a person becomes attached formally to the Church.” (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 311. Emphasis mine.)

I have gone a bit long in replying to your “Open Letter.” In doing so, my intention is to show that there are indeed answers to your objections. Hopefully, you will have noticed that there are no *ad hominem*s here. I stayed, as I said I would, completely *ad rem*.

It is my sincere hope that this reply has shown that a deeper reading of the Council of Trent and of St. Thomas will answer your objections. I also hope I have set the record straight regarding what the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary really believe in this matter of sacrament of Baptism and the justifying power of the *votum* (vow) for the sacrament. Lastly I hope I have clarified that we do not regard our theological opinion (which is Father Feeney’s) on this point as equal to the Church’s Magisterium.

Nos, cum Prole pia, benedicat Virgo Maria!

In the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Br. André Marie". The script is cursive and elegant, with the first letters of "Br.", "André", and "Marie" being capitalized and prominent.

Brother André Marie, M.I.C.M.