

Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus

It is difficult to think of a more controversial statement than *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*: Outside the Church there is no salvation. One wonders how any dogma, let alone the most fundamental one, can be so controversial, particularly in traditional circles.

No one can deny the fact that the heresies of Liberalism and Modernism have ravaged the Church in our day; there is not one aspect of Catholic life that has not been touched or ruined by these ideologies. Yet, these heresies are not new; they have been striking at the underbelly (from within) of the Church for the past 150 years or so. The damage that has been done is, by mere human standards, irreparable.

These ideologies have sought to undermine the Church from within; the safest place for the enemy. If we think about this for a moment, a very interesting question comes to mind: What is the quickest, most effective way to crush an organization, a system, a belief? Obviously, the best way to do this is to destroy its reason for existence. Now the purpose of the Church is to save souls; once that role has been stripped away from her, she is instantly crippled. Why bother to listen to Her teachings and obey Her laws? Why bother to profess our Faith and try to convert anyone anymore, since they don't have to be Catholic to be saved? Why be subject to the Pope? Why should we be willing to die for a Faith which really isn't all that necessary?

Since Father Leonard Feeney began publicly defending the Church's perennial teaching on salvation against the attacks of the Modernists in 1949, there has been a heated argument over whether or not only Catholics can be saved. Such a thing could only have happened in our age of unbelief, skepticism, and sentimentality.

Ever since the year 33 A.D., the Church's Faithful have believed, accepted, and adhered to the infallibly defined dogma, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, outside the Church there is no salvation. The evidence for this fact is so overwhelming that it cannot be questioned, either historically, or doctrinally. Fr. Feeney knew this, and his love for the Faith compelled him to preserve and defend it . . . at any cost.

Very seldom do we meet a Catholic, man or woman, priest or laymen, who will permit us to say that "Out of the Church there is no salvation for anyone," without requiring us to qualify this statement, as if that were possible with God's immutable Truth. We are told that under certain circumstances people may be saved outside the Church. This is absolute heresy, and it has sadly been adopted by the majority of bishops, priests, religious, and faithful.

In our day the dogma *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* has been nearly universally denied, even as the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ was denied by 97% of the Catholic bishops during the Arian Heresy in the 4th century. At that time, as in our own day, God raised up a powerful voice to combat this pernicious error: St. Athanasius. Though he was excommunicated, beaten up, thrown out of his diocese, scorned, and called a heretic, he stood firm and defended Truth against nearly every bishop and priest in Christendom! Hence the saying: "St. Athanasius against the

world." If anyone said that Christ was God, they were labeled as a 'heretic,' an 'Athanasianite,' a 'fanatic,' an 'extremist.'

Today, anybody who says "outside the Church there is no salvation" is also labeled as a 'heretic,' a 'Feeneyite,' a 'fanatic,' an 'extremist.' What is it about this doctrine that engenders such animosity? More importantly, is it true? Was Father Feeney right? Is it really a Catholic doctrine that says what it means and means what it says?

To find out the answer to these questions, let us first examine the three infallible definitions given us by the Roman Pontiffs:

- *The Church Teaches Ex Cathedra*: "There is but one Universal Church of the Faithful, outside of which no one at all can be saved." (*Pope Innocent III, Fourth Lateran Council, 1215.*)

In the philosophical science called Logic, the above statement is known as a Universal Negative, allowing of no exceptions at all. If there were just one single exception to this statement, the Church would not be the True Church of Christ, as she, who claims to be infallible in such matters, would have told us an "infallible error."

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

We now know, infallibly, that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Pope. The only people on the face of the planet who are submissive to the Pope are Catholics: all pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics are automatically excluded. If there were just one single exception to this definition, then we must conclude one of two things: a) the Pope is not infallible, or b) the person in question is not a human creature . . . go figure.

- *The Church Teaches Ex Cathedra*: "The Most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, and heretics, and schismatics, can ever be partakers of eternal life, but that they are to go into the eternal fire "which was prepared for the devil, and his angels," (Mt. 25:41) unless before death they are joined with Her; and that so important is the unity of this Ecclesiastical Body, that only those remaining within this unity can profit from the sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and that they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, almsdeeds, and other works of Christian piety and duties of a Christian soldier. No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, even if he pour out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved unless they abide within the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church." (*Pope Eugene IV, the Bull Cantate Domino, 1441*)

How could anything be clearer? If the Church really believed that only Catholics can be saved, how could they say it any stronger? It's utterly impossible! Another thing that should be noted at

this juncture is that, chronologically speaking, **each definition is even more emphatic than the last; the dogma is defended with increasing intensity, never weakened.**

A brief look at that last definition, *Cantate Domino*, will reveal several things: 1) what is about to be said is a firm doctrine of the Church; 2) that no one outside the Church can be saved. Who are considered not inside the Church? Pagans, Jews, heretics, and schismatics — aside from Catholics there aren't anybody else in the world; 3) that the only way such individuals can be saved is if they become Catholics; 4) that the sacraments, when used outside the Church, can never procure salvation for anybody; 5) that no matter what good works a person does, if he is not a Catholic he will never receive an eternal recompense, let alone be saved; 6) no one, no matter what he may do, even if he is martyred and sheds his blood for the "Name of Christ," can be saved unless he abides within the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church.

As Catholics, we know that a doctrine or dogma of the Church is a truth which has been revealed by God and must be believed by all Catholics in order to be saved.

Papal definition precludes any further interpretation of dogma. The Church has taught from her beginning that no matter how much a doctrine may be developed or meditated upon, never, never can its meaning in any way be changed. Despite all this, bishops, priests, theologians and canon lawyers in our day have insisted that distinctions be made with regard to the solemn doctrine "Outside the Church there is No Salvation."

These distinctions are so involved, confused, fantastic and dishonest that the dogma finally has emerged — in the minds of the Faithful — as completely changed. To the straightforward question: Is there or is there not salvation outside the Catholic Church? the answer, after this manipulation of doctrine, would have to be: Yes, there is salvation outside the Catholic Church. We have arrived now at the exact opposite of the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the Popes.

Frequently the objection arises: "What about those who have never had a chance to become Catholic, such as the ignorant native on the desert island?" We answer thus:

To begin with,

- Jesus made His Church necessary for supernatural life, just as He made air, water, and food necessary for natural life.

In the second place,

- The supernatural virtue of Hope teaches us to trust in God to give us "our daily bread;" everything we need in this life and in the next, provided we are willing to accept it.

Thirdly,

- God is not limited by the human accidents of chronology, geography, etc. He can get His Faith and His Church to whomever He wills, using whatever means He wills.

Fourthly,

- As is shown many times in Scripture, Tradition, lives of the saints, annals of the missions, etc., God will get the Catholic Faith to anyone on the face of this planet, so long as he is of good will and ready to cooperate.

The point is, no one is born by accident, the ignorant native (or other non-Catholic) is no exception. God knew from all eternity that this individual will be born at that particular time and in that particular place. As with all things, God has a plan by which He wills "all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the Truth." (1Tim. 2:4) Now, if the 'ignorant' native (or other non-Catholic) follows this plan (i.e., follows the natural law, seeks to do God's will, searches for Truth, etc.), God will get His Faith, His Sacraments, His Truth etc., (which He made necessary for salvation) to him. If anyone seeks God, God will reveal Himself. Jesus promised "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened." (St. Luke 11:10) If a man truly loves God, he will seek Him. If a man truly loves Truth, he will ask for it. If a man truly values his soul, he will knock to find out how to save it. God knows all things, and if He knows that this person will search for Truth, God *pre-arranges* that it be made available to him. If the individual does not care enough about God, Truth, etc., to make the effort to search, it would be his own fault that He didn't know anything about the Church.

"When thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, yet so if thou seekest Him with all thy heart." (Deut. 4:29)

The Saints have had much to say about this:

"But why is it, then, that all men have not known, and that at this day so many are ignorant? This is the reason: 'The light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than the light.' (Jn. 3:19). They have not known Him, and they do not know Him, because they do not want to know Him, loving instead the darkness of sin rather than the light of Grace." (St. Alphonsus Maria Liguori)

"How to provide each person with what is necessary for salvation belongs to Divine Providence. Consequently, should someone put forward the case of a person who is brought up to draw from natural motives in pursuing good desires and avoiding the bad — even among unfeeling savages in the woods — it must most certainly be held that God would reveal to him, even by an interior inspiration, what is necessary to be believed: even so far as to direct some preacher of the Faith to him, just as he sent Peter to Cornelius." (St. Thomas Aquinas)

"And as the sun, that creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the Truth shines everywhere and enlightens all men who are willing to come to a knowledge of the Truth . . . It is in the power of anyone, who cares, to discover

the Truth and to know the tradition which the Apostles professed throughout the world . . . For the Apostles lavishly deposited all aspects of the Truth with the Church, as in a bank, so that everyone, whoever wants, may withdraw the Truth from her." (St. Irenaeus of Lyons)

To reiterate: if God knows that John Doe will accept the Truth (whether he's on a desert island or not), God will pre-arrange that the Church be brought to him. On the other hand, if God knows that John Doe is content as he is, and will have nothing to do with the Faith, God is committing no injustice to leave John as he is. St. Alphonsus already explained why so many are ignorant: they *don't want to know*, so God doesn't reveal Himself to them. They are content as they are, i.e., heaped in sin.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to take the example of a child and his dessert. Let us say that you have a child who unquestionably hates broccoli. You know 100% guaranteed that he won't even touch it. On the other hand, you know that he absolutely loves ice cream, and he'd eat a whole gallon of it if he could. With this knowledge, you would never dream of giving him broccoli for dessert, unless you wanted an exercise in futility. You would be wasting your time giving him broccoli. It is similar with God. If He knows that this "ignorant" person would reject His Church (broccoli), and that he would rather stay as he is (ice cream), it would be utterly stupid (and in no way merciful, considering what the punishment is for outright rejecting Truth) to offer it to him, knowing that he will have nothing to do with it. There is no injustice done to him at all.

What Does Scripture Say?

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned." (Mk. 16:16)

"I am the Way and the Truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by Me" (Jn. 14:36)

"Jesus answered: 'Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.'" (Jn. 3:5)

"I am the Vine, you the branches: he who abides in Me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone abide not in Me, he shall be cast forth like a branch and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire, and he burneth." (Jn. 15:5-6)

"He who is not with Me is against Me; he who gathers not with Me scatters." (Mt. 12:30)

What Do the Saints Say?

"No man can find salvation save in the Catholic Church. Outside the Catholic Church he can find everything except salvation. He can have dignities, he can have the Sacraments, can sing 'Alleluia,' answer 'Amen,' accept the Gospels, have faith in the Name of the

Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and preach it, too, but never except in the Catholic Church can he find salvation." (St. Augustine)

"Hold most firmly, and do not doubt at all, that not only all the pagans, but also all the Jews, and all the heretics and schismatics who end this present life outside the Catholic Church, will go into the eternal fire, 'which was prepared for the devil and his angels' (Mt. 25:41)" (St. Fulgentius)

"Outside of this communion (as outside the Ark of Noah) there is absolutely no salvation for mortals: not to Jews or pagans, who never received the Faith of the Church; not to heretics who, having received it, forsook or corrupted it; not to schismatics who left the peace and unity of the Church; finally neither to excommunicates who for any other serious cause deserved to be put away and separated from the Body of the Church, like pernicious members . . . For the rule of Cyprian and Augustine is certain: he will not have God for his Father who would not have the Church for his Mother." (St. Peter Canisius)