

The Scriptural foundation of the Feenyite position is John 3:5.

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.

- John 3:5, Douay Rheims translation

The Dimond Brothers take the above quotation to mean that it is impossible for men to be saved without water. Despite coming to prominence through the efforts of Fr. Leonard Feeney in the 1950's and 60's, this idea that water is necessary for salvation is not new. In fact, it was described by St. Thomas Aquinas as early as the 13th century in his Summa Theologica:

It seems that no man can be saved without Baptism, for Our Lord said (Jn. 3, 5): "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God". But those alone are saved who enter God's Kingdom. Therefore, no one can be saved without Baptism, by which a man is born again of water and the Holy Ghost...

- Part III, Question 68, Article 2, Objection 1, available:

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4068.htm#article2>

The reply which St. Thomas gives is insightful because it carefully delineates between the functions which are played by the water and the Holy Ghost in Baptism:

As it is written (1 Kgs. 16, 7), "man seeth those thing that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart". Now, a man who desires to be "born again of water and the Holy Ghost" by Baptism, is regenerated in heart, though not in body. Thus, the Apostle says (Rom. 2, 29) that "the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

- Summa, Part III, Question 68, Article 2, Reply to Objection 1

Thus, St. Thomas shows what is plain to see for those who are willing: that the water of baptism cleanses the body while it is the Spirit who cleanses the heart. Like the Judaizers of the early Church, the Feenyites refuse to accept that the regeneration of the soul is effected solely by God and that water is not required for Him to do so.

This fact is emphatically supported by the very next verse after John 3:5:

That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. Wonder not, that I said to thee, you must be born again. The Spirit breatheth where he will; and thou hearest his voice, but thou knowest not whence he cometh, and whither he goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

- John 3:6, Douay Rheims translation

Confirming the teaching of St. Thomas, Christ teaches that rebirth is effected by the Spirit, and He expressly states that the Spirit "breatheth where he will". The relevance of this "breathing" to

baptismal rebirth becomes clear when we recall Genesis Chapter 2:

And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

- Genesis 2:7, Douay Rheims translation

The breathing of the Holy Ghost in John 3:6 is not merely a vague, metaphorical motion of the third Person of the Trinity; it is the creative action by which the soul of man is regenerated with life. Understood in this way, John 3:6 demonstrates that the Spirit breathes life into the souls of men *wherever* He wills, and that we do not always know where He does this. This is in direct contradiction to the Feenyite position which might be paraphrased as: "The Spirit breatheth where *water* is, and so we know *exactly* where He cometh and whither He goeth."

The dangerously simplistic method which the Feenyites apply to "unless a man be born again of water" leads to insurmountable difficulties when it is applied elsewhere in Scripture, as Fr. Martin points out:

We could not help but think of other words of our Lord that supposedly "mean exactly what they say." Thus, for example, Our Lord said in His sermon on the Mount, "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee" (Matthew 5: 29). And he said the same about the right-hand. Later on, some time after His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, Our Lord repeated the same kind of admonition (Matthew 18:8-9), mentioning this time the hand and the foot and the eye.

- [The "Unbaptized Saints" Deception](#)

The difficulties raised by this distorted "exactitude" do not stop with the examples given above, however. For instance, consider John 6:54:

Then Jesus said to them: Amen, amen I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.

- John 6:54

If we take the "except you eat" above with the same literalism with which the Feenyites take "unless a man be born again of water", then we are forced to confess that the Eucharist is every bit as necessary for salvation as Baptism. This, in fact, is not an original error as we see from Objection 1 of the Summa's Article concerning the necessity of the Eucharist for salvation:

It seems that this sacrament is necessary for salvation. For our Lord said (John 6:54): "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." But Christ's flesh is eaten and His blood drunk in this sacrament. Therefore, without this sacrament man cannot have the health of spiritual life.

- *Summa Theologica*, Part III, Question 73, Article 3, Objection 1, available:

<http://newadvent.org/summa/4073.htm#article3>

Despite the literal exactness of this interpretation, it is directly condemned by the Council of Trent in Canon IV, Session XXI:

If any one saith, that the communion of the Eucharist is necessary for little children, before they have arrived at years of discretion; let him be anathema.

- Council of Trent, Session XXI, Chapter IV, available:

<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct21.html>

Clearly Feenyistic literalism cannot be applied in this case without falling under the condemnation of the Council of Trent, and therefore we cannot help asking ourselves in what *other* cases the exacting methods of the Feenyites would lead to error if logically and consistently applied to Scripture.

Consider the phrase, “eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood”. Fr. Leonard Feeney’s method of Scriptural interpretation would force us to confess that it is impossible for a man to have life without partaking of both the Body *and* the Blood. This was, in fact, a common opinion among the enemies of the Catholic Church at the time of the Council of Trent, and it would appear logically consistent with an “exact” reading of the words. Nevertheless, the Council condemns the requirement for communion under both species as follows:

But neither is it rightly gathered, from that discourse which is in the sixth of John... that the communion of both species was enjoined by the Lord : for He who said; *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you* (v. 54), also said; *He that eateth this bread shall live for ever* (v. 59); and He who said, *He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life* (v. 55), also said; *The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world* (v. 52); and, in fine,- He who said; *He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him* (v. 57), said, nevertheless; *He that eateth this bread shall live for ever* (v. 59.)

- Council of Trent, Session XXI, Chapter I, available:

<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct21.html>

By juxtaposing verses wherein Christ enjoins communion under both species with verses wherein He mentions only one, the Council provides the full and complete dogma with regards to the Eucharistic matter. This is significant because the erroneous teaching that salvation cannot be obtained without partaking of both Body *and* Blood is directly parallel to the equally erroneous teaching that it is impossible to be regenerated without both the Spirit *and* the water of Baptism. In light of this, it is curious and inconsistent of the Dimond Brothers to deny the first error while accepting the second.

Following the admirable example of the Holy and Ecumenical Synod of the Council of Trent, briefly consider the verses which balance and complete John 3:5 with regard to man’s salvation. The principal among these is John 14:22 - 23:

Judas saith to him, not the Iscariot: Lord, how is it, that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not to the world? Jesus answered, and said to him: If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.
- John 14:22-23, Douay Rheims translation

In this passage, Judas asks how it is that Christ will not manifest himself to the world at large in contrast to the Church / Apostles only, and Jesus replies by laying down the universal precept that *anyone* who loves Him and keeps His word will abide with God.

The love of which our Saviour speaks here is of crucial importance because it refers to that “perfect charity” which forms the essence of *baptismus de voto*. This is described by the Encyclopedia as follows:

Baptism is held to be necessary both necessitate medii and præcepti. This doctrine is grounded on the words of Christ. In John 3, He declares: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he can not enter into the kingdom of God." Christ makes no exception to this law and it is therefore general in its application, embracing both adults and infants. It is consequently not merely a necessity of precept but also a necessity of means.

This is the sense in which it has always been understood by the Church, and the Council of Trent (Sess, IV, cap, vi) teaches that justification can not be obtained, since the promulgation of the Gospel, without the washing of regeneration or the desire thereof (in voto). In the seventh session, it declares (can. v) anathema upon anyone who says that baptism is not necessary for salvation. We have rendered votum by "desire" for want of a better word. The council does not mean by votum a simple desire of receiving baptism or even a resolution to do so. It means by votum an act of perfect charity or contrition, including, at least implicitly, the will to do all things necessary for salvation and thus especially to receive baptism.

- *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Baptism”, Necessity of Baptism, para. 1 - 2, avail:
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm>

Thus, the perfect love of Christ is declared to have the power of sanctifying *anyone* who has been blessed with this gift both according to the Council of Trent and the words of Christ in John 14:23. Having said that, this justifying love necessitates keeping the word of Jesus Christ which definitely includes the injunction to be baptized in water. Is justification therefore impossible to those who are not cognizant of the words of Christ and yet are inspired with the love of Him?

No, justification *is* possible for such people because they are bound to follow the commands of Jesus Christ only in so far as they are cognizant of them. This principle is based on the principle that those who are ignorant of a precept are not responsible for the precept so long as they are unable to acquire knowledge of it. This principle is described by the term “invincible ignorance”, described in the Encyclopedia in this way:

So far as fixing human responsibility, the most important division of ignorance is that designated by the terms invincible and vincible. Ignorance is said to be invincible when a person is unable to rid himself of it notwithstanding the employment of moral diligence, that is, such as under the circumstances is, morally speaking, possible and obligatory. This manifestly includes the states of inadvertence, forgetfulness, etc. Such ignorance is obviously involuntary and therefore not imputable. On the other hand, ignorance is termed vincible if it can be dispelled by the use of "moral diligence"... Invincible ignorance, whether of the law or of the fact, is always a valid excuse and excludes sin. The evident reason is that neither this state nor the act resulting therefrom is voluntary.

- *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Ignorance", para. 2 & 4, available:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm>

The principle that men are not responsible for laws of which they are invincibly ignorant gives rise to the distinction between the two kinds of "necessity" mentioned earlier with regards to Baptism: *necessitate medii* and *necessitate praecepti*. This distinction is described as follows in the Encyclopedia:

Theologians distinguish a twofold necessity, which they call a necessity of means (*medii*) and a necessity of precept (*praecepti*). The first (*medii*) indicates a thing to be so necessary that, if lacking (though inculpably), salvation can not be attained. The second (*praecepti*) is had when a thing is indeed so necessary that it may not be omitted voluntarily without sin; yet, ignorance of the precept or inability to fulfill it, excuses one from its observance.

- *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Baptism", Necessity of Baptism, para. 1, avail:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm>

The sum of this is that men are not culpable for commands necessary as precepts unless they can reasonably obtain knowledge of these commands; whereas, men are culpable for commands necessary as means regardless of their cognizance of these commands. Only by grasping this distinction can we arrive at the accurate comprehension of John 14:23: that the love of Jesus as God is the necessary *means* to salvation while the reception of the baptismal water is the necessary *precept* of the same. Once this is established, it is clear that the reception of water in Baptism is only binding on those who are able to comply whereas the love of Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for all.

If we fail to distinguish between *necessitate medii* and *necessitate praecepti* by saying the Holy Ghost is restricted in His regenerative action to the usage of physical water in Baptism, then we begin an inexorable descent into the superstitious system of magic and ritual which dominates the mechanistic paganism of the idolatrous heathens, for it is the classic birthmark of paganism to imprison divinity within created, lifeless works such as water. In direct contrast to this, Christ has always taught that He is able to forgive and sanctify man directly without the mediation of physical objects or rites upon which to fix the five senses.

This principle is described by St. Thomas Aquinas as follows:

Further, no one can confer the sacramental effect without conferring the sacrament, except he produce the sacramental effect by his own power. But Christ conferred the sacramental effect without conferring the sacrament; as in the case of Magdalen to whom He said: "Thy sins are forgiven Thee" (Luke 7:48). Therefore it seems that Christ, as man, produces the inward sacramental effect.

- Part III, Question 64, Article 3, Objection 4

The forgiveness of St. Magdalen also recalls to mind that of the Paralytic:

And behold they brought to him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee.

- Matthew 9:2, Douay Rheims

In the case both of St. Mary and the Paralytic, the Jews were intensely scandalized on exactly the same ground as the Dimond Brothers, namely: that God would forgive sins without the ceremonial forms normally required by the Law. Instead, Christ demonstrates that the power to forgive sins is His alone such that He does not require the mediation of carnal matter to exercise this power. This principle marks the momentous shift from the Old Covenant under which grace was strictly veiled beneath rites and forms of the Jewish religion.

It is often objected against these examples of the Paralytic and St. Magdalen that Baptism had not yet been made mandatory at the time of their forgiveness. This objection is entirely moot, however, because the sacramental forms of forgiveness under the Old Law were most definitely in effect at the time and yet Christ still summarily and directly bestowed the effect of sacramental forgiveness without reference any form of sacrament whatever either Old *or* New. The reality of this fact that Christ can and *does* do this is confirmed by the story of Cornelius' conversion in Acts which occurred well after the institution of Baptism:

While Peter was yet speaking these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word. And the faithful of the circumcision, who came with Peter, were astonished, for that the grace of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the Gentiles also.

For they heard them speaking with tongues, and magnifying God. Then Peter answered: Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then they desired him to tarry with them some days.

- Acts 10:44 - 48, Douay Rheims translation

In this passage, we are told the Holy Ghost descended upon the gentiles of Cornelius' household who had been listening to the preaching of St. Peter. Upon perceiving this, the Apostle bids them be

given the water of Baptism on account of the fact that they had received the Holy Ghost just the same as those who had already been Baptized. There can be no question as to the fact that the Holy Ghost was given to these gentiles prior to receiving the water of Baptism; therefore, the only point at issue is whether they were fully *justified* by this reception, or whether they remained in their original state of bondage under sin until receiving water. Put another way: would Cornelius' household have been admitted to eternal bliss if they had died after receiving the Holy Ghost yet before receiving the water of Baptism?

The key to this question lies in the words of St. Peter: "...who have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we". The phrase "as well as we" is from the Latin *sicut et nos* which occurs nine times elsewhere in the Vulgate. It is used in the Our Father where Christ teaches us to say: "and forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors," (Matthew 6:12) and it is used twice in the High Priestly Prayer where He prays: "that they may be one, as we also are" (John 17:11) and "that they may be one, as we also are one" (John 17:22). It is also used in Isaiah when prophesying of Christ with the words: "Thou also art wounded as well as we, thou art become like unto us." (14:10). In all of these cases, *sicut et nos* is used to express an exact similarity between the two objects in comparison, and to deny the similitude would, in many cases, amount to heresy. Given this fact, it is undeniable that when St. Peter exclaimed that his gentile converts had received the Holy Ghost *sicut et nos*, there was no question in his mind that these men, women, and children were justified as children of God *in the same manner* as those who had received the water of Baptism. To argue that Cornelius' household had received the Holy Ghost but had not been justified thereby would be to argue either that the Prince of the Apostles was lying or that he and the Christians with him were not justified, neither of which alternatives are tenable.

The sum of all this is that the words "unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter in the Kingdom of God" given in John 3:5 can be taken in a completely plain and literal sense without doing any injury whatever to the doctrine of *baptismus de voto* which is elsewhere in Scripture both demonstrated and taught by Christ in person and by means of His ministers. The interpretation which would have us believe that the *water* of rebirth is necessary in precisely the same way and degree as the *Spirit* does great violence to many other passages of Scripture unless it is corrected by the sagacity of such holy men and authoritative teachers as St. Thomas Aquinas, the Council of Trent, Fr. Martin Stephanich, and the Catholic Encyclopedia. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to understand Christ not in the manner which initially appears most simple to us, but in a manner which is aligned with the *entirety* of His teaching and life as well as that of His ordained ministers and successors in His office.