

No Salvation Outside the Church?

Early Church

The early Church accepted Christians who had been baptized by heretics without the need to be rebaptized. Since baptism is necessary for salvation, the early Church clearly recognized that one could be outside the confines of the Church and still have the baptism necessary for salvation.

Aquinas

In the *Summa Theologicae III, q. 69, art. 4* Aquinas speaks of the baptism of desire whether explicit or implicit. These are those who had begun instruction but died before baptism and those who had not yet heard Christ proclaimed in an adequate way and had invincible ignorance.

Pius XII

Pius XII wrote in his 1943 encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, that there is hope for salvation even for non-Christians had the possibility of being related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer by a certain “unconscious desire and yearning.” (103)

Feeneyism

In 1949 Fr. Leonard Feeney of the archdiocese of Boston insisted on a strict interpretation of the phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is not salvation). The Vatican condemned the strict interpretation stating that while baptism is *normative* for salvation, this does not preclude those with invincible ignorance from being saved, for God accepts also an implicit desire.

Vatican II – *Lumen Gentium*

The only ones that the Council says “could not be saved” are those “who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, refuse either to enter it, or remain in it” (LG, 14). “Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those, who through no fault of their own, have not yet arrived at the explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life” (LG, 16).

The Church’s teaching

The Catholic Church teaches neither exclusivism, that all non-Catholics are damned, nor indifferentism, that it doesn’t matter which religion you belong

to. The Church believes that one cannot be saved apart from grace and Jesus Christ. This does not, however, deny the possibility of salvation to those outside the confines of the Church.

CCC

"Outside the Church there is no salvation"

846 How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it. (LG 14)

847 This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation. (LG 16)

848 "Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men."