

## PREFACE: OF PSEUDONYMS AND SMALL MINDS

Readers of this edition of *Desire and Deception* will notice that a major change has occurred since the last one: the name of the author. Rather than Thomas A. Hutchinson, the cover carries my moniker. The very few who follow such things will be justified in wondering why - especially since, in those far off days when this volume first saw the light, I refused to admit any part in its authorship. The reasons are somewhat complex, but interesting - not, perhaps, so much for what they might say about the book and its author, but rather about the times and places both have inhabited.

There were, in fact, two reasons why my name was not put on the first edition of this book. The first is rather straightforward: this book grew out of an editing job I did on another work (*Church of Salvation*, by Br. Leonard Mary, M.I.C.M.). It was not, at the outset, considered as an independent work.

But the second is the more exciting: it was simply because it was feared by those responsible for publishing the first edition that my writing career would suffer, due to the unpopularity of the views expressed therein. They were proved right, in the end.

The problem was and is twofold: on the one hand, on the philosophical plane, I endorse herein the philosophical view variously called Christian Neo-Platonism or Ultra-Realism. Such a stand was sure to annoy the Neo-Thomists who make up a good percentage of the thinking element of more orthodox Catholics. Never mind that the Catholic creeds, liturgies, Fathers, and earlier Doctors of the Church held such views; if anything contradicted what was taught in seminary philosophy classes in 1955, it would be held by many to be anathema.

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Nor would it matter if one held the same views as those ancient and venerable sources on the question of Salvation outside the Catholic Church or the necessity of water Baptism to be saved. Again, the 50s trump all, and the older - and more authoritative - teachings were simply dismissed as *Feeneyism*. Now, of course, use of this word is generally as unfair and inaccurate as simply dismissing its users' views as *Rahnerism* would be: a usage they would rightly complain to be oversimplified. But many who consider themselves "Traditional Catholics" are quite modern in spirit, and it is a hallmark of the modern mind that it dismisses with labels anything it cannot overcome intellectually.

In any case, the elderly chap who urged a pseudonym on me was proved right by events. Rather than engaging in any sort of reasoned refutation, a number of those whose self-appointed task was the defense of an orthodoxy of their own imagining became obsessed with finding out the author's identity - the better to abuse him, as it turned out. One of these, a Catholic evangelist of some note, was sure that I was the author of the piece, and went on to harass me in a number of ways - going so far as to call a Catholic newspaper for whom I wrote to denounce me as a "Feeneyite heretic." Unfortunately for his reputation at the journal, his attempt at making an anonymous call was foiled by his speaking to an editor who had interviewed him before, and recognized his rather distinctive voice. Of course, the fact that he had stiffed the paper on advertising money he owed it did not help his cause either.

It so happened that one of his friends had decided to write an article exposing the author of *Desire and Deception* in an article in the evangelist's magazine. The friend happened to be director of catechetics for a small Midwestern diocese. Said director wrote me a letter in red ink, declaring that he was the head of a small Catholic group in his town, that he loved the book, wanted me to speak on it, but was very curious as to why

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my name did not appear. I did not reply (I have learned over the years not to answer letters written in colored ink, without any margins, all in capital letters, or whatever).

Nevertheless, he went ahead and wrote his sizzling expose, which predictably, was filled with ridicule but not refutation. Amused as I was, I handed over the letter to a bookstore which sold the book, so that his fulsome praise of the book could be quoted in their catalogue. It was attributed to him under his title of diocesan director of catechetics.

He called the store, outraged, the day after the catalogue appeared.

Stating his name to the lady who answered the phone (and who knew all about the article and the letter), he shouted, "Don't you know who I am?"

"Should I?"

"My name appears in your catalogue!"

"Really? Are you one of our authors?" (with great excitement).

"No! But you published my words praising that book *Desire and Deception!* I demand you remove them immediately!"

"Oh, but didn't you write them? We have the letter right here..."

"I did. But I didn't mean them!"

"Ah!" Then seamlessly gliding from ditzzy to a maternal tone, she said, "I see. Well, in future, could you let us know when you're lying? Otherwise we'll presume you're telling the truth." It was an interesting riposte to an individual who was apparently outraged by my using a pseudonym.

Of course, in the Catholic world, then as now, there is nothing more untouchable, more loathsome, than a "Feeneyite." Since I have come to espouse such views, I myself have been called all sorts of things, even by close friends and family members. While this does hurt a bit, it does point up a contradiction.

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Most Catholics today are really universalists - actually believing, if you analyze what they say, that almost everyone is saved, provided that they are sincere in their belief or disbelief. This is a sweeping statement to be sure, but between “Implicit Baptism of Desire” (wherein the well intentioned are part of the Church without knowing it, and so saved), Hans Urs von Balthazar’s daring to hope that all men be saved, and Karl Rahner’s “Anonymous Christianity” (whereby one is a member of the Church through birth, rather than Baptism), one can see little practical difference: these views cover all three major theological parties in the Church today.

Now, if what they all say is true, and sincerity is all that is required for Salvation, then by their standards I do not know a single Feeneyite who is not en route to Heaven; for there is not a single Feeneyite I have ever met who has not suffered abuse for his beliefs. If you maintain (as many writers who do not really know the topic assert) that Feeneyism is a heresy and its holders are thereby out of the Church - then what of it, since such folk hold that membership in the Church is not necessary for Salvation? Ought not Feeneyites be treated with the same decency meted out to the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dalai Lama, or one’s own Lutheran aunt? But consistency is, after all, the bugbear of little minds.

Of course what makes it all so different today is that, when this book was written in the early 90s, one could make a juridical case against Feeneyism. Did not its holders refuse to accept the famous “decree of the Holy Office” condemning the belief back in 1949? Was not Fr. Feeney himself excommunicated for his teaching? Well, as a reading of this book will show, these were specious arguments even then. But things have changed considerably since.

Gary Potter wrote, in his 1995 book, *After the Boston Heresy Case*, (pp. 181-182) that “Ten years after the passing of

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Fr. Feeney, the 14 sisters of St. Ann's House were "regularized" (the word had replaced "reconciled"). That was in February, 1988. Soon after, a member of Br. Francis' community in Richmond, N.H., Mr. Douglas Bersaw, wrote to Bernard Cardinal Law, Archbishop of Boston, about the regularization. Rev. John B. McCormack, Secretary for Ministerial Personnel for the Archdiocese of Boston, answered Mr. Bersaw's letter on behalf of Cardinal Law. When Mother Teresa of St. Ann's House learned of Fr. McCormack's answer, she communicated with Fr. Lawrence A. Deery, Vicar for Canonical Affairs and Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Worcester. Fr. Deery thereupon wrote a letter to Fr. McCormack. (It is dated May 4, 1988).

I write to clarify some aspects of the regularization which took place at St. Ann's House in Still River this past February.

Mother Teresa, Superior of the community, has expressed concern about your letter of 7 March 1988 to Mr. Douglas Bersaw who had asked Cardinal Law for a clarification of the Church's teaching on the doctrine *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. It is Mother Teresa's feeling that your letter implied a 'walking away' from Father Feeney's teachings on their part.

Several clarifications might prove helpful:

1) The Sisters were asked to 'understand' the letter of the then Holy Office dated 8 August 1949. They were not asked to 'accept' its contents.

2) The Sisters were asked to make a Profession of Faith. Nothing else was required.

It would seem that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith holds the doctrine to have been defined and consequently definitive. It is its theological interpretation and speculation which they see as problematical.

In our discussions with the Congregation it seemed rather clear that proponents of a strict interpretation of the doctrine should be given the same latitude for teaching and discussion as those who would hold more liberal views.

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Summarily, Mother Teresa and her community do a great deal more than keep the memory of Father Feeney. They now actively proclaim his teachings as they did before the regularization.

I do hope this information helps to clarify the status of these Sisters and their apostolate.

St. Benedict Abbey, in Still River, which was the first group to be “regularized,” on the implicit understanding that they would not preach the doctrine, nevertheless carries the three definitions on their website<sup>1</sup>, explaining that “These days, while the document “Dominus Jesus” is a prominent issue, we at the Abbey look to the solemn definitions which the Catholic world has so frequently tried to explain, especially for the past fifty years.”

Br. Thomas Augustine’s group, who are very staunch in upholding the “strict interpretation” of the dogma<sup>2</sup>, were nevertheless “regularized” by the diocese in 2003, under the same understanding as St. Ann’s House. Significantly, both Br. Thomas Augustine’s St. Benedict Center and St. Ann’s House serve as the recognized indult Mass centers for the diocese of Worcester.

It would seem obvious that the CDF do not give the 1949 letter the same importance that innumerable other commentators do (including Fr. Karl Rahner, who included it in his edition of *Denzinger*; since it had not existed in Latin up to that point, and did not make it into the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* while its author was alive, Fr. Rahner was forced to translate it from English into Latin). Perhaps their superior knowledge of its actual canonical status might explain why the CDF has not demanded that the “regularized” Feeneyites “accept” it, and why nothing more was asked of Fr. Feeney in his “reconciliation”

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abbey.org/abbey-1.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.saintbenedict.com/Articles/get\\_articles.php?item=1](http://www.saintbenedict.com/Articles/get_articles.php?item=1)

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than that he recite the Athanasian Creed - which famously states the doctrine Father allowed his career to be ruined over.

The Sisters of St. Ann's House have recently published a new book, primarily of Father's lectures, entitled *Not Made For This World*. The last section is made up of anecdotes about him, the final one of which is as follows:

"The Brothers used to take Father for drives as he got older. One day, shortly before his death [i.e., 1978, six years after the "reconciliation"], they took him to the Trappist Abbey at Spencer, where the monks invited them into the cloister for lunch. Father was quiet as lunch progressed. Then he stood up, rapped his glass for attention, said, 'There is no salvation outside the Catholic Church,' and sat down." Obviously, he held to his guns.

I must admit, that between Vatican II, and *Dominus Jesus*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a great deal of confusion exists on the point; but these are all less solemn teachings than the three ex cathedra definitions that Feeneyites quote ad infinitum:

There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved.

(Pope Innocent III, Fourth Lateran Council, 1215 A.D. )

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 Papal Bull "Unam Sanctum", 1302 A.D.)

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 schismatic's, can have a share in life eternal; but that they will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before death they are joined with Her, and

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that so important is the unity of this ecclesiastical body that only those remaining within this unity can profit by the sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, their almsgiving, their other works of Christian piety and the duties of a Christian soldier. No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, not even if he pour out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remain within the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church.

(Pope Eugene IV, the Papal Bull "Cantate Domino", 1441 A.D.)

Now these seem about as explicit and as solemn as one can get. Had it not been for the Holy Office letter and a few generally mistranslated statements of Bl. Pius IX (in any case contradicted more or less explicitly by his Syllabus of Errors), then there really could be no question. But these more recent and less solemn documents do indeed contradict the older and more solemn ones. What is a Catholic to make of this?

A good parallel, I think, can be found in the history of the dispute over the Immaculate Conception. This has been well summarized by Fr. Alban Butler, in his *Lives of the Saints*, long before the definition of 1854 settled the issue:

The question concerning the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary had been agitated with great warmth in the university of Paris, when both the University and the bishop, in 1387, condemned certain propositions of John de Montesano, a Dominican, in which this privilege was denied. The Council of Basle, in 1439 (Sess. 36), declared the belief of her Immaculate Conception to be conformable to the doctrine and devotion of the church, to the Catholic faith, right reason, and the holy scriptures, and to be held by all Catholics. But this council was at that time a schismatical assembly, nor could its decree be of force. It was, nevertheless, received by a provincial council held at Avignon in 1457, and by the

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university of Paris. When some gave scandal by warmly contesting the Immaculate Conception, this famous university passed a decree in 1497, in which it was enacted, that no one should be admitted in it to the degree of doctor of divinity who did not bind himself by oath to defend this point. (See Spondan, *Contin. Baron. Ad an. 1497*; Bulaeus, *Hist. Universit. Paris*, t. 5, p. 815; Fleury, *cont. t. 24*, p. 336; Frassen, t. 8, p. 227). The council of Trent declared, in the decree concerning original sin, that it was not its intention to include in it the Immaculate Virgin, the Mother of God, and ordered the decree of Sixtus IV, relating to this point, to be observed. That pope, in 1476, granted certain indulgences to those who assisted at the office and mass on the feast of her Conception; and, in 1483, by another constitution, forbade anyone to censure this festival, or to condemn the opinion which asserted the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception. St. Pius V, by his bull in 1570, forbade either the opinion which affirmed, or that which denied it, to be censured. Paul V, in 1616, reiterated the same prohibition, and, in 1617, forbade anyone to affirm in sermons, theses, or other like public acts, that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin. Gregory XV, in 1622, forbade anyone to affirm this, even in private disputations, except those to whom the holy see gives a special license to do it, which he granted to the Dominicans, provided they do it privately, and only among themselves [emphasis added]; but he ordered that, in the office or mass of this festival, no other title than simply that of the Conception should be used. Alexander VII, in 1671, declared that the devotion of honoring the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is pious; yet prohibits censuring those who do not believe her Conception immaculate. Philip III of Spain, demanded of Paul V, and Philip IV, of Gregory XV, a definition of this question, but could obtain nothing more than the foregoing bulls. (See Luke Wadding, the learned Irish Franciscan, who lived some time in Spain, and died at Rome in 1655, *De Legatione Philippi III et Philippi IV ad Paulum V et Greg. XV, pro definienda Controversia de Conceptione*

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Virginis). In the latest edition of the Roman Index, a certain little office of the Immaculate Conception is condemned; but this censure is not to be extended to other such little offices. In the prayers themselves it is called the Conception of the Immaculate Virgin, which phrase is ambiguous, and may be understood to imply only that she was spotless from all actual sin, and was cleansed from original sin before she was born, in which all Catholics agree. Benedict XIII granted to the subjects of Austria, and the empire a weekly office of the Immaculate Conception on every Saturday; but the epithet Immaculate Conception occurs not in any of the prayers, but only in the title of the office. This prudent reserve of the church in her public prayers is a caution to her children, whilst they maintain this pious sentiment, not to exceed the bounds which she has prescribed them [emphasis mine]; though certain devotions are used in many parts, in which the Conception is called immaculate in the prayers themselves. It is the mystery of the Immaculation, or Sanctification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is the object of the devotion of the church on this festival, rather than her bare Conception...

(Butler, *op. cit.* vol. IV p. 493)

Of course, as we know now, Fr. Butler's final explanation of the feast was erroneous; but he had plenty of reason to be wrong. St. Thomas Aquinas had denied the Immaculate Conception in the *Summa*, and had not the Fathers of Trent had the *Summa* placed upon the altar during their deliberations? (Of course, since 1854, all imprimatured editions of the *Summa* without correctives on this point have carried defective approbations). The note of caution Fr. Butler sounds in the penultimate sentence may well have been directed toward such of his contemporaries as Charles III of Spain, who ordered all his civil servants to swear an oath to defend the Immaculate Conception to the death (His Most Catholic Majesty's contradictory nature may be evoked by reflecting both upon his financing of Bl. Junipero Serra in California, and his expulsion

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of the Jesuits from the Spanish domains). Against St. Thomas, there were simply the University of Paris, the schismatic Council of Basle, and the Lullists and Scotists. While not wanting to endorse Basle, I think that the much put-upon University and the Franciscan philosophers, so often slandered on this very point from the 13th to 19th centuries, deserve an enormous apology.

We are, of course, in a Pontificate as much concerned with theological change (as were the immediately preceding ones) as with clarity (this a welcome alteration). As a result, Benedict XVI has apparently set about resolving contradictions. Thus, in his Christmas message to the Curia he boldly addressed the differences between the documents of Vatican II and the Syllabus of Errors. His resolution of the issue is to declare that no solemn or infallible truths are covered by either set of decrees, but are both contingent upon real-world conditions. If he is correct, then that means that the former may be as vigorously questioned as the latter has been so completely forgotten. His Holiness opened up an enquiry into Limbo, which many confidently predicted would lead to this teaching being set aside (such as Fr. Richard McBrien happily point out that this will doom Original Sin). In the event, the document produced by the International Theological Commission was forgotten as soon as it came out.

Why? Because the men who produced the document, although wanting to allow Limbo to be set aside, were honest scholars and historians. The first half of the piece accurately describes the development of doctrine on Limbo, and shows that it was indeed, indisputably, the common teaching of the Church until, in the words of the document, "In the 20th century, however, theologians sought the right to imagine new solutions, including the possibility that Christ's full salvation reaches these infants." The rest of the document attempts to justify these imaginings - and, if one is candid and a believer in immutable

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truth, falls exceedingly flat. It is no surprise that it was forgotten by those who had trumpeted it as soon as it was released and read.

Fr. Feeney was, in reality, a peripheral member of the *Ressourcement*, the theological movement among many Jesuits and Dominicans in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to return for inspiration to the Church Fathers and the Doctors of the Church other than St. Thomas Aquinas. What these diverse *Ressourceurs* had in common was the view that for many Catholics the Faith had become an intellectual or cultural abstraction, rather than something to redeem and transform their lives. The solution to this problem, they believed, lay in a return to the sources - and this solution was often invoked at Vatican II. The problem, of course, was that such a return negates many of the comfortable compromises that have allowed Catholics to live in a society that has more or less despised them for several centuries. Many of Fr. Feeney's colleagues found a way out of this by relativizing the Fathers, Doctors, and Solemn teachings of Popes and Councils in such a way as to make them palatable to modern sensibilities (including their own). Fr. Feeney chose to take them at face value - in the way which their authors intended them to be taken. He suffered the consequences of such a stand.

I do not believe, humanly speaking, that an authoritative definition on *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* reaffirming the three cited definitions is likely to happen anytime soon. Rather, I believe that, as with the Immaculate Conception, they will be affirmed whenever the Holy Ghost decides. As has been pointed out to me, the "Feeney/SBC position" "was essentially that assumed to be true by millions of Catholics for many centuries." Indeed it was. And what Catholics they were: the Fathers, the Doctors, and all the great Missionaries like St. Francis Xavier, to say nothing of those three annoying definitions.

Against all that, I am supposed to side with the more "advanced" theologians of the 19th and early 20th centuries,

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almost all those of the past five decades, and a handful of less solemn documents, whose place in the Magisterium is at least questionable. Those who held the “Feeney/SBC” position built up the Church; those who opposed it have produced what we have. If I am to take Our Lord at face value, then by their fruits, at least, I will know them. It is the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost with His Church, despite all that we churchmen do to frustrate the truth, that has thus far prevented the Magisterium from solemnly defining against the doctrine EENS, even as it prevented it from endorsing the Thomistic denial of the Immaculate Conception.

And so, all “proponents of a strict interpretation of the doctrine,” must, in keeping with the CDF’s advice to the Diocese of Worcester “be given the same latitude for teaching and discussion as those who would hold more liberal views.” Rome has spoken, to be sure; but the case is not yet closed. In any case, I would hope that the ideas in this book will be debated, rather than the author attacked for thinking them - in a word, that the need for pseudonyms has passed. After all, if, in a debate, one of the parties sinks down to the *ad hominem*, he declares that he has lost the argument.

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Our Lady of Ransom

