

## CHAPTER 12

### BAPTISM

#### *Summary*

- I. The solemn teaching of the Church.
- II. Baptism defined. How it is conferred. Its Minister and its Subject. Its Ceremonies. The office of sponsor. Christian name.
- III. Its effects: grace and the Sacramental Character. The “revival” of Baptism. Invalid baptism.
- IV. It is absolutely necessary for salvation either in fact or in desire. The Baptism of the Holy Ghost, or Baptism of Desire. The Baptism of Blood.
- V. Baptism directly instituted by Christ.
- VI. Solution of difficulties.

#### I

**The solemn teaching of the Church.** The Church teaches solemnly that:

- (1) Baptism is a Sacrament.<sup>1</sup>
- (2) It imprints a Character, or indelible mark, on the soul and cannot be repeated.<sup>2</sup>
- (3) Water is necessary for its administration.<sup>3</sup>
- (4) Baptism removes all stain of Original Sin and all stain of Actual Sin, together with the punishment due to it.<sup>4</sup>
- (5) Concupiscence or an inclination to sin, however, remains after Baptism.<sup>5</sup>
- (6) Baptism is necessary for salvation.<sup>6</sup>
- (7) It can be validly received by infants.<sup>7</sup>
- (8) Children when they grow up are not free to reject the Baptismal promises made for them by their sponsors.<sup>8</sup>

#### II

**Baptism defined, how it is conferred; its ceremonies. The minister of Baptism and its subject. Sponsors. Christian name.**

DEFINITION. Baptism (sometimes called “christening”) is the Sacrament which makes us Christians and children of God.

HOW IT IS CONFERRED. Baptism is given by pouring water on the head of the person to be baptised while reciting the words: “I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The words used in the Eastern Catholic liturgies are: “The servant of God is baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> The Sacrament may also be conferred by a threefold immersion of the body, or at least of the head, as was the common practice in the Church down to the twelfth century, or by sprinkling with water (aspersion). The last method, however, was very rarely used, and is not recommended.

SOLEMN AND PRIVATE BAPTISM. Solemn Baptism is Baptism accompanied by all the ceremonies prescribed by the Church. Private Baptism consists of the bare essentials, namely, the pouring of water and the recital of the proper words. Solemn Baptism is given in a church. Private Baptism, which is given in an emergency or in the absence of a Catholic minister, may be given anywhere. (After a Private Baptism, if the opportunity arises, the other ceremonies are “supplied” by a Catholic minister in a church. The Baptism itself, of course, is not repeated).

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<sup>1</sup> Trent: DS 1601

<sup>2</sup> Trent: DS 1609

<sup>3</sup> Trent: DS 1615

<sup>4</sup> Trent: DS 1513, 1515

<sup>5</sup> Trent: DS 1515

<sup>6</sup> Trent: DS 1618

<sup>7</sup> Trent: DS 1514, 1626

<sup>8</sup> Trent: DS 1627

<sup>9</sup> CCC 1240

THE CEREMONIES. At an infant Baptism in the Latin Rite, after the preliminary rites, the prayer of exorcism is said over the infant, who is then anointed on the breast with the Oil of Catechumens.<sup>10</sup> The baptismal water is blessed, if not already. The parents and godparents renounce Satan and sin, and profess the faith, on behalf of the child. After the Baptism itself, the child is anointed on the crown of the head with sacred Chrism,<sup>11</sup> clothed with a white garment as a sign of having “put on Christ”,<sup>12</sup> and its parents and sponsors are presented with a candle lit from the Easter candle. The ‘ephphetha’ prayer is said over the baby’s ears and mouth, and the mother and father are blessed by the ordained minister.

THE MINISTER OF BAPTISM. The ordinary minister of Baptism is a priest or deacon.

Private Baptism may be lawfully conferred in case of necessity by any person—man, woman, or child. Since whoever baptises must have the intention of doing what the Church does, it follows that he or she must possess the use of reason. It is preferable to have a Catholic perform the baptism, but anyone of any or no religion can do so validly.<sup>13</sup> The case of necessity arises: (a) when there is immediate danger of death; or (b) when, in the absence of a minister, Solemn Baptism cannot be given without difficulty or long delay.

The minister of Baptism has the duty of ensuring that the details of the Baptism are recorded in the parish register. When a layman gives Baptism, he should endeavour to secure, if possible, the presence of two witnesses and should draw up a baptismal certificate to which he and they should affix their signatures, and should send it without delay to the priest in charge of the district or to the Bishop. The certificate could be worded: “On ... (*give full date*), at ... (*name the place*), I baptised ... (*full name of child*), the son/daughter of (*give parents’ names; if unknown, say so*) by pouring water on its head, saying at the same time: ‘I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’ Signed: (*name and address of baptizer*). Witnesses: (*their signatures and addresses*)”.

THE SUBJECT OF BAPTISM. The subject of Baptism is anyone who has not yet received it.

BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. Jesus instructs His Apostles, “baptise ... in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>14</sup> We read in Acts 2:38, 10:48, of Baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ”. This does not mean that the Apostles said: “I baptise you in the name of Jesus Christ.” The phrase, “in the name of Christ”, was a *term* for Baptism, distinguishing the Baptism instituted by Christ from that of John the Baptist.

THE OFFICE OF SPONSOR. The Church requires that, if possible, at least one sponsor or godparent be present at Solemn Baptism; also, at Private Baptism, if a suitable person can be easily found. The Church permits the presence of two godparents, one male and one female, but no more than two. It is part of the sponsors’ office to make a profession of faith in the recipient’s name during the ceremony. Their obligations do not end at the baptismal font; they are strictly bound to watch over the subsequent career of their spiritual child, to see that he is instructed in all the duties of the Christian life and fulfil the promises which were made of him at Baptism. This duty, however, binds only when the parents or guardians neglect to discharge it. To undertake the office of sponsor, one must be: (1) appointed by the parents or guardians, or, if necessary, by the parish priest or minister of Baptism, and intending to assume the obligations in question; (2) at least sixteen, unless the priest or minister admits an exception; (3) a Catholic who has received Confirmation and Communion and lives a suitable life of faith; (4) not labouring under an ecclesiastical penalty; (5) not a parent of the child.<sup>15</sup> - A non-Catholic cannot be a godparent, but may act as co-witness.

CHRISTIAN NAME. At least one of the names given should be that of a Saint. A patron Saint provides a model of charity for the Christian and assures the benefits of that Saint’s prayer from Heaven.<sup>16</sup> Names taken from the entertainment world are totally unsuitable for a child who is to be taken from the world to become one of the “sons of light”.

### III

**The effects of Baptism: Sanctifying Grace, the virtues and gifts, remission of all sin & punishment, Sacramental Grace, the Sacramental Character. The “revival” of Baptism. Invalid baptisms.**

The effects of Baptism may be summarised under the following headings:

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<sup>10</sup> For “Oil of Catechumens”, see p.\*\*.

<sup>11</sup> For “Chrism”, see p.\*\*.

<sup>12</sup> Gal 3:27

<sup>13</sup> DS 1315

<sup>14</sup> Matt 28:19

<sup>15</sup> Can. 872-4

<sup>16</sup> Cf. CCC 2156, 2165.

SANCTIFYING GRACE. Through Baptism we are given a new birth: by our natural birth, we are children of our parents, by our spiritual or supernatural birth in Baptism, we become children of God and heirs to His Kingdom. This is effected by *Sanctifying Grace*.

THE VIRTUES AND GIFTS. Accompanying Sanctifying Grace are the *theological virtues* of Faith, Hope and Charity,<sup>17</sup> by which we believe in God, hope in Him and love Him. The *moral virtues*, also given, enable us to grow in goodness, especially by the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. At the same time we are given the power to live and act under the divine prompting through the *gifts of the Holy Spirit*.<sup>18</sup>

REMISSION OF ALL SIN AND PUNISHMENT. Sanctifying Grace, infused into our soul at Baptism, removes every trace of sin, *original and actual*, and extinguishes any debt of *temporal punishment* which we may have incurred through actual sin committed before Baptism.

SACRAMENTAL GRACE. Along with Sanctifying Grace we receive *Sacramental Grace*, the orientation to live as an adopted child of God. This Grace gives also the right to a series of actual graces which, if properly used, will enable us to live the new life of Brotherhood with Christ, of membership in His Mystical Body, by faithfully following in His footsteps and obeying all His commands.

THE SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER AND INCORPORATION INTO THE CHURCH. A Sacramental Character is some permanent change made in the soul, specially fitting it for spiritual work. Since Baptism imprints a Character, it cannot be repeated: as we can be born but once of our natural parents, so we can be born but once into the Church of God. By the Baptismal Character: (1) we are made members of the body whose head is Christ, i.e., we become citizens and subjects of the Church, and sharers in the priestly, prophetic and royal mission of Jesus Christ;<sup>19</sup> (2) we become capable of receiving the other Sacraments; we become capable of joining with the priest in the Church's great act of public worship, namely, the Sacrifice of Mass; and we become capable of participating in all the special blessings bestowed by Christ on the Church on our behalf. Baptism is, as it were, a compact between God and man: God gives spiritual life and promises all the means necessary to preserve and increase it; man, on his side, renounces sin, and undertakes to lead a good Christian life as a faithful member of the Church. It is the solemn teaching of the Church that the Character is indelible, which means that it is permanent at least for this life; the teaching that it is permanent also for the life to come, though not defined, is regarded as certain.

Note. *Unbaptised* would-be converts, though they may possess faith, hope, and charity, cannot *co-offer*, in the strict sense, the sacrifice of the Mass.<sup>20</sup> Their acts of adoration, however pleasing they may be to God, are not accepted, as ours are, by the Divine Victim on the altar, who gives them a higher value, and so presents them to the Eternal Father.

“REVIVAL” OF BAPTISM. Baptism validly, but unfruitfully, received, can “revive”, i.e., can produce the grace proper to it, as soon as the recipient has the required dispositions. This “revival” or recovery is made possible by reason of the Baptismal Character which remains in the soul. It is effected sometimes with the aid of the Sacrament of Penance, sometimes without it, as will be understood from the following cases: (1) A man about to be baptised forgets that he has committed a grave sin of which he has never repented, and fails to make an act of attrition; it is only after Baptism that he perceives the omission. Such a person, by an act of attrition, can remove the obstacle to the operation of the Sacrament, and so receive all its graces. (2) If a man knowingly and wilfully receives the Sacrament of Baptism without attrition for grave sin, he commits the heinous crime of sacrilege. His assent to that crime must necessarily continue for some moments after the reception of the Sacrament: the Baptism is valid and cannot be repeated, but he must go to Confession and be absolved of this sin of sacrilege. The Sacrament of Penance forgives the sin committed after Baptism but not before it. Simultaneously with that forgiveness, his Baptism produces its full effect, namely, the remission of all sins committed before Baptism. The principle underlying this reasoning is that the Divine Mercy could not permanently exclude the repentant sinner from the graces of the Sacrament. Note that the word “revival” is given inverted commas to indicate a certain want of aptness. Strictly taken, it implies that the Sacrament is restored to life, as though at some time previously it had been “alive”, when it was not. A better term would be “vitalisation” or “vivification.”

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 13:13.

<sup>18</sup> CCC 1266. See p.\*\*\*.

<sup>19</sup> Can. 204

<sup>20</sup> See p.\*\*\*.

INVALID BAPTISM. An invalid baptism is a ceremony devoid of the effects listed above. Some fringe Protestant groups and modern sects have invalid baptism, either because they do not baptise at all, or because they have changed the Trinitarian formula. Among them are Quakers, Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Salvation Army, Christian Scientists, Christadelphians, Pentecostals, and the New Church (of Emmanuel Swedenborg).<sup>21</sup> The Church has also declared Mormon baptism invalid.<sup>22</sup>

CONDITIONAL BAPTISM. If a person has a reasonable doubt about the validity of his baptism, he may be baptised by a priest conditionally, thus: "If you have not been baptised, I baptise you in the name of... etc."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, if there is a doubt whether death has taken place, a person who had been willing to be baptised may be baptised with water thus: "If you are alive, I baptise you... etc." When death is certain, no sacrament may be administered; sacraments are for the living.

#### IV

### **The necessity of Baptism for salvation. The Baptism of infants. Timing. The substitutes for Baptism.**

THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM FOR SALVATION. By "salvation" we mean, as has already been explained, the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision. The Church teaches that Baptism is necessary for the salvation of both adults and infants. Its necessity for adults is defined by the Council of Trent, which says, "If any one says that Baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema."<sup>24</sup> (The word "optional", *liberum*, indicates that the Council speaks here only of an adult, of one who is capable of making a free choice).

The necessity of Baptism for infants follows: (1) from the condemnation of the Pelagians<sup>25</sup> who held that infants were saved without Baptism; (2) from the ancient rule of the Church that all, infants as well as adults, should be immediately baptised when there was danger of death; and (3) from the comprehensive words of Christ, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (Jn 3:5). Baptism makes us members of Christ, members of His Mystical Body. It is only those thus united to Him who can be saved.<sup>26</sup>

THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS. "The practice of infant Baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church."<sup>27</sup> Some Protestant groups have abandoned the practice and even condemned it as un-Biblical. However, three passages of the Acts of the Apostles speak of the Baptism of a whole household or family,<sup>28</sup> and there is explicit testimony to the practice from the second century on.<sup>29</sup> As circumcision of the infant Jews signified entry into the Old Covenant, so its fulfilment, Baptism, introduces infants into the New Covenant.<sup>30</sup>

TIMING. Because of the absolute necessity of Baptism, the Church has made a law requiring that all infants should be baptised "within the first weeks".<sup>31</sup> Her command imposes a grave obligation on parents and guardians. To delay Baptism beyond the first few weeks is sinful. Absence of relatives or the desire for a particular priest is *no excuse* for delay. If there is danger of death, the child should be baptised immediately; this is a case of necessity in which anyone may lawfully administer the Sacrament.

THE SUBSTITUTES FOR BAPTISM. The words of Christ Himself show us that He accepts the Baptism of Desire and the Baptism of Blood as substitutes for the Sacramental Baptism of water.

*The Baptism of the Holy Ghost (Baptism of Desire).* By Baptism of the Holy Ghost we mean an act of perfect contrition or perfect charity made by an adult who has not received Sacramental Baptism. It is termed Baptism by analogy, or comparison, because it resembles the Sacrament in producing Sanctifying Grace in the soul and in blotting out Original Sin and grave actual sin. It is called Baptism of the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. J.M. Huels OSM, *The Pastoral Companion*, Franciscan Press, Illinois, 1995, p.342.

<sup>22</sup> Cong. for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002

<sup>23</sup> Can. 869

<sup>24</sup> DS 1618

<sup>25</sup> See p.\*\*.

<sup>26</sup> See p.\*\*\*.

<sup>27</sup> CCC 1252

<sup>28</sup> Acts 16:15; 16:33; 18:8. Cf. 1 Cor 1:16.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. CCC 1252.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Col 2:11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Can. 867

causes grace in the soul directly and not through the medium of any sacramental rite. It is also spoken of as Baptism of Desire, i.e., desire of the Sacrament of Baptism.

It is Catholic doctrine that it has this power, as is proved from the words of Christ: “he who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him”;<sup>32</sup> of Mary Magdalen He said, “her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much”, and turning to her He added, “Your sins are forgiven you”;<sup>33</sup> to the penitent thief who had expressed sorrow for his crimes, resignation in his sufferings, and belief that Christ after death would reign as a King, He addressed the words, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”<sup>34</sup> Baptism of Desire does not imprint the Sacramental Character; therefore, it does not make one a member of the visible Church (nor does it necessarily remit all the temporal punishment due to sin). Hence, the obligation remains of receiving the Sacrament at the earliest opportunity.

*The Baptism of Blood.* Baptism of Blood is martyrdom suffered by one who has not been baptised. (1) Martyrdom, whether of baptised or unbaptised persons, is the endurance of death or deadly suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ. There are, therefore, two requisites: (a) the martyr must be put to death or endure sufferings that lead to death; (b) the persecutor must inflict death or deadly violence through opposition to the Church, the Catholic Faith, or a Christian Virtue. (A Christian killed for refusing to commit a sin against the virtue of chastity is a martyr; so, too, a Christian who suffers death rather than commit the sin of perjury or apostasy). In the case of adults, it is furthermore required: (c) that they endure death or deadly violence from a supernatural motive and do not try to save their lives by resistance; (d) that they have made acts of Faith and Hope, and that they have at least attrition for grave sin committed. Hence a person with these dispositions, if, while unconscious, he is slain from hatred of Catholicism, is a martyr: his attrition, by which he detests sin “above every other evil”, carries with it the implicit intention to suffer death rather than offend God by denying the faith.

Note. Christ was slain by the enemies of truth, the enemies of God, and offered no resistance. The martyr’s death is like the death of Christ; hence its great fruitfulness for the soul. Resistance, so far as it spoils the likeness to our Saviour’s Passion, is inconsistent with martyrdom; that likeness is not, of course, spoiled in the case of one who resists an unchaste assailant solely for the purpose of escaping sin and defilement. Soldiers who fall on the battle-field, fighting for God or virtue, may be martyrs, but since, in their case, it would be difficult to establish that there is no admixture of any merely human motive, such as self-protection or the desire of distinction, the Church follows the rule that those who die as combatants must not be honoured as martyrs.

It is Catholic doctrine that the Baptism of Blood blots out Original Sin, and all actual sin together with the punishment due to it. This is evident: (a) *from the words of Christ*: He has absolutely promised salvation to those who give their lives for the Gospel: “he who loses his life for My sake will find it”;<sup>35</sup> and again He says, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven”;<sup>36</sup> (b) *from the Tradition of the Church*: the Church honours as martyrs in heaven several who were never baptised, e.g., the Holy Innocents massacred by Herod; St Emerentiana (c. 304); one of the twenty-two Ugandan martyrs, the catechumen St Mukasa Kiriwawanvu (1886); and some others. St Augustine says, “it would be an affront to pray for a martyr: we should rather commend ourselves to his prayers.”<sup>37</sup>

Martyrdom does not imprint the Sacramental Character. Hence, an unbaptised martyr could not receive Holy Communion or any other sacrament in his last moments without first receiving Sacramental Baptism.

Notes. The title “Baptism of Blood” reminds us of the words of Christ when He spoke of the outpouring of His Blood as a “baptism” (Lk 12:50); but though He was condemned to death by Caiaphas on a charge of blasphemy, His death should not be described as a “martyrdom”, but rather as a “sacrifice” (See p.\*\*\*).

Since the substitutes for Baptism are rightly held to imply a desire of its reception, the doctrine of the Church on the necessity of the Sacrament can be expressed in a form that excludes all exceptions, namely, *the Sacrament of Baptism received in fact or in desire is absolutely necessary for salvation.*

THE FATE OF INFANTS WHO DIE WITHOUT BAPTISM. It has been the common teaching of theologians that infants who die without Baptism cannot be admitted to the beatific vision of Heaven, since they have not been cleansed of Original Sin; nor suffer the pains of Hell, since they are free of personal sin. After death they must, therefore, enter a state of natural, but not supernatural happiness, known as Limbo. This doctrine is taught by St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. (“Limbo” in common parlance means, “no man’s land; a state of uncertainty”. That is not the meaning here). Aquinas explains that exclusion from Heaven does not necessarily mean a state of suffering, but in this case includes the enjoyment of natural goods.<sup>38</sup> Nor is there any injustice, since man does not have a *right* to the beatific vision; it is not *due* to his nature as such. The Council of Carthage in 418

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<sup>32</sup> Jn 14:21

<sup>33</sup> Lk 7:47,48

<sup>34</sup> Lk 23:39-43

<sup>35</sup> Matt 10:39

<sup>36</sup> Matt 10:32

<sup>37</sup> *Sermon*, 159, 1

<sup>38</sup> *De malo* (On Evil) q. 5, a. 3; *Commentary on the Sentences*, II, d. 33, q. 2, aa. 1, 2

condemned the Pelagians for denying the need for infants to be baptised for the remission of sin.<sup>39</sup> The Council of Trent repeated this condemnation.<sup>40</sup> The Second Council of Lyons and the Council of Florence (both General Councils) presumed this teaching on Limbo to be true when they defined that the penalty of those who die “in Original Sin only” is different from those who die in personal mortal sin.<sup>41</sup> If no-one dies in Original Sin only, then these dogmatic definitions are worthless. The Council of Florence declared against the postponement of the Baptism of infants, “since it is not possible for them to be saved by any other remedy than the sacrament of Baptism”.<sup>42</sup> The *Roman Catechism* teaches that it is sinful to delay Baptism unnecessarily, “since infant children have no other means of salvation except Baptism”.<sup>43</sup> Pope Pius VI adopted this common teaching on Limbo against the Jansenist synod of Pistoia.<sup>44</sup> Pope Pius XII insisted that the gratuity of the supernatural order means that God can have created rational beings without necessarily ordaining them to the beatific vision.<sup>45</sup> The same Pope said, “Under the present economy there is no other way of giving this [supernatural] life to the child who is still without the use of reason. ...In the case of a grown-up person, an act of love may suffice for obtaining sanctifying grace and making up for the lack of Baptism. To the child still unborn or the child just born this path is not open.”<sup>46</sup> The *Instruction on Infant Baptism* says, “The Church has thus shown by her teaching and practice that she knows no other way apart from Baptism for ensuring children’s entry into eternal happiness.”<sup>47</sup> Various theories about how infants may receive grace without Baptism have been put forward. There is no need to list them here. (One theory is that they receive an enlightenment before or upon death, enabling them to make a choice. This theory is totally inadmissible, since it means they could be saved *or damned*). *However, none of these theories may be taught as a certainty, and no-one may refuse or delay Baptism on the grounds of any such theory.*

The *Roman Missal* cautions the celebrant at the funeral of an unbaptised baby: “In catechesis, care must be taken that the doctrine about the necessity of Baptism not be obscured in the minds of the faithful.”<sup>48</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says only that we are permitted to *hope* that there be a way of salvation for such infants; it gives no assurances.<sup>49</sup> The *Code of Canon Law* presumes the necessity of Baptism for a dying infant, when it lays down, “In danger of death, an infant of Catholic or even non-Catholic parents is lawfully baptised, even against the parents’ will.”<sup>50</sup>

*The happiness of Limbo.* In that state, they are as fully happy on the natural level as human nature can be, a state akin to the happiness of Adam and Eve in Paradise. The souls in Limbo are not in an infantile state; they are fully mature, and immortal, as their bodies will be at the General Resurrection.<sup>51</sup>

## V

**The Sacrament of Baptism was instituted by Christ.** PROOF FROM THE SOLEMN TEACHING OF THE CHURCH. The Church in the exercise of her infallible authority declares the institution of the Sacrament of Baptism by Christ to be a doctrine given to her by God Himself. This proof alone suffices for Catholics; the proof from Sacred Scripture is added to give fuller instruction.

PROOF FROM SACRED SCRIPTURE. The Scriptures show that Christ himself personally instituted the Sacrament of Baptism. He said to Nicodemus, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>52</sup> and to the Apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). These texts show that Christ definitely proclaimed the necessity of Baptism, and showed precisely how the rite was to be administered: Christ, therefore, is the institutor of this Sacrament in all its essential details. That the Apostles understood their Master to speak, not of a figurative baptism, but of a true washing with water, is clearly conveyed in Sacred Scripture: we read in Acts how Philip, having converted the treasurer of queen Candace of Ethiopia, went down with him into some water by the wayside and baptised him;<sup>53</sup> and how Peter, seeing the wonders wrought on Cornelius and his household, the first Gentile (= non-Jewish) converts, exclaimed, “Can any one forbid water for baptising these people?”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>39</sup> DS 223, 224. Cf. 903-4, 1349.

<sup>40</sup> DS 1514. Cf. 1524.

<sup>41</sup> DS 858, 1306. The same doctrine is upheld in DS 184, 219, 780, 926.

<sup>42</sup> DS 1349

<sup>43</sup> *Roman Catechism*, Part II, “Baptism”. On the *Roman Catechism*, see p.\*\*\*, f.\*\*\*.

<sup>44</sup> DS 2626

<sup>45</sup> *Humani Generis*, 1950: DS 3891

<sup>46</sup> Discourse of 29 Oct. 1951. Cf. St Augustine, *De Anima*, III, 9; St Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 67, a. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Pastoralis Actio*, art. 13, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1980

<sup>48</sup> *Missale Romanum*, 1975, p.913

<sup>49</sup> CCC 1261

<sup>50</sup> Can. 868 §2; Cf. Eastern canons (CCEO) 681 §4.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. St Augustine, *Enchiridion* (Manual of Faith, Hope and Charity) ch. 85.

<sup>52</sup> Jn 3:5

<sup>53</sup> Acts 8:26-39

<sup>54</sup> Acts 10:47

## VI

**Solution of objections and difficulties.** (1) “The Catholic method of Baptism by pouring water is un-Biblical, since in the New Testament and in the early Church, Baptism was performed by total immersion in water.” (A common objection by Fundamentalists and Evangelicals). REPLY: (a) For Catholics, the power of the Catholic Church to determine what does and does not constitute Baptism, removes the force of this objection entirely. The Catholic Church teaches that Baptism by infusion (pouring) fulfils the command of Christ as fully as any other recognised method. (b) It is not true that Baptism by full immersion into the water was the only method originally used. St Paul baptised at very short notice a jailer and his family after midnight (Acts 16:33); it is not reasonable to suppose that there was always a man-size tub and loads of water, or a deep river nearby, in which to be baptised. The *Didache* of the 2nd century mentions use of running water, but if not, “then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son, etc.” (Ch. 7). St Cyprian (d. 258) recognises Baptism by infusion for the sick.<sup>55</sup> It is not true that full immersion remained common even in the early Church: of the dozen or more 3rd and 4th century baptisteries excavated in Greece, only two have fonts a metre or so deep, and most are under 50cm, i.e., knee-deep *if full*. The same pattern is true of baptisteries found in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and N. Africa.<sup>56</sup> A fresco from the first half of the 3rd century in the Catacombs of St Callistus, Rome, shows a baptism being performed in water a few inches deep. From all these it is clear that an adult candidate stood in a shallow pool, and some water was gathered from it and poured over his head.

(2) “At our Baptism, our sponsors promised that we would lead Christian lives. How can we be bound by a promise given without our knowledge and consent?” REPLY: The obligation to lead a Christian life is not imposed on us by our sponsors’ promises, but by the Sacrament itself: as we, by our physical birth and without our consent, are made members of a family and a nation, so, by our spiritual birth and without our consent, we are made members of the household of God. As we are bound to love and obey our parents and are entitled to receive from them corporal nurture, so we are bound to obey the Church, and are entitled to our share of the blessings Christ has given her for us; and as a man by ingratitude or disobedience can never cease to be the child of his parents, even if they bar him from their house, so he can never cease to be a child of the Church, no matter how disloyal or disobedient to her he may be. She may, by excommunication, sentence him to exclusion from her sacred rites, but she cannot cancel his baptism. She cannot deny that he is still her child. She cannot and will not refuse to restore him, on due repentance and submission, to all that he has lost.

(3) “It is an injustice and a violation of personal freedom to be baptised unawares. Baptism should be proposed when a child is old enough to choose for himself.” REPLY: By the same argument, no child should be made to rise, eat, or sleep, take medicine, bathe, learn how to speak, or go to school—until he freely desires to do any of these things. Parents must necessarily make choices for their children. Good parents want to pass on to their children the best that they can offer. One could only object to infant Baptism on these grounds if Baptism and the Faith were a curse and not a blessing. Moreover, every individual, whether baptised or not, is, as a creature, already bound by indefeasible duties to God and His representatives.

(4) “Does it not seem that children who receive Protestant Baptism are bound to practise the Protestant religion?” REPLY: (a) There is no such thing as Protestant Baptism. Baptism is a sacrament instituted by Christ and entrusted to His Church, the Catholic Church. Some Protestant communities have valid Baptism (because they have retained the true way of conferring it) and their children who validly receive the Sacrament are made members of the Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup> The Church, however, from motives of prudence and charity, does not exercise jurisdiction over them, i.e., she does not use her right to command their obedience. (b) A Protestant child is bound to obey his parents and superiors, until he discovers that they are in error. If he lives according to his conscience, God in His own time will give him all the light and grace he needs for salvation.

(5) “If Baptism can never be administered without faith, what is the advantage of baptising children when they cannot possess or profess faith?” REPLY: The advantages are set out above: the remission of Original Sin, the bestowal of sanctifying grace, the pledge of salvation, etc. Baptism is no less the sacrament of faith with infants, since they are baptised in the faith of the Church, and the sacrament also confers upon them the virtue of faith, which will grow and mature as they are reared in it. In His Public Ministry, Our Lord conferred benefits upon children for the sake of their parents’ faith, e.g., He raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, He delivered a desperate man’s son from a demon.<sup>58</sup>

(6) “The Gospels do not record when the Apostles received Baptism. Were they baptised and by whom?” REPLY: At some time in His Public Ministry, Christ must have baptised His Apostles, but He did not require any

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<sup>55</sup> *Ep.* 69, 12

<sup>56</sup> Cf. J.G. Davies, *The Architectural Setting of Baptism*, Barrie and Rockliff, London 1962; S.A. Stauffer, *On Baptismal Fonts: Ancient and Modern*, Grove Books, Nottingham 1994; Bellarmino Bagatti OFM, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem 1984, p.245; Id., *The Church from the Gentiles in Palestine: History and Archaeology*, Francisc. P. Press, Jerusalem 1984, pp.301-8.

<sup>57</sup> See p.\*.

<sup>58</sup> Lk 8:41-2, 49-56; Mk 9:14-29. Cf. Lk 7:11-5.

ceremony to do so. He, the God-Man and author of Grace, needed no ritual to confer all that the rite of Baptism gives. He simply had to will it, for it to happen. The Council of Trent teaches solemnly that Christ made the Apostles priests (with the fulness of the priesthood as bishops) at the Last Supper,<sup>59</sup> but that does not mean that He necessarily imposed hands upon them one by one. The same applies for His baptism of them some time earlier. He may or may not have employed water and a formula of words. It had certainly taken place earlier, for Baptism is a requisite for the Holy Eucharist and ordination. “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but He Himself is not bound by His own sacraments.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> DS 1752

<sup>60</sup> CCC 1257; cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 64, a. 7. Cf. also Jn 3:22; 4:1-2.