

WHY ARE WE BAPTISED?

The Doctrine and Discipline of the Sacrament of Baptism.

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HOLY BAPTISM.

DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE.

“Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

It is in virtue of this commission, which is recorded at the very end of Saint Matthew’s Gospel, and seems to be the climax of the whole narrative, that the Catholic Church invites all men to membership. She is a society established by Our Lord Himself, organised for the public worship of God, and for the instruction and spiritual government of men. Those who reject her teaching and refuse to obey her do so at their peril. “He that believes and is baptised shall be saved: but he that believes not, shall be condemned.” (Mark 16:16).

1. Ceremony of initiation.

Baptism, then, can first be considered as the ceremony of initiation into the Catholic Church of Christ. Like every other organised society, the Church must have some method of enrolling its members, and of distinguishing those who are within from those who are without (see 1 Corinth 5:12). A new member of Parliament must be sponsored and sworn in, a man joining a Masonic lodge goes through an elaborate ceremonial, and a man who wishes to be a Christian must pass through the gate of baptism.

Once he is validly baptised he is a member of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, with all the duties and rights of membership, unless by misconduct he forfeits or is debarred from the exercise of these rights. But as the Church is not merely an external society, so is his membership not merely external, but should be also internal and spiritual.

2. Character of baptism.

Baptism is far more than a mere external ceremony; it is a sacrament and as such has an intimate effect upon man's soul. The first effect to be considered is the indestructible character given by baptism which marks the soul as Christian, and makes it capable of receiving the other sacraments. Many descriptions have been given of the sacramental character, and all may be useful, but none are fully adequate, for it is impossible to give in language, derived from what we hear and see, an exact picture of spiritual things. It may be helpful to describe the character as a dignity which, unlike any worldly dignity, is permanent and inalienable; and it will illustrate the character of baptism if we compare it with the character given by the sacraments of confirmation and holy order.

The priesthood, then, confers upon its recipient spiritual powers by which he shares in the office of Christ's priesthood. He consecrates in Christ's name, "This is My Body," he forgives sins as His minister. Whether the priest be worthy or not of his high dignity, this character remains. Should he be excommunicated, or abandon his faith, he retains the powers of his priesthood, even though their exercise be in all normal circumstances interdicted. Once a priest, always a priest, in time and in eternity, for he shares in Christ's eternal priesthood — "You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech." Though upon the priestly character is based the obligation of holiness, yet in itself it is independent of grace and sanctity, so that the Mass of a sinful priest, or the absolution he imparts in the sacrament of penance, is just as valid as it would be if he were a saint.

Similarly, we may speak of the character of confirmation. By it, a man is marked out as a full member of the Church, and a soldier of Christ. The earthly soldier can put off the uniform which is the sign of his profession, but the soldier of Christ retains his rank for all eternity. If he is victorious in life's spiritual combat, this character received in confirmation will for ever redound to his praise; if he is lost, to his everlasting disgrace.

The character of baptism, then, is always received when the sacrament is validly administered, even though the recipient, by lack of proper dispositions, may hinder the inflow of divine grace into his soul. He is now marked in his soul as a member of the Church of Christ, and has the power to receive further sacraments. Whether his life be in conformity or not with his Christian profession, he is for ever a Christian soul and will be judged as one. The privileges and opportunities of his baptism will be taken into account by the all-seeing and infinitely just judge.

3. Re-baptism impossible.

As the character conferred by these sacraments can never be lost, it follows that they can be given only once and never repeated. No sin, no excommunication, no apostasy, no profession of an alien faith, can ever destroy a sacramental character, and just as a priest

can never be re-ordained, so can a baptised Christian never be re-baptised. Should an attempt be made, through error or malice, to confer a second baptism upon one who has already received the sacrament, the second ceremony is purely idle and inoperative. (It is also gravely sinful if the attempt be deliberate.) A practical difficulty is that the character of baptism is purely internal and not obvious to sight or touch.

Thus, it may happen that we do not know whether this or that man has been baptised, or whether, if some ceremony has been gone through, it was performed with sufficient correctness to constitute a valid baptism. The only remedy in such cases is to confer baptism conditionally. "If you are not already baptised," says the priest, "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is obvious that such a ceremony is not a repetition of baptism. If the earlier baptism was valid, the present ceremony is ineffectual; but if no valid baptism has before been conferred, it is now at length received.

4. Valid baptism.

All that is necessary for the valid conferring of baptism is that the minister should use the matter and form of the sacrament (these will be explained later on) with essential correctness and should intend to confer a sacrament or, at least, intend to do what the Church does. On the part of the recipient it is required that he be hitherto unbaptised and that, if he has reached the use of reason, he should have some kind of real intention of receiving baptism.

5. Fruitful baptism.

But such a valid reception of the sacrament is far from fulfilling Our Divine Lord's gracious purpose in instituting it. He came into this world "for us sinners and for our salvation." He died for the remission of our sins; He ascended into heaven that He might send His Holy Spirit for our sanctification. He appointed the sacraments as means by which we might receive the grace He won for us by His passion and death. The office of baptism is not merely to mark us out as possessing the spiritual powers and obligations of Christians, but to bestow upon us that sanctifying grace which makes us children of God and heirs to the supernatural reward of the beatific vision. Thus, it is compared to a new birth: "unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). By natural birth, we are the children of Adam, by baptism we become the adopted children of God. Our descent from Adam has brought us the loss of grace and the shame that we call original sin. We are the children of one who grossly disobeyed and outraged his Creator. As baptism, being the first of the sacraments, is the normal means appointed for the first bestowal of sanctifying grace, it is said to take away original sin.

6. "Ex opere operato".

In order, however, that valid baptism may produce its appointed effect in the sanctification of the soul, it is necessary that the recipient place no obstacle to its salutary operation. However satisfactory his dispositions may be, he is not the cause of the grace he receives, yet if his dispositions be unsatisfactory, he can hinder the entry of this grace into his soul. This is because of the special mode by which the sacraments produce their effect, known technically as *ex opere operato*. ('Out of the very work itself, it works!') They are means of grace to us, not through any merit of our own, but through the merits of Christ. He appointed, for example in baptism, a certain action to be performed and a certain form of words to be uttered, and attached to that sacred rite a spiritual effect. He made it a channel of grace to the soul of man, and all its efficacy is from Him who died for us, not from man for whose sins He died.

An example may make it clear. In the morning, we take down the shutters and draw the blinds. Thereupon the bright sunlight streams into the room. What is the cause of the illumination of the room? Obviously the sun, not the taking down of the shutters which is merely the removal of an obstacle. So man's evil dispositions can hinder the entry of grace into his soul, but the effective cause of grace is Christ, the Sun of Justice.

This consideration is especially important in regard to baptism, for baptism is one of the sacraments that can be, and the only one that normally is, conferred upon infants. They cannot form acts of faith, hope, sorrow, or other good dispositions, and if such were essential, they could not receive the grace of baptism and the remission of original sin. But similarly, they are incapable of putting a deliberate hindrance to the action of the sacrament. As, therefore, the sacraments give grace by their own inherent virtue, belonging to them through their institution by Our Saviour, we know that anyone who has never enjoyed the use of reason, whatever his age, may receive the grace of baptism.

If, however, the candidate for baptism has reached the use of reason, he needs to have certain dispositions, and if he lacks them, he places an obstacle to the reception of the grace of baptism, though he may still, as explained above, receive the character.

7. Dispositions for baptism.

Amongst the dispositions necessary for adults if they are to receive the grace of baptism, faith takes the first place. It must be so, for no man can love or fear a God in whom he does not believe. Baptism is preeminently the sacrament of faith. When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip the deacon what hindered him from being baptised, he received the answer: "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And the eunuch replied: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:36-37). From the earliest times, the minister of solemn baptism has always required a profession of faith from the candidate for the sacrament or from his sponsors. From this profession of faith, as used in the Roman Church, has come the formula which we call the Apostles' Creed. It summarises the

Christian doctrine of the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation, and virtually includes all revealed truth under the words: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," for the Church is the divinely protected teacher of revelation. Upon entering the Catholic Church all must profess their readiness to believe her teaching. Thus the first question put by the priest to the one who comes for baptism is: "What do you ask of the Church of God?" and the answer required is: "Faith".

A second disposition, following naturally upon belief in what God has revealed, is a salutary fear of the divine judgements. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 110:10 in the Vulgate or 111:10 in the Hebrew). Baptism is for the remission of sin, and how shall the sinner appreciate its benefit, if he be not conscious of his burden? "Come to Me," said Our Lord, "all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Matthew 11:28). "I have come not to call the just, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32).

Fear of the divine judgements, however, would drive the sinner to despair unless it were accompanied by hope of forgiveness. God's mercy has an essential, indeed a predominant, place in the revelation which Our Lord has committed to His Church. He came to call sinners and has entrusted the power of forgiving sin to the pastors of that Church. "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:23). The candidate's belief in the infinite mercy of God, in the passion and redemption of Our Lord Jesus Christ, will fill him with hope that his sins, how gross so-ever they may be, will be forgiven. "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

With this hope of forgiveness will come the beginnings of the love of God. Should the sinner fear the chastisements of God's anger as the slave fears the lash of a cruel master, with rebellion in his heart, he would be obviously unfit to obtain forgiveness. But if he knows the infinite goodness of God, and trusts in His mercy that in spite of his sins he will find pardon, he is not far from the love of God. He may not yet have attained to what theologians call perfect charity, but he, like the sinners who of old gathered round Our Lord, is attracted by the divine mercy and longs for God's friendship.

Those twin virtues, fear and hope, together produce that sorrow for sin which is essential for forgiveness. Almighty God, in His Wisdom, will never forgive any sin, whether of angels or men, without repentance. Those who were baptised by Saint John in the Jordan confessed their sins (Mark 1:5), but those who come to receive Christian baptism are not required to make any other confession than is involved in submitting to the cleansing rite. Yet interiorly they must have sorrow for sin, they must regret the evil they have done, be ready to make reparation to their fellow men if they have injured them, and determine never to sin again.

As candidates for baptism must profess their belief in the divinely revealed teaching of

the Church, so too they must promise to live according to her moral precepts. This is involved in the reply that is demanded to the question: “Do you renounce Satan and all his works and pomps?” Similarly, the final exhortation of the priest (in the ritual laid down by Pope Saint Pius V) is: “Observe the commandments of God, that when Our Lord shall come to His nuptial feast, you may meet Him in the company of all the saints in the heavenly court, and live for ever and ever. Amen.” The promises made by the person who is to be baptised, or his sponsors, to renounce the devil and sin, the work of the devil, are called the baptismal vows. It is a common custom to renew them at the end of a mission, and it is good to do so at other times as well, (such as during the Masses of the Easter season).

8. Full remission of sin.

Baptism, then, having been received with proper dispositions, produces its full effect upon the soul. Not only does it bestow the character and make the recipient a member of the Church, but it floods his soul with sanctifying grace, making him thereby the adopted child of God and heir to heaven. All stain of sin is removed by the infusion of grace, and the soul is made holy and clothed with spiritual beauty. When baptism is given in infancy it remits original sin only; when it is bestowed upon adults, it takes away all the sins of which they have ever been guilty. Nor is any distinction to be made here between the guilt and the punishment, for there is full and complete remission, always provided there is sorrow for all sins committed. No “penance” is imposed by the priest upon those he baptises. Should a man die immediately after baptism received with due dispositions there could be no question of purgatory for him, but he would at once enter into heaven.

It was this complete forgiveness, which can be bestowed but once in life, that led many men, at some earlier periods, to postpone reception of the sacrament until late in life, or even until they lay on their deathbed. Such a practice, however, was always reprehensible, not only because of the danger of sudden death, but because it is our duty to give our whole lives to God and to sanctify them by frequent reception of the sacraments, and not merely our last moments. We are to live, and not merely to die, as Christians.

9. Revival of Grace.

What is the position of an adult who receives baptism without the necessary dispositions? He may ask for the sacrament for some motive of convenience or advantage, but may lack faith or sorrow for sin. He may be a good-humoured husband who wishes to please his wife, or a Jew who hopes to avoid persecution by a maddening (and sinful) mob. In such a case, he will have received the sacrament validly but will have received no grace. He will have been marked with the character and so will have incurred all the obligations of a Christian without having obtained any of the corresponding helps. What is to become of such a man? How can he now be saved since

he cannot be baptised again? How can he be freed from original sin and from the sins he may have committed prior to the reception of his valid but unfruitful baptism?

An answer is to be found in the infinite mercy of God. If this poor sinner repents of the sacrilege he has committed in receiving baptism so unworthily, if he now has faith and the other dispositions he should have had at the time of reception, then he will, though late, receive the graces of baptism. In virtue of the character which he has received and can never lose, he now receives the gifts and graces which were withheld at the time of his baptism. His evil dispositions may be compared to an obstacle preventing the flow of a stream of water; when the obstacle is removed the water flows; when the obstacle of his evil dispositions is removed the graces of baptism flow into his soul. That Our Lord should give the grace of baptism after the sacrament has been so grossly abused is indeed a wonderful proof of His infinite love and mercy.

10. Necessity of baptism.

To what extent is the sacrament of baptism necessary for salvation? Our Divine Master has said: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is sanctifying grace alone that gives us a right to enter heaven. Without that grace not only are we debarred from entrance, but we should be utterly incapable of enjoying that open vision of God, the "beatific vision" which is the essential happiness of eternal life. For the soul by its own natural powers cannot see God face to face, but only, as Saint Paul puts it, through a glass or in a dark manner (1 Corinth 13:12). It needs the gift of sanctifying grace that its faculties may be raised up or strengthened to bear "the eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinth 4:17). Now unrepentant sinners cannot enter heaven just because, though God in His mercy wishes all men to be saved, they do not accept the gift of grace which He wishes to bestow upon them. By the sin of Adam, that original sin the guilt and stain of which we all contract, we lost our birthright, that is, the grace that otherwise we should have had to make us, from the first moment of our being, God's children with the right and the power to see His face in eternal life.

As Our Divine Lord by His death revoked the curse of Adam and won grace once again for the human race, it is for Him to say how that grace shall be bestowed upon men. The means He has instituted are the sacraments, and apart from them, He gives no forgiveness of man's sins. Apart from baptism, then, the first of the sacraments, remission cannot be obtained of original sin or of any other sin committed before its reception. Our Lord's words express the simple truth "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Is this a hard saying? The truth is taught in the New Testament in a dozen different ways. Our Lord compares Himself to the vine of which it is necessary for us to be living branches; "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5 and following verses). Saint

Paul, again and again, speaks of the need of incorporation with Christ, which incorporation is effected by baptism. "In one spirit were we all baptised into one body" (1 Corinth 12:13). "One body and one spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:4-5). "As many of you as have been baptised in Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27.) (Compare also Romans, chapter 6). Saint Peter compares the salvation effected by baptism to the saving of the remnant of the human race from the deluge in the ark of Noah (1 Peter 3:20-21). If Our Lord died for His Church (see Eph 5:25-27) and commanded all to enter it under pain of eternal condemnation (Mark 16:16), if He gave to His apostles the power of the keys, the power of binding and loosing, and promised to ratify in heaven the forgiveness of sin that they might pronounce on earth (Matthew 16:19 and John 20:23), it is clear that no one can receive the grace by which his sins are forgiven apart from the ministry of the Church and, in the first instance, of baptism.

Therefore it is, that the Church is so insistent upon the need of baptising children. She never ceases to urge upon Catholic parents their duty of procuring the sacrament for them as soon as possible after their birth, and she orders parish priests and preachers frequently to exhort them to be faithful to this grave obligation.

11. Infants dying unbaptised.

This is a difficult theological dilemma. Down the ages, the following is the most commonly proposed solution.

Should infants die unbaptised, whether through the negligence of parents or not, they can never enjoy the supernatural happiness of the vision of God. As, however, they have died before they were capable of committing personal sin, they do not receive any positive punishment, but, on the contrary, enjoy for ever a peace and happiness which we call Limbo. Whatever this happiness may be, it is within the limits of the natural order in contrast to the supernatural order by which we are admitted to the beatific vision. Such children do not enjoy the open vision of God and thus, even though they be unconscious of it, have in fact suffered, on account of Adam's sin, a stupendous and irreparable loss.

*Footnote: What has been said above concerning the lot of children who die unbaptised is not indeed **de fide**, (certain because it is 'of the faith') but it has seemed to most theologians to be an inevitable consequence from the principles expounded. Cardinal Cajetan taught that children who died before they could be baptised could be saved by the prayers and desires of their parents, but this teaching, by order of Pope Saint Pius V, was afterwards expunged from his writings*

[Other theologians have proposed another solution. Baptism is normally the absolute pre-requisite for salvation. Baptised babies who die before the age of reason, therefore can expect to be taken straight to the Beatific Vision. Unbaptised babies who die,

however, face a dilemma. The baby is body and soul. It is possible that the human soul, at the point of death is given a similar sort of test as was given to the angels. Baptised souls would always pass such a test. Unbaptised souls could obtain the same results as the angels obtained. Some would choose life. Others would choose perdition. This theological solution maintains the importance of Baptism, while it removes the ‘injustice’ of some humans being able to gain a reward beyond the nature of the human condition, while others, through no direct fault of their own, would be deprived of such a super-natural reward. It would seem to fittingly maintain both the Justice AND the great Mercy of our God.]

12. Adults dying unbaptised.

What is the condition of those who, after having enjoyed the complete use of reason, die without baptism? If they have, with full knowledge, persistently refused baptism, they cannot be saved. Our Lord’s words peremptorily demand two conditions for salvation, faith and baptism.

There are many, however, who either have never heard of baptism, or have never understood their grave obligation of receiving it, or, even if they have neglected to receive it, have at any rate died repentant. What of these, and of other adults who, through no fault of their own, die unbaptised?

13. Baptism of desire.

The Church’s teaching is that they may be saved by what is called baptism of desire. In other words, if men have the necessary good dispositions and yet cannot receive the actual rite of baptism, they may be considered implicitly to desire baptism and may be saved through this desire.

They must have true faith in God, though perhaps they do not know His name. The apostle writes:

“Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him” (Hebrew 11:6).

To believe, though perhaps in a vague way, in the existence of the Supreme Being, and in our accountability to Him, is the bare minimum of faith which is indispensable. Also, they must love God and be truly sorry for what they have done to offend Him. In this love will be included a wish to carry out God’s commandments and consequently an implicit desire of baptism.

Here we have the reconciliation of the two most certain revealed truths, the first, that God desires the salvation of all men, and gives to all graces sufficient for

salvation,
the second, that baptism is necessary.

We can never overestimate the infinite and most tender mercy of God, and His pity for the weakness and frailty of His creatures. “You have mercy upon all,” said the Wise Man, “because You can do all things, and overlook the sins of men for the sake of repentance. For You love all things that are, and hate none of the things which You have made, for You did not appoint or make any thing hating it, . . . but You spare all, because they are Yours, O Lord, who love souls” (Wisdom 11:24-27).

Yet God, who has given to men their dignity as rational creatures, who has spoken to them in the voice of conscience, and given them a knowledge of good and evil, together with freedom of choice between them, must demand that they shall give to Him their willing adhesion. “He who made you without your consent,” says Saint Augustine, “will not save you without it.” God’s grace, then, is offered to all men, but they must co-operate with it, and thus gain eternal life.

In view, however, of the power of forgiving sins committed exclusively to the apostles and their successors, the priests of Christ’s Church, the Council of Trent teaches that since the promulgation of the New Law of the Gospel, sanctifying grace cannot be obtained apart from the water of regeneration or the desire for it (Session 6, Chapter 4). Similarly with sin committed after baptism, it cannot be remitted without a sincere contrition which includes, at least implicitly, a desire to receive the sacrament of penance. “Man’s reconciliation with God cannot be attributed to contrition apart from the desire of the sacrament which is included in it” (Trent Session 14, Chapter 4).

Baptism of desire, then, as we have explained it, will obtain grace and, through it, the remission of all sin, both original and personal (or actual, as it is called). But it does not bestow the character of baptism nor make a man a member of the external body of the Catholic Church. On the contrary, it is not necessarily permanent. Should the recipient fall back into grievous sin, nothing but a renewal of good dispositions (under the influence, of course, of God’s assisting grace) including at least implicitly a desire for the sacrament, can restore him to the way of salvation.

14. Baptism of blood.

There remains one other form of baptism, namely martyrdom or the baptism of blood. In the acts of the early martyrs, it is not uncommon to read of catechumens, or even pagans, who, moved by God’s grace, professed their belief in Christ and embraced death for His sake. The Church held that they were baptised in their own blood, and taught that they entered immediately into heaven, in accordance with the words of Our Lord: “Every one that shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). She judged similarly even in regard to those unbaptised infants, like the Holy Innocents, who before the dawn of reason had the privilege of

shedding their blood for Christ. Even martyrdom, however, though it remits all guilt of sin and all the debt of punishment due to it, does not bestow the character of baptism. If, therefore, before death, the martyr has the opportunity of receiving baptism by water, he is bound to accept it, nor can he receive any other sacrament until he has done so.

15. Manner of baptism.

The words to be used are those indicated by Our Lord Himself in the text which we have placed at the beginning of this pamphlet. "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." For validity, it is necessary that these words should be uttered without substantial alteration. Yet it is the meaning that is essential, not any mere utterance of sounds after the manner of a charm. This is shown by the fact that they can be spoken in Latin, English, French, or any other language. In the English form, the substitution of "thee" for "you" would make no difference. Other minor alterations might perhaps be thought out which would not invalidate the sacrament, but to avoid all possible scruple and anxiety the words should be pronounced clearly and distinctly as they stand. The word "Amen" is not part of the form.

The substance to be used, or the "matter" of the sacrament, is natural water. A decree of the Council of Trent lays it down that the word "water" in the text of Saint John (3:5) which has been quoted above, is to be taken literally, and anathematises anyone who should attempt to explain it away as purely metaphorical. Rain-water, sea-water, well-water, distilled water, water melted from snow or ice, water hot or cold, clean or dirty, blessed or unblessed, will suffice for valid baptism, and in the case of need, any of these may be employed. The water in the baptismal font, however, which is to be used under normal circumstances, is consecrated with an elaborate ceremonial on Holy Saturday night during the Easter Vigil, and (in the rubrics of Pope Saint Pius V) on the eve of Pentecost.

Baptism may be administered by immersing the candidate, by pouring water upon him, or sprinkling him. The usual method is the second. What is essential is that the water should be applied, and the words uttered by one and the same minister simultaneously and that the water should flow upon the skin of the head or at least some important part of the body.

16. Minister of baptism.

The essentials, then, of baptism are quite simple, and should be known by all, for as the sacrament is of such vital importance, it may be administered by anyone in a case of necessity, when a priest or deacon is not available.

When baptism, either of infant or of adult, is conferred with all its ceremonies, as they are found in the ritual, it can be lawfully administered by none under the rank of deacon.

Even when necessity demands that it should be given without the full ceremonial and in the briefest possible manner, it is still the office of a priest or deacon to confer it. Nevertheless, anyone has the power to baptise validly. All that is required is that the minister should apply the essential matter and form, and have the intention of doing what the Church does. Man, woman, or child, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, unbeliever, infidel, - literally anyone is capable of conferring the sacrament. He may think what he is doing to be idle, superstitious, or useless, but nevertheless if he does it correctly and intends to do what Catholics or the Church or Christians do when they perform this rite, what he does is valid, whether it be a case of necessity or not. Thus baptism, if correctly given, will be valid though conferred by heretical or schismatic ministers, and may never be conferred a second time if the baptised person should become a Catholic.

Footnote: We have explained in point 3 what procedure is followed if, as often happens, we cannot be quite sure that baptism has been correctly administered.

Though anyone at any time can validly confer baptism, it is not lawful for anyone to do so except when there is danger of death before a priest can come. There may be immediate danger, as when a child, or an adult who wants to be baptised, is at the point of death, or the danger may be very remote, as when in the mission fields a catechist baptises because it will be a very long time (involving danger that the child or adult may die unbaptised) before the priest will be able to travel to the district concerned.

Should baptism be thus conferred by a minister other than the priest, it should at once be notified to the parish priest so that he may enter the particulars in the baptismal register. Moreover where, in danger of death, baptism has been conferred with only the essential matter and form, if the recipient recover, he should come, or be brought, to the church in order to go through all the ceremonies that have been omitted. This is a serious obligation upon the baptised person or, if a child, upon his parents or guardians.

17. Infant baptism.

It has sometimes been urged, against the Church's practice of infant baptism, that it is unfair to impose life-long obligations upon a child who is incapable of giving his consent. In reply, it can be urged that the obligations assumed are merely those which all are bound to carry out, for, in accordance with Our Lord's words, all men are bound, unless excused by ignorance, to enter His Church, believe its teaching, and obey its laws.

18. When infants may not be baptized.

Yet there is just so much of substance in the objection that the Church forbids any child to be baptised unless either it is likely to die before reaching the use of reason (what the medical profession calls "hopeless imbeciles" would come under this head), or there is a hope of its being brought up a Catholic. Catholics sometimes find the latter condition

hard to understand. “This child,” they will argue, “will never receive baptism unless the priest will baptise it, or allow us to do so privately. Though its parents be Jews or infidels, is the child, through their ignorance or neglect, to be for ever excluded from heaven because its original sin has not been cleansed?”

The answer is, first, that the Church provides for the case where the child is likely to die before reaching the use of reason, and, second, that to baptise a healthy child without consent of parents or guardians is unjust to the latter and also to the child itself if there is no hope of its being taught, later on, to live in accordance with the obligations it has assumed. Thus Saint Thomas Aquinas, asking whether it be lawful to baptise Jewish infants without their parents’ consent, answers that to do so would be against natural justice, just as it would be to baptise an adult against his will. Children, he says, even in those things that appertain to God, are by the natural law under the care and authority of their parents until they become *sui juris* (*Summa Theologica* Part 3, question 68, article 10).

Further, such Catholics sometimes misunderstand the teaching of the Church concerning baptism of desire. The child who was unbaptised comes eventually, we will suppose, to the full use of reason. If then, or at any later period, he realises his obligation of baptism and neglects to fulfil it, he is guilty of a sin which, if not repented of, will exclude him from heaven. But if, not knowing this obligation, he yet turns himself to God in faith, love, and obedience, he may obtain grace, with remission of original sin. “Turn to Me,” says Almighty God, “and I will turn to you” (Zach. 1:3).

On the other hand, one who is baptised in infancy but afterwards deprived of Catholic training, may easily fall into grievous sin for which he will have no other means of forgiveness than these same dispositions of faith, sorrow, and love. Assuming in both an ignorance of Catholic teaching, one who is baptised and falls into grievous sin is hardly better off than one who has never been baptised.

19. Godparents.

Hence, we are brought to the subject of godparents or sponsors, for these take upon themselves the obligation of watching over the Catholic training or education of the person baptised. They are bound, in the words of the Code of Canon Law of 1917, to use their best efforts to induce their spiritual child to live a life conformable to the promises they have made on his behalf. Godparents are required both for adult baptism and for infant baptism, and even when baptism is conferred privately in danger of death, if one can be easily procured. One who has acted as godparent contracts a spiritual relationship with his godchild which lasts not merely until the child reaches the use of reason or receives the sacrament of confirmation, but throughout life. It involves an impediment to marriage, so that a godparent cannot marry his godchild unless the Church should, for a sufficient reason, grant a dispensation; but more important still, it creates a spiritual

bond, in virtue of which the sponsor is bound to care for his godchild, to help, advise, and protect him especially in religious and moral matters. It is certainly not the intention of the Church that this spiritual relationship should be regarded lightly.

There must be at least one godparent, of whatever sex, and at most two, in which case they must be of different sex. A larger number is not allowed by the Church, although there is no objection to others witnessing the ceremony and giving presents to the newly baptised child.

The Church's Canon Law gives two classes of qualifications for sponsors, one for validity, the other for lawfulness. The meaning is that if anyone does not fulfil the one set of conditions he is not a godparent nor does he contract any spiritual relationship, whereas if he fulfils the one set, but lacks any of the second class, he will be a godparent and contract spiritual relationship, though he will have committed a sin by violating the law of the Church.

Under the first head, then, that is, for **validity**, it is required

1. That the sponsor be baptised, that he have the use of reason and the intention of acting as sponsor.
2. That he belong to no heretical or schismatic sect, nor be excommunicated by name, or by public sentence, nor declared infamous, nor deprived of the privileges of Church membership, nor a deposed or degraded cleric.
3. That he be neither the father, nor the mother, nor the husband, nor the wife, of the person baptised.
4. That he be duly designated by the person to be baptised, or by his parents or guardians, or, in their defect, by the minister.
5. That personally or by proxy he physically hold or touch the baptised person at the moment of baptism, or immediately after baptism raise him up from the baptismal font or receive him from the arms of the minister. [This fifth condition is no longer a requirement since the reforms of Vatican II, but they are expected to sign the forehead of the child with the sign of the cross at one point during the ceremony.]

Under the second head, that is, for **lawfulness**, it is required

1. That the sponsor has reached his fourteenth year, unless the minister have a just cause for dispensing with this provision. [It is sixteen years since Vatican II.]

2. That (even without excommunication by name or public sentence) he be not notoriously under ecclesiastical censure, or a notorious evil-liver.

3. That he knows the rudiments of the Catholic faith.

4. That he be not a novice or professed member of a religious order or congregation, unless it be a case of urgent necessity and express permission has been granted by at least the local superior. [Vatican II allows a certain flexibility in the interpretation of this norm.]

5. That he be not in major orders, unless the local ordinary gives express permission.

20. Christian names.

Finally, we should notice that it is the duty of parents to give their child a Christian name. The priest has to urge the parents to avoid ridiculous, pagan, or immoral names, or the names of false gods or notorious enemies of the Church. During the last war, [the First World War,] the writer was asked to burden innocent babes with the names of “Kitchener”, “Smith-Dorrien”, and “Rheims”! Surely, there are enough saints to satisfy all tastes, common and uncommon. Why give girls the names of flowers, or boys the names of landed families to which they do not belong, when they are receiving a sacrament which makes them the children of God, heirs to heaven, and companions of the saints?
