

ON BAPTISM.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER VII.

BAPTISM.

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538. *An Officer Baptized in a Fountain.* -

Before a s grown person is baptized, my friends, it must first be ascertained that they are sufficiently instructed in religion. Of this we have a proof and an example in the *Acts of the Apostles*. One day the deacon, St. Philip, was quietly reposing in his house, when God spoke to him and said: "Arise quickly and go towards the south, to the desert way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." St. Philip arose and set out.

Soon he perceives a fine chariot, in which was a black-a-moor, who was one of the principal officers of Candace, queen of Ethiopia. He was returning from adoring God in Jerusalem, and reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. Philip accosts him as he sits in his chariot, and asks him if he understands what he reads.

"How can I," said he, "unless some one show me?" He had happened on the passage where Isaiah says, speaking of Our Lord: "As a sheep He was led to the slaughter: and like a lamb without a voice before a shearer, so opened He not His mouth." The holy deacon took occasion, then, to speak to him

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of Jesus Christ, made him observe that those prophecies related to His Passion, and finally gave him a brief explanation of all our holy religion. The chariot was still going on; they soon came to a fountain; the officer asked what hindered him from being baptized, and St. Philip, finding him sufficiently instructed to receive baptism, willingly conferred it upon him. The officer went out of the water regenerated by the new sacrament he had received, and went his way rejoicing.

- *Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter VIII.

539. *An Actor Baptized on the Stage.* -

One of the most extraordinary baptisms I ever heard of is, unquestionably, the one of which I am going to speak to you. Public rejoicings were going on in Rome, and the Emperor Dioclesian was present with all his court. An actor, named Genes (or Genesis), thought he could no better divert those idolaters than by counterfeiting in derision, the ceremonies of baptism of the despised Christians. He appeared on the stage lying in a bed, as though he were sick, and asked to be baptized, so that he might die easy.

Two other actors then came forward, one dressed as a priest, the other as an exorcist. They approached the bed and said to Genes, with mock gravity: "My child, wherefore did you send for us?" The very moment they pronounced these words, the heart of Genes was changed by the grace of God, and he answered very seriously: "Because I wish to receive the grace of God, and, by holy regeneration, obtain the remission of my sins." This only made people

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think that he played his part all the better. The ceremonies of the Sacrament were then gone through on the very stage, just as Christians performed them at that period, that is to say, in 306. When the white robe, the mark of the newly-baptized, was put on Genes, soldiers took him, continuing the farce, and presented him to the Emperor, to be interrogated like the martyrs. Genes availed himself of the natural facility he had in

speaking, and with an inspired tone and air, he delivered this discourse from the high place where he was: "Hear me, O Emperor, and you all, courtiers, senators, plebeians, and members of all the orders of superb Rome, hear me. Formerly when I so much as heard the name of Jesus Christ uttered I trembled with rage and outraged, in every way I could, those who professed that belief. I even hated several of my neighbours and connections, because they were Christians, and I detested that religion so much that I made myself intimately acquainted with all its mysteries, as you may have observed, in order to make of them a public farce. But, at the moment when the water of baptism touched my flesh, my heart was changed, and to the questions put to me, I answered sincerely as I believed. I saw a hand stretched out from heaven, and shining angels hovering over me. They read in a terrible book all the sins I had committed from my childhood; they effaced them all immediately after, then showed me the book whiter than snow. You, then, great Emperor, and you, spectators of all conditions, whom

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these sacrilegious games have made laugh at our divine mysteries, believe with me, who am more guilty than you, that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and that He is worthy of our adoration, and try, also, to obtain His mercy." The Emperor Dioclesian, equally surprised and irritated, first had Genes beaten with rods, then he handed him over to the prefect Plantian, in order to compel him to sacrifice to the idols. The prefect employed every torment, but in vain. Genes constantly answered:

"There is no master like Him who appeared to me; I adore and love Him with my whole soul; though I had a thousand lives to lose, nothing should separate me from Him. Never, no, never, shall torments take Jesus from my mouth and heart; I feel the deepest sorrow for all my past errors, and for having commenced so late to serve Him." It was seen that his eloquence was making an impression, and they hastened to cut off his head. He thus went, like the newly-baptized, who have received pardon for all their sins, he thus went, I say, to receive in heaven the crown due to his generous martyrdom.

- GODESCARD, *Vie des Saints*, (*Lives of the Saints*), 26th August.

540. *The Forty Martyrs of Sebasti (or Sebaste)*. -

Ecclesiastical history furnishes several examples of martyrs who were baptized in their blood. One of the most celebrated is that which I am going to tell you, my dear children! - In 320, under the Emperor Licinius, a Roman legion, named *the Thundering*, had its winter quarters at Sebasti, in Armenia. Most of the soldiers were pagans like the Emperor; nevertheless

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forty of them had the honour of being baptized. They courageously refused to offer incense to the idols, and were brought before Agricola, governor of the city, who condemned them to be exposed a whole night on a frozen pond. In order to tempt them still more, he took the cruel precaution of having a hot bath ready close at hand, and he told these forty heroes that those who were willing to offer sacrifice would have only to plunge into the hot bath. But they all promised to persevere even to the end; they said to God: "Lord, You have called forty of us to the combat, let forty obtain the victory."

Nevertheless, towards midnight, one of them, unable longer to bear the rigor of the cold, apostatized and went and threw himself into the hot bath; the wretch found his death there after a few minutes. About an hour after, the sentinel on duty suddenly saw a brilliant light; and it seemed to descend from heaven and place a crown on the head of each valiant soldier of Christ. But as there were forty crowns, and only thirty-nine martyrs, there remained one without an owner.

Then the sentry immediately quits his box, leaving his arms behind, strips himself of his furred coats, and goes to place himself on the ice beside the others, crying as loud as he could, "*I, too, am a Christian!*" I need not tell you, my good friends, that the fortieth crown was for him. Thus he was baptized in his own blood.

- GODESCARD, *Vies des Saints*, (*Lives of the Saints*), 10th March.

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541. *A Child Resuscitated to be Baptized.* -

Baptism is so necessary for salvation, dear friends, that even children cannot enter heaven if they have not been regenerated by this sacrament. (That is why, in an emergency, anyone, even a pagan, can baptize someone by pouring water over a part of the body, preferably the head, while saying the words: 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.) It has even happened that some of these poor little children, having died without being baptized, were miraculously restored to life. St Augustine himself relates an interesting instance of this kind, which I am going to tell you. At Uzale a woman had an infant son; she so ardently desired to make him a good Christian, that she had him already inscribed on the roll of the catechumens. Unfortunately he died before they had time to baptize him; his mother was overwhelmed with grief, still more for his being deprived of life eternal, than because he was dead to her.

Full of confidence, nevertheless, she takes the dead child, and publicly carries it to the Church of St. Stephen, the first martyr. There she commences praying for the son she had just lost, and she prayed in these terms: "Holy martyr, you see that I am left without any consolation, for I cannot say that my son is gone before me, since you know he is lost, and that is why I weep; give me back my son, so that I may see him in heaven in the presence of Him who crowned you!"

Whilst praying in this way, and shedding bitter tears, her son moved, uttered a cry, and was suddenly restored to life. And because his mother had said, 'You know why I ask him back', God was pleased to show that she spoke sincerely. She immediately brought him to the priests, he was baptized, sanctified, anointed, hands were imposed upon him, and

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after thus receiving the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, he died anew. The pious mother, happy in having seen him regenerated in the waters of baptism, took care not to lament his death; on the contrary, she followed him to the grave with a gay and smiling air because she knew very well that he was not going into a cold sepulchre, but to dwell with the angels in heaven.

- ST. AUGUSTINE, *Sermon 324*.

542. *Can One be Baptized with Sand?* -

You all know, my friends, that baptism cannot be administered except with natural water, even in case of urgent need. Here is a curious story on that subject, which happened at the end of the sixth century, or in the first years of the seventh. It is related by a celebrated priest and solitary of Egypt, named John Mosch, who was himself told it by the Abbot Octavius, an eye-witness.

"In my childhood," said that abbot, "I lived at Alexandria; I was very giddy and thoughtless. One day, having been severely chastised for a serious fault I had committed, I fled from my father's house with nine others, as silly as myself, with the exception of one, who had much good sense and religion. We took the way to Jerusalem. When we were in the desert of Arabia, one of us, who was a little Jew, fell suddenly sick unto death, which gave us a great deal of concern, as we knew not what to do with him. We did not abandon him, however, but, assisting him with the charity common to those who travel in company, we carried him, in turn, the best way we could, so as to take him, if possible, to some

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inhabited place, and not let him die in the desert. But the want of nourishment, the violence of the fever, excess of fatigue and thirst, having reduced him to such an extremity that he could no longer bear to be carried, we resolved, although with much grief and many tears, to leave him, lest we, too, should die in the desert of hunger and thirst. We laid him on the sand and left him; but when he saw us going away, he besought us by all that is most holy not to let him die a Jew, but to have the charity to baptize him, so that, being a Christian, he might go to enjoy the presence of God on departing this life. As we had no water and knew not what to resolve on, the one whom I mentioned as the most sensible of us all, being doubtless inspired by God, filled his two hands with sand, which he poured three times on the Jew's head, saying the sacramental words: '*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*'. As for us, we all answered '*Amen*' when he named each person of the Most Holy Trinity. I take God to witness that this ceremony was no sooner ended than Jesus Christ Our Lord cured the child so perfectly that there remained

not in him the least trace of his malady, nor any weakness whatever; he was even in such good health that he made with the greatest ease all the rest of the journey through the desert. When we arrived at Ascalon, we took the Jew, now a Christian, to the blessed Bishop Denis, and told him all that had happened. He assembled his clergy, in order to consult whether that baptism

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given with said instead of water, might pass for a true baptism.

“Some said yes, since the action was followed by a great miracle, others maintained the contrary, on the authority of St. Gregory of Nazianzen and Our Lord himself, who says that *unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he shall not enter the kingdom of God*. These reasons and a number of others having been advanced on both sides, the holy Bishop Denis ordered the child to be baptized anew in the sacred waters of the Jordan; but to reward the piety and zeal of the youth who had baptized him with sand, in the extreme desire the child had of becoming a Christian, he conferred upon him the dignity of deacon.”

- JOHN MOSCH, *Pre Spirituel*, Ch. 50.

543. *My Fathers Name and Likeness.* -

By baptism we become children of God; and children ought to imitate their father, and beware of doing anything that might displease him or dishonour his name. When you come to read the history of Poland, my very dear friends, you will there find something that may serve you as a lesson in this respect. Boleslaus IV., king of that country, ascended the throne in 1146, and reigned thirteen years. He so loved his father, who was also called Boleslaus, that he had a fine miniature taken of him, got it framed in gold, hung it round his neck like a medal and all the day he kept looking at it and kissing it with the greatest fondness. When he meant to undertake anything of importance, if he were about

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to go on a journey, to dictate a law, to pronounce a sentence, he took that precious portrait, glued his lips to it with love and fervour, and said from the depth of his heart: "O my father! pray to God that I may never dishonour your name; let me not say or do anything unworthy of you!" Let us imitate this example, my friends! We bear within us the image of God, Our Father, let us never do anything that would displease Him.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, I., 82.

544. *The Body of a Child Found in the Filth of the Street.* -

I have already told you, dear friends, that baptism is so necessary for the salvation, even of little children, that God has sometimes wrought miracles on that account, to reward the faith of His servants. A sight well worthy of public attention was witnessed by the whole parish of St. Martin des Champs, in Paris. It was that of a miracle which took place, in 1393, by the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, and that prodigy is stamped with all the characters of truth. An unfortunate woman, having forgotten the laws of religion and honour, from one crime precipitated herself into another; she even came at last to stifle the cries of nature. To save her reputation, and get rid of a little girl whom she had brought into the world, she had the horrible barbarity to take the life of the unhappy child, by thrusting a piece of linen into its mouth, so that it could not breathe, and was smothered. Then she had it secretly carried out of the city and buried in a heap of manure, near the door of St

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Martin des Champs. Providence arranged it so that a huntsman passed that way some time after; one of his dogs stopped at the place, began to smell round the heap of dirt, scattered it with his paws, and exposed the child to view. People ran from all parts, and as there was no proof that baptism had been administered, it was thought that the body ought not to be buried in consecrated ground. Whilst the people were consulting about it, a woman, touched with compassion, cried out that it was a great pity an innocent creature should be deprived of the sight of God by the fault of its parents; and, instantly, taking the little body in her arms, she proposed to carry it to the church, and ask the Blessed Virgin to intercede for it. It was a second prodigy, remarks the historian of the time of Charles VI., that of more than four hundred persons who heard what the woman said, not one opposed it, and that, on the contrary, all of them followed to the Church of St. Martin

des Champs.

When they reached the church the pious woman laid the child before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, and the religious and all present were asked to pray for it. At the end of some moments, the protection of Mary was publicly manifested: the dead infant gave signs of life; she made an effort to throw out the cloth that had stifled her, and succeeded; then gave a loud cry This was the signal for universal acclamation; all the bells were rung, the *Te Deum* was sung, and as the crowd was so dense that not a step could be made

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in the church towards the baptismal font, the child was baptized at the foot of the altar, and received the name of Mary. It lived three hours after, in the sight of every one; a nurse was even brought, who suckled it several times. This child of benediction then died, and, on the morrow, it was buried in the church, under the very altar at which it was baptized.

- DEBUSSI, *Nouveau Mois de Marie*, 132.

545. *How One Ought to Live After Baptism.* -

When one has had the happiness of being baptized, like you and me, my very dear friends, they should, by right, never more offend the good God. There were Saints, nay, even poor savages, who did so. Listen: A pious missionary, whose name I have forgotten, was traversing the wildest regions of North America to win souls for Christ; he stopped at the principal villages, and often found there savages whom grace brought to him from a considerable distance. He instructed them, baptized those whom he thought well disposed, and then went on his way to other places.

A savage one day presented himself to him whose fervour appeared to have something extraordinary; so soon as he was well instructed in the mysteries of our holy religion and what relates to the sacraments, the missionary administered baptism to him, and also gave him the divine Eucharist, which this good Indian received with the most lively transports of love and gratitude. The missionary then went off on other apostolic excursions. A year after he returned to the place where dwelt this Indian convert.

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As soon as the latter was aware of the missionary's arrival, he ran to throw himself at his feet, and bathed them with his tears; he knew not how to express the joy he felt in seeing again him who had begotten him to Jesus Christ. He soon entreats the Father to grant him once more the happiness he had made him enjoy the year before.

"Of what happiness do you speak?" asks the missionary.

"Ah! my father, do you not know? the happiness of receiving within me the body of my God!"

-- "Willingly, my child, but first you must go to confession. Have you examined your conscience well?"

-- "Father, I examined it every day, as you charged me to do last year."

-- "In that case, kneel down, and declare to me the faults into which you may have fallen since your baptism."

-- "What faults, Father?"

-- "Why, the grave faults you feel having wilfully committed against the commandments of God and the Church."

-- "*Grave faults!*" answers the savage all amazed; "can any one offend God after they are baptized, and especially after having received communion? Is there anywhere Christians capable of such ingratitude?"

Saying these words he burst into tears, and the missionary, on his side, wept too, blessing God for having prepared for himself even in the forests of America such worshippers, who may, indeed, be called worshippers in spirit and in truth. What a lesson for us, dear friends! - Let us try to profit by it.

- DEBUSSI, *Nouv. Mois de Marie*, 135.

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546. *A Child Dying with the Desire of Baptism.* -

You have not forgotten, dear friends, that baptism may be supplied in divers ways for those who have come to the use of reason. They may, for example, be saved by the baptism of desire. Here is a very interesting instance of that which I read in the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*. It is Monsignor Odin, missionary apostolic, (Footnote: Subsequently Archbishop of New Orleans,) who himself relates it.

“At some distance from our establishment at Barrens, in Missouri (United States of America), there was a district inhabited by Protestants or infidels, with the exception of three or four Catholic families. In 1834 we had the consolation of baptizing several persons there; thus it was that the Lord was pleased to reward the kindness with which one of the most respectable inhabitants gave us hospitality every time we journeyed that way. His Family's Baptism came about in this manner. This worthy man, who was not a Catholic, had three little children, who received with eagerness the instructions we never failed to give them. The tallest of the sons, only eight years old, especially showed such a particular relish for the word of God that he learned by heart the entire catechism. Evening and morning he addressed his little prayer to the good God, and if ever his little sister missed that holy exercise, he reproached her very seriously. Things were at this point when the cholera broke out in the neighbourhood; then this good little boy said simply to his mother: 'Mamma, the cholera is coming here; oh! how glad I should

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be if the priests from the seminary came to baptize me. That cruel disease will attack me, I am sure it will, and I shall die without baptism; then you will be sorry, as so will I.' Alas! the poor child predicted truly: he was one of the first victims of the dreadful plague.

“During the short moments of his cruel sufferings he incessantly asked for baptism, and even with his last sigh he kept repeating: 'Oh! if any one would baptize me! My God! must I die without being baptized?' The mother, thinking that she could not herself administer that sacrament, although there was evident necessity, and she most certainly could have, had she but known, was in the greatest trouble; neither would the child consent to receive it from the hands of a Protestant minister. (Again, he could have, since Baptism belongs to the true church of Christ, and not to any of the many break-away off-shoots of Christ's One True Church.

“But the child was understandably anxious not to find himself formally enrolled in some congregation that denied the truths that Christ had come to teach the world.) At last he died without, having obtained his ardent wish. As soon as I heard of the cholera being in that part of the country I hastened thither; but I only reached there some hours after the child's funeral. The family was plunged in the greatest affliction. I consoled them all I could, and especially in relation to the eternal destiny of their poor little one, by explaining to them what the Church teaches us on the baptism of desire. This consoling doctrine much assuaged their grief; after giving the other necessary instructions, I baptized the mother and the two young children, and some days after the father failed not to follow the example of his family." There is a story, my friends that will fully enable us to understand what is meant by the baptism of desire, and will also make you thank God for the happiness he gave you of receiving

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that sacrament in your earliest infancy.

- *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*, IV.

547. *The Renewal of the Baptismal Vows.* -

An imposing ceremony is that of the renewal of the baptismal vows; but, very dear children, I doubt whether you have ever seen one so solemn as that which I am going to describe for you. In 1845, in the very middle of the sound between the islands of Java and Sumatra, in the Indian Ocean, the ship *l'Orient* presented a spectacle well worthy to fix the eyes of Heaven. After the exercises of the Month of Mary had been gone through with the most touching piety, there was a general communion, in which all took part, from the captain to the smallest cabin-boy. In the evening, vespers were sung by two choirs; then took place the renewal of the baptismal vows, which was preceded and followed by a little instruction. You cannot think what impression that ceremony, which was certainly to no one a mere formality, made on those brave fellows. After the missionaries had themselves renewed the promises of their baptism, to give the example,

the captain advanced to the foot of the altar, at the head of his men, and pronounced the usual formula in a firm and energetic tone, the more striking because it contrasted strangely with the tears that stood in his eyes. You should have seen and heard him, with all the others, standing, with his right hand on the book of the Gospels, pronouncing slowly and in a tremulous voice these words:
I RENOUNCE SATAN, HIS POMPS, HIS WORKS,

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AND I ATTACH MYSELF TO JESUS CHRIST ALONE. This was all that had been put in the formula, but the captain added, **FOR EVER**, and most of the others repeated after him that eternal oath. Then came the consecration to the good Virgin of sailors, who was never forgotten in their pious conversations. It was followed by a little hymn, the last verse of which is as follows:

*Vois cette foule recueillie,
Qui t'appartient, qui te supplie;
Ce sont tes enfants agenoux,
Marie ;
Jette ton regard le plus doux
Sur tous.*

Which may be thus translated ;

*Behold this crowd assembled,
To you belonging, you entreating;
Your kneeling children are they all,
Oh! Mary,
Cast your sweetest look
Upon them all!*

At these words all fell on their knees, as if instinctively. Finally, the *Te Deum* was sung, in a full chorus, in which every one joined, with an expression of happiness that surpasses all description. If Chateaubriand, the sublime author of the *Genius of Christianity*, had been there, he, at least, might have done justice to that scene.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, VI, 248.