



Holy

Baptism

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“Onward Christian Soldiers”

From Sabine Baring-Gould’s

The Golden Gate

Fr. Baring-Gould is most famous for his hymn, “Onward Christian Soldiers”.

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Since the fall of Adam all men are born in sin, and the children of wrath. In their birth there is a certain defect, or lack of power to fulfil God's law, and disarrangement in the faculties of the soul, which requires supplementing. The necessary grace is supplied in Baptism. The Church may be regarded as a benefit club instituted by Christ, with a certain form of admission, certain rules for its government, and certain privileges, the enjoyment of which depends on the fulfilment of conditions.

Heavenly life is the prize set before us in Baptism. The conditions are, the observance of the Commandments, and belief in the Creed. The form of admission is Baptism. No person who has not joined a club has a right to its benefits; so no unbaptized person has any claim to be admitted to Heaven. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," said our Lord¹; and again, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."² We do not say or believe that all heathens or unbaptized persons are lost. Far from it, we believe that if they act up to the light given them, Christ will of His boundless mercy save them. He is not tied to means, but He acts ordinarily by means.

But Baptism is not a mere outward form of admission into God's Kingdom. It is more. Special benefits are conferred by it. (1) Original sin is remitted. That is, the guilt of Adam's transgression is no more imputed to us.³ (2) The

Holy Ghost is given to guide our consciences.⁴ (3) We are adopted by God as His children, and a right is given us to the other Sacraments, and a title to the Kingdom of Heaven.⁵ (4) A character, or spiritual mark, is imprinted on the soul, consecrating us to God as Christians.⁶

We see this from Christ's Baptism. There was no need for him to be baptized, as He was without sin. He needed not the Holy Ghost, as He was one with Him. He needed not to be adopted as God's Son, for He was from all ages the Only-begotten Son of God. He needed no mark to consecrate Him to God, as He was a Priest for ever. Yet He condescended to be baptized in Jordan, to teach us by outward signs what would be the effect of Christian Baptism. When He was baptized, the Holy Ghost came down on Him in shape like a dove, and a voice from Heaven proclaimed Him to be the Son of God.⁷

The outward and visible sign of Baptism is *water*, *i.e.*, natural water, rain, spring, river, or sea-water, poured on the head, if possible, with the words said at the *same time* that the water is poured, and by the same person who pours the water. The necessary *words* are, "*Name*, I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

The right *person* to administer Baptism is the *Priest*, but the Deacon may baptize in the

absence of the Priest,⁸ and, in case of extreme necessity, as when a child is likely to die before the proper minister can be procured, anyone may baptize, if he is careful to use the right matter and the right words.

Baptism is a contract. We promise God to keep His commandments, and to keep the true faith. He promises to give us grace to keep the Commandments, and faith to believe the Creed. If we do not keep our compact, God is released from keeping His. A farmer hires a laborer to reap a field. He promises him a wage for the day's work, and his meals, which will strengthen him to do the work. If instead of working the laborer idles his day, he can have no claim to the stipulated remuneration. If he works but does not seek the farm for his necessary food, his strength will fail, and the work will be imperfectly executed. Now this is a figure of our Baptismal contract. We are hired to work for God. In the Sacraments are our nourishment and strength, and the wage is eternal life.

¹ John 3:5

² Mark 15:16

³ Acts 22:16

⁴ John 1:33; Acts 1:5

⁵ Romans 8:15

⁶ Ephesians 4:30

⁷ Luke 3: 21, 22

⁸ Acts 8:5-13; Philip was a deacon, see Acts 6:5