

THE WRITINGS OF THE FATHERS DOWN TO A.D. 325

ANTE-NICENE FATHERS

VOLUME 3

**LATIN CHRISTIANITY: ITS FOUNDER, TERTULLIAN
I. APOLOGETIC; II. ANTI-MARCION; III. ETHICAL**



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ON BAPTISM.

[TRANSLATED BY THE REV. S. THELWALL.]

CHAP. I.—INTRODUCTION. ORIGIN OF THE TREATISE.

HAPPY is our¹ sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free *and admitted* into eternal life! A treatise on this matter will not be superfluous; instructing not only such as are just becoming formed (in the faith), but them who, content with having simply believed, without full examination of the grounds² of the traditions, carry (in mind), through ignorance, an untried *though* probable faith. The consequence is, that a viper of the Cainite heresy, lately conversant in this quarter, has carried away a great number with her most venomous doctrine, making it her first aim to destroy baptism. Which is quite in accordance with nature; for vipers and asps and basilisks themselves generally do affect arid and waterless places. But we, little fishes, after the example of our ΙΧΘΥΣ³ Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water; so that most monstrous creature, who had no right to teach even sound doctrine,⁴ knew full well how to kill the little fishes, by taking them away from the water!

CHAP. II.—THE VERY SIMPLICITY OF GOD'S MEANS OF WORKING, A STUMBLING-BLOCK TO THE CARNAL MIND.

Well, but how great is the force of perversity for *so* shaking the faith or entirely preventing its reception, that it impugns it on the very principles of which *the faith* con-

sists! There is absolutely nothing which makes men's minds more obdurate than the simplicity of the divine works which are visible in the *act*, when compared with the grandeur which is promised thereto in the *effect*; so that from the very fact, that with so great simplicity, without pomp, without any considerable novelty of preparation, finally, without expense, a man is dipped in water, and amid the utterance of some few words, is sprinkled, and then rises again, not much (or not at all) the cleaner, the consequent attainment of eternity⁵ is esteemed the more incredible. I am a deceiver if, on the contrary, it is not from their circumstance, and preparation, and expense, that *idols'* solemnities or mysteries get their credit and authority built up. Oh, miserable incredulity, which quite deniest to God His own properties, simplicity and power! What then? Is it not wonderful, too, that death should be washed away by bathing? But it is the more to be believed if the wonderfulness be the reason why it is *not* believed. For what does it behove divine works to be in their quality, except that they be above all wonder?⁶ We also ourselves wonder, but it is *because* we believe. Incredulity, on the other hand, wonders, but does *not* believe: for the simple *acts* it wonders at, as if they were vain; the grand *results*, as if they were impossible. And grant that it be just as you think,⁷ sufficient to meet each point is the divine declaration which has fore-run: "The foolish things of the world hath God elected to confound its wisdom;"⁸ and, "The things very difficult with men are easy with God."⁹ For if God is wise and powerful (which even they who pass Him by do not deny), it is with good reason that He lays the material causes of His own operation in the

¹ i. e. Christian (Oehler).² Rationibus.³ This curious allusion it is impossible, perhaps, to render in our language. The word ΙΧΘΥΣ (*ikhthus*) in Greek means "a fish;" and it was used as a name for our Lord Jesus, because the initials of the words Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτὴρ (i. e. Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Saviour), make up that word. OEHLER with these remarks, gives abundant references on the point. [Dr. Allix suspects Montanism here, but see Kaye, p. 43, and Lardner, *Credib.* II. p. 335. We may date it *circa* A. D. 193.]⁴ As being a woman. See 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12.⁵ Consecutio æternitatis.⁶ Admirationem.⁷ i. e. that the simple be vain, and the grand impossible.⁸ 1 Cor. i. 27, not quite exactly quoted.⁹ Luke xviii. 27, again inexact.

being infected with the repetition of impurities, again defile them whom it has washed!

CHAP. XVI.—OF THE SECOND BAPTISM—WITH BLOOD.

We have indeed, likewise, a *second font*,¹ (itself withal *one with the former*,) of *blood*, to wit; concerning which the Lord said, "I have to be baptized with a baptism,"² when He had been baptized already. For He had come "by means of water and blood,"³ just as John has written; that He might be baptized by the water, glorified by the blood; to make *us*, in like manner, *called by water, chosen*⁴ by *blood*. These two baptisms He sent out from the wound in His pierced side,⁵ in order that they who believed in His blood might be bathed with the water; they who had been bathed in the water might likewise drink the blood.⁶ This is the baptism which both stands in lieu of the fontal bathing⁷ when that has not been received, and restores it when lost.

CHAP. XVII.—OF THE POWER OF CONFERRING BAPTISM.

For concluding our brief subject,⁸ it remains to put you in mind also of the due observance of giving and receiving baptism. Of giving it, the chief priest⁹ (who is the bishop) has the right: in the next place, the presbyters and deacons, yet not without the bishop's authority, on account of the honour of the Church, which being preserved, peace is preserved. Beside these, even laymen have the right; for what is equally received can be equally given. Unless bishops, or priests, or deacons, be on the spot, *other* disciples are called *i. e. to the work*. The word of the Lord ought not to be hidden by any: in like manner, too, baptism, which is equally God's property,¹⁰ can be administered by all. But how much more is the rule¹¹ of reverence and modesty incumbent on laymen—seeing that these *powers*¹² belong to their superiors—lest they assume to themselves the *specific*¹³ function of the bishop! Emulation of the episcopal office is the mother of schisms. The most holy apostle has said, that "all things

Lavacrum. [See Aquinas, *Quæst.* lxxvi. 11.]

² Luke xii. 50, not given in full.

³ 1 John v. 6.

⁴ Matt. xx. 16; Rev. xvii. 14.

⁵ John xix. 34. See c. ix. *ad fin.*

⁶ See John vi. 53, etc.

⁷ Lavacrum. [The three baptisms: *fluminis, fluminis, sanguinis.*]

⁸ Materiolam.

⁹ Summus sacerdos. Compare *de Orat.* xxviii., "nos . . . veri sacerdotes," etc.: and *de Ex. Cast.* c. vii., "nonne et laici sacerdotes sumus?"

¹⁰ Census.

¹¹ Disciplina.

¹² i. e. the powers of administering baptism and "sowing the word." [i. e. "The Keys." *Scopiacæ*, p. 643.]

¹³ Dicitum.

are *lawful*, but not all *expedient*."¹⁴ Let it suffice assuredly, in cases of *necessity*, to avail yourself (of that rule¹⁵), if at any time circumstance either of place, or of time, or of person compels you (so to do); for *then* the steadfast courage of the succourer, when the situation of the endangered one is urgent, is exceptionally admissible; inasmuch as he will be guilty of a human creature's loss if he shall refrain from bestowing what he had free liberty to bestow. But the woman of pertness,¹⁶ who has usurped the power to teach, will of course not give birth for herself likewise to a right of baptizing, unless some new beast shall arise¹⁷ like the former; so that, just as the one abolished baptism,¹⁸ so some other should in her own right confer it! But if the writings which wrongly go under Paul's name, claim Thecla's example as a licence for women's teaching and baptizing, let them know that, in Asia, the presbyter who composed that writing,¹⁹ as if he were augmenting Paul's fame from his own store, after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed²⁰ from his office. For how credible would it seem, that he who has not permitted a *woman*²¹ even to *learn* with overboldness, should give a *female*²² the power of *teaching* and of *baptizing*! "Let them be silent," he says, "and at home consult their own husbands."²³

CHAP. XVIII.—OF THE PERSONS TO WHOM, AND THE TIME WHEN, BAPTISM IS TO BE ADMINISTERED.

But they whose office it is, know that baptism is not rashly to be administered. "Give to every one who beggeth thee,"²⁴ has a reference of its own, appertaining especially to almsgiving. On the contrary, this *precept* is rather to be looked at carefully: "Give not the holy thing to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine;"²⁵ and, "Lay not hands easily on *any*; share not other men's sins."²⁶ If Philip so "easily" baptized the chamberlain, let us reflect that a manifest and conspicuous²⁷ evidence that the Lord deemed him worthy

¹⁴ 1 Cor. x. 23, where *μολ* in the received text seems interpolated.

¹⁵ Or, as Oehler explains it, of your power of baptizing, etc.

¹⁶ Quintilla. See c. i.

¹⁷ Evenerit. Perhaps Tertullian means literally—though that sense of the word is very rare—"shall issue out of her," alluding to his "pariet" above.

¹⁸ See c. i. *ad fin.*

¹⁹ The allusion is to a spurious work entitled *Acta Pauli et Theclæ*. [Of which afterwards. But see Jones, *on the Canon*, II. p. 353, and Lardner, *Credibility*, II. p. 305.]

²⁰ Decessisse.

²¹ Mulieri.

²² Fœminæ.

²³ 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.

²⁴ Luke vi. 30. [See note 4, p. 676.]

²⁵ Matt. vii. 6.

²⁶ 1 Tim. v. 22; *μηδενὶ* omitted, *ταχέως* rendered by "facile," and *μηδὲ* by "ne."

²⁷ "Exertam," as in c. xii.: "probatio exerta," "a conspicuous proof."

had been interposed. ¹ The Spirit had enjoined Philip to proceed to that road: the eunuch himself, too, was not found idle, nor as one who was suddenly seized with an eager desire to be baptized; but, after going up to the temple for prayer's sake, being intently engaged on the divine Scripture, was thus suitably discovered—to whom God had, unasked, sent an apostle, which one, again, the Spirit bade adjoin himself to the chamberlain's chariot. The Scripture which *he was reading* ² falls in opportunely with his faith: *Philip*, being requested, is taken to sit beside him; the Lord is pointed out; faith lingers not; water needs no waiting for; the work is completed, and the apostle snatched away. "But Paul too was, in fact, 'speedily' baptized:" for Simon, ³ his host, speedily recognized him to be "an appointed vessel of election." God's approbation sends sure premonitory tokens before it; every "petition" ⁴ may both deceive and be deceived. And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. For why is it necessary—if (baptism itself) is not so necessary ⁵—that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? Who both themselves, by reason of mortality, may fail to fulfil their promises, and may be disappointed by the development of an evil disposition, *in those for whom they stood?* The Lord does indeed say, "Forbid them not to come unto me." ⁶ Let them "come," then, while they are growing up; let them "come," while they are learning, while they are learning whether to come; ⁷ let them become Christians ⁸ when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the "remission of sins?" More caution will be exercised in worldly ⁹ matters: so that one who is *not* trusted with earthly substance *is* trusted with divine! Let them know how to "ask" for salvation, that you may seem (at least) to have given "to him that asketh." ¹⁰ For no less cause must the

unwedded also be deferred—in whom *the ground* of temptation is prepared, alike in such as *never were* wedded ¹¹ by means of their maturity, and in the *widowed* by means of their freedom—until they either marry, or else be more fully strengthened for continence. If any understand the weighty import of baptism, they will fear its reception more than its delay: sound faith is secure of salvation.

CHAP. XIX.—OF THE TIMES MOST SUITABLE FOR BAPTISM.

The Passover affords a more *than usually* solemn day for baptism; when, withal, the Lord's passion, in which we are baptized, was completed. Nor will it be incongruous to interpret figuratively *the fact* that, when the Lord was about to celebrate the last Passover, He said to the disciples who were sent to make preparation, "Ye will meet a man bearing water." ¹² He points out the place for celebrating the Passover by the sign of *water*. After that, Pentecost is a most joyous space ¹³ for conferring baptisms; ¹⁴ wherein, too, the resurrection of the Lord was repeatedly proved ¹⁵ among the disciples, and the hope of the advent of the Lord indirectly pointed to, in that, at that time, when He had been received back into the heavens, the angels ¹⁶ told the apostles that "He would so come, as He had withal ascended into the heavens;" ¹⁷ at Pentecost, of course. But, moreover, when Jeremiah says, "And I will gather them together from the extremities of the land in the feast-day," he signifies the day of the Passover and of Pentecost, which is properly a "feast-day." ¹⁸ However, *every* day is the Lord's; every hour, every time, is apt for baptism: if there is a difference in the *solemnity*, distinction there is none in the *grace*.

CHAP. XX.—OF PREPARATION FOR, AND CONDUCT AFTER, THE RECEPTION OF BAPTISM.

They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all by-

¹ Comp. Acts viii. 26-40.

¹¹ Virginius; but he is speaking about men as well as women.