

The 8th Canon of the Council of Arles, A.D. 314, and the 19th of that of Nicaea are [so far as the officiant is concerned] to the same effect.

(c) The third point above referred to—the dogma, from which originated the past and present practice of the Church of Rome—remains to be considered, viz: that the reception of Baptism is *absolutely necessary* to salvation.

Forgetting that *positive* Divine institutions impose obligations only in proportion to man's ability to act upon them; that "God requireth according to that which a man hath, and not according to that which a man hath not," the Roman Church assumed that, in every case, and under all possible circumstances, baptism was indispensable. Even *infants*, who had committed no actual sin, yet dying unbaptized, were consigned to a special division of the infernal world, called the "*limbus infantum*."

This gave rise to an intense anxiety in regard to this sacrament, an anxiety which, urging men beyond Primitive or Catholic usage, forced them—through mistaken charity—to adopt any agency, however unhallowed, rather than incur the penalty of a doom so fearful and apparently so certain.

"Minister hujus Sacramenti est sacerdos, cui ex officio competit baptizare. In *concessa* autem *necessitate*, non solum Sacerdos, vel diaconus, sed etiam *Laius*, vel *mulier*, imo etiam *Paganus* et *Hereticus* baptizare potest."

So spake Rome by the mouth of Pope Eugenius in his decree to the Arminians. Hence, then, the practice, afterwards so prevalent in the Romish Church of lay administration of baptism, a practice which through Rome, and on the basis of her authority, came into the Church of England.

That it was an error, however, is evident from the judgment of the Primitive Church in regard to those who, being yet *unbaptized*, had suffered martyrdom for Christ. Their *faith* and *constancy* were deemed a guarantee of their acceptance with God. So also in the case of Catechumens who died without this Sacrament. No doubt was entertained of their being within compass of salvation by Christ.

S. Bernard, as quoted by Hooker, [*Lib. v. cap 60*], is clear on this point:—  
 "If a man desirous of baptism be suddenly cut off by death, in whom there wanted neither sound faith, devout hope, nor sincere charity, [God forgive me if I err], but verily of such a one's salvation...despair I cannot, nor induce my mind to think his faith void, his hope confounded and his charity fallen to nothing, only because he hath not that which not contempt, but impossibility withholdeth."

S. Ambrose also—"Tell me, I beseech you, what there is in any of us more than to will, and to seek for our own good. Thy servant, O Lord, did both." [For Valentinian the Emperor died before his purpose to receive baptism could take effect.] "And is it possible, that he which *had purposely Thy Spirit* given him to *desire grace*, should not receive Thy grace which *that Spirit did desire*?" Doth it move you that the outward accustomed solemnities were not done? As though converts that suffer martyrdom before baptism did thereby forfeit their right to the crown of eternal glory in the kingdom of heaven. If the blood of martyrs in that case, be their baptism, surely his religious desire of baptism standeth him in the same stead. [*Lib. v. cap. 60*].