

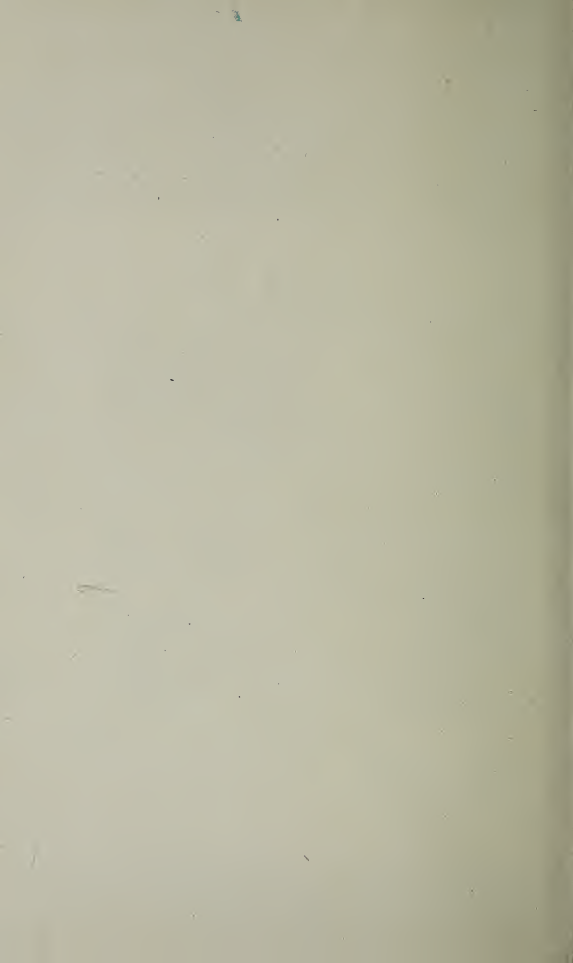
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Christian Militia





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# THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA



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*by*

**RICHARD GINDER**



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# THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA

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**T**HE apostles and disciples were really perplexed. The Lord had stayed with them forty days after His resurrection. He had promised them a baptism with the Holy Ghost, different from the baptism of water. They were to receive power from this second baptism. They were to be witnesses for the Lord to the ends of the earth. All this He had said, and then He had been taken up out of their sight.

Now they did not know quite what to do. Yes, they were to pray together, in preparation for their visitation by the Holy Ghost, but that was as far as their planning

carried them for the present. They were simply to wait.

And they did. They prayed together: the apostles, the disciples, the pious women who followed Jesus, and Mary, His mother.

“And when the days of Pentecost were drawing to a close, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a violent wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as of fire which settled upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign tongues, even as the Holy Spirit prompted them to speak.”<sup>1</sup>

They were transformed. Something had happened. These were not now the timorous people who had followed the Lord to Calvary from afar off. Before they had been bewildered, like children suddenly deprived of their parents. But now—they were filled with power. They were courageous. They had discovered their tongues. They knew what to say and how.

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1. Acts II, 1-4

It happened that there was a crowd in Jerusalem for the religious holidays. The coming of the Holy Ghost must have made an impressive disturbance, like the rumbling of thunder, localized in one house. Is it any wonder that the throngs were almost stupid with wonder? — and lo! a miracle. The Christians spoke the only language they knew, Aramaic with a Galilean intonation, and yet—"Behold, are not all these that are speaking Galileans? And how have we heard each his own language in which he was born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, Jews also and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we have heard them speaking in our own languages of the wonderful works of God."<sup>2</sup>

### **Thousands of Converts**

What happened after this first outpouring of the Holy Spirit? For the first time, Jewry

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2. Acts II, 7-13

learned the tragic news that, after waiting thousands of years for their Messiah, in spite of ceaseless poring over the prophecies, the Anointed of the Lord had finally come and they had killed Him. He had come and was gone. But it was not too late.

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins: and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

We can imagine Peter’s voice ringing up and down the narrow street like a call to judgment. Three thousand were baptized on that day. It became the birthday of the Church and has been celebrated ever afterward as one of the greatest feasts of the Christian year.

It is impossible to confuse the happenings of this Pentecost with the baptism of the apostles. They had already received their First Communion and ordination to the priesthood at the Last Supper. Jesus could not have given Himself to souls still at odds with His Father through the sin of Adam.

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3. Acts II, 38



No. This was different. This was a new sacrament, for here we find all the necessary elements. It had certainly been promised by Christ. There was a visible sign, so obvious that it was perceptible to thousands outside the house, and inside, through the tongues of fire. And the outpouring of grace showed itself immediately in the new spirit which animated the hearts of the Christians.

The early Church always made a clear distinction between Baptism and this confirmation of the faith. Naturally the apostles prized this gift of the Holy Ghost. They were busy men, so busy that they elected deacons to help them with the temporalities of the Church, but they were never too much occupied to attend to the confirming of their converts. And they never sent their deacons to take care of the matter for them.

“When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John. On their arrival they prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for as yet

He had not come upon any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

St. Paul observed the same practice. At Ephesus he found a few disciples and inquired carefully about their confirmation: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” And they answered that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit—“How then were you baptized?” asked Paul in amazement. “With John’s baptism.”

Evidently some disciples of John the Baptist had strayed over to Ephesus and given them a baptism of promise, for Paul said:

“John baptized the people with a baptism of repentance, telling them to believe in Him who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.”

“On hearing this: they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus: and when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit

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4. Acts VIII, 14-18

came upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy.”<sup>5</sup>

### Completes Baptism

Confirmation, as it is called, is another of those means by which the love of God is built up in our souls. It marks and establishes the maturity of the Christian in his faith.

It is baptism which establishes us in the love of God. The Church conferring the sacrament prays for the perseverance of the Christian—“Guard him by Thy never failing power, that he may keep the great beginning of Thy glory and, by the observance of Thy commandments, arrive at the glory of regeneration.” — “Look down, we pray Thee, on this, Thy servant, whom Thou hast deigned to call to an initiation in Thy faith: take away all his blindness of heart: break every bond of satan, by which he was held fast: open the door of Thy piety to him, Lord, that he may be steeped in the sign of Thy wisdom; that he may no longer stink with every desire,

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5. Acts XIX, 1-7

that he may rather serve in Thy Church with joy, in the goodly odor of Thy precepts, and advance from day to day.”

With confirmation, a seal is put on the soul. The Christian is strong enough, now, to lift up his eyes and turn himself to the spreading of the faith among his fellows. In the eastern churches the sacrament is conferred by the priest immediately after baptism. But in the Latin rite it is the bishop who confirms; a priest can do so only in virtue of a special delegation from the Holy See.

Although the peculiar powers given to the early Christians at their confirmation no longer accompany the sacrament, it is because they are no longer needed. These miraculous gifts—charisms they are called—were to be used, not for the private profit of their owner, but as an argument to support the truth of his faith. They were a proof, to demonstrate as a living oath, the verity of the faith being announced.

Now we can appeal to even greater arguments. We have the support of Christians by hundreds of millions; we have the

universality of the Church; its ancient strength; its permanence; its saints; the miracles centered at its shrines; these, and a thousand other proofs have superseded the personal endowments formerly granted.

Confirmation, then, more than baptism, looks to our neighbor. It gives the Christian a militant character. He is made sturdy, but with a purpose. He is to confess the faith of Christ. He is to spread the faith of Christ.

### **The Miracle of the Catholic Church**

The Catholic Church today, in its far-flung outposts, is a living testimony to the effects of confirmation.

St. Paul, travelling the length and breadth of the Roman Empire, St. Patrick in Ireland, St. Augustine in England, St. Boniface in Germany, SS Cyril and Methodius among the Slavs, Father Marquette, Fra Junipero Serra, St. Isaac Jogues—all of these were inflamed by that Sacred Spirit kindled in them at confirmation.

Beyond these missionary apostles, behind the Xaviers, the men in the front lines, stands an army of martyrs, the men and

women, boys and girls, who had their tongues pierced, their eyes reamed out, their sides braised, who were flayed alive, who drank molten lead, who kissed the sword of deliverance from the body of this death, rather than disown the faith that was in them. These too were filled with the Spirit of Pentecost.

After them, the stout-hearted Catholics who survived the white martyrdom of a life spent in God's service: monks and nuns, hermits, recluses, detaching themselves as much as possible from the things of this world; the people, living in the world, and suffering the evil shafts of discrimination just because they were Catholics. We think of our brethren in Tudor England: where Catholicism was high treason; where no Catholic might be a school-master; nor come within ten miles of London; nor travel more than five miles from his home; nor sue at law. We are reminded of our brethren in Ireland: the Bishop of Killala executed in 1578; the Archbishop of Cashel, burned at the stake in 1578; the Bishop of Down martyred at Dublin in 1611. Every

priest to be hanged, drawn and quartered. Everyone to be hanged who so much as offered a priest a cup of tea. Catholics, until 1800, kept out of the Irish Parliament. Every Catholic schoolmaster to be exiled. And so the story goes in the history of almost every nation.

This presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, corporately and individually, this divine impulsion, this burning zeal directed toward the conversion of others, is nowhere more strikingly demonstrated than in the missionary attainments of the Church, past and present.

Right now we have: over 18,000 priests and 8,000 brothers; 49,000 sisters, 78,000 catechists; 68,000 teachers; 10,000 churches; 49,000 chapels; 400 seminaries; 17,000 students for the priesthood; besides innumerable schools, hospitals and institutions for orphans and lepers, all in mission countries.

### **The Holy Spirit Poured Out**

The spread of Catholicism in the first centuries is a recognized marvel. Harnack concludes that by the year 300 A.D. Cath-

olicism had won more than half of Asia Minor, Southern Thrace, Cyprus, Armenia and Edessa, with its territory. It was stronger than any other religion in Antioch and Coele-Syria, Egypt (especially in Alexandria), Thebes, Rome, southern and central Italy, Roman Africa and Numidia, Spain, the principal parts of Greece and Southern France. The faith had made great headway in Palestine, Phenicia, some parts of Mesopotamia; the Grecian peninsula and the Danube section, northern and easterly Italy, Mauritania, and Tripolitania. It was spreading in Philistia, Scythia, Persia, India and the shore of the Black Sea, a part of western Italy, central and northern France, Belgium, Germany, England and Nora.

“The impression entertained by the Fathers of the Fourth Century, v.g. Arnobius, Eusebius, and Augustine, that their faith was from generation to generation, and spread with an incomprehensible rapidity—that impression was just. Sixty-six years after the foundation of the first Christian community in Syrian Antioch, Pliny



expressed himself in the strongest terms regarding the spread of Christianity in remote Bithynia, and thought that the other cults, established in that province, had already been ruined. Sixty-six years later, the Easter controversy revealed a federation of Christian churches centering around Rome and reaching from Lyons to Edessa. Sixty-six years afterward, the Emperor Decius declared he would rather have another emperor in Rome than a Christian Bishop; and sixty-six more years saw the cross embroidered on the Roman banners."

In other words, by the year 326 Christianity had conquered paganism and had become the official religion of the Empire. Harnack says that one-third of the cities of the Empire had resident bishops by then. There were 900 of them in the East and 800 or 900 in the West.

One cannot say, of course, that this is a result of confirmation alone. But it is a feat of the Holy Spirit working through human agents, and individual souls are visited in a special way by the Third Person when they receive this great sacrament.

After all, the expansion of the Church traces back to that first Pentecost. She does well to make its annual observance an occasion of solemn joy, and to date so many of her Sundays by their sequence after that festival.



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