

Hugh of St. Victor on Baptism of Desire

The Following is taken from the well-known work of Hugh of St. Victor . He was the most influential Catholic Theologian of the 12th Century (Died 1141) . He resided at the Monastery of St. Victor in Paris. He is well known for his theological treaties called “the Sacraments of the Christian Faith (De Sacramentis). In book II, Part 7, on the sacrament of Baptism he states as follows:

“VII: Whether the after the precept of baptism was given anyone could be saved with out actually receiving the sacrament of baptism.

Some either through curiosity or zeal are accustomed to inquire whether anyone after the enjoining and proclaiming of the sacrament of baptism can be saved, unless he actually receives the sacrament of baptism itself. For the reasons seem to be manifest and they have many authorities, first because it is said: “Unless a man be born again of the water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” (Cf. John 3,5), and again: “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved,” (Mark 16:16). There are many such passages, which seem, as it were, to affirm that by no means can he be saved who has not had this sacrament, were, to affirm that by no means can he be saved who has not had this sacrament, whatever he may have besides this sacrament. If he should have perfect faith, if hope, if he should have charity, even if he should have a contrite and humble heart which God does not despise, true repentance for the past, firm purpose for the future, whatever he may have, he will not be able to be saved, if he does not have this. All this seems so to them on account of what is written: “Unless a man be born again of the water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God,” (Cf. John 3, 5).

Yet if someone should ask what has happened to those who, after shedding blood for Christ, departed this life without the sacrament of water, they dare not say that men of this kind are not saved. And, although one cannot show that this is written in what is mentioned above, yet they dare not say that, because it is not written

there, it is to be denied. For he who said: “Unless a man be born again of the water and the Holy Ghost,” did not add: “or by pouring forth his blood instead of water,” and yet his is true, although it is not written here. For if he is saved who received water on account of God, why is he not saved much more who sheds blood on account of God? For it is more to give blood than to receive water. Moreover, what some say is clearly silly, that those who shed blood are saved because with blood they also shed water and in the very water which they shed they receive baptism. For if, those who are killed are said to have been baptized on account of the moisture of water which drips from their wounds together with the corruption of blood, then those who are suffocated or drowned or are killed by some other kind of death where blood is not shed have not been baptized in their blood and have died for Christ in vain, because they did not shed the moisture of the water which they had within their body. Who would say this? So, he is baptized in blood who dies for Christ, who, even if he does not shed blood from the wound, gives life which is more precious than blood. For he could shed blood and, if he did not give life, shedding blood would be less than giving life. Therefore, he sheds blood well who lays down his life for Christ, and he has his baptism in the virtue of the sacrament, without which to have received the sacrament itself, as it were, is of no benefit. So where this is the case, to be unable to have the sacrament does no harm.

Thus, it is true, although it is not said, there, that he who dies for Christ is baptized in Christ. Thus, they say, it is true, although it is not said there, and it is true because it is said elsewhere, even if it is not said there. For He who said: Unless a man be born again of the water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,” the same also said elsewhere: “He who shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father,” (Cf. Matt. 10,30). And so what is not said there, is nevertheless to be understood, although it is not said, since it is said elsewhere. Behold therefore why they say it. They say that what is not said is to be understood where it is it is not said, because it is said elsewhere. If therefore, this is to be understood in this place where it is not said, since it is said elsewhere, why is it not also to be understood similarly about faith, since it is said elsewhere: “He who believeth in me, shall not die forever,” (Cf. John 11,26). Likewise, He who said: “Unless a man be

born again of the water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God,” He himself said: ““He who believeth in me, shall not die forever,”. Therefore, either deny faith or concede salvation. What does it seem to you? Where there is faith, where there is hope, where there is charity, finally where there is the full and perfect virtue of the sacrament, there is no salvation because the sacrament alone is not and it is not, because it cannot be possessed. “He that believeth,” He said, “and is baptized, shall be saved,” (Mark 16,16). Therefore behold, there is no doubt but that where there is faith and is baptism, there is salvation.

And what follows? “But he that believeth not shall be condemned,” (Cf. (Mark 16,16). Why did He wish to speak thus? Why did He not say: “He that believeth not and is not baptized, shall be saved?” Why, unless because it is of the will to believe and because he who wishes to believe cannot lack faith. And so in him who does not believe, an evil will is always shown, where there can be no necessity which may be put forth as an excuse. Now to be baptized can be in the will even when it is not in possibility, and on this account just is good will with the devotion of its faith not despised, although in moment of necessity he is prevented from receiving that sacrament of water which is external. Do you wish to know more fully whether or not his reason is proven elsewhere by more manifest authority, although even those authorities which we have mentioned above seem so manifest that there can be no doubt about the truth of them?

Listen to something more, if by chance this matter about which you should not be in doubt can be shown you more clearly. Blessed Augustine in his book, “On the One Baptism,” speaks as follows: Again and again, as I consider it, I find that not only suffering for the name of Christ can fulfill what was lacking to baptism but also faith and the conversion of heart, if perhaps assistance could not be rendered for the celebration of the mystery of baptism in straitened circumstances.” You see that he clearly testifies that faith and conversion of heart can suffice for the salvation of good will where it happens that the visible sacrament of water of necessity cannot be had. But lest perhaps you think that the

contradicted himself, since afterwards in the book of retractions he disapproved of the example of the thief which he had assumed to establish this opinion where he had said that the shedding of blood or faith and change of heart could fulfill the place of baptism, saying: In the fourth book, when I said that suffering could take the place of baptism, I did not furnish a sufficiently fitting example in that of the thief about whom there is some doubt as to whether he was baptized,” you should consider that in this place he only corrected an example which he had offered to prove his opinion; he did not reject his opinion. But if you think that that opinion is to be rejected, because the example is corrected, then what he had said is false, that the shedding of blood can take the place of baptism, since the example itself was furnished to prove that. For he does **not** say: “When I said that **faith** could have the place of baptism,” but he says: “When I said that **suffering** could have the place of Baptism,” although he had placed both in the one opinion. If therefore, regarding what he said, that suffering can have the place of baptism, an example has been furnished, since it is established that it is true without any ambiguity, it is clear that the example was afterwards corrected but the opinion was not rejected.

You should, therefore, either confess that true faith and confession of the heart can fulfill the place of baptism in the moment of necessity or show how true faith and unfeigned charity can be possessed where here is no salvation. Unless perhaps you wish to say that, no one can have true faith and true charity, who is not to have the visible sacrament of water. Yet by what reason or by what authority you prove this I do not know. We meanwhile do not ask whether anyone who is not to receive the sacrament of baptism can have these, since this alone as far as this matter is concerned is certain: if there were anyone who had these even without the visible sacrament of water, he could not perish. There are many other things which could have been brought up to prove this, but what we have set forth above in the treatment of the sacraments to prove this point we by no means think needs reconsideration.” – De Sacramentis