

The Praxis of Infant Baptism Theory & Practice (An Adaptation of the RCIA)



Bishops at Vatican II

- Called for a restoration of the catechumenate and, after years of preparation, the new rite was given to the Church in January, 1972.
- The word catechumenate comes from the Greek and means “instruction.” Catechumens in the early church were people being prepared for baptism, and it was primarily an adult process. It was generally a three year process, of mentoring, prayer, learning, and ongoing conversion.
- The catechumenate, both in the early Church and today, takes place within the Christian Community.

The Catechumenate

**A process of adult mentoring,
apprenticing, group
socialization, and
enculturation.**

(Because Faith is Caught)

Infant Baptism

- We begin the baptism liturgy with the question: “What do you ask of God’s Church?” The answer is FAITH?
- Baptism, both of adults and children is about FAITH, preceded by conversion.

If baptism is primarily about faith and conversion, but the infant presented to us has neither, whose faith and conversion is it about?

“Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?”

- The on-going-ness of baptismal conversion is precisely the argument for baptizing infants.
- The important factor in infant Baptism is the community and, within the community, the parents and sponsors (see Catechism, #1252-1255).
 - Infant baptism remains an adult ritual

A Sacrament of Faith & Community

- **1253:** Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe. (Faith, for Catholics, is an ecclesial reality.) The faith required for Baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop. The catechumen or the godparent is asked: “What do you ask of God’s Church? The response is “Faith!”

Intended for Everyone

- **1254:** *For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow after baptism.*

Baptism is an Ecclesial Responsibility

- **1255:** *For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents' help is important. So too is the role of the godfather and godmother, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized – child or adult – on the road of Christian life. Their task is a truly **ecclesial** function. The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.*

St. Tertullian, 155 – 240 CE

“Christians are
made, not born.”

(See Searle, p. 1)

St. Bonaventure, 1221 – 1274 CE

- Baptism is not a sacrament of the individual person, but a sacrament of the Church, and therefore he stresses the communal and social nature of the sacrament. In baptism the faith of the Church is clearly present. In infant baptism, in which the child cannot make a statement of personal faith, the faith of the Church plays a role, but it is still subjective, in the sense that it stands on the human side of the relationship.

Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx

- Jesus is the “primordial (first) sacrament” present in his Church.
- When the Creed professes belief in “One Baptism,” we are referring to Jesus himself.
- Jesus in himself is what baptism is all about.
- Baptism is not just what the Church does, but what it is . . . The Church is a radically baptized Church.

Faith is Caught more than Taught:

- John Westerhoff (1976)
- “Will Our Children have Faith?”
- Six Institutions . . .
 - Neighborhoods
 - Extended Families
 - Catholic Schools
 - Public Schools
 - Parishes
 - Entertainment Industry
- The Changing of Society after WW II
 - The Judeo-Christian envelop that fostered faith, children absorbed a way of living which supported the values and lifestyle of believers.

Faith Formation & the GDC (1998), NDC (2005) by USCCB

- 1) Catechesis “is essentially an ecclesial act.”
- 2) The community needs to deepen its own identity.
- 3) Faith formation is for everyone, and involves the whole community.
- 4) Baptism as a “sacrament of unity” needs the community present and involved.

GDC & NDC

- 5) How can children grow if adults are not?
- 6) “An apprenticeship of the entire Christian life” (#67).
- 7) To live as a person of God, one must belong to the people of God. The great themes of Vatican II were “**The People of God**” and the “**body of Christ.**” Both radically communal.

GDC / NDC

- 8) Knowledge of the faith is not enough . . . It takes the whole community.
- 9) Faith is not about information. Faith is a relationship. Experience must always precede the message, in order for the message to be integrated into life.
- 10) Faith is caught; faith is not taught. One must always be conscious of the reality that peoples hearts are changed not by religious literacy, but by the relationships of people in relationship with Jesus. This is the primary purpose of catechesis, and it is always orientated towards adults.

*THE CHURCH / COMMUNITY
BECOMES BOTH THE
CONTENT AND THE
CURRICULUM FOR BAPTISM.*

Infant Baptism and the Community

- Children of infant baptism are the “catechumens” of home and school and Church.
- The missing piece of infant baptism today is that we are not helping parents and godparents, and perhaps even the faith community today, learn of how they caught faith and experienced conversion.
 - Unless we can name our conversion moments/stories, we can't pass them on to someone else!
- Especially for young Catholics, the question becomes, have they experienced conversion, and if not, how can we better facilitate them being able to name their own faith stories, and help them on the journey of conversion? We need to ask them how they caught faith?

Praxis Questions

- Infant baptism is a Sacrament of the Church, and therefore, the Church's responsibility and privilege, how do we help prepare both parents and the larger community for what we celebrate?
- Are we willing to ask the community to help? How do we do that?
- What about post baptismal catechesis? Do we contact the family after baptism as a way to do Mystagogy?

Soren Kierkegaard

- “I only know a truth that has become life in me!”

Karl Rahner

“The challenge of religion is not to pump faith into people, but to draw it out of them!”

Infant baptism has one clear advantage . . .

- It is a clear statement that salvation is entirely God's work (see Catechism, #1996). His love is freely bestowed before the child can possibly do anything to seem to deserve it. Long before a baby has come to know the Christian community, the community claims responsibility for the infant.

