

Article: Infant Baptism

In today's Gospel we read: "*Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). Some have questioned whether Christ really had baptism in mind when He spoke these words. But our Saviour here uses an expression that was a current phrase in His day and which all Jews understood to refer to baptism. The Jews called the baptism of a Gentile his new birth, his regeneration, being born again. In the Jewish Talmud we read: "If any one become a proselyte, he is like a child new born." Again, "The Gentile that is made a proselyte, and the slave that is made free, behold, he is like a child new-born." In the Jewish mind the idea of a new birth was associated with baptism. Christ uses this term, and in v. 5 adds the words "*of water and the Spirit*," thereby clearly indicating that He was speaking of baptism. To be sure, the new birth Christ had in mind and the new birth of the Jewish baptism were by no means the same; but the words "*born of water and the Spirit*" could by Nicodemus have not been understood any other way than referring to baptism.

One objection about baptism we find today is based on the seeming inability of the child to understand and to appreciate what is being done with it. For this reason it is held that baptism is absolutely useless to the child. It is true, as we look upon the infants we baptise, we observe that sometimes they sleep, sometimes they cry, or appear altogether unconcerned as to what is being said and done. And it is quite natural that the thought comes to us, "How can this baptism be of any benefit to the infant, and what is the use or baptising him?" These rationalistic considerations are perhaps the chief reason why some defer the baptism of their children until they have reached the age of assent.

However, the same line of reasoning may have been advanced against circumcision. Still, it was definitely commanded that a child eight days old was to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12). Besides, parents do not follow that rule otherwise with their children in temporal affairs. They will do for their children what they believe to be good for them, even though these do not assent or are vehemently opposed to it. Where there is a question whether or not a thing is beneficial, the concerns of the child are not lightly to be disposed of by another; but in baptism the benefit is evident and unquestionable: the child enters into communion with God and is made the recipient of His grace. In every case it is for the good of the child to be baptised; therefore children should be brought to baptism even though, as it may seem to us, they do not consciously assent. One may privilege a person though he be incapable of knowing it. The argument that by infant baptism we predetermine the religion of the child has as little force as the argument that by the schooling and education we give a child we predetermine his career in life. We do the one; why not the other?

In baptism large benefits and privileges are bestowed upon the child. It is a means of grace, through which God's grace and forgiveness is not only offered but through which also the Holy Spirit is given, who so operates on the heart of the child that by faith he accepts the proffered gifts. How this is one is a profound mystery to us. But for the fact that it is done, we have the authority of God, who tells us that by water and the Spirit we are born again and who calls baptism a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Children, who by their natural birth are flesh born of flesh, are by baptism reborn unto God and become partakers of all His blessings in Christ. The indifference towards, and the neglect of, infant baptism which we find in many churches of our day have their root in the denial that baptism is indeed a means of grace, through which God's Spirit is shed upon us abundantly to bestow on us grace and forgiveness and to work in the soul that faith whereby we accept these gifts and thus are regenerated. To convince them of their error, we must point to the command of Christ which tells us to make disciples of all nations, which certainly includes infants and children. We must show that all children are flesh born of flesh and do not inherit from their parents membership in the covenant of grace, but must themselves be born of water and the Spirit if they are to enter the kingdom of God. Finally, they must learn from the Bible that baptism is the means through which God bestows grace and works regeneration in the heart. Whoever understands the Biblical teaching of the natural depravity of children and of the benefit and power of baptism will not hesitate to have his children baptised.