

Baptism in the New Church

Adapted from an article by the Rev. B. David Holm

When we are blessed with a baby, we are thrilled and awestruck with the wonder of new life. We feel very close to the Lord as we view the miracle in our arms. We reflect upon our responsibilities both to Him and to the newborn infant. In all likelihood, we make promises to the Lord and to our partner to do our best in raising the child. We feel a flood of love toward our baby.

All this is of order, intended by the Lord. We are filled with a deep response to the innocence of the babe. This is from an influx of the inmost good of love from the Lord. From this springs love for the infant, especially with mothers. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 710.)

Such tender states are gifts from the Lord. They are caused by two universal spheres proceeding from the Lord: the love of procreating and the love of protecting what is procreated (*Conjugal Love* 386-387). Almost all parents receive a natural love of children. It motivates us to foster and protect the worldly welfare of our children. And though the natural well-being of children is certainly important, we must not forget that their spiritual welfare is an even higher concern. When that is our concern, the emphasis is upon eternal life, and this will be reflected in our instruction of our children and in the protective sphere with which we surround them.

By its instruction and leading, the Church tries to give parents the religious principles necessary to raise and protect their children for eternal life. These spiritual values are clearly, even urgently, stated in the baptismal service—that holy act of worship—the first *sacrament* of the Church.

Parents in the New Church are encouraged to bring their children forward to the altar of the Lord for baptism. We learn from the Word what this sacrament involves and what it promises for the child. Baptism is more than a pleasant custom celebrating the arrival of a new baby, it is a serious commitment to the Lord. This commitment comes from an inner desire for the spiritual welfare of the child and an earnest desire for the Lord's help in fulfilling our true parental responsibility.

Baptism sets up a spiritual environment with guardian angels in the Christian heaven where the child can be kept in a state of receiving faith in the Lord (*True Christian Religion* 677).

It also benefits the parents spiritually for they are, in the baptismal service, acknowledging that the child belongs to the Lord and not to them. By actively seeking Divine aid, they are also acknowledging that they will be able to set up a natural environment in accordance with the spiritual environment into which baptism has introduced their child.

The baptismal service in the New Church is a powerful one. In it parents make a solemn covenant with the Lord to keep the Commandments for their child until he or she comes of age. This promise involves the whole spiritual welfare of the child. It is based upon the two fundamentals of religion: the acknowledgment of God and the acknowledgment that evils are to be shunned as sins against Him.

These two fundamentals are contained in the first two questions parents answer in the service. They are first asked, “Do you, for yourselves and for this child, acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ, as He is now revealed in His Second Advent, to be the one God of heaven and earth?” This

acknowledgment involves the heartfelt desire to have a full relationship with the Lord through a life leading to regeneration. It also involves actively seeking the Lord in the spiritual sense of the Word contained in the Writings of the New Christianity. Thus, the parents are affirming the need for an active spiritual life—a truly Christian life.

The second question follows from this first acknowledgment. “Do you, for yourselves and for this child, acknowledge that evils are to be shunned as sins against Him?” This acknowledgment affirms that a daily life of regeneration is necessary for salvation. Spiritual rebirth comes through actual repentance and through victory in temptation. In baptism, parents are promising to introduce their child into this life of regeneration—the life of religion.

The third question incorporates all that has been said before. When parents are asked if they desire that their child “be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” their answer promises that they will teach their child about who the Lord is and about the type of life He wills for us. Parents promise to do this both by instruction and in the actions of daily life.

To be “baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” is to be introduced into all the Divine qualities of the Lord—His life, His wisdom, His power which leads to victory, and His loving Providence which leads us out of evil. Parents who set up an environment, which allows these Divine qualities to mold and guide their child, fulfill this third promise wonderfully.

The baptismal service ends with a charge, or injunction, to the parents. They are urged to lead their child to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ. They are told to teach the child the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments and to see that he or she learns from the threefold Word.

As we contemplate our own child's baptism or perhaps reflect on those we have witnessed in the past, let us work with the organized Church for the spiritual growth of our children. Let us summon the courage, strength and wisdom necessary to do this great work of rearing children as the Lord asks us.

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Thus the first use of baptism is that a person may have the name of Christian; the second, following from the first, that he or she may know and acknowledge the Lord, the Redeemer, Regenerator and Savior, and the third is that he or she may be regenerated by Him. When this takes place, a person is redeemed and saved. As these three uses follow in order, and unite in the ultimate, and consequently to the angels appear to combine as one, therefore when baptism is performed, when it is read of in the Word or mentioned by name, angels who are present do not understand baptism but regeneration (True Christian Religion 685).