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## 7

## Baptismal Practices and the Spiritual Nurture of Children<sup>1</sup>

### An Historical Overview

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#### Introduction

From the earliest days of the church, baptism has been a rite marking those identified as Christians. As rites of initiation, baptism and other practices associated with it (e.g., exorcism, anointing, confirmation, eucharist), have been viewed as either creating or reflecting a new spiritual reality in the life of the one baptized. Because of the critical importance of this rite and what it was understood to mean, it became a driving force in the development of the church's teaching ministry. For example, in the early church, extensive instruction in the faith, both belief and behavior, normally preceded baptism. Later, as theological views of human nature and childhood developed in the Western church, the practice of infant baptism increased, with instruction in the faith coming later as the child grew. Today, on this side of the Reformation, there are many diverse understandings of the nature and purpose of baptism and who is viewed as eligible for it. As a result, there have developed many different approaches to the spiritual formation and nurture of people both before and after the

1. This essay was originally published in slightly different form in the *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 2011). The essay is republished here with permission of the *Christian Education Journal*.

rite. In particular, differing views on the baptism of children has led to very different understandings of their relationship with God and the church, resulting in different approaches to their spiritual instruction and nurture.

Church leaders today stand in both theological and educational traditions that shape what we expect of and do with our children. This chapter explores how historical changes in the theology and practice of baptism have impacted the church's ministry with children. By carefully reviewing this history, I hope to help church leaders in the present more faithfully design and carry out educational ministries with children that reflect their baptismal theology and practice.

This chapter begins with an historic overview of why and how baptismal practices changed, and examines the resulting impact on the church's educational efforts with children.<sup>2</sup> It then presents a brief case study of theological reflection on the meaning and impact of baptism by Horace Bushnell as he wrestled with what the "Christian nurture" of children should be like. Finally, issues are explored for those in the church today who are responsible for the development of their church's educational ministry and other spiritual formation efforts with children.

### Historical Overview

#### *Children and Baptism in the New Testament*

Though hotly debated, it is unclear whether or not children in the church during the New Testament era were baptized. Examples shared in the Bible generally either focus on adult believers receiving baptism (e.g., Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:26-39) or on entire households following new adult believers in baptism (e.g., Philippian jailor, Acts 16:29-33). Whether or not these households included young children or infants is not discussed in the biblical texts. This ambiguity has led to considerable debate throughout the history of the church, as theologians sought both to understand and justify current baptismal practices, and give new direction where they felt it was needed. The tendency has been for scholars to either find support for their own

2. Unless otherwise noted, the quotations from early church documents that appear in this chapter are taken from the excellent compilation that Paul Turner has published on CD-ROM as part of *Ages of initiation: The first two Christian millennia* (The Liturgical Press, 2000).

current practices or to leave it ambiguous. Some of the relevant biblical texts include the following<sup>3</sup> (emphasis added):

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. *And when she and her household had been baptized*, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:14-15)

And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together will all who were in his house*. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, *and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household*. (Acts 16:29-33)

*Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household*; and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. (Acts 18:8)

*Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas*; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. (1 Cor. 1:16)

Both Turner (2000) and Bakke (2005) argue that although children are not specifically identified within these texts, what we know of children being included in the worship of the early church, early views that identified baptism with the practice of ritual circumcision in the Old Testament, and the collective nature of the family in both Jewish and Greek cultures, it seems more likely that children were included in household baptisms in the New Testament record. What is clear is that the biblical examples all have a time of instruction of the adult believer preceding the baptism of the person and his or her household. In some cases the instruction was specifically given to the entire household (Acts 16:29-34; possibly Acts 18:8). This ambiguous beginning led to divergent practices as the early church spread and grew.

What also seems clear from the New Testament records is that parents bore the primary responsibility for teaching and nurturing their children in the Christian faith. Passages like Ephesians 6:4 reveal the expectations parents in the church were to fulfill: "Fathers, do not

3. All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, updated edition, 1995, the Lockman Foundation.

provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

### *Children and Baptism in the Early Church*

#### *First through Third Centuries*

Baptism continued to be an important rite of initiation in the early church, marking a person as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ (e.g., see the *Didache*, Milavec, 2003). The general pattern involved having a sponsor attest to the faith and moral life of the person, his or her enrollment in the catechumenate for a period of time, then baptism (including exorcism, anointing, and the eucharist). However, the practice of baptizing infants and children of adult believers varied and was vigorously debated by church leaders.

The first direct reference to the baptism of infants appears in Tertullian's writings as he wrestled with his understanding of the innocence of children and the dangerous consequences of serious sin following baptism. He ended up rejecting the necessity of their baptism. The prevalent view was that baptism provided forgiveness for sins up to that point in time. Serious sins committed after baptism were seen as potentially removing one's salvation. (Emphasis added.)

Granted, the Lord said, "Do not stop the children from coming to me." But they may come while they are maturing, they may come while they are learning—while they are taught where they may come. *They will become Christians when they are able to know Christ. Why should this innocent age rush to the forgiveness of sins? Will worldly affairs be approached more cautiously, so that one who is not entrusted with earthly matters is entrusted with divine ones? Let them know how to ask for salvation so that you may seem to have given to someone seeking it. . . .* For no less reason the unmarried should also delay. Temptation has made plans for them—virgins because of their maturation and widows because of their instability—until they either marry or are strengthened for continence. *If people understand the importance of baptism, they will fear its execution more than its delay. A blameless faith is sure of salvation.* (Tertullian, *Baptism* 18:3–6)

Likewise, Origen wrestled with the practice of infant baptism, but ended up supporting it as a rite of purification that removed the "stain" of birth, not the guilt of personal or original sin (Origen, *Homilies on*

*Luke* 14:5). Irenaeus, on the other hand, specifically identifies infants and children as ones who have been reborn through Christ (Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* 2:22, 4).

Macarius describes the change of practice from the baptism of adults after time in the catechumenate to the inclusion of infants in baptism.

In the first generation infants were not baptized, but those who were of an appropriate age were called catechumens, and it was to those that baptism was preached and the Christian religion was taught for three years, and they were baptized. . . .

In the end, the baptism of adults was rejected and it was given to infants, because they were born in the faith of Christ, children of the faithful. But it was a continual rite in the churches up to today. (Macarius, "Letter")

Cyprian writes of the decision of 66 bishops at the Synod of Carthage (AD 251–253) that infants should be baptized as soon as possible, not waiting until the eighth day as some were advocating who equated infant baptism with ritual circumcisions of male infants in the Old Testament.

This was our opinion in the council, that we should keep no one from baptism and from the grace of God, who is merciful and kind and gentle to all. Since this must be observed and maintained about everyone, we think it should be even more observed about infants themselves and newborns. They deserve more from our help and from the divine mercy, since crying and weeping immediately from the very beginning of their birth, they do nothing other than pray. (Cyprian *Letter* 64:2,5f.)

Finally, in the *Apostolic Tradition* (21), the baptism of children is described, including those "who cannot speak for themselves." This later reference is taken by Bakke (2005) to refer not necessarily to infants, but to all children under the age of seven who were not viewed as being able to take responsibility for their own actions and verbal commitments.

In general, children were viewed as being under the authority and responsibility of parents for their spiritual instruction and nurture. Because of the disagreement regarding children, two scenarios developed during this time period: (1) Believing adults were to instruct their

own children in the faith, bring them to participate in the worship of the church, and encourage their enrollment in the catechumenate at a young age so that they could profess their own faith and be baptized, and (2) Believing adults had their newborn infants and other children baptized and then instructed them in the faith and brought them to participate in worship in the church. These two competing traditions continued for several centuries.

#### Fourth through Seventh Centuries

Early in the fourth century, as Christianity changed from a persecuted or tolerated religion to one favored within the Roman Empire, it grew quickly. In some areas, it became common for parents to present their children to become catechumens at a young age so they could be taught prior to baptism. However, as the practice of infant baptism spread it undermined the catechumenate and put more responsibility on the parents for instructing their children following baptism instead of in preparation for it.

In this time period the two competing scenarios described above developed differing patterns of teaching. On the one hand, this era is called by some the "Golden Age" of the catechumenate. Many church leaders developed extensive catechetical lectures and the catechumenate was a lengthy time of instruction leading to baptism (e.g., Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*). Following baptism additional instruction was carried out (mystagogy) to explain the sacraments just experienced. A concern of leaders in this tradition was that some adults were delaying baptism out of fear of the consequences of serious sin following this sacrament. Penance for sin after baptism was a rigorous process that could only be done once, and marked a person for life with a stigma (Bakke, 2005). This led some to become perpetual catechumens, unwilling to be baptized until late in life or on their deathbed.

On the other hand, this period of time also saw a growing acceptance of infant baptism. A theology of original sin supplanted the view of the innocence of children held by many earlier church leaders. For church leaders like Augustine, the concerns over original sin and infant mortality led to an insistence on the baptism of newborn infants as a means to safeguard them from eternal damnation. In the late fifth and early sixth century, as a theology of repeatable penance

developed, the fears of the consequences of dying unbaptized came to overshadow those of the consequences of sin after baptism. This growth of infant baptism led at first to parents going through the baptismal preparation activities on behalf of their children (Dujarier, 1979). Eventually this practice disappeared. The norm eventually became having newborn infants baptized, anointed or confirmed, and receive communion all in one ceremony.

The Apostolic Constitutions affirmed the appropriateness of both baptizing children and teaching them the Christian faith based on Jesus' own teaching and example.

Baptize also your little children, and "teach them in the instruction and the law of the Lord." For he says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them." (*Apostolic Constitutions* 6:15,7)

Augustine defended the idea that children should participate in both of the sacraments of the church relevant for their age: baptism and communion. Though they could not exercise their own faith, the sacraments were seen as providing forgiveness of sin and making the child a believer.

Whoever says, "An infant's age does not possess within it what Jesus saves," says nothing other than, "Christ the Lord is not Jesus for faithful infants," that is for infants baptized in Christ. . . . They are infants, but they become members of him. They are infants, but they receive his sacraments. They are infants, but they become partakers of his table, so that they may have life in them. (Augustine, *Sermon* 174:6,7)

Therefore although there is not yet that faith which is in the will of believers, nevertheless the sacrament of that faith already makes the child a believer. (Augustine, *Letter* 98:10)

Chrysostom, a leader in the church in the East, defended infant baptism on other grounds than Augustine. In his view, though mortal, infants were themselves sinless, and baptism was a sign of inclusion in the church and the reception of the Holy Spirit. As Guroian (2001) explains, for Chrysostom,

Baptism, above all else, is an acceptance by the church and entrance of the baptized person into the redeemed and sanctified body of Christ. Baptism is the beginning of a life spent in spiritual combat (*askesis*) and instruction in holiness and

godliness and on a deepening journey into the kingdom of heaven. Infants and children are especially needful of being incorporated and socialized into the church because they benefit from the care and discipline of adults experienced in the spiritual struggle. (p. 70)

Finally, for the Western church, the Council of Carthage in AD 418 affirmed the idea of original sin, seeing in the rite of baptism the opportunity for children, who are guilty because of another's sin, to receive forgiveness of sin by the actions of another. A quote from their conclusions, and a letter by John the Deacon around AD 500, explain this perspective.

Furthermore, it pleases all the bishops that the following be condemned: those who deny that children should be baptized fresh from the womb of their mothers; or who say that they are indeed baptized for the forgiveness of sins, but that they contract nothing of original sin from Adam, which is atoned for by the bath of rebirth; for it follows that the form of baptism "for the forgiveness of sins" is understood falsely, not truly. For what the Apostle says must not be understood in any other way except the way the Catholic church spread throughout the world has always understood it: "Through one person sin entered into the world (and through sin, death), and thus it is passed on to all people, since all sinned in that person" (cf. Rom 5:12). For because of this principle of faith, even children who have not yet been able themselves to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized for the forgiveness of sins, so that what they contracted by birth may be cleansed in them by rebirth. (Council of Carthage XV [418] 2)

However let this not appear to be omitted before we mention it, that all these baptismal rituals should also apply to children, who understand nothing up to this point because of the earliness of their age. For this reason you ought to know that, since they are presented by parents or by some others, it is necessary that those who have been condemned by another's sin now be saved by another's faith. (John the Deacon, *Letter to Senarius*, 7)

Over time, the increasing acceptance of the legitimacy of baptizing infants set the stage for the decline of the catechumenate, and placed the burden of spiritual instruction and nurture on parents, with the purpose of teaching children how to live the faith they were baptized

into. What had been "catechumenate" now became "mystagogy," instruction following baptism. John Chrysostom explained it thus:

Let us bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Great will be the reward in store for us, for if artists who make statues and paint portraits of kings are held in high esteem, will not God bless ten thousand times more those who reveal and beautify His royal image (for man is the image of God)? When we teach our children to be good, to be gentle, to be forgiving (all these are attributes of God), to be generous, to love their fellow men, to regard this present age as nothing, we instill virtue in their souls and reveal the image of God within them. (Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, 44)

The responsibility of instructing their children in the faith (both belief and behavior) was a great one, with some church leaders seeing this as critical for the salvation of parents, drawing on the story of Eli the priest in the Old Testament for their example. Salvation was not viewed as an individual experience, but corporate in nature with the family as a critical unit of responsibility. Both Chrysostom, writing in the fourth century, and the *Didascalia* of a century earlier show this concern.

After God had stated the charge against Eli, he added the punishment with great wrath: *For I have sworn*, he said, *to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever* [I Sam. 3:14]. Do you see God's intense anger and merciless punishment? . . . Except for the man's negligence in regard to his children, however, God had no other charge to make against the elder at that time; in all other respects Eli was a marvelous man. (Chrysostom, *Comparison/Against the Opponents*, 128-29, cited in Guroian, 2001, pp. 72-73)

Now, whether this [that is, the sons' falling into fornication] happen to them without their parents, their parents themselves will be accountable before God for the judgment of their souls; or whether again by your license they are undisciplined and sin, you their parents will likewise be guilty on their account before God. (*Didascalia*, cited in Bakke, 2005, p. 159)

Finally, with infant baptism came the growing practice of separating the post-baptismal anointing, or confirmation, from the baptismal rite. The anointing became identified with the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and was viewed as an apostolic function to be carried out by

AD 858, cited in Lynch, 1986, p. 317). Not only was knowledge of these prayers required, but godparents were also to be moral examples and guides to their spiritual children. This "spiritual kinship" relationship became one of great responsibility and honor, thus socially desirable. The church capitalized on this to make this an opportunity to ensure that people knew the foundations of the faith. According to Lynch (1986),

To serve as a sponsor had long been an honor and a social necessity in Frankish society, a reality that was used by the church to create a checkpoint where many laymen could be tested on their religious knowledge. Furthermore, in sermons, during visitations, and in confession laymen were reminded of their duty to carry out the promise to guide and teach that they had made as sponsors. Thus the Carolingian church grafted onto the flourishing institutions of sponsorship and spiritual kinship a significant pedagogical component. (p. 332)

*Delayed Communion and Opportunity for Instruction.* Throughout the early church era and up through the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century of the medieval time period, it had been common for infants and children who were baptized to receive communion as part of that rite. They were then also admitted to the celebration of communion when it was offered in the life of the church. However, two theological issues began to change this. First, as the theology of the Eucharist developed, the doctrine of the real presence of the flesh and blood of Christ (transubstantiation) became accepted. With this, concern grew that infants and children would not handle the elements well, resulting in spilling or regurgitating the blood of Christ. Infant communion disappeared, and much debate took place regarding when it would be appropriate for a child to partake in communion. Second, as part of this discussion, there was a concern that those who participated in communion should discern what was happening as the wine and bread became the blood and flesh of Christ. When could children be expected to do this? The same concern was raised over when a child should make confession to a priest and whether a child on the verge of death should receive extreme unction (Orme, 2001, p. 214). These debates continued into the later middle ages as well. This delay in receiving communion, how ever long it lasted (5–14 years) and the need to understand what was

happening in it, created another opportunity for godparents and parents to instruct children in the fundamentals of the faith.

#### Thirteenth through Early Sixteenth Centuries

In the later medieval period, as infant baptism continued, several developments had a great impact on the spiritual instruction and nurture that children received. The one with arguably the greatest impact was the Fourth Lateran Council in AD 1215 and the resulting Canons regarding the necessity of all Christians receiving communion at least once a year at Easter. This seemingly simple requirement had great implications for the teaching ministry of the church for all of the laity, including children.

All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion [i.e., fourteen] faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own [parish] priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the eucharist, unless perchance at the advice of their own priest they may for a good reason abstain for a time from its reception; otherwise they shall be [barred from entering] the church during life and deprived of Christian burial in death. (*Canon 21*, cited in Shinnars, 1997, p. 9).

*Confession, Communion, and Instruction.* To celebrate communion one must first make confession to the local parish priest. In order to make a good confession, one must know what God requires and also what He considers to be sin. To know these, one must be taught God's laws and the basics of the faith and how to confess. The decision of the Fourth Lateran Council to require annual communion also meant annual confession and led church leaders to take initiatives to strengthen and extend their teaching ministry with the laity. Throughout the thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries Dominican and Franciscan friars and others developed various documents (*pastoralia*) to aid parish priests and lay people in learning the fundamentals of the faith and how to make a good confession in preparation for communion. While these were generally written for adults, there was an expectation that parents would then teach these things to their children. There are also indications that beginning in the thirteenth century,

some diocese encouraged parish clergy to teach the children under their care (Orme, 2001, p. 200).

*Development of Written Catechisms.* Written documents for instruction had been fairly limited in scope in Europe prior to the thirteenth century. The Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer were the major documents available in the vernacular for instructional purposes. With the educational impetus coming from the Fourth Lateran Council, new expanded catechisms were developed. An example is the "Lay Folk's Catechism" written by Archbishop Thoresby in 1357 in England. This work was modeled on both the Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council and the Canons of the Lambeth Council called by Archbishop John Peckham in 1281. Available in both Latin (for priests) and the vernacular (translated into a rough verse form for less educated clergy and lay use), this is the first written catechism in the English language. Others soon followed and were used by clergy to guide their preaching and teaching and by literate lay people in learning and teaching the basics of the faith. These early catechisms tended to include the Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria, Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, and in many cases also included the seven deadly sins, seven acts of mercy, seven sacraments of grace, and the seven chief virtues. These new documents gave a template for use in the church (According to Thoresby, they were to be taught four times a year) and in the home by parents who were to teach them to their children (Simmons and Nolloth, 1901).

*Renewal of the Preaching Ministry.* One outgrowth from the Fourth Lateran Council was the renewal of the preaching ministry by mendicant friars (primarily Franciscan and Dominican) who traveled from town to town. Pfander (1937) says that,

The friars preached . . . In the street, in the market, in house or castle, in private chapels, in cemeteries at the preaching corss, in churches ranging from the meanest to the greatest. They preached to lay folk, clerks, prelates, knights, and kings. They preached to nuns and to Benedictine monks. They preached commonly at Mass 'either between the creed and offertory or else after the latter,' and also in procession. They preached very brief sermons devised to please the common people, they preached collations, long sermons on Sunday afternoon after dinner. They preached on Feast Days, or at funerals, or at the

dedication of churches, or on various occasions at the universities. (pp. 4-5).

Their sermons covered the Scriptures, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. They also taught on the vices and virtues of life, about the lives of saints and martyrs. The response to these preaching friars was very positive, with people gathering to hear new preachers as they came into town. Not only adults, but children as well would come to hear them explain the faith and exhort the people to faithful living (Pfander, 1937).

*Confirmation and First Communion.* As discussed above, with the debates over when children should be confirmed in the faith, and when they should make confession for sins and receive communion, the church found itself delaying these events and creating new opportunities for instructing children in the faith. William Pagula (early 1300s) felt that both communion and confirmation in the faith should wait until children reached the "years of discretion," or age twelve for girls and age fourteen for boys. Others, like John Mirk (early 1400s), felt that confirmation should occur within five years of baptism (Orme, 2001, p. 218-19). In some areas and times, confirmation (e.g., age 5) preceded first communion (e.g., age seven or older). In other times and places, first communion (e.g., seven or older) preceded confirmation (e.g., seven-twelve). These two rites became the impetus for parents, godparents, and increasingly priests, teaching the faith to children to ensure that they were prepared to understand what they were undergoing in confession, communion, and confirmation. The earliest requirement of catechesis before the reception of communion at age seven occurs in Henry of Segusia's *Manual* (AD 1245, cited in Turner, 2000).

#### *Children and Baptism in the Reformation Traditions*

In the sixteenth century, the Reformation movements across Europe brought with them new understandings and practices regarding baptism, communion, and confirmation. These new views had direct impact on how children were viewed in the life of the church, their participation in the sacraments, and the kind of spiritual instruction and nurture they received. This section provides a brief summary of the new positions reached in a few of the major branches of the

Reformation.<sup>4</sup> A full history of their development is outside the scope and focus of this chapter.

#### Martin Luther and Martin Bucer: Lutheran Traditions

In the early sixteenth century in Germany, Martin Luther called into question the Roman Catholic Church's sacramental system (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 1520). For Luther, "Since salvation is a divine gift, not a human work, the sacraments are subject to the same order of salvation. They are signs and promises of what God does for humans and, like redemption, can only be received in faith" (Johnson, 1999, p. 235). Luther ended up reducing the sacraments to two, baptism and Eucharist. He continued the practice of baptizing infants, defending it on the basis of the inherited sinful nature of infants, the vicarious faith of the Church, and the freedom of the Holy Spirit to bestow faith. For Luther, the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith in the sacrament of baptism. "That is, infant baptism testifies to the reality that faith and repentance are not prerequisites for baptism but, rather, life-long consequences of baptism" (Johnson, p. 239).

In the Lutheran tradition, baptism began the journey of faith and the Church was to provide instruction and nurture to encourage the growth and maturing of that faith given by God. Instruction in the faith was provided through the use of the catechisms that Luther developed for children (*Small Catechism*) and adults and clergy (*Large Catechism*). These provided instruction on the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. The order was intentional, to help the learner understand the demands of the Law and how they were fulfilled through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Later work by Martin Bucer, in Strassburg, emphasized the importance of the role of godparents in baptism and the early instruction of the child in the faith. Godparents were to pledge that the child would be raised and instructed in the faith, either by the parents or themselves. For Bucer, having godparents who were prepared to do this became a precondition to baptism.

4. I rely heavily on the work of Maxwell Johnson (*The rites of Christian initiation: Their evolution and interpretation*, The Liturgical Press, 1999) for the summaries that appear in this section.

#### Ulrich Zwingli: Reformed Traditions

In Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli rejected a "means of grace" understanding of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. For him, faith came through the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the person. Baptism was to be used as a sign of the internal reality that God had already accomplished. In light of this understanding, it is initially surprising that Zwingli supported infant baptism. However, his covenant theology understanding of the nature of the family provided the basis for this practice.

... birth to Christian parents within the 'covenant' community, for Zwingli, seemed to convey membership in that community automatically. That is, birth to Christian parents already constituted their divine 'election' to salvation and so their baptism was simply an external sign of what was true for them already. . . . as a sign of membership in the covenant community, infant baptism had its parallel with circumcision among the Jews. (Johnson, 1999, p. 244)

Baptism itself then did not justify or save a person, but was a witness to God's saving work through His covenant with His people. Baptism was a rite of initiation and infants were dedicated and pledged to future faith in God. Baptism made the infant a member of a community of Christians where they could grow in the faith (Wandel, 2004, p. 276). In the corporate gathering of the baptism ceremony, those present interceded for the infant that on the basis of future faith this child be incorporated into the life of the church and instructed and nurtured in the faith. Similar to Martin Bucer, Zwingli's approach made baptism a pledge "that the infant, who by birth to Christian parents is already part of God's elect and now solemnly dedicated, will be brought up in the Christian faith and so one day make his or her own faith response" (Johnson, 1999, p. 249). All expectation was that the child would indeed follow Christ as he or she was to be taught, making the teaching ministry of the church critical for fulfilling this rite. Central in the teaching ministry of the church was the proclamation or preaching of the Word and teaching children how to read it. Schools were to create an environment of prayer where the Word could be taught and children could learn to pray. This was done as an "aid to the work of the Holy Spirit" (Wandel, p. 286). "Education in Zürich was intended to enable right faith to discern more accurately



and fully God's will for the conduct of one's life and the content of one's belief" (Wandel, p. 288).

#### John Calvin: Reformed Traditions

In Geneva, Switzerland, John Calvin led the growing "Reformed" movement through his writings and leadership in the church and city government. Holding to a similar covenant theology as Zwingli, he retained a higher view of the sacraments as a means of grace for the elect. For Zwingli, the sacraments were signs of the church's pledge toward God (in baptism) and commemorations of past events (in the Lord's Supper). Calvin focused more on God's work in these sacraments, seeing them as testimonies of God's grace exercised in the present and confirmed by outward signs (Johnson, 1999, p. 250). Although no one could know who were elect and who were not, infant baptism was seen as appropriate because of the nature of God's covenant with his people and the place of children within the family. Regarding baptism, Calvin wrote:

Hence it follows, that the children of believers are not baptised, in order that though formerly aliens from the Church, they may then, for the first time, become children of God, but rather are received into the Church by a formal sign, because, in virtue of the promise, they previously belonged to the body of Christ. (1559/1972, Vol. II, Ch. 15, p. 526)

The sacraments were seen as "visible words" that do not bestow grace in themselves, but ratify what God has accomplished. For Calvin, like Luther and Zwingli, baptism became a corporate event for the church, not a private event for the infant and family. It served to remind the congregation of their own baptism and the grace of God in their own lives for salvation. Unlike Luther, however, Calvin did not view the Holy Spirit bound to the external sacraments as means of grace.

Like Luther, Calvin developed catechisms to be used in instructing children in the faith they were baptized into. So important was instruction in the catechism that it was not left to parents to do on their own. Calvin, and those who followed his lead, both affirmed the importance of fathers teaching their children and developed catechism classes taught by ministers each Sunday between the morning and afternoon worship services (Kingdon, 2004, p. 300-301). The catechisms covered instruction on the Apostles' Creed, the Ten

Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. The catechism became so important in Geneva under Calvin that adults could not receive communion until they were able to recite them from memory. This instruction in the basics of the faith was reinforced in the worship services, where the Creed and the Lord's Prayer were recited as part of the service (Kingdon, p. 306).

#### Thomas Cranmer: Church of England

In England, Thomas Cranmer authored the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549, 1552), which gave instructions regarding the practice of baptism for the newly reformed Church. Heavily influenced by both Luther and Bucer, the rite called for baptism to be done at times of regular corporate worship. The baptismal rite followed the earlier *Sarum Rite* in many respects but godparents were to promise on behalf of the infant that they would "forsake the devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy word and obediently keep his commandments." The baptismal rite closes with a final exhortation to the godparents, reminding them that it was

... your parts and duty to see that these infants be taught, so soon as they shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession they have made by you. And that they may know these things the better, ye shall call upon them to hear sermons, and chiefly you shall provide that they may learn the creed, the Lord's prayer and the ten commandments in the English tongue. (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1549)

And, this important addition reveals the new model of catechetical instruction that the church intended to carry out:

... the children be brought to the bishop to be confirmed of him, so soon as they can say in their vulgar tongue the articles of faith, the Lord's prayer and the ten commandments, and be further instructed in the catechism, set forth for that purpose. (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1549 - emphasis added)

Baptism then is carried out with the infant to identify him or her as one who is part of the Church. It is carried out by others on his or her behalf, "in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto life's end" (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1552).

This approach has some language that is compatible with a Lutheran understanding of baptism as a means of grace, and other language that fits with a Calvinist focus on the promises of God and confirmation of faith. This has led to the Anglican practices being understood and practiced in both ways in the Church. Whichever approach is taken, there is a heavy emphasis on the necessity of instruction in the faith and the need for personal confirmation of the faith as the child grows. This led to an explosion of writing and printing of catechisms in England and their use in homes, schools, and the church. Parents and godparents were expected to teach the catechism at home. Schoolteachers taught and prepared their students for reciting the catechism to their priests. Priests were required to have regular times of instructing and checking the knowledge of the catechism by children in their parishes.<sup>5</sup>

#### Menno Simons: Anabaptists

The Anabaptist traditions of the sixteenth century (e.g., Swiss Brethren, Moravian, Hutterite Brethren, Mennonites) rejected the idea and practice of infant baptism all together. Their emphasis on the church being formed of believing persons who have responded to the call of God led Anabaptists to practice believer's baptism. Baptism was seen as part of the economy of obedience, not salvation, and faith (conversion) must come prior to baptism, with baptism being an outer sign of an already accomplished inner spiritual reality. Infant baptism was replaced with rites of infant dedication, with baptism being postponed until persons could give an account of their faith (Johnson, 1999, p. 268).

Infant dedication (seen as an ordinance, not a sacrament) brought the entire congregation together as the parents, supported by the congregation, dedicated the child to God and promised to raise and instruct the child in the faith so that he or she could one day respond in faith to the gospel.

Menno Simons, a leader within the Anabaptist movement, understood children to have inherited a sin nature, but not to be held accountable for actual sins due to their young age. They are "innocent"

5. For an excellent study on the growth and use of catechisms in England during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, see Ian Green's work, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and catechizing in England c. 1530-1740* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996).

because through the grace of Christ their sinful natures are covered, at least until they reach an "age of discretion."

Our entire doctrine, belief, foundation and confession is that our innocent children, as long as they live in their innocence, are through the merits, death, and blood of Christ, in grace, and partakers of the promise. (Simons, *Reply to Gellius Faber*, cited in Miller, 2001, p. 202)

Children then were raised and taught by their parents to understand the faith and its importance so that when they were old enough they could respond in faith to the salvation offered in Christ and be baptized. This instruction was generally not from a prescribed catechism (though some groups developed them), but through learning the Scriptures and parental discipline and guidance in what it meant to have faith in Christ. Dramatic conversions were not expected, but personal embracing of the faith modeled by the family and church community was understood to be the norm (Miller, 2001, p. 210).

General practice was to allow baptism when a child reached an "age of reason" or "age of discretion," but when exactly this was reached was debated. In some cases this was seen as age twelve, but this practice was not yet universally settled. The minimum age for baptism was variously proposed as six, seven, ten, eleven, twelve, fourteen and even older (Miller, 2001, p. 206-7). Without this personal faith commitment and baptism the child was not viewed as a part of the church.

#### Confirmation Practices in the Reformation Churches

One of the great ironies of the Protestant Reformation is that, in spite of the Reformers' almost unanimous deletion of confirmation from the list of sacraments in the Church, Lutheranism, Reformed Protestantism, and Anglicanism all ended up with some form of 'confirmation' as the preliminary rite leading to the reception of first communion. (Johnson, 1999, p. 270)

For those reform groups that practiced infant baptism, confirmation was initially rejected as a sacrament, but eventually embraced as a rite of initiation into full participation in the life and worship of the church. Catechetical instruction became a prerequisite to being confirmed in the faith, and communion became available to those who were confirmed. Confirmation, often carried out on the day

before the principal feasts of the church calendar (i.e., Christmas, Easter, Pentecost) involved a public examination of the faith of the children by a pastor. The congregation offered prayer for them, and the pastor laid hands on them and prayed that the Holy Spirit would strengthen them in the faith. Once this was completed, the children were admitted to their first communion celebration. The following quotes from Martin Bucer and from the *Book of Common Prayer* illustrate these practices.

Such children who through catechetical instruction are sufficiently advanced in Christian knowledge to be permitted to go to the Lord's table shall on a high festival such as Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, at the instance of the elders and preachers, be presented by their parents and sponsors to the pastors in the presence of the congregation in a place designated in the churches for that purpose. The elders and all other ministers of the word shall stand about the pastor, who shall then examine these children in the chief articles of the Christian faith. When they have answered the questions and publicly surrendered themselves to Christ the Lord and his churches, the pastor shall admonish the congregation to ask the Lord, in behalf of the children, for perseverance and an increase of the Holy Spirit, and conclude this prayer with a collect. . . . Finally, the pastor shall lay his hands upon the children, thus confirming them in the name of the Lord, and establish them in Christian fellowship. He shall thereupon also admit them to the table of the Lord, adding the admonition that they continue faithfully in the obedience of the gospel and readily receive and faithfully heed Christian discipline and reproof, especially from the pastors. (Martin Bucer, *Ziegenhain Order of Church Discipline*)

The curate of every parish, or some other at his appointment, shall diligently upon Sundays and holy days half an hour before evensong, openly in the church instruct and examine as many children of his parish sent unto him as the time will serve, and as he shall think convenient, in some part of this catechism. . . . And all fathers, mothers, masters and dames shall cause their children, servants and apprentices who have not learned their catechism to come to the church at the time appointed, and obediently to hear and be ordered by the curate, until such time as they have learned all that is here appointed for them to learn. And whenever the bishop shall give knowledge for children to be brought before him to any convenient place for their confirmation, then shall the curate

of every parish either bring, or send in writing, the names of all those children of his parish who can say the articles of their faith, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments: and also how many of them can answer to the other questions contained in this catechism. . . . And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he or she can say the catechism and be confirmed. (*Prayer Book of the Church of England, 1552*)

This "rite of passage" into full participation in the life of the church made preparation for this event important, motivating parents and parish leaders to invest time in teaching the basics of the faith in formal ways. Confirmation then became a driving force for the instruction and spiritual nurture of children. As Johnson comments, "in spite of the (differences in) theological understanding, all were, in practice, fully initiating only 'responsible' and faith-professing 'adult' individuals whose intellect and will had been shaped by catechetical education" (1999, p. 289).

#### *Children and Baptism Since the Reformation Era*

##### Developments in Roman Catholic Practice

From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Church continued its practice of infant baptism, followed later by confirmation and first communion. Various councils set standards for the preparation of children for their first communion experience. Children were expected to participate in confession and also be able to recite the Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria, Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed, in addition to some basic understanding of confession and the Eucharist. The recommended age for First Communion was generally held to be ten to fourteen, with confirmation preceding it at age seven. The delay of first communion was motivated by a desire to both ensure that children were capable of confessing sins, and that they could distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary food. The new goal of preparing children for First Communion created a strong motivation for teaching them the basics of the faith (Turner, 2000).

The Reformation churches quickly developed catechisms for use in instructing both adults and children in the reformed faith. While these kinds of resources were not new to the Roman Catholic Church, with the emphasis on preparing for First Communion, their

development and use increased dramatically from the sixteenth century on. Emphasis still remained on parents and godparents instructing their children, but priests were also expected to teach children of the parish about confession and the Eucharist. As time progressed, priests began to hold catechetical classes for groups of children at specified times, with Lent being commonly used for this purpose. The practice spread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, becoming the norm for congregational practice.

Pastors should not permit children who have just reached the years of discretion to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist, even if they have confessed, unless the children know well the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments, and if they have been educated with the capacity of understanding about the mystery of this sacrament. Therefore parents should be frequently urged to take care of the instruction of their youth in this matter. (Synod of Ypres [Ieper], 1577, 14:3)

Once each month on a day firmly established, pastors should call to the church children who have reached age nine, and instruct them individually in the right way of confessing. . . . At the beginning of Septuagesima week they should invite those who have reached age ten and individually instruct them and prepare them for the knowledge and worship of the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, and teach them how humbly, religiously, and reverently they should come to receive it. (Council of Milan VI, 1582)

We desire that every year and in all the parishes there be established, as we have said, a period for instruction of children and at the same time the day of first solemn Communion. The ceremony should be preceded by an examination in which the children will show proof of a sufficient instruction and of a preparation of three days in the parish. (Pius X, *Letter to the Cardinal Vicar*, 1905)

Beginning in 1910, amidst considerable debate, Church practice of First Communion changed, with age seven becoming a new standard. A child's ability to use reason was in some ways equated with the older concept of age of discretion. This also impacted the practice of confirmation. Turner (2000) explains,

Throughout this period the preferred age of confirmation remained seven, but permissions proliferated to confirm

earlier in emergencies, and later for the sake of catechetical formation. Confirmation was interpreted both as a sacrament of initiation and as one of commitment. Efforts to defer the age of confirmation seemed to fill a void left by lowering the age of First Communion. (CD-ROM, Chapter 12, Section 6, Confirmation: Age and Meaning, ¶ 11)

#### Expansion of Reformed Traditions

In the centuries following the Reformation era, Protestant denominations that practice infant baptism have tended to develop confirmation classes for children around ages twelve to fourteen, when they felt children were able to take responsibility for their own faith profession. These led to the development of catechetical materials and ceremonies that have also been used as "rites of passage," similar to the bar mitzvah in Jewish practice, marking the transition from childhood to becoming a full adult member in the church. Richard Osmer (1996) has provided a helpful history and contemporary analysis of confirmation practices and theology, covering the Lutheran, Anglican, United Methodist, and Presbyterian traditions. Arthur Repp (1964) produced a similar work in the Lutheran tradition. Those interested in the development of confirmation since the Reformation will enjoy reading these works.

#### A Case Study in Theological Reflection: Horace Bushnell, Baptism, and Children

Having reviewed this historical perspective on the ways that theologians and practices of baptism influenced the church's views and ministry practices with children, I would like to turn to a case study of theological reflection. The circumstances described below illustrate how important it is to carefully work through the ministry implications of our theological positions. I hope you will find it helpful.

In the early nineteenth century, New England was experiencing the impact of the "Second Great Awakening." It was a time of religious revival with renewed emphasis on personal religious experience and conversion. Within the Presbyterian denomination, in which Horace Bushnell served as a pastor, those who embraced the revivals and emphasis on personal experience were known as "New Lights" or "New Side," while those who were uncomfortable with this insistence on a conscious personal conversion experience were known as "Old

Lights" or "Old Side." This controversy began with the "First Great Awakening" in the early eighteenth century but was reignited during the new revival movement of the early nineteenth century.

One of the issues that arose within this context was the spiritual status of children and the best way to raise them in the Christian faith. Old Lights emphasized the covenant relationship of a believer's family with God and instruction toward embracing the faith children were baptized into. While not viewed as baptismal regeneration, the expectation was that as parents taught and guided their children in the light of the gospel, they would confirm this faith as their own when they reached an age of discretion. New Lights emphasized the necessity of a more specific personal religious experience and the ability to give a testimony of conversion and faith in Christ. In their view, without this experience, the child was not in right relationship with God, and parents were to let them know this, and teach to promote a personal conversion experience. In essence, the theological emphases of both pietism and an Anabaptist perspective were influencing what was viewed as normative for children growing up within a denomination whose roots were influenced more by Calvin and Zwingli.

Horace Bushnell, now famous for his major work, *Christian Nurture* (1847a, revised in 1861, 1876, 1888, and 1916), was deeply concerned about how parents and church leaders were viewing the spiritual lives of children and the impact of those views on their ministry with them. He saw a deep inconsistency between the Reformed theology of baptism and how the New Light emphases on experience and conversion were being applied to children.

In an earlier work, *Discourses on Christian Nurture* (1847b), a publication by the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society which grew out of two public lectures he had given to a ministerial association, Bushnell presents a two-fold argument for his major thesis that the true idea of Christian education is that the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise (1847b, p. 6). The first part of his argument for a nurture approach with children is based on human experience, and the second on theological grounds. One that he develops most fully is rooted in a reformed theology of baptism. What follows are some extensive quotes from this argument. (Emphasis added)

Last argument, which is drawn from infant or household baptism—a rite which supposes the fact of an organic connection of character between the parent and the child; a seal of faith in the parent, applied over to the child, on the ground of a presumption that his faith is wrapped up in the parent's faith; so that he is accounted a believer from the beginning. . . . the Christian parent has, in his character, a germ, which has power, presumptively, to produce its like in his children, though by reason of some bad fault in itself, or possibly some outward hindrance in the Church, or some providence of death, it may fail to do so. *Thus it is that infant baptism becomes an appropriate rite. It sees the child in the parent, counts him presumptively a believer and a Christian, and, with the parent, baptizes him also.* Furthermore, you will perceive that it must be presumed, either that the child will grow up a believer, or that he will not. The Baptist presumes that he will not, and therefore declares the rite to be inappropriate. God presumes that he will, and therefore appoints it. The Baptist tells the child that nothing but sin can be expected of him; God tells him that for his parents' sakes, whose faith he is to follow, he has written his own name upon him, and expects him to grow up in all duty and piety. (Bushnell, 1847b, p. 42)

*I have been thus full upon the rite of baptism, not because that is my subject, but because the rite involves, in all its grounds and reasons, the same view of Christian education which I am seeking to establish. One cannot be thoroughly understood and received without the other. . . . The regeneration is not actual, but only presumptive, and every thing depends upon the organic law of character pertaining between the parent and the child, the church and the child, thus upon duty and holy living and gracious example. The child is too young to choose the rite for himself, but the parent, having him as it were in his own life, is allowed the confidence that his own faith and character will be reproduced in the child, and grow up in his growth, and that thus the propriety of the rite as a seal of faith will not be violated. In giving us this rite, on the grounds stated, God promises, in fact, on his part, to dispense that spiritual grace which is necessary to the fulfillment of its import. . . . Therefore we bring them into the school of Christ and the pale of his mercy with us, there to be trained up in the holy nurture of the Lord. And then the result is to be tested afterwards, or at an advanced period of life, by trying their character in the same way as the character of all Christians is tried; . . . (Bushnell, 1847b, pp. 49-52)*

Bushnell calls church leaders to consider carefully what the baptism of their children signifies, and in light of that understanding to approach the instruction and nurture of children with an expectation of God's grace in their lives to give spiritual life as they grow toward taking on responsibility for their own faith and walk with God. This fits his church's theological understanding better than what he saw practiced in many of their congregations as the revival movement of the time swept through New England. Whether or not you agree with his theological views or final conclusions, it is a helpful example of how our theology of baptism gives guidance on what we should expect of and do with the children in our midst.

#### *Review and Discussion*

*Review.* A brief recap of the major changes in baptismal theology and practice covered in this chapter may be helpful:

1. In the earliest church, instruction and the testimony of a sponsor were seen as critical to prepare for baptism because of their theology of baptism and penance after baptism. Some church fathers opposed the baptism of infants out of concern for how sin would be addressed after baptism. As Christianity grew, this led many to delay baptism.
2. When the concern for the souls of children grew (i.e., dying without benefits of baptism), baptism of infants took priority over their instruction and nurture, but parents and godparents were expected to teach children the basics of the faith they were baptized into.
3. When confirmation was separated from baptism, this opened an opportunity for instruction prior to the rite, confirming children in the faith they had been raised in and equipping them for the struggles of adulthood.
4. When communion was separated from baptism, this opened an opportunity for focused instruction to prepare children for confession, which involved knowing the commandments, Lord's Prayer, Apostles' Creed, etc.
5. In the Reformation:
  - A. Where baptism was viewed as God's initiative in planting

the seed of faith in the child, instruction and nurture was to help the child grow into the significance of the baptism and lead up to their own confirmation of this faith. (Lutheran, Anglican)

- B. Where baptism was viewed as a sign of the covenant of God with His people, children were included under the faith of their parents and raised and taught in expectation of their own confirmation of faith in adolescence. (Reformed, Anglican)
  - C. Where baptism was viewed as a sign of the faith of the individual, instruction of children focused on knowing the Scriptures, hearing the gospel, and preparing the heart to respond in faith at an "age of discretion." (Anabaptist)
6. In the Roman Catholic Church in the modern era, First Communion and confirmation have both become important events marking the faith journey of children, leading to extensive catechetical efforts in preparation for their celebration.
  7. In most denominations today, instructing children in the faith is a precursor either to their confirmation of the faith they have been baptized into or raised to embrace. For those who practice infant baptism, instruction within the church has been added to parental instruction to ensure children know the basics of the faith and can affirm them at an age when they can take responsibility for their own faith commitments. For those who practice believer's baptism, instruction is toward a personal faith experience and commitment.

*Discussion: Instructional Practice in Light of Baptism Today.* So, what kind of instruction and spiritual nurture should we provide children in our various denominational settings? While not providing the only guidance to answer this question, our understanding of the nature and practice of baptism creates certain expectations and priorities that influence what we feel is appropriate. In many ways, it continues to be a driving force shaping our ministry with children, both at home and in the congregation. Three general approaches

have emerged, and I close with some reflections for consideration by those within these traditions.<sup>6</sup>

*Children Viewed as Insiders: (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran, some Anglican).*

These groups view baptism as the beginning of faith for the infant. God, in His sovereignty, uses the sacrament of baptism to bestow spiritual life. The teaching ministry of the church is aimed at guiding children into a fuller knowledge of and obedience to that faith into which they were baptized. *Teaching is for those in the faith.* The teaching ministry of the church is designed to help children grow into an identity that is seen as already theirs, God's adopted children in Christ. For Lutherans, "remember your baptism" is a call to grow into the reality that God has brought about through the sovereign work of His Spirit in baptism. The story of the gospel needs to be made clear and repeated frequently so that children will come to understand what God has done for them in and through Jesus Christ, encouraging responses of gratitude, love, and obedience. Instruction in the basics of the faith (Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, etc.) and the redemption story presented in Scripture provides a grounding for understanding what God has done and continues to do on their behalf, and also helps the child begin to understand what it means to be God's child and how to live within that identity. Confirmation becomes a time for taking one's place as a responsible believer within the faith community. Confirmation is only a beginning, and should not be seen as a "graduation from," but a "graduation to" a journey of faith that requires both a deepening knowledge of the faith and carrying out spiritual practices that foster a vital walk with God.

*Children Assumed to Be/Become Insiders: (e.g., Reformed groups, some Wesleyan, some Anglican).*

These groups view baptism as an expression of the corporate nature of faith and the grace of God that comes to those in covenant relationship with Him. Children in these groups are expected to grow spiritually as they are taught and eventually embrace the faith as their own. *Teaching is for personal confirmation of the faith of the*

6. I myself fall within the latter category (believers baptism), but have done my best to consider important issues for those within the other traditions as well.

*covenant community.* As Bushnell explained, in a covenant theology perspective, children are viewed as within the community, not strangers. Every expectation is that by God's grace, as children are raised by believing parents and participate within the church community, God will make Himself known to them and the faith they have been raised within will be confirmed as they take on responsibility for their own faith commitments.

It is critical then to not wait until a confirmation class in the middle school years to help the child know the gospel story or to understand what it means to be a Christian. Clear instruction in the faith, and active involvement in the faith community, is important both before confirmation and after. Prior to confirmation it helps ensure that the child is familiar with the faith, what it means to follow Christ, and desires to make a public declaration identifying Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Following confirmation, instruction in the faith helps the believer continue to grow in knowledge and practice of the faith. They have not graduated from being taught, but have taken responsibility for continuing to learn and grow in faith and faithfulness. The confirmation experience itself needs to make clear the nature of the gospel, not assuming that because children have grown up with some exposure to it in the home and church they comprehend it, or have responded to it in faith. It should help the child consider how God has been working in his or her life to draw the child to faith and into a vital relationship with Himself. Confirmation needs to be more clearly developed as the confirming of God's work of salvation in the life of the child, and the beginning of a growing life of love and obedience.

*Children Invited to Become Insiders: (Anabaptist, Baptist, many Evangelical and Charismatic groups).*

These groups view baptism as a visible sign of the new life that God has brought about in a person through grace and faith in Jesus Christ. The teaching ministry of the church is to help children understand the importance of sin and to know the love and grace of God through Christ that is available to all who will respond in faith. *Teaching is toward personal affirmation of the faith and eventual baptism.* Teaching both the fundamentals of the faith (Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer) and the gospel story of redemption in the Bible is critical so children can be attentive to the Holy Spirit's work of conviction

of sin and the need for receiving the grace of God in Christ through faith. Teaching and spiritual nurture need to make the gospel story both plain and compelling, but the environment of instruction is equally important for helping a child understand the very nature of love and forgiveness.

Children should not be viewed as "strangers" or "outsiders" by the church, but perhaps more like foster children, invited to partake of the full hospitality of the house and family so that they will grow to desire to know the one who loves them, and to become His fully adopted children. Children need to have time to both learn and respond to the gospel message. While a faith response can come at most any age, it is important that adults not pressure children to respond before they are personally capable or ready. Patience and trust is needed as we wait for the Holy Spirit to move in the heart of the child to draw them to faith. When a child responds to the gospel in faith, a well-developed instruction time leading to baptism can ensure the child knows the foundations of the faith and how to walk with God in this new life as a believer.

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