

Baby Baptism: The Role of Parental Consent

Christians take their babies to the clergy to get them baptised. Water is sprinkled on them and magic words are said and this is supposed to remove a sin they never committed but which they are blamed for (original sin). God then adopts them as his children - he rejected them before. They are made members of his Church and given the power to believe and love God. The gate of Heaven is opened for them and they belong to God meaning they must obey him instead of pleasing themselves.

According to St Thomas Aquinas in the Summa 3 q 68, 10 ad 2, children should not be baptised without the consent of the parents for the parents have immediate authority over them. However, if there was a disagreement between the father and the mother if the child should be baptised, the Church would no doubt say that it is the wishes of the parent who wants the baby baptised that should be followed out. It would say that the parent is right which is why it has to be her or him. Others say that parents don't have authority over the baby in relation to the obligation to be baptised which belongs to the Church by baptism. The Church does. So the baby can be baptised without the consent of the parents. Such baptism is recognised as valid by Christians who say that babies should not be baptised unless their parents consent. The Church says it is not the Church or the person who pours the water who baptises but it is Christ who baptises. The sacraments are divine not human. So when Jesus baptises without regard to the parent's feelings how can the Church believe that such baptism is wrong? Baptism then implies a right by the Church to baptise babies at all costs including the babies of pagans. Pagan nations should be invaded just so that the babies can be all baptised. Bad doctrines have bad implications. Don't desecrate your baby by having it baptised.

STAND YOUR GROUND

There are many people who do not wish to have their babies baptised but feel their decision is going to bring trouble from religious relatives.

They should explain that they respect the views of the relatives and ask the relatives to extend the same courtesy to them. It's their child and their decision.

They should explain that they feel baptism and child initiation into religion is telling the child and everybody else a lie. A child can't be a Catholic or a Protestant or a Muslim or a Jew.

They should explain that they would be disrespecting religion itself by having the ceremony just to please others.

They should explain to say their Christian family that if the family was Muslim they would have much the same feeling about the child being uninitiated.

They should explain how hardly anybody these days who has a healthy baby rushes it for baptism. They may delay it for months. They often delay it out of indifference. They often delay because they want to have a baby born in winter baptised in the summer. They often delay because they want to pick the right time for a good party and when all their friends will be free. If it is okay to delay then why worry about getting the baby baptised at all? What would there be to fear?

Some may reason that it is okay to get the baby baptised and commit the child to being influenced by Catholicism or even indoctrinated for the child will probably fall away anyway when she starts thinking for herself just like other kids do. This is a rationalisation and is not acceptable. Unbelieving parents may feel that the best way for their child to integrate into the community is by attending Church. So they are unbelievers and still take the child to church. They expose the child to deep religious faith - to faith in a serious way. They feel however that unbelief in religion is best for their child and want to pass it on. Some say, "They do right though it is incompatible with their broader goal to help the child in unbelief. What they are doing is more than permissible. Its admirable. They know that if they encouraged unbelief now it would undermine the child's membership in the church." I would say that they need to tell the child they do not believe but invite the child to think about these things and listen to both sides. This is not encouraging unbelief but letting the child decide. And it is hard to believe they need to get the child baptised or anything. If unbaptised children were attending Mass in a strong Catholic community, would that affect their integration in the community? No.