

## INFANT BAPTISM: HISTORY AND PASTORAL PROBLEMS

The theme of the third day of the Thirty-ninth International Eucharistic Congress in Bogotá was the sacraments of initiation.<sup>1</sup> Since this broad topic includes so many possible topics of discussion, we limit this paper to one much discussed in foreign periodical literature, but not in the U.S.: the question of whether or when to baptize infants.<sup>2</sup> Is Christ's purpose in instituting this sacrament being frustrated by the practice of infant baptism? Do people have valid motives in requesting baptism for their children? To what extent must infants be

<sup>1</sup> This bulletin is an elaboration of a talk given to English-speaking pilgrims in the course of the Eucharistic Congress at Bogotá, August, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> In alphabetical order according to authors we list the following: Ph. Berryman, "El bautismo de niños en el sector urbano de América Latina," *Concilium* 23 (1967) 542-55; P. Camelot, "Le baptême des petits enfants dans l'église des premiers siècles," *Maison-Dieu* [hereafter *M-D*] 88 (1966) 23-42; Centres diocésains de la catéchèse, "La pastorale du baptême des enfants dans la mission de l'église," *Supplément à la Semaine religieuse*, Nov. 3, 1967, pp. 1-6; J. Debès, "Que pensent les pratiquants de l'admission aux sacrements? Analyse et leçons d'un sondage d'opinion," *Paroisse et liturgie* [hereafter *ParLit*] 4 (1967) 374-81; "Document épiscopal sur la pastorale du baptême des petits enfants," *M-D* 88 (1966) 43-56; J. Didier, *Faut-il baptiser les enfants? La réponse de la tradition* (Paris, 1967); Equipe sacerdotale de Notre-Dame-des-Champs, Paris, "Expérience pour une pastorale sur la foi et les sacrements dans le cadre du baptême," *ParLit* 3 (1966) 276-86; F. Favreau, "La demande du baptême: Que veulent les parents?" *M-D* 89 (1967) 87-100; J. Frisque, "Le baptême est-il au seuil de la vie ecclésiale?" *ParLit* 5-6 (1964) 517-29; P. Gerbé, J. Potel, R. Salaun, et al., *Ils demandent le baptême pour leur enfant* (Paris, 1966); A. Henry, "Le baptême des enfants d'incroyants," *Parole et mission* [hereafter *ParMis*] 22 (1963) 396-418; M. Hurley, "Qué pueden aprender los católicos de la controversia sobre el bautismo de niños?" *Concilium* 24 (1967) 19-27; A. Iniesta, "Pastoral del bautismo," *Pastoral misionera* 4 (1968) 105-9; A. Laurentin, "Attitudes et tendances pastorales," *ParLit* 5-6 (1964) 480-96; J. Lécuyer, "L'Enfant est baptisé dans la foi de l'église," *M-D* 89 (1967) 21-37; L. Mambrilla, "El bautismo en un medio no-praticante," *Revista litúrgica argentina* 226 (1967) 289-326; H. Manders, "Qué relación existe entre nuestro bautizo y nuestra fe?" *Concilium* 22 (1967) 175-87; E. Marcus, "La pastorale du baptême des petits enfants," *ParLit* 3 (1966) 260-75; *id.*, "Bulletins bibliographiques: Le baptême des enfants," *Catéchèse* 26 (1967) 83-88; J. McClendon, "Por qué los baptistas no bautizan a los infantes?" *Concilium* 24 (1967) 9-18; C. Paliard, "Le baptême des enfants," *Catéchèse* 26 (1967) 31-50; C. Pape, "Problemática acerca del bautismo de párvulos," *Teología y vida* 8 (1967) 291-99; Pastoral Commission of Deanery in Southern France, "Une enquête décanale sur le baptême," *ParLit* 8 (1964) 840-53; Pastoral Committee of Arrondissement 13, Paris, "Réflexions sur la pastorale du baptême," *ParLit* 5 (1963) 412-21; H. Peuchmaurd, "Qui faut-il baptiser?" *ParMis* 28 (1965) 112-32; J. Torrella, "Experiencias en torno al bautismo de los niños," *Phase* 42 (1967) 525-45; A. Turck, "Questions sur la pastorale du baptême," *ParLit* 4 (1964) 362-68; *id.*, "La pastorale du baptême des petits enfants après un an d'expérience," *ParLit* 4 (1967) 429-31; L. Villette, "Le baptême des enfants: Dossier et interprétation," *M-D* 89 (1967) 38-65; J. J. von Allmen, "Réflexions d'un protestant sur le pédobaptisme généralisé," *M-D* 89 (1967) 66-86. For specifically Protestant bibliography, see the articles cited above by Hurley, McClendon, and von Allmen.

baptized as soon as possible? These are only a few of the questions raised by infant baptism today. After a consideration of infant baptism in its historical context, we will list some of the causes for its apparent ineffectiveness and propose some possible solutions.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Prior to the New Testament institution of the sacrament of baptism, we find as antecedents in Jewish history purification baths (e.g., Ex 19:10-14; Lv 15:5-13), proselyte baptisms, the rite of circumcision, Essenian baptisms, and the baptism of John. Reference to infant baptism or initiation is clear in proselyte baptisms and circumcision, but not in the other initiatory rites.<sup>3</sup> The New Testament Church shows no apparent concern for infant baptism.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in view of the solidarity of family life, we have good reason to believe that the sacramental baptism of a household must have included infants, even though there is no mention of them (e.g., Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16). While not all agree on the existence of infant baptism in the early Church,<sup>5</sup> it is hard to deny, as Didier says, the positive probability that infants were baptized.<sup>6</sup> The second and third centuries provide specific evidence of the practice of infant baptism (Polycarp, funeral epitaphs, the tradition that finds expression in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus).<sup>7</sup> In the fourth century a misguided prudence led some (Basil, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, etc.) to defer baptism till a later age. In their case baptism was not so much the sacrament of incorporation into the Church as was the case in earlier Church tradition, but a sacrament of pardon.<sup>8</sup>

Until the time of Augustine, baptism was generally thought to forgive actual sins, not original sin.<sup>9</sup> Since in the case of infants there is no question of actual sin, Chrysostom justified infant baptism saying: "This is why we baptize infants, even though they have not sinned, that there be added to them justice, filiation, inheritance, the grace

<sup>3</sup> Didier, *op cit.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Gutwenger, "Die Erbsünde und das Konzil von Trient," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 89 (1967) 438; R. Brown, "We Profess One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins," *Worship* 40 (1966) 265, 268-69.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Barth, *The Teachings of the Church Regarding Baptism* (London, 1948), and K. Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* (London, 1963).

<sup>6</sup> Didier, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-73 and the corresponding texts, pp. 89-102.

<sup>8</sup> See Lécuyer, *art. cit.*, pp. 32-33; Camelot, *art. cit.*, p. 29; and A. Turck's presentation of the views of Jeremias in this regard, "Une étude sur la tradition du baptême des enfants," *ParLit* 7 (1967) 728.

<sup>9</sup> See R. Brown, *art. cit.*, pp. 268-69; M. Hurley, *art. cit.*, p. 27; J. L. Connor, "Original Sin: Contemporary Approaches," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 29 (1968) 219-22.

to be brothers and members of Christ and to become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit."<sup>10</sup> No reference is made to original sin. Though Origen had associated baptism with original sin, he was thinking of original sin as something that existed anterior to birth.<sup>11</sup> Church tradition related baptism to actual sin till Augustine's controversy with the Pelagians. But even for Augustine it was the practice of infant baptism that proved the existence of original sin, not vice versa.<sup>12</sup> Only later, in the ninth century, did Walafrid Strabo reverse Augustine's argument by saying that because of original sin infant baptism is necessary. Thereafter original sin explained the necessity of infant baptism.<sup>13</sup>

From the tenth to the thirteenth century, Neo-Manicheans objected to the practice of infant baptism on the basis of the infant's incapacity to believe. They insisted on a literal interpretation of Mark: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16). Infants cannot believe; therefore they cannot receive the sacrament validly. Theologians of the time repeated Augustine's argument that the Church's faith supplies for the faith of the infant. Peter Lombard added the explanation which became the classic answer down to our own day with his teaching on the *munus* and *usus* (or habit and act) of faith.<sup>14</sup> The Council of Vienne in 1312 approved this doctrine as probable (*DS* 904) and Trent taught that in justification we receive all the theological virtues, including faith (*DS* 1530, 1532).<sup>15</sup> Both Aquinas and Bonaventure synthesized the explanation of the child's faith saying that before baptism the faith of the Church supplied for the faith of the infant, but in the sacrament itself and by virtue of it this faith of the Church is communicated to the infant as the theological virtue of faith.<sup>16</sup> This synthesis, however, was lost in the centuries that followed. While the sacrament has been recognized as infusing faith *ex opere operato*, the role of the faith of the Church has been almost forgotten down to our own day.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Huit catéchèses baptismales," in *Sources chrétiennes* 50 (Paris, 1957) 153-54, cited by Didier, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>11</sup> Didier, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 136. <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-39.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9 and the text cited on pp. 239-41 from Strabo's *De exordiis et incrementis*, chap. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Lécuyer, *art. cit.*, pp. 33-35. Augustine also said that the sacrament's efficacious symbolism made the child a believer, but only from the time of Peter Lombard did it become commonly accepted in Church tradition; see Villette, *art. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>15</sup> Later on Benedict XIV specified that infants at baptism receive the theological virtue of faith (*DS* 2567).

<sup>16</sup> Villette, *art. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>17</sup> The *Document* of the French Bishops (*art. cit.*, n. 2 above) says nothing about the faith of the Church. Vatican II says nothing directly (Constitution on the Liturgy, nos.

At the time of the Reformation the Anabaptists renewed the rejection of infant baptism. Not only Catholics but even Protestants opposed them. While most of the Protestant traditions have rejected many of the ceremonies of the Roman rite and have restricted the administration of baptism to ministers of the word, they have consistently, with few exceptions, defended the doctrine of infant baptism. In the 1940's Karl Barth and F. J. Leenhardt renewed the controversy.<sup>18</sup> They did not question the validity of infant baptism, but the unconditional generalized practice of it. To them, the practice of infant baptism was becoming a cause of scandal for the world and for the Church itself. On the other hand, some Baptists, in a re-evaluation of infant baptism, are challenging their practice of rebaptizing baptized converts and of not recognizing infant baptism.<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Church has continued to defend the practice of infant baptism since its first official statement at Florence (*DS* 1349), reconfirmed by Trent (*DS* 1514, 1625-27), down to our own day (the Holy Office *Monitum*, Feb. 15, 1958, and Paul VI's *Credo*, June 30, 1968). We might note, however, that in an explanation of the *Monitum* and also in the *Document* of the French Bishops on infant baptism, the "quaproprimum" urgency of canon 770 is slightly attenuated.<sup>20</sup>

#### CAUSES FOR APPARENT INEFFECTIVENESS OF INFANT BAPTISM

While theology assures us of the *ex opere operato* validity of infant baptism, the practice of it preoccupies many today. Both the general renewal in theology and pastoral and the recent controversy among Protestants have called attention to the problem. At stake are the realization of the nature of baptism and the mission of the Church. While this problem appears principally in dechristianized countries,<sup>21</sup> the Church in the U.S. cannot neglect it.

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67-69), but recalls this aspect in other texts where it speaks of the liturgy as a celebration of the Church (nos. 7, 10, 11, 14, 26) and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (nos. 8, 9, 11, 14).

<sup>18</sup> K. Barth, *Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe* (Zurich, 1943), and F. J. Leenhardt, *Le baptême chrétien, son origine, sa signification* (Neuchâtel, 1944). For further bibliography see von Allmen, *art. cit.*, pp. 72-74. For a lengthy study of Barth's teaching see H. Schlier, "L'Enseignement de l'église sur le baptême," in *Le temps de l'église* (Tournai, 1961) pp. 116-39.

<sup>19</sup> Hurley, *art. cit.*, pp. 19-21; see also the statement of G. R. Beasley-Murray at the Eleventh Congress of the World Baptist Alliance in his *Baptism Today and Tomorrow* (London, 1966) pp. 145-172, and N. Clark, "The Theology of Baptism," in *Christian Baptism*, ed. A. Gilmore (London, 1959).

<sup>20</sup> J. Weber, "Date du baptême des enfants," *M-D* 56 (1958) 162-63; and the French Bishop's *Document* III, 3 (*art. cit.*, p. 53).

<sup>21</sup> Beasley-Murray says that while 77% of the children born in England are baptized

Among the causes for the ineffectiveness of this sacrament is the faulty relation between infant baptism and faith.<sup>22</sup> As was mentioned above, ever since the late Middle Ages, the sacrament has been regarded as an *ex opere operato* instrument for the automatic infusion of faith. While the faith of the Church necessarily finds expression at least in the rite itself, often those who represent the Church, i.e., parents, godparents, and the community, show little or no faith. The theological faith of the child finds no environment in which to take root. A long period of careful catechetical preparation in the early Church used to precede adult baptism, so that the faith of the recipient was assured. Now, with the process reversed in infant baptism, the instruction is supposed to follow baptism but often does not. While we are convinced of the necessity of baptism, many are not convinced of the instruction and formation necessary to make this sacrament fruitful. Even where there is instruction, often it is no more than a veneer. Without formation in the faith, the child can hardly be expected to mature as an apostolic representative of the Church.

Besides lack of faith, we also find a confusion of faith and religion that checks the sacrament's effectiveness.<sup>23</sup> Whereas faith is a question of doctrine, of God's word understood and lived, religion is a natural need of man based on his human condition; it is a lived relationship which man establishes with the divine based on fear, or a need for security, or for giving praise, or for communion. Religion orientates man toward faith, but once joined with faith it needs to be continually evangelized lest it become an obstacle to faith. Hence, while religion has values to offer, faith needs to take possession of it and sanctify it. If faith is weak or lacking, religion can degenerate to superstition and magic. Nevertheless, this is the context of faith offered by some parents and godparents who request baptism for their infants. Again, we cannot expect children baptized in such a milieu to give life and meaning to the Church's mission.

The lack of instruction in the faith and the influence of religious superstition have led in many cases to spurious motives in the petition for infant baptism.<sup>24</sup> Motives vary from person to person, and place to

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by the Anglicans, only 9% are faithful enough to make their annual Easter Communion; cited by Hurley, *art. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> Manders, *art. cit.*, pp. 176-77, presents a good general bibliography on this question. See also, for a broader consideration, A. Laurentin, "Bulletin bibliographique sur le problème 'foi et sacrement,'" *ParLit* 5-6 (1964) 543-49.

<sup>23</sup> In *ParMis* 31 (1965) see P. Liégé, "La religion qui n'est pas la foi," pp. 551-56; C. Geffré, "La critique de la religion chez Barth et chez Bonhoeffer," pp. 567-83; J. Bosc, "Foi chrétienne et religion," pp. 584-89; see also Berryman, *art. cit.*, pp. 546-47.

<sup>24</sup> See Favreau, *art. cit.*, pp. 87-100; Mambrilla, *art. cit.*, pp. 297-301; J. Potel, in Gerbé *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-51; and R. Salaun in the same work, pp. 52-64.

place, but some parents are known to request baptism solely to relate their child to the social life of the community, as if it were a pass to social acceptance, a start on the right road with the cultural baggage or spiritual inheritance necessary. For some it is a social routine or family tradition: everyone does it. In some instances it is the desire of a poor man to have his child recognized as the equal of richer people. Some see it as a means of obtaining a useful document which eliminates later legal or ecclesiastical problems. In some small villages it is a chance for a party, a fiesta, to break the monotony of ordinary life. Some see it as a magic protection against physical and spiritual evils. In the U.S. a more common motive among divorced or fallen-away Catholics is that of satisfying the demands of concerned Catholic grandparents and relatives. While there is usually some degree of faith in the above requests, the mistaken motives often dominate. Because of such motives, dialogue with the parents and godparents, as we will mention below, is most important for discerning their intention. It might show that we have to begin with evangelization and not catechetics in preparing them for the baptism of their child.

The Church's law (*CIC 770*) that the child must be baptized as soon as possible ("quamprimum") has not always helped to assure the effectiveness of the pastoral practice of infant baptism. As was mentioned above, infant baptism did not have much importance in the New Testament Church; rather it developed from adult baptism. Nor need we interpret John as an argument for infant baptism: "Unless one is begotten of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). For, as Raymond Brown says, John's concern here is "one of contrasting flesh and spirit, and of insisting that life from above is not the same as ordinary life and cannot be received without the work of the Spirit. His 'unless' refers to the general incapacity of the purely natural."<sup>25</sup> The negative universal of this verse, then, does not prove the necessity of infant baptism. Nor do we find any "quamprimum" urgency about baptism, since for a long time in Rome Easter and Pentecost were the only dates for baptism. We should also note that even adult converts for several centuries had to enter a catechumenate preparation of two years or even longer before being baptized. This certainly does not indicate a sense of urgency about baptism. Eventu-

<sup>25</sup> See Brown, *art. cit.*, pp. 265-66, where he also notes with regard to Rom 5-6 that "Paul is thinking of baptism as uniting Christians with the death of Jesus and taking away actual sin. The sinful state of unbaptized infants is not directly in Paul's discussion (although some Catholic scholars would see an indirect reference to it)." Here we might also note the controverted statement of Paul which suggests the sanctification of children by baptized parents: 1 Cor 7:14; see Brown, p. 265, and Didier, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-35.

ally, however, insistence on the doctrine of original sin and the high mortality rate of infants led to the practice of infant baptism at any time and soon after birth.<sup>26</sup> As a matter of fact, the Church never officially insisted on the practice of "quamprimum" baptism till the Council of Florence's Decree for the Jacobites (*DS* 1349). Moreover, the Church has always recognized baptism of desire, as in the case of catechumens, and baptism of blood as substitutes for sacramental baptism. When we try to reconcile the pastoral problems of infant baptism and canon 770, the law need not be taken literally, as was mentioned above.<sup>27</sup> Many feel that the "as soon as possible" expression of the fourteenth century entered into Church teaching because of the high mortality rate of infants at that time.<sup>28</sup> Since then the high mortality rate has decreased considerably in many countries. Nevertheless, because of the existing Church law, a kind of blind urgency surrounds infant baptism: pastors insist on it and parents respond even though they cannot guarantee the religious formation of their child.

Furthermore, we know that the baptismal rite of infants has not helped to make the sacrament more meaningful. We understand the rite (and even most of the theology) of baptism only when we consider it, as it historically originated, as a sacrament for adults. Unfortunately, the adaptation of the rite to infants has not always been too felicitous. What we have had up to the present is an abbreviated rite of adult baptism addressed to unknowing infants with very little reference to the parents and community present. With little or no commentary to accompany the rite, it is not surprising that the rite has meant very little to most people. Fortunately, Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy announced future improvements for the rite: "The rite for the baptism of infants is to be revised, and should be adapted to the circumstance that those to be baptized are, in fact, infants. The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more sharply in the rite itself" (no. 67). The postconciliar Liturgy Council, commenting on the new rite for infant baptism presented at its eighth plenary session in April, 1967, said: "The rite is not a reduction of the rite of adult baptism as the rite in the Ritual has been up to the present, but something new, taking into account not only the true condition of the infants who neither understand nor can speak, but also all the principles regarding brevity, clarity, and the commu-

<sup>26</sup> See Pope Siricius in 385 and the Council of Girone sometime after 517, cited by Didier, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-4 and 220 respectively.

<sup>27</sup> See n. 20 above.

<sup>28</sup> E. Marcus, "Implications théologiques d'un problème pastoral," in Gerbé *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-28.

nity aspect which the Constitution approved."<sup>29</sup> This rite presupposes a well-formed faith in the community. If it does not exist, it will not do much to make infant baptism meaningful.

One of the main effects of baptism is to incorporate the child into the life of Christ and His Church. It is the rite by which initiation takes place. Rahner even calls incorporation into the Church the *res et sacramentum*, or character, of baptism.<sup>30</sup> The difficulty is that often those responsible for fostering and developing the child's incorporation into the Church are unprepared to do it. For one thing, the experience of the Church as a community, of people who know each other, has been lost, especially in large modern parishes of highly mobile people. No longer is the parish the center of village or neighborhood life; no longer is it the family place of times past. Besides this sociological change in the parish, many of the faithful, even those instructed in the faith, hardly appreciate Vatican II's designation of the Church as "a sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind" (*LG*, no. 1), as "the universal sacrament of salvation" (*LG*, no. 48). So often even for priests the Church has become a question of quantity of people and not quality. Children are baptized indiscriminately. We forget, as A. Henry says,<sup>31</sup> that there is not necessarily more holiness, charity, or grace in the world every time a hundred thousand names are added to the list of those baptized. Often a small minority radiates more charity than larger numbers of baptized people whose way of life differs very little from that of unbaptized people. Though we multiply signs of grace, we do not necessarily multiply grace. Our concern should be first for the quality of the Church and only secondarily for its quantity. The Church is meant to be a light to the world, a leavening force. Judging from the way we continue to recruit new members, we can understand why the Church as "the universal sacrament of salvation" does not always live up to its evangelical image.

In regard to the sign-value of the Church, the Reformed Church theologian von Allmen says that the practice of infant baptism generalizes something that should be exceptional. Moreover, God loves us but He is not so impatient to save us that He cannot await our free response to His call. Furthermore, infant baptism, according to him, compromises our awareness of the eschatological character of God's people. Baptized lethargic masses do not live with the fervor that should characterize Christians who would conscientiously risk their lives for God. Even though he recognizes the validity of infant baptism, he feels that

<sup>29</sup> *Notitiae* 28-29 (1967) 145.

<sup>30</sup> K. Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York, 1963) pp. 87-90.

<sup>31</sup> A. Henry, *La force de l'évangile* (France, 1967) pp. 207-12.

it depreciates baptism to a rite hardly distinguishable from magic. The more he has reflected on the advantages of infant baptism, the more disadvantages he has found.<sup>32</sup>

#### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

While not all the above criticisms of the practice of infant baptism are of equal value or always exist, the sum total should make us reflect on the pastoral response to the existent situation. What possible solutions can be proposed as a means of making infant baptism what it should be?

First, as a general answer to a problem so widespread and deep, there is a need for catechetical programs, for instructive and formative cursillos. The programs are not merely to focus on baptism but on Christian faith in general, not merely for children but especially for adults. A program in this regard that had much success in preparation for the Eucharistic Congress in Bogotá was that of the *Asambleas Familiares* (Neighborhood Meetings).<sup>33</sup> The success of such programs will depend in large measure on the extent of interest they arouse. Individual efforts will bear little fruit; it must be a project of the whole diocese or of a number of dioceses. It should include the work of both pastors and theologians. Ultimately the responsibility for it falls upon the authorities in pastoral offices.

Another general answer to the pastoral problem of infant baptism is the need to promote a sense of Christian community. Many have no sense of solidarity with the Church. For some, the Church is like a factory that manufactures sacraments with the priest as its business representative. One cause for the breakdown of a sense of community is the size of many parishes. Smaller communities are necessary to make one feel part of the Church. E. Pin tells us that small communities are a psychological necessity to modern man and also have a decisive value in helping the Church to pass from abstraction to existence.<sup>34</sup> Though the relationship of such communities to the larger Church sometimes causes problems, due in part to the fact that the official Church often regards them with suspicion, these differences

<sup>32</sup> Von Allmen, *art. cit.*, pp. 76-81.

<sup>33</sup> In these meetings people from the neighborhood gathered to discuss, with a leader prepared beforehand, some basic themes of Christian life. Each leader had a copy of the talk presented on television and radio which served as a basis for the discussion. If the assembly chose another day or hour to meet than that of the talk on television and radio, the talk was read to them by one of the group. Two or three prepared questions related to the talk served to provoke discussion in the group. Several thousand groups of ten to thirty people each met weekly in the city for twenty weeks before the Congress.

<sup>34</sup> E. Pin, "The Church as a Way of Being Together," *Information Documentation on the Conciliar Church* 27 (July 7, 1968) 1-11.

must be overcome for the sake of the greater values involved. Another important factor in removing barriers to community life is dialogue, not only among the people themselves, but especially between the clergy and the people. Some parishioners are afraid to talk to their pastors, or what is worse, have no desire to talk with him. Means for assuring a continuing dialogue should form part of parish life if we are to promote a community sense in which the faith of the children can take roots.

As regards the more immediate problem of those requesting baptism for their infants, the *Document* of the French Bishops serves as a guide.<sup>35</sup> They call attention to the pastor's attitude in receiving the petition and caution against too much severity or complacency. A Church concerned with the salvation of all men should not be severe. Moreover, the priest is the minister of the Church's sacraments, not the owner. An aggressive or suspicious pastor does not represent the Church. His attitude should be that of a father or friend, benevolent, kindly, and welcoming to all. Yet he must also avoid the other extreme of complacency or carelessness with little respect for the meaning of baptism and the Church's mission. While avoiding juridicism, he must be a judge in the Church's name to safeguard the authenticity of the signs that represent her.

The French Bishops also recommend a dialogue with the parents of the child to be baptized. The dialogue would begin with the initial request for baptism and continue through a series of three or four reunions before the actual baptism. Also present at these meetings would be other parents with their children to be baptized, as well as godparents and militant representatives of parish apostolates. In the course of these dialogue meetings, which will include Scripture readings, instructions, and prayer, the priest can help the parents to reflect on their obligations, to clarify their motives in requesting baptism, and to deepen their ties with the Church community.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, during this time the pastor can form his judgment regarding each case. His prejudice, if any, should be in favor of and not against the parents' request. Most cases are obvious. But if parents do not attend to the religious education of their older children, there is serious reason to question their sincerity. The norm of the White Fathers in Africa is not to baptize a child if there is no assurance of its religious educa-

<sup>35</sup> For a list of commentaries on the *Document*, see *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 48 (1967) 75-76. For an assessment of the pastoral plan of the *Document* after one year of practice, see Turck, *art. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> J. Puyo offers a series of dialogues as a basis for these meetings: "Entretien pastoral avec les parents en vue du baptême," *Catéchèse* 24 (1966) 323-38; 26 (1967) 51-66.

tion.<sup>37</sup> Regarding the baptism itself, the Bishops feel that the sociological and pastoral conditions of the Church in France justify a delay between the request for baptism and the actual baptism. They speak of a delay of several weeks to permit the meetings between pastor and people mentioned above.

The French Bishops are not the only ones with a plan for this pastoral situation that confronts the Church of today. Some would restrict the days of baptism each year to several feasts. At least they would not baptize during the seasons of Lent and Advent.<sup>38</sup> Another proposed solution would invent a rite for young people, already baptized as infants, in which they would renew or reaffirm their commitment to the faith.<sup>39</sup> However, a more radical solution, increasingly proposed by Catholics and Protestants, suggests formally initiating infants into the catechumenate but not actually baptizing them till a later age, which would be decided by the child, his parents, and the community itself.<sup>40</sup> Attention has become so centered on infant baptism that we forget that the early Church thought mainly in terms of adult baptism. While it would be an exaggeration to make this long period of catechumenate necessary for all children, especially in view of the Church's insistence on the necessity of infant baptism, we can consider such a practice in areas where few children mature in the faith. Till the child reaches the age when he can responsibly choose the Church, he will be related to it as a catechumen with baptism of desire. Thus we avoid making membership in the Church something cheap, undervaluing what, as von Allmen says, should be exceptional. We also show more concern for the quality of the Church as "the universal sacrament of salvation" than for her quantity of numbers.

Just as the French Bishops led the way by taking a step forward regarding infant baptism in their 1951 *Directoire pour la pastorale des sacrements*, and another in their *Document* of 1966, might we not contemplate still another step forward in the pastoral of infant baptism, at least in areas of special difficulty, and this step not only in France but elsewhere too? The answer is important to the mission of the Church in the world today.

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<sup>37</sup> Maison générale des Pères blancs, "Le baptême des enfants en Afrique," *M-D* 89 (1967) 101-4.

<sup>38</sup> Iniesta, *art. cit.*, p. 107.   <sup>39</sup> Von Allmen, *art. cit.*, p. 85, n. 35.

<sup>40</sup> See McClendon, *art. cit.*, pp. 17-18; Hurley, *art. cit.*, pp. 20-21, 23-24; von Allmen, *art. cit.* p. 85; though the work by D. Moody, *Baptism: Foundation for Christian Unity* (Philadelphia, 1967), was not available for this article, it also speaks of this solution while permitting the alternative practice of infant baptism; see the review by P. Hill in *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 29 (1968) 343-45.