

some people need to warm up their cold faith?

Indeed! But the question is, on what basis? Do we point people to what God has already done for them (the catholic option) or do we urge them to do something, such as being rebaptized (the "born-again" option)?

What do you mean by the catholic option?

I use the word catholic to refer to the tradition that embraces infant baptism and does not practice rebaptism. In this tradition baptism is complete in itself.

But are you really born again?

Typically, the experience is described as a feeling of being loved by God and, at the same time, of being called to commit oneself totally to Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. Often people who have had the feeling seek baptism as a sign of being born again and urge others who were baptized as infants to be rebaptized.

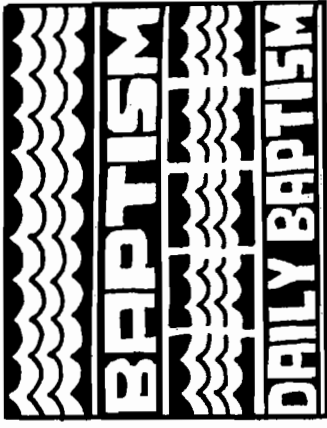
But aren't these people dedicated and sincere?

Of course they are. We both have Christ in common. They are not the "enemy." We are Christian sisters and brothers who differ in our understanding of baptism. All of us want to honor Christ and follow scripture.

Then why the fuss?

There is a fuss because people are being invited to feel as if they were spiritually second-rate, incomplete without a "born-again" experience and a "second baptism."

Well, maybe that isn't so bad. Don't



How does that differ from the "born-again" option?

The "born-again" option emphasizes baptism as human response rather than as God's gift. It is viewed as an ordinance, a divine command that must be obeyed. It is a symbolic act on the part of a person, rather than a sacramental act on the part of God.

What does the catholic option stress?

Gift, promise, forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation, none of which are contingent upon the fervency of my faith or the intensity of my feelings. Infants have nothing to do with their baptism. They can only receive it. The same is true of grace. We can only receive it, with great joy, "as a little child."

But what about the total dedication our fervent friends urge on us?

It is God's gracious washing that summons us to decision and action. We can't just bask in our baptism. We are called actively to affirm our baptized status as forgiven sinners, dying daily to sin and rising to a life of sacrificial love in the power of the Spirit. Notice I said daily. You don't need a one-time spiritual splurge of emotion. What you need is to claim what is already yours. The important thing is not how you feel about God. It's how God feels about

Why do you prefer the catholic option?

I believe it is more faithful to the gospel and to the Bible. It emphasizes grace, the love of God in Christ that doesn't depend on our virtue or lack thereof. In baptism, a baby is made a member of the body of Christ without doing anything.



Just what is baptism according to this catholic option?

Baptism is the church's act which God makes God's act, to give new life, to create us as one with Christ's people, to grant us a share in the destiny of our Lord, which is to live with God forever. Through the water connected with God's promise, we participate in Christ's death. What's more, we participate in his rising.

you, and the grace God has given you.

Yet those spiritual highs can keep you going for a long time.

No doubt they can. However, those highs depend so much on our changeable emotions. Fortunately, we have another gift from God to sustain us in our Christian pilgrimage.

What's that?

Holy Communion. The Lord's Supper. Eucharist. When we celebrate that meal, Christ is as present, with his forgiveness and power, as he was in our baptism. Again there is God's unmerited embrace, coupled with the Lord's own energy and challenge to love others as he loved us. In baptism, God gave us new life and a new destiny. In the meal, God nourishes us so we can be what we already are.

So people don't need to be baptized again?

No. They need to remember when they were born again "by water and the Spirit" and "marked with the cross of Christ forever." This baptizes them into service to the world in his name. Daily dying. Daily rising. In baptism we have enough to practice our whole life long!

For further reading

Matthew 28:18-20
John 3:5
Acts 2:38
I Corinthians 12:13
Romans 6:1-11
Galatians 3:27-28
Ephesians 4:13
Colossians 2:12
Titus 3:5
BAPTISM by Martin E. Marty
(Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1962), a small paperback that places the catholic option in the context of ecumenical Christianity.
BAPTIZED WE LIVE by Daniel Erlander
(Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1981), a 30-page book on Lutheranism as a way of life.

Credits

*Author Bruce Wollenberg is the Lutheran campus pastor in Santa Barbara, Calif.
Art is from BAPTIZED WE LIVE by Daniel Erlander, Holden Village, Chelan, Wash.*



When you get asked,

"But Are You Born Again?"

Questions and Answers on Baptism

It can be unsettling to have your faith called into question by someone who claims to have had an intense religious experience and desires you to have it, too. This tract is offered to help you think through the issues involved in considering a "second baptism" and to assist you in responding, in love, to those who call your baptism, and, therefore, your faith, into question.

Campus Ministry Communications