

## **BAPTISM**

### **Comments by Pope Benedict XVI**

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) was interviewed by Peter Seewald over the course of 3 days. Excerpts from this conversation on Baptism follow. (Taken from: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. God and the World. Ignatius Press, 2002.)

**[In the early church, it was necessary to complete the catechumenate (period of study and formation) before being baptized as an adult.] Are you against infant baptism?**

Ratzinger: “Baptism serves the purpose of giving a meaning to man’s life, above and beyond biological life, so that this life is justified. In an age like today, when the future looks dark, the question can arise of whether it is moral at all to bring someone into the world...

The gift of life can only be justified if I can give the new person more than mere biological life. If I can give him, along with it, a meaning that I know to be stronger than all the darkness of history. That is what baptism is...[it] takes him up into fellowship with Christ.

In that sense, infant baptism is clearly justified. It does become a different matter, of course, when in a dechristianized society...many still cling to baptism only because it somehow provides the beginning of life with its celebration, and its requisite ritual expression.... Baptism is, in fact, much more than a ritual conferring membership in a community, as many people conceive it nowadays. It is a process of birth, through which a new dimension of life opens out.”

**Church canon law says: “Baptism...[is] necessary to salvation in fact or at least in intention,” But what happens when a man dies unbaptized? And what happens to the millions of children who are killed in their mother’s wombs?**

Ratzinger: “The question of what it means to say that baptism is necessary for salvation has become ever more hotly debated in modern times. The Second Vatican Council said on this point that men who are seeking for God and who are inwardly striving toward that which constitutes baptism will also receive salvation. That is to say that a seeking after God already represents an inward participation in baptism, in the Church, in Christ.

[Regarding children who die from abortion or who die unbaptized], earlier ages had devised a teaching that seems to me rather unenlightened. They said that baptism endows us, by means of sanctifying grace, with the capacity to gaze upon God. Now, certainly, the state of original sin, from which we are freed by baptism, consists in a lack of sanctifying grace. Children who die in this way are indeed without any personal sin,

so they cannot be sent to hell, but, on the other hand, they lack sanctifying grace and the potential for beholding God that this bestows. They will simply enjoy a state of natural blessedness, in which they will be happy. **This state people called *limbo*.**

In our century, this has gradually come to seem problematic to us. This was one way in which people sought to justify the necessity of baptizing infants as early as possible, but the solution is itself questionable. Finally, the Pope made a decisive turn in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, when **he expressed the simple hope that God is powerful enough to draw to himself all those who were unable to receive the sacrament.**

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