

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Adult Baptism

Dear Father Hohman.

It is my understanding that the Church now identifies adult as being the normative stage for Baptism. This is consistent with the admonition of the Church that we receive the sacraments consciously, fully and actively. Further, it is my understanding that the preceding is consistent with Church practice pre-Constantine.

In the very early days of the Church there was no such problem, because people were coming into the Church as adults and were required to make their own personal commitment. The development of the catechumenate gave them a process through which that commitment would become very real.

Later the vast majority of people became Christians by being born into a Christian family — hence the problem.

On another approach, primacy of conscience, a marriage is considered invalid if both parties did not choose by their free will to be married. Isn't there an element of choosing a marriage partner when we baptize our children as babies? Aren't we imposing our choice, our will, our power on our babies? Why not approve the Church's renewed approach to Baptism which I view as being more relevant to the commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ that is conscious and reflects primacy of conscience.

M.C.

Dear M.C.,

One of the most serious problems the Church faces has to do with your questions. It is a matter of the relationship of personal commitment to the Sacrament of Baptism. It would appear that far too many Catholic Christians (as well as Christians of other traditions), having been baptized as infants, never actually make that commitment their own by an explicit acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and their incorporation into Him. They never consciously center their lives in Jesus. We say that such Christians have implicit cultural faith: that is, they accept Christianity because their parents gave it to them and go through the motions all of their lives for that reason.

In our time, the catechumenate has been restored in the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults, and becomes the model for all Christians in the growth and development of their commitment to Jesus Christ.

Some liturgists and theologians today are talking about the desirability of delaying Baptism until it can be received as an adult along with the other two sacraments of initiation, Confirmation and Eucharist. These people would call for introduction of children into the Church as catechumens, but leave the sacraments of initiation until they were old enough to make the commitment personally. I rather like this idea.

In the meantime, it is important to remember that parents and godparents cannot make a commitment for their children even in Baptism. No one can make a commitment for another human being. The most they can do is to make a commitment that by their word and example, by their seeing to the best possible Christian education of their child, they will bring that child to the fullest possibility of making a full commitment to Christ in adulthood. The Church has the right and actually does expect this from parents and godparents on the occasion of infant Baptism.

BOOKS

"Nuclear Peril: The Politics of Proliferation," by Rep. Ed Markey with Douglas Waller. Ballinger (Cambridge, Mass., 1982. 183 pp., \$14.95.

attempt to stop shipment of 38 tons of U.S. uranium to the Tarapur, India, reactor in 1980. India is one of six nations that possess nuclear weapons.

current nuclear book list. It has far too many minor details about Congressman Markey's part in trying to uphold the spirit and the letter of the 1978 Nuclear Nonproliferation Act.

Nuclear power, says Congressman Markey, must be "phased out" both at home and abroad. "There are more than 200 nuclear reactors in the world, and each one is a potential bomb factory," he writes.

By Joseph F. McKenna
NC News Service

I am always suspicious of books written by people in public office. All too often these books are "epic" tales encased in the first-person singular. Congressman Markey's book did nothing to alter that opinion.

As the prologue notes, "This is the story of one congressman who pried his way into the debate and came away with the simple conviction that . . . the spread of nuclear power guarantees the spread of nuclear bombs."

Nevertheless, Congressman Markey offers comments about nuclear power and nuclear weapons that are worth heeding as President Reagan continues to call for more nuclear defense spending.

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In essence, "Nuclear Peril" is the Massachusetts legislator's account of Congress' unsuccessful

Unlike Robert Scheer's "With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush and Nuclear War" (Random House, 1982), "Nuclear Peril" is not a very readable entry on the

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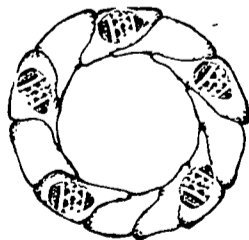
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