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**The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults: Its Potential of Revitalizing
The Basic Ecclesial Communities of Bontoc-Lagawe**

A thesis by

Bento F. Tamang

Presented to
The Faculty of the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Title: The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults: Its Potential of Revitalizing The Basic Ecclesial Communities of Bontoc-Lagawe

A thesis by

Bento F. Tamang

Abstract

One of the most important innovations of Vatican II is the restoration of the Catechumenate and its integration into the Lenten and Easter celebrations as practiced in the early centuries of Christianity. But it is surprising that in the Philippines in general and in the Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe in particular, the RCIA is not yet in place. I would like, therefore, to argue in this paper that the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) in Bontoc-Lagawe could revitalize the Basic Ecclesial Communities of the vicariate. The BEC experience, in which I was immersed and formed, is the context, presenting some pastoral-liturgical challenges that jumpstarts my research. The RCIA experiences I have here in the USA, deepened by my liturgical/sacramental theology formation at the Jesuit School of Theology provided the theological and practical frameworks that shed light to the challenging pastoral-liturgical practices in Bontoc-Lagawe. This enlightenment of the pastoral-liturgical context (BEC), through the RCIA theology and practice, strongly supports the implementation of the RCIA in Bontoc-Lagawe because the RCIA theology and practice can certainly revitalize the BECs of the vicariate.

This theological exploration on the RCIA will focus on the practice of the catechumenate integrated in the Lenten and Easter celebrations. It looks into how this RCIA theology and practice, with its vibrant ecclesiological vision, embodied in the

images of the Body of Christ and the People of God and further expressed in liturgical preparation, celebration, and post-initiation catechesis, can revitalize the ecclesial, participative, and communal structures and processes of Church life in Bontoc-Lagawe. And to provide the overall trajectory of this paper, these two-fold general research questions will be undertaken. How can the RCIA provide vitality and opportunities for renewal in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe? And how can the RCIA – with its underlying history, theology, rite, and pastoral practice provide new impetus for Bontoc-Lagawe’s journey towards a more participative community of disciples that is expressed in the way it prepares for, celebrates, and lives the sacraments of initiation?

The above general questions are answered in three chapters. The first chapter presents a historical evolution of the BEC-type church in the Philippines and how it emerged in Bontoc-Lagawe, with its current structures, values, principles, and practices. The building up of a participative, dialogic, and co-responsible church inspired by Vatican II’s *communio* ecclesiology led to the organization of chapel-based and neighborhood-based BECs, whose focus also evolved from liturgical participation to involvement in liberational and developmental concerns, respectively. After twenty six years of organizing, forming, and mobilizing BECs, there are still challenging practices in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in Bontoc-Lagawe such as the disintegrated celebration of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist, the non-ecclesial and non-Eucharistic celebration of initiation, the non-integration of the initiation process in the Lenten and Easter celebrations, the mineralization of liturgical symbols and rituals, and

the interruption of the flow of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist by the practice of receiving Holy Communion prior to Confirmation.

The above challenges can be corrected by the RCIA's theology and practice, in the second chapter, that deals with the RCIA's historical, theological, ritual, and consequent pastoral developments from the post-resurrection communities to the Patristic period, the middle ages, to the Council of Trent until Vatican II, and post-Vatican II. What is so telling is RCIA's vigorous vision of the Church as the Body of Christ and the People of God that summons all the baptized to fully, actively, and consciously participate in the liturgy and the mission of the Church. The RCIA concretizes this by making the Christian community aware that ministry and service is the responsibility of the baptized who needs to minister as an initiating assembly that supports, inspires and journeys with the catechumens in their evangelization, conversion, initiation, and post-initiation catechesis. Additionally, the RCIA's Trinitarian foundation, revealed through the paschal mystery of Christ, provides the theological reasons for celebrating Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist together as an organically unified liturgical corpus. Furthermore, the RCIA affords a new perspective and model for sacramental catechesis based on serious theology for the whole community that is focused on evangelization and conversion into the way, the truth and the life of Jesus. This subsequently calls for a faith response and mission that challenges those baptized to live in communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and to participate in the paschal mystery—the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

Chapter three, picking up on the prevailing RCIA theology and practice in chapter two, demonstrates that the RCIA can transform Bontoc-Lagawe BECs by helping in the

attainment of the vicariate's transformative directions towards a church of participation, communion, and mission. This is attainable through empowered lay ministries, communal living of the faith, engagement in total human salvation, inculturation of the liturgy, and the formation of self-reliant and missionary Christian communities. Furthermore, the RCIA theology and practice corrects the problematic liturgical practices in Bontoc-Lagawe by supporting an integrated, ecclesial and Eucharistic celebration of the sacraments of initiation, specially within the seasons of Lent and Easter, by maximizing liturgical rites and symbols, and by empowering the baptized to become evangelized-evangelizers. In the end, we can say that the RCIA's implementation in Bontoc-Lagawe promises to revitalize the vicariate's BECs. The RCIA achieves this as it helps in the fulfillment of Bontoc-Lagawe's transformative directions, corrects the challenging practices of the sacraments of initiation in the vicariate, and assists in the attainment of the vision-mission-goal of Bontoc-Lagawe.

Prof. Paul Janowiak, S.J., Director

Acknowledgement

I thank the clergy, lay leaders, and parishioners of the different mission parishes of Bontoc-Lagawe who gifted me with a lot of valuable learning experiences from the rough grounds of theology, faith, and praxis fostered in the Basic Ecclesial Communities. I also thank the parishioners at the Newman Hall-Holy Spirit Parish, St. Leo the Great Church, and St. Michael Catholic Church for providing me glimpses and precious experiences of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. Both the BEC experiences in my local church and my enlightening RCIA experiences here in the USA provided the context and framework of my current research that is deepened by my various liturgical/sacramental courses in theology at JST. My heartfelt thanks to Dr. Paul Janowiak, SJ, thesis director, Dr. Mary McGann, RSCJ, thesis reader, Dr. Eduardo Fernandez, SJ, Dr. John Klentos, and Dr. Christopher Hadley, SJ for generously sharing themselves and their knowledge in theology that helped me deepen my theological understanding. My gratitude as well to all the staff of the Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union, who helped me in my academic journey. My appreciation and thanks to all my classmates, who were my travel companions in our communal pursuit for academic formation. To my family and relatives, my heartfelt thanks for the unwavering support. And to God, for all that has been and for all that will be, thanksgiving, glory, and praise now and forever.

Introduction

The sacraments of Christian initiation are indisputably foundational sacraments, as they open for us the door to life in communion with the community of the baptized and ultimately communion in the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are foundational and significant for our Christian lives as community of disciples, they must therefore be celebrated with utmost fervor and dignity. The RCIA process done communally, participatively, and co-responsibly will surely contribute to the sacraments of initiation's meaningful preparation, celebration, and missionary call and help build the Basic Ecclesial Community into a real Body of Christ, People of God, and community of disciples.

When I came to the Jesuit School of Theology for my liturgical studies, I experienced during the Lenten and Easter celebrations the unfolding of the RCIA process at the Newman Hall – Holy Spirit Parish. It fascinated me because it was such a wonderful process that involves the whole community of the baptized who do not simply act as a passive audience but are communally seen as the initiating and welcoming community into which the catechumens are incorporated as members. In addition, the sacraments of initiation are celebrated integrally from Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, which highlight the inter-connected nature of the initiation sacraments. I came to understand and appreciate the rigorous and long process involving the periods and steps of the RCIA through which the catechumens have undertaken. I thought to myself that if this can be done in the vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe, it could perhaps be responsive to the discovery of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines that many Filipino Catholics are sacramentalized but not evangelized. They received the sacraments but are

not living their meanings and ethical challenges because of the failure of evangelization or catechesis and some flaws in the manner of sacramental celebrations.

I also remember noticing in the liturgical prayers for Lent and Easter, in my years as a priest in the Philippines, specially crafted prayers for the preparation and celebration of adult initiation that are not used due to the non-existence of the catechumenate program. I remember asking myself, “Why are we not using this liturgical possibility for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation that is fitting for the liturgical season of the Church? Why can I not try this Lenten and Easter catechumenal program to make the seasons’ celebrations more meaningful both to the candidates and the Christian community?”

I came, therefore, to an assumption that the RCIA can help address the problem of the shortfall in evangelization resulting from various deficiencies in the preparation processes and celebration of the sacraments, and the failure to live their ethical demands. It can also make the celebration of Lent and Easter more meaningful since the presence of catechumens and candidates of initiation embody and exhibit the meanings and challenges of both Lent and Easter and the initiation sacraments. Moreover, the RCIA process done in the BECs in a communal and Eucharistic context surely promotes participation and co-responsibility in preparing, baptizing, welcoming candidates, and of collectively guiding them in their journey of faith. Thus, the RCIA implementation in Bontoc-Lagawe promises to aid in renewing the sacramental preparation, celebration, and post-initiation catechesis that leads to a thorough evangelization and conversion of the Basic Ecclesial Community members, transforming them into evangelized-evangelizers.

List of Abbreviations

BCC – Basic Christian Community

BCCs – Basic Christian Communities

BEC – Basic Ecclesial Community

BECs – Basic Ecclesial Communities

CBCP – Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines

GKK – Gagmay'ng Kristohanong Katilingban (Small Christian Communities)

LOMAS – Lay Organizations, Movements, and Associations

MSPC – Mindanao - Sulu Pastoral Conference

OBA – Ordo Baptismi Adultorum

PCP II – Second Plenary Council of the Philippines

PDO – Poor, Deprived and Oppressed

RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

SAC – Social Action Apostolate

SCC – Small Christian Community

SCCs – Small Christian Communities

SWAP – Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest

WESTY – Worship, Education, Social Services, Temporality and Youth

YEAST – Youth, Education, Altar, Social Services/Action, and Temporality

CHAPTER ONE – A HISTORY OF BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

The Worldwide Emergence of Basic Ecclesial Communities: A New Way of Being Church

Karl Rahner once predicted in 1974, “(t)he Church of the future will be one built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association.... Basic communities will in fact emerge from below, even though it will be a call from the gospel and the message of the Church coming out of the past.”¹ Bernard Lee interprets Rahner’s prophetic vision to mean that

...while small Christian communities are not, in any simple way, the future of the Catholic Church, there is probably no future that will not find itself shaped by their worldwide emergence. That new church will almost surely have a place for them because they will have made a place for themselves.²

The phenomenon of small/basic Christian communities seen as the future of the Church is not totally new, since we have in the New Testament the house churches and throughout the history of Christianity we have the monastic, lay, and groups of people akin to small Christian communities renewing the Church.³ In fact, “the small Christian community or house church was... the normative unit of church life until Constantine and Theodosius gave Christianity the status of a state religion in the mid-fourth century.”⁴ Thus, this re-emergence of small Christian communities is expressive of our Christian tradition but is also a “new way of being Church,” which is a term to express the many ways Christians of various denominations seek out meaningful ways of being

¹ Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, Trans. by Edward Quinn (New York: Seaburg, 1974), 108-15.

² Bernard J. Lee, William V. D’Antonio, and Virgilio Elizondo et.al, *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 3-4.

³ Healey, Joseph G., and Jeanne Hinton, eds. *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2005), 9.

⁴ Lee, D’Antonio, and Elizondo, *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*, 6-7.

church in the contexts in which they find themselves.⁵ This new way of being church can therefore be the slogan for the worldwide movements of small/basic Christian communities constantly trying to revitalize their lives of faith amidst their constantly changing world.

The late Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., the bishop of the vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe from 1995-2004, in his book, *The Making Of A Local Church*, considered participation as “the most visible innovation” of the Second Vatican Council that was “mandated and set-up” at all levels of the church. Participation, in the topmost level of the church, is through the synod of bishops for the purpose of collegiality, “the participation of the bishops of the world in the governance of the Church Universal.” While the participation of the synod of bishops is simply as a consultative body in relation to the Holy Father and his curia, it was nevertheless a big leap over how the church in the past dealt with national hierarchies. National conferences of bishops, composed by all bishops of all ecclesiastical territories in a country, is the next manifestation of this participation model wherein bishops “meet in communion with one another for the advancement of their common task as leaders of the common church” and enact regulations in a limited capacity for the whole local church. At the level of dioceses are the diocesan pastoral councils enabling clergy and laity to take part in the local ordinary’s governance of the diocese in a consultative way. The mandate for the “senates of priests” and presbyteral councils intends to foster fuller collaboration between the bishop and his clergy. The parish pastoral councils are at the bottom of church

⁵ Healey, Joseph G., and Jeanne Hinton, eds. *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, 7.

sanctioned reformation. Through these councils, parish members play active roles in partnership with their pastors in the life and ministry of the parish.⁶

The common downside of these church-sanctioned structures of participation, Claver observes, is “the fact that they are all consultative, always in reference to someone in authority over them” (pope-synod of bishops, Vatican-national bishops’ conferences, local bishop-pastoral councils and presbyteral councils, and pastor-parish pastoral council relationships). It is suspected strongly that if the structures are not operating as expected, “the reason could well be those canonical strictures (and the clerical culture that underlies them) about decision-making powers.” An intriguing question then develops about these new structures: “Are they structures of participation or structures of domination and control? Pope over bishops, bishop over priests, priests over laity – at every level, the former have the deliberative vote, the latter only consultative.”⁷

Aside from the officially recognized church structures, there are also “extra-canonical structures of participation” that grew out of Vatican II’s spirit of participation and are also an authentic expression of the nature and thrust of the church as communion. These include the “Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference (FABC), the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) (it existed earlier than Vatican II, but has received new vigor after the Council), the Episcopal Conference of East Africa (AMECEA) and other alliances of national conferences of bishops at the international level.” The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines also have the pastoral assemblies, which are gatherings of bishops, priests, religious, and laity at different church levels (national, regional, diocesan, parish) with the intention of coming together

⁶ Francisco Claver, SJ, *The Making of the Local Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications/Jesuit Communications, 2009), 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

to collaborate for the wellbeing of the church at the level they are meeting. Further down the parish level are the basic ecclesial communities (BECs) that developed from the Third World churches.⁸

These small communities are variedly called Small Christian Community (SCC) in Africa, Asia, and North America and *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEB) in Latin America. Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), being the English translation, is widely used in Asia especially in the Philippines. The term Basic Christian Community or Base Christian Community (BCC) is extensively used by communities at the margins of the church both Protestants and Roman Catholics. The foregoing are the common names among the more than 3,000 terms referring to the small/grassroots church communities worldwide. The word small stresses the fact that these communities are tiny enough to usher in a real community and interpersonal relationships. “Base” and “basic” emphasizes the grassroots character of these communities, highlighting their being immersed in the rough grounds of the basic realities of life and Christian living. “Ecclesial,” moreover, accentuates that these communities are considered as church in the most basic level.⁹

“The spontaneous combustion of the Spirit”¹⁰ is how Ian Frazer explains the global movement of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that emerged as a response of these small communities to the gospel message of Jesus Christ vis-à-vis the context of their lives. SCCs “offer a glimpse of a church endlessly refired by the Holy Spirit, just as

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Healey, Joseph G., and Jeanne Hinton, eds. *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, 7-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

it was at the beginning in Jerusalem,” Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, declares.¹¹

Although SCCs/ BECs emerged in response to the challenges of the Gospel in the various contexts of peoples, they nevertheless have shared trademarks and common concerns:

. . . [p]eople at risk from social, political, economic, and environmental causes are at the heart of these concerns, and indeed it is primarily these people who form and make up many of these communities. Small Christian Communities are still the church of the poor and for the poor, helping to create an alternative from the base.¹²

SCCs not only share common concerns but also common resources coming from “a liberation/contextual theology: the use of the pastoral cycle—see, judge, and act and its many adaptations and new ways of reading the Bible, such as the Seven Step Method and the Bible-Community-Reality.”¹³ SCCs also denote a new church experience, a rebirth of each church, and “hence an action of the Spirit on the horizon of the matters urgent for our time.”¹⁴ Ultimately, SCCs present seeds for the “birthing of the church” and for beginning a church once again.¹⁵ It is a “principle of a genuine *ecclesiogenesis*” that does not simply aim at extending the “existing ecclesiastical system, rotating on a sacramental, clerical axis, but with the emergence of another form of being church, rotating on the axis of the Word and the laity.”¹⁶ And this calls us to be open, to change our ecclesial behaviors, and to overcome our opposition to its emergence, or elsewhere might stifle the Spirit.¹⁷

The Emergence of Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴ Pope Paul VI, in a statement appearing in *Revista Ecclesiastica Brasileira* 34 (1974): 945

¹⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) in the Philippines started in the late 1960s in the “Local Church of Mindanao-Sulu – specifically the Prelature of Tagum – that gave birth to the first BCCs in the country.”¹⁸ The origins of Philippine BCCs emerged through the pastoral initiative of the Maryknoll Missionaries in collaboration with young diocesan clergy assigned in the deaneries of Lupon and Nabunturan within the above-mentioned prelature.¹⁹ The basic aim for the establishment of BCCs is geared towards the active participation of communities in parish life. The first indicator of BCC success was the growth in liturgical participation. In comparison, *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* of Latin America grew from “catechumenal efforts in Brazil in the late 1950s” wherein instructions were aired through the radio to the mountain areas that do not have priests.²⁰ The first Basic Christian Communities founded by the Maryknoll missionaries were chapel-based as Christians were organized according to the chapel where they belonged.²¹ Retrospectively, the pre-existing practice in the late 1950s and early 1960s of neighborhoods coming together for their holy rosary devotion, especially on the months of May and October, facilitated the routine gathering of clusters of households.²² These clusters of neighbors coming together for their rosary devotions may have become forerunners of the chapel-based BCCs or may have catered to its organization.

Francisco Claver, a Jesuit missionary priest-turned-bishop in Mindanao, claims that the emergence of Basic Ecclesial Communities, though not formally initiated by Vatican II, still flourished out of it and their roles in renewing the church cannot be

¹⁸ Karl M. Gaspar, “Basic Ecclesial Communities In Mindanao: A Call to Continuing Missiological Relevance,” *MST Review* 19, no.1 (2016): 39.

¹⁹ Ma. Fe Mendoza, R.G.S., “Formation of the Basic Ecclesial Community as an Authentic Community,” *Landas* 18, no.2 (2004): 265.

²⁰ Lee, D’Antonio, and Elizondo, 7.

²¹ Karl M. Gaspar, “Basic Ecclesial Communities In Mindanao: A Call to Continuing Missiological Relevance,” 43.

²² *Ibid.*

disregarded.²³ His assertion is supported by Bro. Karl Gaspar, a Redemptorist missionary in Mindanao and a witness to the emergence of BCCs. BCCs arose, he claims, because of Vatican II's spirit that animated missionaries to organize small Christian communities, locally referred to in Mindanao as "gagmay'ng Kristohanong katilingban"²⁴ (GKK).

Mindanao, in the 1970s, had several young bishops, some of whom might have attended Vatican II. The majority of Mindanao's bishops and clergy were mostly members of religious congregations or a Society of Apostolic Life (Jesuit, Maryknoll, Oblates, Columban, Camboni, etc.), who had international connections and may have heard of the pastoral initiatives in Latin America. Both the above realities have contributed to the genesis of BCCs in Mindanao.²⁵ A story was told that in the 1970s, just after the Vatican II, Archbishop Lino Gonzaga who belongs to the Archdiocese of Zamboanga (in Mindanao) joined an All-India Pastoral Assembly and afterwards he suggested the conduct of such kind of assembly in the Philippines.²⁶ Sadly, the suggestion did not find favor with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). The proposal, however, was received by the Mindanao bishops, who decided to conduct a pastoral conference for the dioceses and prelatures of Mindanao-Sulu leading to the birth of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC).²⁷ The first MSPC happened on November 17-21, 1971 at Davao City, with the theme, "The Christian Community of Mindanao-Sulu." The pastoral conference reflected, discerned, and gave answers to the following ecclesiological questions:

²³ Francisco Claver, SJ, *The Making of the Local Church*, 37.

²⁴ Karl M. Gaspar, "Basic Ecclesial Communities In Mindanao: A Call to Continuing Missiological Relevance," 39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

²⁶ Bishop Jesus Varela, "A Brief History of MSPC," in *What Is the MSPC* (Davao City: MSPCS Publications, 1976): 12-13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

What new structures must be set up in the Church of Mindanao-Sulu to meet modern demands? What should be the roles of the clergy, religious, (and) laity in these new structures? How are we to educate ourselves, clergy and laity, both rich and poor, all classes of society, to new responsibilities and leadership functions in the renewed Christian Community, more specifically in the church as a worshiping and serving community?²⁸

As a result of the MSPC delegates' common reflection and discernment, they decided to involve themselves in "the promotion and strengthening of BCCs," which accelerated its emergence in the parishes and dioceses of Mindanao-Sulu.²⁹ The MSPC's thrust of "Building up Christian Communities in Mindanao-Sulu" led to the delegates' identification and actualization of various important ministries, outlined in the document as "Lay leadership, Social Action, Catechesis, Catholic Schools, Family Life, Media, Tribal Filipinos and Muslim-Christian dialogue."³⁰ All these ministries cater to the formation and bolstering of BCCs. At first, the chapel-based structure of BCCs introduced in the Prelature of Tagum was adopted. BCCs composed of groups of neighboring families, known as the "*Kristohanong Kasilinganan* (Christian neighborhoods)," were subsequently established in the Diocese of Marbel and the Prelature of Ipil.³¹

Basic Christian Communities During the Period of Martial Law

When president Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in September 21, 1972, the Catholic Church involved itself in social issues through its Social Action Centers (SAC). In Mindanao-Sulu, the Church actively participated in monitoring and documenting human rights violations perpetuated by the military and made the people

²⁸ "Joint Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Mindanao-Sulu," (1 August 1971), in *Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference Workbook*, mimeographed document (Davao City: Mindanao Development Center, 1971): 1-3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

³¹ *Ibid.*

aware and vigilant in order to exercise their rights. The martial law situation became the paramount concern of the MSPC II that was held in Cagayan de Oro City on March 28-April 1, 1974 with the theme, “Building BECs that are Self-nourishing/sustaining/governing.” The MSPC secretariat asked the different dioceses/vicariates/prelatures to prepare updates relating to the social, economic, political, religious and cultural realities in their respective jurisdictions. From the various reports shared during the conference, it became clear that roughly two years of martial law had worsened the country’s overall situation:

Instead of bringing about peace and order, there was more dislocation and insecurity (especially of Moro and Lumad communities) given the twin evil of corporate incursion into the countryside and the ensuing militarization that usually led to the abuses committed by the armed and para-military forces against the civilians. There were reports of massacres and endless occurrence of human rights violations on the ground level, especially in the hinterlands. Many GKK (Gagmay'ng Kristohanong Katilingban) were subjected to harassment, their leaders persecuted.³²

These dire situations challenged the participants to discern how to address these realities. Their common discernment led them in crafting a statement asking president Ferdinand Marcos to revoke martial law. This statement published by the “Hongkong-based Far Eastern Economic Review” was the first statement among all Philippine church entities deploring martial rule and asking for its cessation.³³ Prophetically challenged to respond to the martial law situation, the Mindanao-Sulu Church chose *Education for Justice* as its thrust. While the majority of Mindanao-Sulu bishops supported the MSPC’s involvement in justice issues, five bishop-members resented the decision and clamored, “the MSPC is

³² *Ibid.*, 49.

³³ *Ibid.*

no longer what they envisioned it to be.”³⁴ Bishop Claver responded to the dissent of his fellow bishops, saying,

[b]ut if what we said about the church of Mindanao-Sulu growing in self-awareness is valid, our continual reflecting on our collective faith experience and our issuing forth from this reflection into concerted pastoral action that is truly relevant to the life of our people at any given time or place is indeed striking out in a new direction and hence developing a distinctive, if not new, concept of the Church.³⁵

Since martial law’s negative impacts on the people continued, justice tempered by love became MSPC’s central theme when it conducted its third pastoral assembly on April 14-17, 1977, in Ozamis City, with the theme, “BCCs Towards Justice and Love.” Liberation theology and its use of structural analysis, preferential option for the poor, and conscientization became imperative. Thus, there was a sustained effort of organizing the “poor, deprived, and oppressed (PDOs)” which made the BCCs and their leaders more aggressive in condemning the atrocities of martial rule. The military’s response was the harassment of BCCs and lay leaders that caused many to run away to the mountains to avoid arrest and imprisonment. The escalation of martial law abuses furthered the “greater mobilization of the forces of the progressive elements of the church,” which caused the bishops to part ways from MSPC’s Board and Secretariat.³⁶

On the one hand, the MSPC secretariat and staff immersed themselves into people’s life situations, making the church’s prophetic stance felt among PDOs. On the other hand, the hierarchy’s support for the MSPC’s thrust for justice waned as they “retreated to the safety of the orthodox.” Some dioceses even barred MSPC staff from

³⁴ Karl Gaspar, *Readings on Contemporary Mindanao Church Realities* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1994), 18-19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

entering their territories, as they were labeled as leftists. Some even suggested that the MSPC be closed.³⁷

These reasons may have contributed to the falling out of the MSPC with ecclesial authorities. The bishops' insistence on non-violence contradicted the peoples' last resort option of joining in the armed struggle. Karl Gaspar attests to the infiltration of the MSPC staff by "an ideological force" that made their "loyalties.... to that force rather than to the bishops." Their agenda was "no longer ecclesial and ecclesiological; but rather political and ideological."³⁸

The Mindanao-Sulu bishops convoked MSPC V in 1983 with the theme, "The Building up of Ecclesial Communities in Mindanao-Sulu: Faith and Reality." The conference made two important resolutions. First, "all decisions related to the conduct of MSPC were in the hands of the bishops."³⁹ Secondly, "Basic Christian Community" would now be renamed as "Basic Ecclesial Community" (BEC) to emphasize the *ecclesiality* of BCCs without any attachment to an ideology. This was also a deliberate dissociation from BCC, which was suspected of being amenable to armed struggle and accused of being infiltrated by the left. The term Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) was officially used in the *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (PCP II) as a general name for the different grass root Christian communities in the Philippines.

The challenges of martial law broadened the Basic Christian Communities' focus on promoting liturgical participation to foster a faith-response and participation in the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁸ Karl Gaspar, *Mystic Wanderer in the Land of Perpetual Departures* (Quezon City: ISA Publications, 2005), 320.

³⁹ Gaspar, "Basic Ecclesial Communities In Mindanao," 53.

challenges of these social, political, economic, cultural, and religious realities. Moreover, in the late 1980s, vigorous ecological consciousness emerged in Malaybalay and Pagadian Diocese particularly “in the parishes of San Fernando, Bukidnon and Midsalip, Zamboanga.” The Scarboro Missionaries led this initiative with the assistance of the Redemptorist Itinerant Mission Team and Columban Missionaries. The missionaries collaborated with the BCC members and other peasants in these areas and they successfully fought for the cancellation of destructive logging concessions.⁴⁰

Basic Ecclesial Communities and the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines

Between 1986 after martial law, and prior to the convocation of PCP II in 1991, BEC life focused heavily on sacramental, liturgical, and devotional activities, while serious social and ecological concerns were minimally addressed.⁴¹ We also should note that not only Mindanao-Sulu organized BCCs/BECs; there were already existing BECs all over the country in the 1970s – in the Dioceses of Infanta, Ilagan, Bacolod, Calbayog, in several parts of southern Luzon, central Visayas, and in some urban parishes in Metro Manila.⁴²

This study deliberately chooses to investigate the history and evolution of the BECs in Mindanao-Sulu for two reasons. First, several “theological and pastoral discourses” of the MSPC Conferences, from the 1970s up to the early 1980s, became part of the *PCP II Acts and Decrees*.⁴³ Among others, these include

⁴⁰ See Karl Gaspar, *A people's Option: To Struggle for Creation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1990)

⁴¹ Gaspar, “BECs in Mindanao...” 57.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

the need for church renewal, preferential option for the poor, to be a church of the poor, engaging in inter-faith dialogue and responding to social/ecological issues, prioritizing various sectors (youth, indigenous peoples, landless peasants, and the like) and evolving a spirituality so needed by the contemporary times.⁴⁴

Second, Bishop Claver introduced the BEC-type church in Bontoc-Lagawe. He first worked as a priest and bishop in Mindanao from 1961 to the early 1980s, and in fact he was one of the radical young bishops who supported the MSPC–BCC engagement in social justice issues. His long engagement in BEC practices might be of paramount consideration in his being chosen as one among three bishops who drafted the *Acts and Decrees of PCP II*. And so it can be argued that Bishop Claver is the link to uncovering the history of BECs from Mindanao to Bontoc-Lagawe. Claver’s prior BEC engagements would have served as his time-tested framework for introducing the BEC-Type church in Bontoc-Lagawe.

If Vatican II provided the impetus for renewal in the whole Catholic Church, one can say that the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, which is also inspired by Vatican II, jump-started the renewal of the Catholic Church of the Philippines. Twenty-six years after Vatican II, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines was convened from January 20 to February 17, 1991, and lasted for twenty-nine days. It was attended by a total number of 489 participants, out of which 156 were lay delegates, representing 33% of the plenary assembly. Seventy-one delegates were women (12 nuns; 59 lay). The gathering yielded “671 paragraphs and 132 decrees (prepared by the ad hoc committee for the final drafting led by Bishops Quevedo, Bacani and Claver).”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Ferdinand D. Dagmang, “From Vatican II to PCP II to BEC Too: Progressive Localization of a New State of Mind to a New State of Affairs,” *MST Review* 18, no.2 (2016): 36.

PCP II has three important themes: “Community of Christ’s Disciples, Church of the Poor, and Renewed Integral Evangelization.” Bishop Theodoro Bacani, Jr. explains the interconnectedness of these PCP II themes, thus,

...we come to true communion, to being a community of Christ’s disciples, by becoming a Church of the Poor. Unless we become a Church of the Poor, communion, the innermost reality of the church according to Vatican II, will not be achieved by us Filipinos in the way the Lord desires. That is why Renewed Integral Evangelization must be geared towards human, temporal liberation, and seek social transformation. Evangelization in the Philippines must be a service of and for the Church of the Poor.⁴⁶

Moreover, the above Church’s vision can best be actualized through the BECs, as PCP II reveals:

Our vision of the Church as communion, participation, and mission...as priestly, prophetic and kingly people, and as Church of the Poor – a Church that is renewed – is today finding expression in one ecclesial movement...to foster Basic Ecclesial Communities.⁴⁷

The PCP II’s central vision of the Church of the Poor was to become flesh and blood in the Basic Ecclesial Communities. Thus, guided by the PCP II documents, BEC formation, with its recently structured ministries, practices, projects and programs, became the standard approach to Church renewal in the Philippines.⁴⁸

From the beginnings of BCCs in Mindanao in the late 1960s that we explored above and to the BECs before and after PCP II, the new way of being church is a “ground-up/down-top case (not top-down) of ecclesial development, that is, from the grassroots clusters of the BECs up to the level of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the

⁴⁶ Teodoro C. Bacani, Jr. “Church of the Poor: The Church in the Philippines’ Reception of Vatican II,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42, nos. 1-2 (2005), accessed January 15, 2019, <http://www.eapi.org.ph/resources/eapr/east-asian-pastoral-review-2005/volume-42-2005-number-1-2/church-of-the-poor-the-church-in-the-philippines-reception-of-vatican-ii/>.

⁴⁷ Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines Secretariat, 1992), 52.

⁴⁸ Ferdinand D. Dagmang, “From Vatican II to PCP II to BEC Too: Progressive Localization of a New State of Mind to a New State of Affairs,” 59-60.

Philippines.”⁴⁹ In other words, BEC as a new way of being Church is ushering a new ecclesiology “from a ‘universalist’ ecclesiology to an ecclesiology of the local Church, from an ecclesiology ‘from above’ to an ecclesiology ‘from below’...the development of common meanings and directions among people at the base.”⁵⁰ Liturgically, this ecclesiology emanating from the phenomenon of BEC demands the full and active participation of the people in the liturgy and the establishment of lay liturgical ministers.

Basic Features of Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines

BEC is often referred to as “a new way of being church” and the novelty is essentially in the fact that they are church communities led by lay people and originating in parts of the world that are experiencing a dearth of priests. Claver describes BECs as “church communities that more than others evince the three traits that characterize an authentic Vatican II church, namely: dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility.” Claver and the bishop members of Mindanao – Sulu “realized that any church community that tried making itself into a dialogic, participative, and co-responsible community was quite automatically forming itself into a Basic Ecclesial Community.”⁵¹

How do we define Basic Ecclesial Community in its Philippine context?

Generally, it can be described

as any community of Christians meeting together on Sundays usually for common worship ... in the *barangay* (village) level, and even lower down the *sitio* or ... *purok* (sub-village) levels and the worshipping is done in a *capilla* (chapel), conducted in most cases not by an ordained minister but by a lay leader specifically trained and officially approved for the task. In a more particular sense, it is the same kind of community of Christians, doing everything mentioned above but with this difference – and a substantive one – that its worship is not simply a liturgical act but also the start of a process whereby

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Claver, 107-108.

the community seeks consciously and deliberately to respond to the problems of daily living in concerted fashion and, most significantly, as a faith community.⁵²

Basic Ecclesial Communities can be described more directly as a community of believers, at the grassroots level, which meets regularly, under the leadership of a lay minister, to express their faith in common worship, to discern out of their common living of the faith, to plan and act on common decisions regarding their life of faith, in community, and as a community.⁵³ Aptly, BECs are “small communities that form themselves into dialogic, participative, and co-responsible church congregations.”⁵⁴ Claver, in Norlan Julia’s view, believed that the existence of BECs was a “compelling evidence of the reception of *communio* ecclesiology... in the Philippines.”⁵⁵ BECs are “*communio* ecclesiology in action”⁵⁶ that bodies forth the vision of participation, dialogue, and co-responsibility in Vatican II.

BECs also can be distinguished in accordance with their levels of development toward a mature and dynamic Christian community. First, a “Liturgical BEC” is one wherein the “community participation is concentrated strongly on its liturgical life” and the priority is put on nurturing a strong spirituality centered on worship.” Second, a “Developmental BEC” is one that actively acts in response to the community’s socio-economic challenges relating to “the protection of the environment, health needs, livelihood projects, poverty alleviation, housing, drug abuse and so forth.” Third, a “Liberational BEC” is one which faces up to questions of “social injustices, human rights violations, crime, violence, and peace-building – what are often looked at as the more

⁵² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁵ Norlan Julia, S.J., “Beyond Basic Ecclesial Communities: Challenges to the Reception of *Communio* Ecclesiology in Asia,” *Landas* 26, no.1 (2012): 130.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

political aspects of life.” BECs are engaged in these three general areas of concerns in varying ways and degrees. The kind or level of a BEC is determined by the area/s of concern upon which it is focusing. What is ultimately desired is that BECs must develop to become dynamically engaged in liturgical, developmental, and liberational affairs. In this progress of BECs, “each successive stage includes the previous one.” Hence, a developmental BEC is also a liturgical one and a liberational BEC is at the same time a liturgical and developmental one.⁵⁷

The Birth of a Basic Ecclesial Community-Type Church in Bontoc-Lagawe

Before the concept of Basic Ecclesial Community as a new way of being Church was formally introduced in Bontoc-Lagawe, there were already various efforts to that direction. In the vicariate of Montañosa, in which the vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe formerly belonged, Fr. Patricio Guyguyon enumerates three approaches to evangelization corresponding to three periods of time. The first period spanned from 1907 to 1948 and focused on the conversion of the natives. The second period is from 1949 to 1989 and focused on organizing the converts into Lay Organizations, Movements and Associations (LOMAS) such as, the Chiro Movement, Knights of Columbus, Mother Butler Guild, Catholic Women’s League, Holy Name Society, and others, and the creation of different ministries such as catechetical, Christian formation, Christian family, vocation promotion and social action. The third period is from 1988 to the present, which is focused on the establishment of a new way of being church, the BEC type church.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Claver, 112-113.

⁵⁸ Fr. Patricio Guyguyon, “The Story of our BECs in the Vicariate of Bontoc–Lagawe,” in *Fidelitas: Ten Years Journey*, A Souvenir Book on the 10th year anniversary of the Vicariate of Bontoc–Lagawe, (August 5, 2002), 5-7.

The vicariate of Montañosa also engaged in the Social Action Apostolate (SAC) in response to the human society's problems and needs, but always in relation to evangelization. The initial way in which the Church involved itself in social action from 1907 to Vatican II was by acting as a benefactor in the task of bringing civilization to the natives, especially through educational and medical services. Secondly, during the decade after Vatican II, the church was active as a co-worker in economic and social progress with other agencies in order to help address issues of underdevelopment through community development and social services. Thus, the Montañosa church established community development projects such as handicrafts, cooperatives, credit unions, farm inputs, irrigation, and others. The third approach for social action emerged in the period between 1979 to the present, where the church has been serving as prophet and animator in response to exploitation and oppression and towards the achievement of justice and total human development. It was during the martial law years that the vicariate of Montañosa engaged in the work of conscientization to empower people to work together to fight for their rights, denounced abusive government agencies, and encouraged dialogue with authorities. All these were triggered as a response to the national and regional development plan of the government to maximize the exploitation of natural resources of the Cordillera Administrative Region through dams, mines, and logging. All these proposals would dislocate the indigenous peoples and destroy their lands and livelihood.⁵⁹

The Montañosa Social Action Apostolate also embarked on community building, emphasizing the need for the church of that time to conscientize, evangelize, and

⁵⁹ Fernando Bautista, Sr. ed., *Golden Years – Golden Harvest: The Christianization of the Montañosa*, (Baguio City: Black and White Printing Press, 1979), 145-146.

organize people to become true Christian communities. The SAC sees itself as an animator working among the poor, deprived and oppressed (PDOs) to enable them towards “total human development.” Furthermore, the SAC animators consider the PDOs as the ones who can make real the vision of the church as People of God.⁶⁰

The continuation and redirection of the work of evangelization in the vicariate of Montañosa into the vision of a Basic Ecclesial Community-type church began in April 1989, during the first Montañosa Vicariate Pastoral Assembly held at Maryheights, Baguio City, Philippines. Three hundred participants composed of clergy, religious, and lay people from all the mission parishes came together. The experiences of Vatican II, the negative experiences of the martial law years, and the present growth of the local Church served as the background and context that helped the participants communally discern the Church’s transformation as a response to the exigencies of the time. These roadmaps to renewal are expressed in five directions:

(1) from a priest-centered church to one with recognized lay ministries; (2) from a spiritualistic church to one engaged in total human salvation; (3) from an individualistic to communal living of the faith; (4) from a westernized church to an inculturated church; (5) and from a dependent church to a self-reliant, even mission sending church.⁶¹

But what is the strategy in achieving these discerned transformations? Bishop Claver, the guest resource person, gave the idea of building Basic Ecclesial Communities – a movement away from the traditional ways to a new way of being church in which we – all of us – are the actors! The five transformations give concrete expression to a participatory church.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁶¹ Fr. Patricio Guyguyon, “The Story of our BECs in the Vicariate of Bontoc – Lagawe,” 6-7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

When the vicariate of Montañosa was divided into three apostolic vicariates, the vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe began to exist. It adapted the 1989 pastoral assembly's vision of building a BEC-type church to guide its evangelizing mission. The vicariate first established the WESTY – Worship, Education, Social Services, Temporality and Youth – ministries to spearhead the way to church transformation. But when Claver eventually became the bishop of Bontoc-Lagawe in 1995, he suggested the change from WESTY to YEAST. The reason for the change was the fact that WESTY sounds western or at least alien to the people of Bontoc-Lagawe. YEAST, however, is a biblical image and a cultural one, since many people of Bontoc-Lagawe use yeast to make rice, sugarcane, and fruit wines. The acronym also puts at the center the letter 'A' referring to the altar ministry. This echoes the centrality of worship in the life and ministry of the BECs. It also puts the Youth as the first concern of the BECs because they are the present and future of the Church. The fact that the youth are often straying from the church makes them a priority concern. This is thus a concrete example of inculturation. The YEAST – Youth, Education, Altar, Social Services/Action, and Temporality – are the BEC ministries that are leading the way towards a new way of being church. Bontoc-Lagawe has committed its church life to the organization, formation, and mobilization of BECs in the mission parishes of the whole vicariate through the establishment of YEAST ministries where everyone can participate, depending on their charism or area of interest.

What makes BEC life dynamic and operative is the functioning of these YEAST ministries. The YEAST have these corresponding functions: Youth – to organize, form, and mobilize young people; Education – to organize, form, and mobilize for catechesis, school apostolate, and family life; Altar – to organize, form, and mobilize for liturgical

worship, biblical apostolate, inculturation, and music ministry; Social concerns/action encompass the social ministry of the church that includes project monitoring, promotion of good governance, ecology, social communications, drug addicts' rehabilitation, and an indigenous people's apostolate; and, finally, Temporalities – to care for the temporal goods of the church, especially for the financial aspects of church communities, training for fiscal management, and the physical upkeep and development of all church properties. When all these ministries function as envisioned in the BEC, mission parish, and vicariate levels, with many members in them working together, the ministries can truly become the *yeast* for the growth of the BECs.⁶³

Structurally, the vicariate has BEC-YEAST offices, with their corresponding pastoral ministers, to empower the YEAST officers and members to truly function as *yeast*, agents of positive changes in the BEC, parish, and vicariate levels. The yearly pastoral assemblies in the BEC, parish, and vicariate levels and the monthly or bi-monthly meetings of mission/parish pastoral council officers and BEC officers are also very significant. They are concrete avenues to dialogue-evaluate-plan and to see-discern-act communally to promote BEC life and mission, to recognize the challenges of different BECs, and to plan for proper actions to respond to them with the utmost co-responsibility and participation of all church members.

This BEC-type church, built upon the principles of *participation*, *dialogue*, and *co-responsibility*, is manifested not only in terms of pastoral structures, but also in liturgical celebrations, especially in the Eucharist and the Sunday worship of BECs in the absence of a priest. In the Eucharist, lay people properly trained for their respective ministries participate as sacristans, lay ministers of Holy Communion, lectors,

⁶³ Claver, 44-45.

commentators, choir, offerers, ushers, and collectors. In the Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest (SWAP), locally termed as *Sangkagimongan a Panaglualo* (A Worship of an Assembled Community), BECs have to include trained presiders and sharers of the Word.

I believe that the BEC-type church, with its participative, dialogical, and co-responsibility dynamics, is a manifestation of the Trinitarian life and relationship. The Triune God is revealed and operative by the efforts of the members of BECs to work participatively, dialogically, and co-responsibly to form themselves as the real body of Christ, People of God, and a community of disciples. This presence of the Trinity in the BEC's way of life is made more manifest by the way the Eucharist and SWAP are participatively, dialogically, and co-responsibly celebrated in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, it can be said that in both the liturgical celebrations and structures of Bontoc-Lagawe BECs, the Triune God is convoking BEC members to a Trinitarian way of life.

Liturgical Implications of the Five Transformative Paths Towards the Building Up of a BEC-Type Church

We start exploring the various problematic practices in the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation in Bontoc-Lagawe by looking back at the five directions for transformation discerned during the 1989 Vicariate of Montañosa pastoral assembly. While the aforementioned five transformative directions are not directly liturgical, except for numbers two (from a spiritualistic church to one engaged in total human salvation), three (from an individualistic to communal living of the faith), and four (from a

westernized church to an inculturated church), they are essentially interwoven with BEC life that embraces the liturgical, developmental, and liberational aspects.

The first transformation, “from a priest-centered church to one with recognized lay ministries,”⁶⁴ confronts the traditional reality of priests being the center of power and decision-making and implementing processes in the parish. The ordained priest, in the traditional model, does it all. With the emphasis of BECs on participation, dialogue, and co-responsibility, selected BEC and parish pastoral council leaders, representing their respective Christian communities, now participate in the decision-making, organizing, formation, and mobilization programs of BECs and the parish. In the context of the liturgy, lay ministers of Holy Communion and commentators were added to the existing lay ministries that included altar servers, choir, lectors, collectors, and offerers. The BEC-type church also gave rise to the ministry of presiders of what is called “Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest,” together with the sharers of the Word, those who share their reflections on the Sunday readings. Lay leaders, too, are empowered to preside at house blessings, funeral services, and prayer services for the sick and other “Christianized” cultural celebrations. However, in these lay ministries, men are sometimes prioritized over women in administering Holy Communion or as altar servers. Often, lay leaders, especially some community catechists, act as ‘little priests’ in their own BECs. During SWAP, for instance, the roles of presider, commentator, and sharer of the word are all taken by one person, because other BEC members are not willing or are not encouraged to participate.

⁶⁴ Fr. Patricio Guyguyon, “The Story of our BECs in the Vicariate of Bontoc – Lagawe,” 6.

The second conversion, “from a spiritualistic church to one engaged in total human salvation,”⁶⁵ implies that there are instances where BEC activities have, in the past, only focused on spiritual activities with lesser or non-engagement in the developmental and liberational aspects. Moreover, many priests and lay leaders are skeptical of developmental and liberational ministries and remain in the safe haven of popular religious devotions and spiritual activities. Thus, there results the reductionist treatment of the sacraments as fulfilling the piety and religious devotions of individual Christians. In the vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe, this privatized aspect of spirituality and worship is always prioritized while the other two (developmental and liberational) are seen as add-ons and not integral to the whole of Christian life. This one-sided concentration of BEC activities on worship is closely related to a type of theology that is focused on an understanding of mission as “saving souls and extending the Church.”⁶⁶

The third goal, the assertion of a movement away from “an individualistic to communal living of the faith”⁶⁷ is precisely what BEC is all about. BECs, Claver claims, are “the most effective manifestation of the Council’s communion ecclesiology as well as the most potent vehicles of the Church’s much needed renewal.”⁶⁸ BEC members have to understand that faith has to be lived communally as well as personally in an integrated and balanced way. But there are always BEC members who join community activities and worship but do not actively participate in them. They simply act as spectators. Their attitude is counterproductive to *Sacrosanctum Concilium’s* primary aspiration for

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 36.

⁶⁷ Guyguyon, 6.

⁶⁸ Norlan Julia, S.J., “Beyond Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs): Challenges to the Reception of *Communio* Ecclesiology in Asia,” 127.

liturgical renewal, where “all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (SC # 14). Moreover, more than 50 years after *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’s promulgation, there is still that disconnect, John Baldovin argues, between the Church’s vision for “full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy” and living out of the grace of Christian worship into the other aspects of life.⁶⁹ The liturgy is ultimately not “hitting its target”⁷⁰ because it is not lived out.

The fourth transformative direction, the passage “from a westernized church to an inculturated church,”⁷¹ is core to PCP II’s agenda towards “A Renewed Evangelization” directed towards “...inserting the gospel into a culture and expressing it through the elements of that culture.”⁷² The New Evangelization, likewise, gives importance to the task of inculturation because “the integral diffusion of the gospel and its subsequent translation into thought and life still constitutes the heart, the means and scope to the new evangelization.”⁷³ While inculturation is indeed practiced in the vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe, most often it is at a superficial level. Liturgical inculturation is mostly in the guise of using indigenous materials like locally woven fabrics in the decorations and furnishings of the church, vestments, books, vessels and images of saints. When there are serious attempts in the BECs to inculturate the liturgy and sacraments, the efforts are often hindered by hierarchical controls that subsequently deter efforts to deepen the

⁶⁹ John F. Baldovin, SJ, “Is Liturgy Hitting its Target,” *The Jurist* 72 (2012): 460.

⁷⁰ This phrase is part of the title of John F. Baldovin’s article, “Is Liturgy Hitting its Target,” *The Jurist* 72 (2012): 453-491.

⁷¹ Guyguyon, 6.

⁷² Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, 75.

⁷³ Manuel G. Gabriel, “Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines: Some Missiological Challenges,” *Landas* 18, no. 2 (2004): 285.

understanding of indigenous cultures.⁷⁴ Admittedly, liturgical language is translated into the vernacular to enable people to understand and participate well in liturgical celebrations. The liturgical songs, too, are indigenized, taking on the language and tunes of local peoples. The use of gongs, native musical instruments, and native dances for special celebrations in the church, such as patronal feasts, ordinations, and harvest thanksgiving, are also commonplace. But there are no comprehensive efforts to study how the gospel message can be embodied within and expressed by means of these indigenous rituals, values, and symbols and vice versa.

In the Eucharist celebration itself, some problematic cases related to inculturation, are found in the preparation of gifts, the institution narrative, and the reception of holy communion. Most often the priest prepares the gifts with silent *Berakah* prayers. But the gifts of bread and wine that are offered are not the work of human hands of the people actually offering the gifts in union with the priest, but the work of people unknown and far off. The local community never even knows if the bread and wine are produced justly or in an environmentally friendly way. Customarily, in Bontoc-Lagawe, the people offer the work of their own hands (such as vegetables, grains, and fruits) along with the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine. Yet, it is interesting to note that the main Eucharistic offering of bread and wine does not belong to the people. Furthermore, Jesus' words, "Take this all of you and drink from it, for this is the cup/chalice of my blood . . ." in the institution narrative is negated by the widespread practice of actually withholding the cup from the people. Such a denial can be tantamount to a subtle expression of clericalism in cultic form. The limited availability of wine, the fear of spillage/desecration, and hygienic considerations are the prevalent justifications given for the denial of the cup to

⁷⁴ Gaspar, 64

the people. These are perfect examples of how the words said in the liturgy become incongruent with the liturgical symbols and actions.

The fifth and final goal, the transition “from a dependent church to a self-reliant, even mission sending church,”⁷⁵ challenges BEC members and leaders to rely on their communal, participative and co-responsible initiatives and creativity. They must overcome their priest-centeredness, which may have been the result of the missionaries’ approach of being the overall providers for the spiritual and basic needs of people, in areas such as education, health, clothes, and food. At the same time, these clerical leaders also acted as decision makers for the people, who would simply follow decisions and implement them because they were not empowered to participate. They were treated less as subjects than as objects of evangelization. Currently, the foreign missionaries are gone and there is no more Catholic Relief Service (CRS) to offer food and clothing. There is a scarcity of foreign aid to support the building of chapels and the maintenance and operation of community clinics and parochial schools. The solution for the BECs is to be self-reliant, depending on local resources, talents, and charisms for their spiritual, developmental, and liberational endeavors. They would ask for assistance only in cases when they are unable on their own to provide financial, technical, and human resources for their organizational, formation, and mobilization programs.

To close this consideration on the five possible transformative paths towards a participative Church of Bontoc-Lagawe, it is important to look at some general problems in relation to the vision of renewal embodied in the BEC-type church. First, as Karl

⁷⁵ Guyguyon, 7.

Gaspar asserts, “there are parish priests who are not interested, reluctant, or not very supportive of the BCC pastoral thrust.”⁷⁶ Second, Manuel Gabriel further claims that

bishops and parish priests whose paradigm of the Church and its mission still fits the pre-Vatican II mold have tended to discourage even the inception of BECs in the parish communities. Some merely pay lip service to it. Others, if not the majority, half-heartedly encourage their existence, only as they reinforce the traditional practices and hierarchical loyalties. A shared paradigm shift remains a challenge for all sectors of the Church to embrace.⁷⁷

In addition, lay organizations, movements, and associations (LOMAS) “have no interest in terms of their members integrating into their respective BECs,”⁷⁸ and they focus too much on their internal affairs with less concern for the larger Christian community. Other members and leaders of BECs simply think of the BEC vision-mission “as just one program in the parish, no different from the LOMAS.”⁷⁹ Hence, there is a real need for a collective conversion of all sectors of the Church to embrace the transformation toward what is in reality a new way of being Church.

The above five transformations demanded a more participative, dialogic, and co-responsible church, and this could only happen if all members of BECs integrate them into their personal and communal way of life. It is true that, to some extent, BECs in the Philippines have evolved and embodied “the ideals/values of subsidiarity, decentralization, lay participation, solidarity with the poor, care for the environment, respect for women.”⁸⁰ They include these aspects in their work for justice and peace, and in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. These “transfigurations,” if and when they are achieved, will truly make the BECs a leaven, a yeast that renews the church from the

⁷⁶ Karl Gaspar, “BECs in Mindanao...,” 46

⁷⁷ Manuel G. Gabriel, “Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines: Some Missiological Challenges,” 289.

⁷⁸ Gaspar, 63.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Ferdinand D. Dagmang, “From Vatican II to PCP II to BEC Too,” 60.

bottom up. These transformations would also have positive consequences regarding the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation in Bontoc-Lagawe, which is our next topic.

Challenging Practices in the Celebration of the Sacraments (of Initiation) in Bontoc-Lagawe

Originally, as we have seen from the beginnings of BECs in the Philippines, the forerunners of BCCs are the pre-existing devotional practices of neighbors praying together the rosary and celebrating chapel Masses and patronal feasts. Thus, BECs in their origins placed great emphasis upon the celebration of the sacraments and religious devotions. These liturgical celebrations were foundational in gathering people of faith together, especially in the initial stages of BEC organizing. They could also, in the long run, “provide the indigenous spirituality needed for BEC sustainability.”⁸¹

However, certain challenges in the celebrations of the sacraments in general and the sacraments of initiation in particular, in the church of the Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe, impede the vision of Church transformation. The first challenging liturgical practice involves the disjointed celebration of the sacraments of initiation for adult. If the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are part of the whole sacraments of initiation corpus, then they are effectively diminished when they are celebrated as if they are not connected at all. “The threefold structure of the liturgy of initiation – Baptism, Chrismation (Confirmation for Catholics) and Eucharist – so clearly evidenced in the early liturgical tradition,” Alexander Schmemmann asserts, “has been abandoned and ignored for such a long time in theology as well as in liturgical practice....”⁸² These three

⁸¹ Gaspar, 59.

⁸² Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 116.

sacraments from the ancient tradition, he further claims, “‘belong together’ from one liturgical sequence and ‘*ordo*,’ because each sacrament within it is fulfilled in the other in such a way that it is impossible fully to understand the meaning of one in separation and isolation from the other two.”⁸³

Second, Baptisms are most often celebrated in private and only seldom celebrated communally within the Eucharist. If, indeed, Baptism incorporates us into the Church, “if the Church’s ultimate being and essence are revealed in and through the Eucharist,” as Schmemmann insists, “(and) if Eucharist is truly the sacrament of the Church ... then of necessity, to enter the Church is to enter into the Eucharist, then Eucharist is indeed the fulfillment of Baptism.”⁸⁴ However, Baptism appears to be absent from the life of Christians because it is “absent from the Church’s ... *leitourgia*” which has been traditionally intended as a corporate act involving the participation of the all members of the Church. Hence, Baptism is never a private family affair separate from the Church’s communal worship.⁸⁵ Practically, celebrating Baptism within Eucharist discourages the habit of some godparents or even parents who would not join the Eucharistic celebration but simply join the Baptismal rite before or after the Eucharist. Thus, it can be strongly argued that Baptism should be celebrated communally and within Eucharist into which the baptized are welcomed and integrated into the gathered Church, the Body of Christ.

Third, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults that should be integrated into the community’s celebration of Lent and Easter is not done at all in Bontoc-Lagawe. Would it not be more meaningful and alive if we celebrate Lent with the presence of people undergoing the catechumenal processes towards receiving Baptism at the Easter/Easter

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 117-118

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

Vigil? Historically, to echo Schmemmann again, “Easter as a liturgical feast, and Lent as a liturgical preparation for Easter, developed originally from the celebration of Baptism (and so) Pascha, the ‘Feasts of Feasts,’ is truly the fulfillment of Baptism, and Baptism is truly a paschal sacrament.”⁸⁶

In relation to the above, the prevailing practice of celebrating Baptism during the feast of the patron saint of a local community or at Christmas, simply because these are grand celebrations and people would flock to churches for such celebrations, is problematic. Even though it becomes advantageous that more people will participate in the initiation of candidates of Baptism at these times, the great feasts of the Epiphany, Easter Vigil, Easter Season, and Vigil of Pentecost, all of which are the natural home of Baptism, is weakened. However, there are cogent practical reasons for having Baptisms outside the Easter Vigil and the Easter season. But, we cannot neglect the more Paschal periods and the proper mystagogical periods for Baptisms because it naturally diminishes the more powerful and meaningful celebration of such a foundational sacrament of Christian identity whose highlight is the Baptism-paschal mystery interconnectivity.

Fourth, the current minimalism in the celebration of the sacraments dims the capacity of the rituals and symbols to convey their meanings. Often, liturgical symbols are treated simply as “things,” which are not communicative or sacramental in the sense of conveying significant sacred reality. During Baptism, for example, the ministers often use a little amount of water and limited oil. Schmemmann describes this general tendency as deep “liturgical decadence.” This liturgical decadence is also exhibited in the practice of skipping the blessing of water during Baptism to “satisfy people who are always

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

begging for shorter services.”⁸⁷ Additionally, in almost all the churches in Bontoc-Lagawe, there are no baptismal fonts, indicative of the lack of appreciation for its profound significance. Commonly, ministers celebrate Baptism by pouring a little amount of holy water upon the candidate’s head. There is the tendency in the sacramental celebrations of ‘getting-it-over-with-fast’ by doing only what is deemed as fulfilling what is necessary.

Lastly, the practice of adults, receiving Holy Communion prior to Confirmation, disrupts the traditional flow of the sacraments of initiation as celebrated in the early centuries of the church. This practice is not in line with the 1972 RCIA. This also unnecessarily inserts the sacrament of Reconciliation into the initiation sacraments.

In short, the following are the diverse problems in relation to the celebration of the rites of initiation in Bontoc-Lagawe: the disintegrated celebration of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist, the celebration of initiation in the presence of only few members of the baptized or simply in the presence of family members and not within the Eucharist, the non-integration of the initiation process in the Lenten and Easter celebrations, the minimalism of liturgical symbols and rituals, and the interruption of the flow of RCIA by the practice of receiving Holy Communion prior to Confirmation. Further theological reflections on the problematic common practices in the celebration of the sacraments (of initiation) in Bontoc-Lagawe will be presented in chapter three. The history, theology, and practice of Baptism in general and the RCIA practice in particular, which is our next topic, will help us in providing constructive ways to deal with the above challenging practices in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 38.

CHAPTER TWO: A HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

Baptism from the New Testament to Post Vatican II

Christ as the Origin and Center of Christian Initiation

The challenges of contemporary practice in Bontoc-Lagawe highlighted in the previous chapter can begin to be addressed by looking more closely at the development of the practice and meaning of initiation as it unfolded from the early Church until the present time. At the outset, the Baptism practiced by John the Baptist, Reginald H. Fuller argues, is the “immediate origin of Christian Baptism.”⁸⁸ Moreover, in Fuller’s view, John’s baptismal ritual may have been taken from the baptismal practices of the Qumran community or the baptist sects and merged them with the “prophetic idea of an eschatological cleansing before the End.”⁸⁹ Although, the synoptic gospels do not tell us whether Jesus baptized or not, the Gospels of Matthew (3:11), Mark (1:8), and Luke (3:16), with much parallelism, speak of John’s testimony on baptism with water that he is performing in relation to baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire to be accomplished by Jesus. John declares, “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk. 3:16). The versions of Luke and Matthew are closest while Mark’s version only says, “he (Jesus) will baptize you with Holy Spirit,” omitting the word fire. The Fourth Gospel also presents John’s testimony, “... I came baptizing with water that he might be made known to Israel” (1:31). John also testified of having seen the Spirit descending and remaining in Jesus

⁸⁸ Reginald H. Fuller, “Christian Initiation in the New Testament,” in *Made, Not Born: New Perspective on Christian Initiation: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

which is the sign for him that "... he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (1:33). The gospel of John, likewise, presents Jesus saying to Nicodemus, "... no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above" (3:3) and "... without being born of water and Spirit" (3:6). All the above tell us that John's Baptism with water is related to preparing the people of Israel to know the Messiah by way of repentance. These further insinuate that Jesus practiced baptism by the Holy Spirit and fire that completes the water baptism of John the Baptist. In this connection, Fuller says, "when Jesus began to assert that the reign of God was already breaking through, he apparently abandoned Johannine baptism which merely pointed to that coming reign and prepared men and women for it."⁹⁰

While the foregoing discussion centered on Baptism by water and Holy Spirit and fire, the following will focus on who is the center of this Baptism. Kenan Osborne, after analyzing the gospels and Paul's letters in light of this question, claims that "Jesus is presented as the center of Baptism."⁹¹ Baptism's essential facet is its connection to Jesus. Paul even looks at Baptism as "a mystic relationship into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus."⁹² Therefore, Christian Baptism's primary significance is not based on whether Jesus may or may not have engaged in such a ministry. Rather, Baptism's impelling meaning comes from identity with Him, with "Jesus' own baptismal experience at his baptism by John, from the fulfillment of that baptism's significance in his passion and death, and from the risen Christ's historical revelation as Breath-baptizer."⁹³

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Kenan B. Osborne, O.F.M., *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 59.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹³ Donald Gelpi, SJ, *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians, vol. 1, Adult Conversion and Initiation* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 234.

Although the gospels do not speak of Jesus baptizing his Apostles, “[t]heir baptism was, so to speak, their total immersion into the Christ event.”⁹⁴ After Christ’s resurrection and his appearances, which also involved the giving and reception of the Holy Spirit, he founded the eschatological community, comprising the Twelve and the Five Hundred.⁹⁵ Those who were not immersed in the foundational events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ “could establish contact with the eschatological reality brought in Christ only through hearing the kerygma, and could participate in that reality only through water baptism.”⁹⁶ Hence, the ritual entrance into the Christian community is made possible through Baptism (Acts 2:34-41).

The New Testament is replete with a lot of meanings attached to the celebration of initiation. According to Maxwell E. Johnson, these multivalent understandings of Baptism include the following:

... forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38); new birth through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5-7); putting off the old self, and putting on the new, that is, being clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Gal 3:27; Col 3:9-10); initiation into the one body of the Christian community (1 Cor 12:13; see also Acts 2:42); washing, sanctification, and justification in Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11); enlightenment (Heb 6:4; 10:32; 1 Pet 2:9); being anointed and/or sealed by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:21-22; 1 John 2:20,27); being sealed or marked as belonging to God and God’s people (2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30; Rev 7:3); and ... being joined to Christ through participation in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3-11; Col 2:12-15).⁹⁷

These numerous meanings pertaining to Baptism are also indicative of the various ways of celebrating that occurred in different places. Later on, to express the above interpretations of baptismal rituals, the following are done: an actual anointing with oil as

⁹⁴ Reginald H. Fuller, “Christian Initiation in the New Testament,” in *Made, Not Born: New Perspective on Christian Initiation: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, 10.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁷ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 37.

an essential part of the early Christian ritual; “prebaptismal stripping of clothes and postbaptismal clothing in new white garments;” signings and consignations with the cross, expressive of God’s ownership of the one initiated; “baptismal candles or tapers” (enlightenment); and immersion into the waters of baptism, understood “as either or both womb (John 3:5) and tomb (Rom 6).”⁹⁸ Moreover, two among these New Testament understandings of Baptism became predominant, namely, “Christian initiation as new birth through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5ff; and Titus 3:5) and Christian initiation as being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection” (Rom 6:3-11).⁹⁹

The Practice of Adult Initiation: Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist

Apparently, in New Testament times up to the Patristic period, baptisms were generally conferred on adults. During the apostolic Church, as Donald Gelpi notes,

the baptized were plunged into water or washed with it as the minister invoked either the name of Jesus or the Triune name (Acts 2:38; Matt 28:19). The rite may have been followed by anointing or, in some Churches, by the laying on of hands ... by the second century, baptism in the triune name had gained universal acceptance.¹⁰⁰

In the second century, baptismal preparation became more organized to include catechetical instruction, aimed at ushering in a process of conversion, fasting, and prayer. Prior to the candidates’ Baptism, he notes further, “they professed their faith in response to a threefold interrogation by the rite’s minister. Because Baptism gave neophytes access to the Eucharist, the rite of initiation now culminated in a Eucharistic celebration, during which the newly baptized communicated for the first time (*Didache*, 1-10).”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Donald Gelpi, SJ, *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians*, vol. 1 *Adult Conversion and Initiation*, 212.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Accordingly, Gelpi continues, Christian initiation in the third century may have been celebrated in these succeeding steps:

(1) ... the catechumenate, which culminated in an intensive period of preparation prior to the rite of initiation themselves, marked the first stage. (2) The baptismal ceremony itself opened with the blessing of the baptismal water (Tertullian, *De Bapt.*, 3 and 4; *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.1). (3) The candidates then repudiated Satan, his pomp, and his works in a threefold formula of renunciation (Tertullian, *De Corona*, 3, *De Spectaculis*, 4; *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.9). (4) The celebrant plunges the candidates three times into the water, inviting them to profess faith first in the Father, then in the Son, then in the Holy Breath. Each time the candidate replied, "I believe" (Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 26, *De Corona*, 3; *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.9). (5) The candidates, who after baptism would refrain from bathing for a week, now had their bodies anointed, probably from head to toe (Tertullian, *De Bapt.*, 7; *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.9). (6) The bishop then signed the candidates with the cross (Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Body*, 8). (7) In the third century, Tertullian speaks of an episcopal imposition of hands and invocation of the Holy Breath in the course of the rite of initiation, although we have no way of knowing the extent to which such a ritual may have occurred in the African Church (Tertullian, *De Bapt.*, 7)... (8) The ceremony culminated in the Eucharist, where the newly baptized partook for the first time of the Body and Blood of Christ.¹⁰²

Thus, Christian initiation during the Patristic period was normally done sequentially by celebrating Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist as one integral sacramental event.

The "golden age of the Catechumenate," Lawrence Mick claims, approximately spanned from the third to the fifth centuries during which it became fully developed and was widely used.¹⁰³ But during the time of Constantine (4th c.), when Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the influx of converts to Christianity made it hard to follow the long and rigorous process of adult Christian initiation. Furthermore, the expansion of dioceses and with some bishops taking on civil responsibilities in the Roman Empire,¹⁰⁴ it was now more difficult for them to be present during adult Christian initiations. These developments made it hard to maintain the continuous celebration of

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 212-13.

¹⁰³ Lawrence Mick, *RCIA: Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly* (Collegencille, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 16.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

adult Christian initiation, resulting in the disintegration of the post-baptismal anointing from the initiation rites themselves.

Furthermore, since it was favorable to become a Christian during the Constantinian era, almost all adults became Christians. As a result, the normal celebration of Baptism centered on children. Augustine's teaching on original sin also contributed to the practice of infant baptism, because he concluded that "since we baptize infants and baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, then infants must have some sin to be forgiven."¹⁰⁵ The original sin that is to be pardoned by Baptism became a factor for the frequent Baptism of children, for fear that if they died unbaptized, they would go to hell.

From the above, we can say that the third and fourth century rites of adult initiation are marked by a ritual integrity "from Baptism, to episcopal invocation of the Holy Breath, to first Eucharistic Communion." While this pattern of the process of initiation was preserved in the oriental liturgy, the ritual integrity of the celebration of initiation in the West initially fissured and eventually disintegrated as Europe embraced institutional Christendom. Out of the Roman ritual's designation of the necessity of the bishop to perform the post-baptismal anointing in the rite of initiation and the solemn invocation of the Holy Breath, the sacrament of Confirmation developed and became ritually separated from its original place in the process of initiation. This resulted in the omission in France and in Holland of "the post-baptismal consignation and invocation of the Holy Breath" from ritual books intended for priests who could only celebrate Baptism and give first Holy Communion." These so-called "abbreviated rites" would be supplied or completed by the bishop on his next visit. In the ninth century, Charlemagne imposed the above developments into the Roman ritual in his kingdom, making these liturgical

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

practices of initiation as the “universal practice of the Gallican Church.” Consequently, these liturgical innovations altered the shape of Christian initiation “from baptism, invocation of the Breath, and first Holy Communion, to that of baptism, first Communion, and invocation of the Breath.” Gelpi concludes that “with the postponement of the Breath’s invocation for longer and longer periods of time, this ritual evolved in the Latin Church into a separate sacrament called ‘Confirmation.’”¹⁰⁶

Different Factors Contributing to the Disintegration of an Integral Connection in the Celebration of the Initiation Sacraments

In a sweeping assessment of Christian initiation from 500 to 1274, Nathan Mitchell expressed the eventual developments in that period regarding Christian initiation. He notes that “. . . the west eventually chose to maintain the episcopal presidency of a portion of the initiation rite, viz., the laying on of hands and consignation with chrism, at the expense of the very unity of the rite itself.” He further attests that Eucharist, which completes the “baptismal incorporation and sealing,” became disconnected and postponed, often for years at a time. Eastern churches, however, “at the expense of episcopal presidency,” retained the integrity of the rite of initiation even in the case of infants. In the West, however, the rising custom of infant Baptism caused the postponement of Eucharistic participation.¹⁰⁷

In the above discussion, requirement of episcopal presidency over the laying on of hands and consignation with chrism after the immersion in water became a factor in the eventual dissolution of the unified celebration of the sacraments of initiation. Moreover,

¹⁰⁶ Donald Gelpi, SJ, 215.

¹⁰⁷ Nathan D. Mitchell, “Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation,” in *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press), 52.

Mitchell adds additional factors that contributed to the breakup of the sacraments of initiation. First is “the problem of ‘accumulated symbolism.’” He argues that a rite can only withstand a limited quantity of symbolic vagueness. If “the symbolic ambiguity grows too intense, when it begins to look like a tropical forest, then the basic architecture of the rite will begin to crumble.”¹⁰⁸

That is what happened, he theorized, to the rite of Christian initiation, when the practice loses sight of the unity inherent in the whole. As Mitchell says,

... the various symbolisms of washing, sealing, incorporation, death-resurrection are clustered around a central axis: the paschal mystery of Jesus.... As long as people understand, through catechesis, how the various symbolisms in the cluster are related, the rite can maintain its cohesiveness. But such a cluster of accumulated symbols will begin to split apart if adequate catechesis declines.¹⁰⁹

Thus, catechetical deterioration and theological misunderstanding in relation to Christian initiation’s dense symbolism caused the collapse of the rite’s original structure, resulting in the emergence of “two ‘separate and distinct sacraments’ with ‘separate and distinct effects.’”¹¹⁰

The second factor is the “loss of symbolic intelligibility.” Mitchell posits that “Christian initiation is full of heuristic symbolism.” However, a symbolism is understandable as long as the one perceiving can make a connection between the symbol and his/her own basic experience. Thus, a good symbol must be heuristic, having the capacity to draw one more deeply towards the symbolic meaning of a word, an action or a material object. For instance, “if one’s contact with water in the symbolic gesture is

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

minimal (e.g. a few drops poured out of a plaster sea-shell), a similar loss of the heuristic power of the symbol is inevitable.”¹¹¹

The third factor is the “loss of the tactile dimension” of the sacramental actions in the rites of initiation as an effect of their gradual cerebralization. The total immersion in water (along with anointing with oil, nudity, imposition of hands, kissing) in earlier celebrations of Christian initiation has a stronger physical dimension because “the symbolic power of initiation was closely allied with a series of tactile contacts.” Consequently, the growing tendency of talking *about* (catechesis) rather than *doing* (through symbols and gestures) in sacramental rites results in the depreciation of the symbolic power of the initiation sacraments.¹¹²

Finally, the fourth factor that contributed to this breaking up of the unity of the initiation rites is the misinterpretation of the relationship between “memorial (*anamnesis*) and invocation (*epiclesis*) in worship.” Moreover, each sacramental action is both anamnestic and epicletic; comprehending their interconnection is essential. Hence, the invocation of the Spirit is not “to vivify the dead recital of past deeds but rather to exhibit God’s presence,” closely enfolded in the community’s shared memory. And “if ‘memorial’ is understood merely as the dramatic recital of past events, then ‘invocation’ will be interpreted as a calling upon the Spirit to vivify what would otherwise remain dead narration.” But we have to understand that “anamnesis and epiclesis are one, since the memory of God is possible only through the action of the Spirit in the depths of the human heart.” The misunderstanding of the interconnection between anamnesis and memorial, Mitchell suspects, ushered to the breakdown of initiation in Western

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 73.

Christianity. When the understanding of Baptism came to be perceived chiefly as imitative of Christ's baptism, he contends, "it seemed more and more necessary to complete or perfect or simply finish the act of baptism by a separate, ritual act of epiclesis – confirmation." Consequently, Confirmation seems like "a 'dangling epiclesis' cut off from the symbolic syntax which inserted believers into the dying and rising of Jesus through the paschal memorial." Both the inseparability and the co-existence of memorial and epiclesis, of liturgical remembering through the Spirit's action, should therefore be maintained in understanding, teaching, and celebrating the sacraments.¹¹³

During the whole era from 500 – 1274, there exists no single rite of initiation in Western Christianity, Mitchell argues. Rather, there exists a corpus of local rites similar in structure yet different in their details. Similarly, even broad claims concerning "'Roman,' or 'Gallican' or 'old Spanish' rites" must be nuanced by differing ritual practices in particular times and places.¹¹⁴ We can conclude that progressively within this period, with the various pastoral, political, and theological developments cited above, the primitive unity of Christian initiation crumbled and disintegrated. At least until the twelfth century, Rome was able to maintain the cohesive celebration of initiation as a unified ritual entity under episcopal presidency. This included integrated ceremonies of immersion in water, followed by "the two post baptismal anointings found already in Hippolytus' third century rite (that is, an anointing of the neophyte's head by the

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

presbyter, followed by a second anointing by the bishop),” and culminating in Eucharistic communion.¹¹⁵

Moreover, the theology of Scholasticism and subsequently the theology of the Council of Trent increasingly centered on Baptism that was ritually separate from Eucharist.¹¹⁶ Consequently, the non-integrated celebration of Christian initiation was sustained by a disjointed theological understanding of the initiation sacraments. Furthermore, Scholastic theology maintained that the distinction between the ‘form’ and ‘essence’ of the sacraments is a precondition for properly understanding them. Subsequently, the Scholastics “decided that the essence of the sacrament can and even must be known, determined, and defined apart from its ‘form.’”¹¹⁷ This metaphysical essence divorced from practice, for Schmemmann, is the “‘original sin’ of all modern, post-patristic, westernized theology”¹¹⁸ that led to an utterly different understanding of Baptism and sacraments in general. In the early Church Tradition, “the form is important since its very nature and function is ‘epiphanic,’ because it reveals the essence, truly is and fulfills it. And being the epiphany of the essence, the form is the means of its knowledge and explanation.”¹¹⁹ In the Western Scholastic approach, however,

the form is no longer an ‘epiphany,’ but only the external sign and thus the guarantee that a particular ‘essence’ has been duly bestowed and communicated. As to this ‘essence’ itself, it can and must be known and defined apart from the ‘form’ and even prior to it, for otherwise one would not know what is being ‘signified’ and guaranteed by means of the form... which makes the sacrament valid but not the revelation of that which is made valid in the sacrament.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Nathan D. Mitchell, “Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation,” in *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, 54.

¹¹⁶ Kenan Osborne, O.F.M., *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*, 77.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 56.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

In addition, rather than ‘receiving’ from liturgical tradition the meaning of the sacraments, Scholastic theologians devised their own sacramental definitions, and then, in view of such descriptions, “began to interpret the liturgy of the Church, to ‘squeeze’ it into their own *a priori* approach.”¹²¹ This is contrary to the early Church’s celebration of Baptism that is so explicit and direct that there is no need for further explanation because the rite itself is seen as “the source and the condition of all explanations, all theologies.”¹²² Baptismal celebration, therefore,

because it is an event (where) – the form and the essence, the ‘doing’ and the ‘happening,’ the sign and its meaning coincide, for the purpose of one is precisely to be the other, both to reveal and to fulfill it. Baptism is what it *represents* because what it represents—death and resurrection—is true. It is the representation not of an ‘idea’ but of the very content and reality of the Christian faith itself: to believe in Christ is to ‘be dead and have one’s life hid with Him in God (Col. 3:3).’¹²³

Both the Scholastics’ non-related definition of the ‘form’ and ‘essence’ of a sacrament, along with a non-ritual-based approach to sacramental theology, furthered the breakdown of the wholeness of initiation’s “sacramental vision and experience.”¹²⁴ This approach since the Scholastic period appears to be embodied by the Council of Trent and remains true in many ways and places today.

Because of the “defensive posture and the lack of any solid historical knowledge on the development of Baptism” that resulted in stagnation and lack of creativity, Kenan Osborne concludes that “scholasticism, reformation theology, and Catholic counter-reformation theology all suffered from narrowness of vision and approach.”¹²⁵ Thus, since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Order of Baptism for Adults (*Ordo Baptismi Adultorum* [OBA]) remained unchanged until its initial revision in 1962. The OBA, as a

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 76-77

¹²² *Ibid.*, 56.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Kenan Osborne, 76.

result of Vatican II documents such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Lumen Gentium*, was subsequently altered to include the restoration of the catechumenate through the 1972 Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA).

Three Historical Circumstances that Guided the (Re)Emergence of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

1. The Desire of Missionaries to Restore the Catechumenate in their Mission Areas and the Desire for Liturgical Renewal

The Second Vatican Council was very providential for re-imagining the initiation rites, as it brought forth the long awaited and needed renewal in the Church, especially in the liturgy. Indeed, prior to Vatican II, Maxwell Johnson notes,

it can be said generally that from the publication and promulgation of the Tridentine liturgical books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to those brought about by the Second Vatican Council in the late 1960's and 1970's, very little actually happened to the shape, liturgical texts, structure or theological interpretation of the rites of Christian initiation within the Roman Catholic Church.¹²⁶

Generally, for more or less four hundred years since Trent, the liturgical rites and rubrics promulgated by the Tridentine Reform were strictly followed.

However, before the 20th century movement to recover and restore the catechumenate, this awakening aspiration for renewal was already widespread in the 17th to 19th centuries, although its fruits would not be seen until later. It was during this period of time, Donald Gelpi says, that

[m]issionary bishops in Asia instituted a catechetical preparation that unfortunately lacked a liturgical dimension and failed to advance in clearly defined stages.... From the eighteenth century on, the Holy Ghost missionaries in Africa intensified their efforts to ensure a thorough program of catechesis prior to adult baptism. Largely, through the effort of Cardinal Lavigerie, the African Church successfully established a catechumenate that not only advanced in stages but also lasted long enough to ensure

¹²⁶ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, 381.

the likelihood of perseverance in the faith. The African catechumenate required a postulancy of two years, a two-year catechumenate, and a pre-baptismal retreat.¹²⁷

Such similar missionary experiences in Asia, Africa, France and other parts of Europe led to the exploration and experimentation to restore the whole of the Christian initiation for adults, encompassing Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

The impetus for the restoration of the catechumenate continued through the 20th century. Various historical elements led to a return to the original sources (*ressourcement*) regarding the catechumenate. Paul Bradshaw provides a summary of the overarching theological and liturgical elements that led to the renewal of the Catholic Church's practice of adult Baptism through the RCIA:

The rise of modern liturgical historical scholarship was, of course, a major factor, particularly in its earlier—primarily historical—phase, which revealed the changing past that existed behind current forms of public worship. This not only demonstrated how very different were the liturgical practices of all churches today from those of the first few centuries of Christians, but also appeared to point towards a unified way of worship among those early Christians that contrasted sharply with the diverse traditions of contemporary denominations.... Historical scholarship both gave birth to, and in turn was stimulated by the Liturgical Movement, which sought to bring renewal to Christian worship in large measure by a return to what was thought to be the pattern of worship in the early Church. But the movement also provided a common theology of worship to undergird the changes and supply a rationale for them.¹²⁸

Thus, modern liturgical historical scholarship and the Liturgical Movement's attempt at renewing Christian worship by a return to the pattern of worship in the early Church joined together as major factors in the eventual renewal of the Church's liturgy in general, and the RCIA in particular.

In addition to the above attempts to restore the catechumenate, Pope Pius XII in 1951 restored the Easter Vigil to Holy Saturday evening from its previous celebration on

¹²⁷ Gelpi, 188-89.

¹²⁸ Paul Bradshaw, "The Homogenization of Christian Liturgy—Ancient and Modern: Presidential Address," *Studia Liturgica* 26 (1996): 6-8.

Holy Saturday morning. While the restitution did not reinstate the catechumenate, it included “a renewal of baptismal vows in the context of the traditional Easter vigil readings and, hence, began to restore a ‘paschal’ focus rather than an emphasis upon “original sin” in the celebration of Baptism.”¹²⁹

The growing desire for liturgical renewal and the restoration of the catechumenate that began in the 17th century became more intense in the 20th century, through the help of modern liturgical historical scholarship and the pastoral concerns of the Liturgical Movement. A first taste of this contemporary renewal was the restoration of the Easter vigil, with its renewal of baptismal promises that highlighted the primarily paschal character of Baptism. The focus is on the wholeness of the redemptive event: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. These previous developments were subsequently advanced by the advent of new ways of understanding the sacraments, which is the second guiding circumstance that prepared for the restoration of the Catechumenate in the Western Church.

2. The Emergence of New Ways of Understanding the Christocentric and Ecclesial Nature of Sacramentality: Christ as Primordial Sacrament and the Church as Fundamental and Basic Sacrament

In the mind of Maxwell Johnson, the paradigm shift in sacramental theology and ecclesiology that both steered Vatican II and is later fostered by it is another essential development fostering the RCIA’s emergence. It is so revolutionary that Johnson described it as theology’s “Copernican Revolution,” whereby what started as a retrieval of the ecclesial aspect of the sacraments swiftly led to additional shifts regarding the revelatory nature of the celebration itself. Maxwell describes the shift:

¹²⁹ Maxwell E. Johnson, 386.

from speaking of sacraments as “means of grace” to speaking of them as encounters with Christ himself; from thinking of them primarily as acts of God to thinking of them mainly as celebrations of the faith community; from seeing sacraments as momentary incursions from another world to seeing them as manifestations of the graced character of all human life; from interpreting them as remedies for sin and weakness to seeing them as promoting growth in Christ.¹³⁰

Embedded within the above transformations, which give us a hint to ecclesial sacramentality and the communal nature of worship, are important shifts in the theological understanding of sacrament. One of these is Odo Casel’s understanding of the “mystery of Christ” being carried out and made present in the “mystery of worship.”¹³¹ The mystery of Christ that encompasses the risen Lord’s saving work is centered on the Pasch – the passage of the Son of God to the Father through his death on the cross and his resurrection¹³² – which, in turn, is the central axis of the mystery of worship. Thus, Rita Ferrone, in expounding Casel’s liturgical thinking, claims that the “pre-eminent mystery that Christians enter through the liturgy is no less than the whole of Christ’s death, resurrection, and glorification ... the paschal mystery.”¹³³ Therefore, the risen Lord’s saving work, centered on the Pasch, is what is actualized in the liturgy. In this connection, Michael Skelley, in interpreting Casel’s liturgical view, says, “liturgy makes present the unique, unrepeatable mystery of Christ realized historically in the past and is sacramentally represented in the liturgical commemoration.”¹³⁴ Consequently, participation in the liturgy is participating in the mystery of Christ. Since the liturgy “is the action of the church in conjunction with the saving actions of Christ,”¹³⁵ the action of

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹³¹ Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, ed. Burkhard Neunheuser, O.S.B. (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1962), 40.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³³ Rita Ferrone, *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 23.

¹³⁴ Michael Skelley, “Theologians, Modern, and Liturgical Renewal,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink, SJ (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 1248.

¹³⁵ Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, 40.

the *totus Christus*, it calls for the utmost and vigorous participation of the whole assembly of the faithful who, through Baptism and Confirmation, are sacramentally joined to Christ and are also destined to participate in Christ's mystery.¹³⁶

Edward Schillebeeckx added another important shift in the understanding of sacrament. He asserts that "the man Jesus, as the personal visible realization of the divine grace of redemption, is the sacrament, the primordial sacrament, because this man, the Son of God himself, is intended by the Father to be in his humanity the only way to the actuality of redemption."¹³⁷ Therefore, "human encounter with Jesus is ... the sacrament of encounter with God."¹³⁸ Now that the risen Lord is in heaven, he "becomes in fact the head of the People of God, the Church assembled in his death,"¹³⁹ whose identity and essence is to make real and present in the whole Church, as a visible society, the final goal of grace achieved by Christ.¹⁴⁰ Schillebeeckx also considers the Church as the mystical body of the risen Lord that actualizes the offer of grace and redemption in Christ. Just as he considers Jesus as the primordial sacrament of the encounter with God, he too views the church as "the primordial sacrament of encounter with the risen Christ."¹⁴¹ Now Schillebeeckx makes a correlation between the risen Lord, the Church, and the sacraments in this sublime way, by asserting that "each sacrament is the personal saving act of the risen Christ himself, but realized in the visible form of an official act of the Church."¹⁴² Basically, each reception of the sacraments is an experience of immersing

¹³⁶ Michael Skelley, "Theologians, Modern, and Liturgical Renewal," *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, 1248-1249.

¹³⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Seed and Ward, 1963), 15.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Michael Skelley, "Theologians, Modern, and Liturgical Renewal," 1250.

¹⁴² Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 54.

oneself into the living Church as the earthly mystery of Christ in glory. Therefore, we encounter God through Christ in our participation in the sacraments of the Church.

Karl Rahner also contributed to the renewal of sacramental theology. In the context of the history of salvation, he declared that “Christ is the primal sacramental word of God, uttered in the one history of mankind.” The church, he further says, “is the abiding presence of that primal sacramental word of definitive grace.” And by being Christ’s perpetual presence in this world, “the Church is truly the fundamental sacrament, the well-spring of the sacraments in the strict sense.”¹⁴³

Moreover, the Church in relation to Christ “is the official presence of the grace of Christ in the public history of the one human race” and the church in connection to the sacraments “is the primal and fundamental sacrament.”¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Rahner’s concept of sacrament “as an instance of the fullest actualization of the Church’s essence as the saving presence of Christ’s grace” can provide us with a way to comprehend the (seven) sacraments of the Church as specific moments of that actualization.¹⁴⁵ It follows that individuals encounter Christ’s mercy and salvation by becoming part of the church that allows them to experience the saving power of Christ.

Furthermore, Rahner proposed that the world is always embraced and infused with God’s grace. This is in contrast to the concept that sees the liturgy as a way for grace to be made accessible to a world that is otherwise divested of it. Thus, in interpreting Rahner, Skelley argues, “we are always and everywhere in the gracious presence of God”

¹⁴³ Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (West Germany: Herder, 1963), 18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

and so, there is no separation; instead, there is continuity between world history and salvation history.¹⁴⁶ Thus, Skelley notes, following Rahner,

the ordinary and profane history of the world is the stage on which takes place the drama of the self-communication of God and our response to it, a drama which reached its highpoint and fulfillment in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Worship manifests the holiness of our lives and our world for we worship from within a graced and redeemed world. It is precisely because our worship takes place in such a world that it is an event of grace for us. Worship expresses the limitless grace of God and thus makes that grace available to us. The liturgy of the church is best understood as the symbolic expression of the liturgy of the world.¹⁴⁷

Lastly, Skelley, explaining Rahner, considers the church as the “basic sacrament” whose sacramental liturgy symbolically and effectively expresses the liturgy of the world, which is a communication event between God and humankind.¹⁴⁸

In light of the above discussion, Kenan Osborne made the correlation between Jesus as the primordial sacrament, the Church as basic sacrament, and the sacraments themselves. He said,

If Jesus is the primordial sacrament of baptism and the church is the basic sacrament of baptism, then baptism itself is not the “first” sacrament.... Rather, Jesus in his humanity is the “first” sacrament. This is precisely what “primordial” means: Jesus enjoys a position of “primacy,” of “firstness.” Likewise, if the church is a basic sacrament, then the church, *qua* sacrament, is more basic than the rite of baptism....¹⁴⁹

This is very significant in that it changes altogether our conception of Baptism, which we normally associate with water washing, “original sin,” or “entrance into the church.” Nonetheless, “if Jesus is the primordial sacrament of baptism,” then the first thing that comes to mind about Baptism is Jesus. The meaning of the Baptism of Jesus, consequently, becomes the basis of sacramental theology.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Michael Skelley, 1253.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1253.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Kenan Osborne, 81.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

We have here both the development of the Christocentric aspect of the sacrament centered on the Paschal Mystery and the rediscovery of the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament. We encounter the Triune God in the risen Christ through the Spirit-filled Church and in her celebration of the sacraments. Therefore, we look at the sacraments as encounters with Christ, celebrated in the Christian community that manifest to us the graced nature of human life and promote growth in Christ. Consequently, being joined to Christ and the Church in Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist, we have the right to participate in the mystery of Christ through our full and active participation in the liturgy.

3. Ecclesiological Images that Influenced the RCIA's Vigorous Vision of the Church

a. The Mystical Body of Christ

Prior to Vatican II, the ecclesiology of the Mystical Body of Christ started to become a prevailing ecclesiological image. Although the concept of the Mystical Body of Christ has seminal roots from Trent to Vatican I, we begin to explore the concept as it developed from the late 19th century. Pope Leo XIII's 1896 encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, in the mind of Peter McGrail, "sought to resolve the tension between the visible and the invisible dimensions of the Church by drawing a distinction between the end of the Church which is invisible, and the visibility of its members..."¹⁵¹ Moreover, the document, he attests, explored "the connection between the visible and invisible ... image of the Body" in reference to Christ's two natures.¹⁵² Thus, *Satis Cognitum* states,

Christ (as) the Head and Exemplar, is not wholly in His visible human nature...nor wholly in the invisible divine nature ... but is one, from and in both natures, visible and invisible; so the Mystical Body of Christ is the true Church, only because its

¹⁵¹ Peter McGrail, *The Rite of Christian Initiation: Adult Rituals and Catholic Ecclesiology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 24.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

visible parts draw life and power from the supernatural gifts and other things (from) whence spring their very nature and essence.¹⁵³

Henceforth, Christ's Mystical Body is the Church, who is the visible body that is united with Christ, its invisible Head. The unity of Christ's humanity and divinity becomes the model of unity in this mystical Body – the Church united to one another in Christ, the Head.

Henri de Lubac further develops the theme of the Mystical Body of Christ. The visible Church, he claims, “is not the Kingdom, nor yet the Mystical Body, though the holiness of this Body shines through its visible manifestation.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, the Church, he further states, while not precisely “co-extensive with the Mystical Body,” is not separate from it.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, McGrail, interpreting de Lubac, attests, that “there is a continuum between the visible Church and the Mystical Body of Christ: in history, the church is a means to unite humanity in God, but at the eschaton it will be that unity in its consummation.”¹⁵⁶

It is in Baptism that one is incorporated into the Mystical Body. In this light, de Lubac points out, “as water flows over our foreheads it does not merely effect a series of incorporations, but there takes place at the same time a ‘concorporation’ of the whole Church in one mysterious unity.”¹⁵⁷ This consolidation of the entire church in Baptism, de Lubac further notes, makes “this one Church ever appears as the chief object as well

¹⁵³ Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical On the Unity of the Church *Satis Cognitum* (June 29, 1896) §3, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_29061896_satis_cognitum.html.

¹⁵⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. by Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 67.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵⁶ Peter McGrail, *The Rite of Christian Initiation: Adult Rituals and Catholic Ecclesiology*, 24

¹⁵⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, 85.

as the chief minister of all the sacraments.”¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, McGrail, expounding de Lubac’s view, affirms that in celebrating and receiving the sacrament of the Body of Christ, the church is transformed and empowered as a profoundly unified Mystical Body with each member being “drawn into the communion of the whole.”¹⁵⁹

Pius XII, in response to the growing literature on the Mystical Body of Christ, wrote the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943). In this exhortation, the Pope introduced the image of the Mystical Body into the mainstream of the church’s theology, emphasizing the Holy Spirit’s role as the unifying principle of the Church. The Spirit is the bond of this union. As he says,

[t]o this Spirit of Christ, also, as to an invisible principle, is to be ascribed the fact that all the parts of the Body are joined one and the other with their exalted Head; for He is entire in the Head; entire in the Body, and entire in each of the members.¹⁶⁰

We have in this whole section a nuanced but interconnected image of the Mystical Body of Christ. First, Christ’s Mystical Body is the true church since its visible parts are kept alive and empowered from the supernatural gifts of Christ, its invisible Head, as we have learned from Pope Leo XIII’s *Satis Cognitum*. Additionally, de Lubac points to the distinct but not separate relationship between the visible Church and the Mystical Body of Christ. While the visible church is an instrument of uniting humankind with God in history, it will be the ultimate embodiment of the Mystical Body’s unity at the end times. Moreover, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is the unifying agent joining all parts of the Body with their glorious Head who is wholly and simultaneously present in the Head, in the Body, and in each of the members, as *Mystici Corporis Christi* already explained. In

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁶⁰ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ *Mystici Corporis Christi* (June 29, 1943) §57, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html.

Baptism, de Lubac emphasized, the baptized are incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, whose unity is strengthened by the celebration and reception of the Eucharist, communally being formed into the Body of Christ, and acts as the chief minister of all the sacraments.

b. *The People of God*

In his book on Christian Initiation, Peter McGrail points out that *Lumen Gentium* begins in Chapter 1 in a “very de Lubac manner with a consideration of the mystery of the Church, pausing briefly upon the idea of the Church as sacrament.” It also presents an image of the Church as “the Body of Christ” and considers the Church as “the People of God.”¹⁶¹ In Aloys Grillmeier’s view, the People of God can be looked upon both as one among the many ecclesiological images of the Council or as the principal image that unifies and accommodates a plethora of church images.¹⁶² *Lumen Gentium* traced back the image of the People of God to the Old Testament by pointing to God’s initiative in choosing the people of Israel as his people and making his covenant and revealing himself to them. Consequently, the people of Israel, in faithfulness to God’s covenant, must “acknowledge Him in truth and serve Him in holiness.”¹⁶³ But through this covenant, *LG* continues, God is preparing his people to a “new and perfect covenant” ratified in Christ’s blood. Hence,

Christ instituted the new covenant, the new testament ... calling together a people made up of Jew and gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God...who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God, not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit, are finally established as a chosen race, a royal

¹⁶¹ Peter McGrail, 96.

¹⁶² Aloys Grillmeier, “The People of God,” in *Commentary on the documents of Vatican II*, vol.2, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Burns and Oates, 1967-69), 154.

¹⁶³ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (November 1, 1974) §9, at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people . . . who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God.¹⁶⁴

Thus, it is the covenant ratified in Christ's death and resurrection that is memorialized in peoples' rebirth through God's living word and through water and the Spirit. It is through this memorial ritual that a new People of God testify to this new identity established by God, in Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, in the discussion on baptismal priesthood, considered as a central theme of *Lumen Gentium*, two ideas blend: "the new People of God constitute a royal priesthood by virtue of Baptism and the anointing with the Holy Spirit" and they are participants in Christ's threefold office as Priest, Prophet, and King.¹⁶⁵ These aspects of the People of God are particularly discussed in Articles 10-12 of *LG* and give us a well-defined account of the inter-connections among the participation of all God's people in the kingly, priestly and prophetic ministry of Christ himself, now celebrated and deepened in the Christian initiation sacraments.¹⁶⁶ It points out that

[t]he baptized, by regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christians they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the greatness of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light.¹⁶⁷

Thus, through Baptism and Confirmation, the People of God are chosen for Christian worship and are also united more closely to the Church as Christ's witnesses through the strength from the Holy Spirit. As the baptized participate in the eucharistic sacrifice, they offer themselves together with the divine victim to God and share in Christ's self-offering in Holy Communion. Having been "strengthened by the Body of Christ in the eucharistic

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ McGrail, 106.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁶⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, §10.

communion, they manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which this holy sacrament aptly signifies and admirably realizes.”¹⁶⁸

How do we interconnect these two images of the Church as Mystical Body of Christ and People of God? Peter McGrail provides two possible ways in correlating the understanding of both images in a way that brings them together. First, as a result of his interpretation of Joseph Ratzinger’s *Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council*, “the core meaning of the term People of God in the New Testament is to be found in terms of its radical transformation through the Christological category of the Mystical Body.”¹⁶⁹ This is so because, for Ratzinger, while the term People of God appears in the New Testament, it is scarcely used to refer to the Christian community but refers more often to the people of Israel. Hence, the term People of God is, for Ratzinger, just a Christological reinterpretation of the Old Testament image and not a primary image describing the New Testament Church. Therefore, it is only through the ratification of the new covenant in Christ, a Christological transformation, that the image refers to the new People of God.¹⁷⁰

Secondly, expounding on Lucien Cerfaux, McGrail proposes that “the category (of) Mystical Body is to be interpreted in terms of its preservation and articulation of the reality of the People of God.”¹⁷¹ This is so since, for Cerfaux, the Church as Body of Christ in Paul resulted from Christianity’s encounter with the Greeks, whose pervasive individualism needs to be countered with a unifying image which the People of God

¹⁶⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, §11.

¹⁶⁹ McGrail, 55.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” *Communio*, vol. 1, *The Unity of the Church*, 62-77 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010): 74-76.

¹⁷¹ McGrail, 55.

could not convincingly do.¹⁷² Consequently, Cerfaux claims, Paul adapted the Hellenistic image of the body and its members to articulate the unity of the People of God in that cultural milieu. This, for Cerfaux, gave birth to the image of Mystical Body that subsequently preserves, articulates and serves the fundamental value of the unity of the People of God.¹⁷³

In a nutshell, both images mutually complement each other, since the Mystical Body manifests the truth exemplified by the People of God and the People of God imagery is, similarly, to be understood through the purview of the Mystical Body. Consequently, we can say that the Church as God's People exists in actuality as Christ's Mystical Body. Moreover, the two are closely connected sacramentally, since in both cases it is through Baptism and Confirmation that those initiated are incorporated into the Body of Christ and constituted as the People of God. Therefore, they participate in the threefold offices of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. Likewise, in the Eucharist, they strengthen, signify and make real in an ultimate way the unity of the Body of Christ and the People of God.

The ecclesiology that influenced the RCIA's vigorous vision of the Church developed out of the images of the Mystical Body of Christ and the People of God. As a result, it helped to broaden an understanding of sacraments within the Church and the role of initiation in incorporating new members into that communion.

The Call for the Revision of the Rites of Baptism

¹⁷² Lucien Cerfaux, *La Théologie l'Église suivant Saint Paul*, 2nd ed., trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 267.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 231.

The need for renewal grew out of dissatisfaction with the prevailing practice outlined in the pre-Vatican II *Ordo Baptismi Adultorum*. A number of examples illustrate this. For example, Latin American bishops called for the abbreviation of the existing rites, because of the problem of a large number of people coming for Baptism with prayers repeatedly said to each candidate. Second, there was the call by the German bishops for a textual reform of the rites of initiation for adults, the restoration of the catechumenate, and the revision of the *Ordo Baptismi Parvulorum* (OBP). Third, the French and Dutch bishops, for their part, called for the catechumenate's restoration by appealing "to history and the recovery of an ancient practice." French bishops "tended to marry that sense of a restored ancient tradition to a contemporary pastoral rationale." Bishop Lille of France provided one good reason for the restoration of the catechumenate when he said that "one of the essential roles played by the catechumenate was to prevent people coming too quickly to Baptism without having been challenged to enter into a proper conversion." Fourth, Africa's pastoral situation also called for the adaptation of the baptismal rituals to the catechumenate.¹⁷⁴ A variety of different pastoral contexts and issues converged on the need for universal change.

These calls would eventually be incorporated into *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which pointed out three important directives regarding the need to revise the current rite of adult Baptism: the restoration of the catechumenate for adults is to be used at the "discretion of the local Ordinary" and implemented in stages (SC # 64); the adaptation of elements of Christian initiation rites may include compatible rites currently used by people in mission areas (SC # 65); and the revision of the rite for the Baptism of adults, in view of the restored catechumenate, including the insertion of a votive Mass for Baptism,

¹⁷⁴ McGrail, 77-81.

would be added into the Roman Missal (SC # 66).¹⁷⁵ The above provisions, being more formal and legal in tone, can be understood more deeply by a section on the catechumenate in *Ad Gentes* on the role of the liturgical rites that stipulated:

Those who have received from God the gift of faith in Christ, through the Church, should be admitted with liturgical rites to the catechumenate, which is not a mere exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, but a period of formation in the whole Christian life, an apprenticeship of a sufficient duration, during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher. The catechumens should be properly initiated into the mystery of salvation and the practice of the evangelical virtues, and they should be introduced into the life of faith, liturgy, and charity of the People of God by successive rites.¹⁷⁶

In summary, the calls for the revision of baptismal rites included pastoral reasons involving the shortening of the existing rites, as well as the adaptation of cultural rites of initiation into the Christian rite of Baptism, revision of the baptismal texts both for adult and infant Baptisms, and the restoration of the catechumenate to recover an ancient practice in order to allow people the appropriate time to experience proper conversion before Baptism. These practical suggestions were addressed by the stipulation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Ad Gentes* in connection to the restoration, adaptation, process of the catechumenate and its relationship to the reform of initiation rites in general.

Basic Descriptions of the RCIA that Complement the Development of Basic Christian Communities

Kenan Osborne, O.F.M. sees the RCIA as intended for those who are not yet baptized and are now desirous of being baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. He

¹⁷⁵ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), §§64-66, at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

¹⁷⁶ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965), §14, at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

views the RCIA as a journey that has a series of processes and steps starting from conversion to the mystery of Christ — the beginning and center of faith’s journey — that reaches its climax with the celebration of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist and culminates in a period of mystagogy.¹⁷⁷ More importantly, “the RCIA has been called the ‘norm’ of/for Baptism, not in the sense that it will be the normal or most frequent celebration of Baptism, but in the sense that it clarifies for us what Baptism means and what is required for full initiation into the Christian community.”¹⁷⁸ When historians look back at the output of Vatican II, Aidan Kavanagh asserts, the RCIA will be looked upon as its single most significant product because the rite embodies a vigorous vision of the church.¹⁷⁹ The RCIA facilitates the sacramental formation processes that prepare individuals and communities for a life centered on conversion.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, the RCIA in its patterns and processes, Lawrence Mick believes, is largely a *ressourcement*, a restoration and rediscovery of the ancient Church’s initiation patterns and practices.¹⁸¹

The Ecclesiological Foundation of the RCIA: The Mystical Body of Christ and People of God

The ecclesiologies of Mystical Body of Christ and People of God are expressed in the RCIA’s “rubrics and euchological texts” that explicitly embody assertions of an ecclesiological nature and present a theme of the entire local church community’s active role in the RCIA rituals.¹⁸² In other words, both of the above ecclesiologies are embodied in the RCIA by envisioning the centrality of the liturgical assembly, the

¹⁷⁷ Osborne, 98.

¹⁷⁸ Lawrence Mick, *RCIA: Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly*, 29.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 13.

¹⁸¹ Lawrence Mick, 13.

¹⁸² McGrail, 135.

community of the faithful as a corporate agent in the initiation process.¹⁸³ The RCIA dynamics, McGrail asserts, enliven the fact that “the gathering of the faithful to worship is itself one of the modes of Christ’s presence and that every liturgical celebration is the action of the Mystical Body.”¹⁸⁴ Hence, the Mystical Body is made present in the gathered initiating assembly, with its Head and members, the *totus Christus*, actively participating in the rituals. Each stage in the liturgical celebration of the catechumens’ journey into the Church makes it an experience of the whole church acting as the Body of Christ, who initiates the catechumens into the Body through the corporate liturgical action of the Body.¹⁸⁵

In the first paragraph of the general introduction to the rites of Christian initiation, which quotes *Ad Gentes* 14, the document presents an image of the Church as People of God:

In the sacraments of initiation we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord’s death and resurrection.¹⁸⁶

Beautifully expressed in the above is the fact that in Baptism, the baptized are immersed in the paschal mystery of Christ, become co-heirs with Christ through the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and celebrate the Eucharist with the whole People of God. The interweaving of the People of God imagery and that of the Mystical Body is made clear in RCIA # 2, where it says, “Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God’s

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* n. 7.

¹⁸⁵ McGrail, 136.

¹⁸⁶ International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Study Edition (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1988), xiv.

people.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, it is because the baptized are incorporated into the Body of Christ in Baptism that they become the People of God.¹⁸⁸

The above implies that the entire Body of Christ and the People of God, in the persons of the candidates’ families, friends, neighbors, and members of the Christian community, have active parts in the celebration of the initiation process. The introduction of RCIA # 9 provides a good rendering of the role of the community:

[T]he people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all baptized. Therefore, the community must always be fully prepared in its pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ.... Hence the entire community must help the candidates and the catechumens throughout the process of initiation.¹⁸⁹

The RCIA process, therefore, embodies the dynamics of a communal faith journey among the candidates together with the Christian community into which they are being initiated.

The Theology of the RCIA

Since the RCIA theology is complex and diverse, we will limit our discussion to only eight aspects that emerge rather clearly.

1. Conversion is a Constitutive Element of Initiation

The RCIA’s intent is “to facilitate the experience of conversion and the response of faith” (# 1), enabled by the “proclamation of the kerygma, the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,” and accepting the gift of salvation by embracing the challenge of the reign of God. RCIA # 1, 2, 4, and 5 express “respect for (the) individual experience of conversion” by shaping a program that flexibly accommodates one’s faith

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ McGrail, 137.

¹⁸⁹ International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 4.

journey. While respecting the person's experience of God, RCIA # 1, 3, and 5 prescribe a way for adults to share their faith together. The RCIA, therefore, has to be properly adapted, as it recognizes the importance of integrating the specific "needs and demands of the community and the candidates" and the necessity for the rite to genuinely evoke the candidates' conversion experiences (RCIA, 32-35).¹⁹⁰ Thus, as Lawrence Mick contends, we have "to remember that the RCIA is not a program through which we put people" but it is a process, a journey of conversion respecting each candidate's unique spiritual experiences.¹⁹¹ This reminds us of our very own journey as a Church towards becoming more fully united into the Body of Christ and becoming truly the People of God.

2. The RCIA is a place for serious theology for the whole community

The catechumenate, Lawrence Mick declares, is not simply a Sunday school activity but an occasion for profound theology. It is in and through this process that the gospel and the contemporary context dynamically dialogue and interact, making the gospel relevant to the catechumens. In fact, in the early centuries of the church, it was in the catechumenate where the finest theology of the church emerged.¹⁹² Catechesis, from this perspective, is beyond simply giving instructions. Rather, it must be connected to peoples' actual experiences of God, the community's life, the liturgy, the Sunday lectionary that makes formation rooted in the Scripture and the liturgical year, and, finally, must integrate "moral awareness with prayer and doctrinal learning."¹⁹³ Thus, the instructions to be given to the catechumens have to be founded on profound theology that

¹⁹⁰ Mick, 12-13.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 92.

is relevant to the catechumens and also holistically connected to all aspects of their social, ecclesial, and personal faith life. Hence, RCIA instructions must, in a sense, be inculturated.

3. *Ministry and service is the responsibility of the entire baptized people*

Because ministry and service as the duty of all the baptized is upheld by the RCIA, the rite itself calls for a variety of ministries for full implementation (RCIA, # 9-16). Therefore, the initiation of the candidates of Baptism is the responsibility of all the baptized, who have the duty to welcome, form, support, encourage and journey together with the catechumens. The team in charge of the catechumenate therefore must find creative ways to involve as many people as possible in the process of initiation,¹⁹⁴ inviting their ministries and service to grow and be fostered. We can see here how the RCIA embodies the Liturgical Movement's retrieval of the Christian community as the initiating assembly, making real Odo Casel's definition of the liturgy as the "action of the church in conjunction with the action of Christ."¹⁹⁵ It also bodies forth de Lubac's view of the church as the "chief object and the chief minister of all the sacraments"¹⁹⁶ by actively participating in the mission and service of initiating new members.

4. *The RCIA clarifies the ecclesial identity of believers individually and communally*

The RCIA "redefines what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be a church" as it exemplifies an image of a church that is a supportive and caring community concerned with the conversion of others and its own conversion.¹⁹⁷ It presents a church that is not self-centered, but a community-centered church that is co-responsible for one

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94

¹⁹⁵ Skelley, 1249.

¹⁹⁶ McGrail, 27.

¹⁹⁷ Mick, 95.

another. Also, considering the catechumens as members of the church, as the RCIA suggests, would mean a redefinition of membership in the church. To be Christian means being baptized and confirmed into the Body of Christ, the People of God, and into the community of disciples who work together as one body, individually and communally, in preparing and initiating new members. This is what it means to be a church, which the RCIA practice expresses and makes visible. The RCIA practice, therefore, realizes Odo Casel's liturgical vision that the faithful, being "sacramentally joined to Christ through Baptism and Confirmation," are meant to participate in the mystery of Christ by their full and active participation, which is actualized in the liturgy.¹⁹⁸ The RCIA practice also gives life to *Sacrosanctum Concilium's* longing for full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgy as required by the liturgy's intrinsic nature and which is the right and duty of the baptized.¹⁹⁹

5. Conversion to the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ is central in the RCIA

The RCIA emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ, since adult conversion is directed to faith in the mystery of Jesus or is geared toward a prayerful and deepening comprehension of the gospel of Jesus. In the illumination and purification period, for example, one is cleansed of all that is not 'of Christ' and enlightened by the 'Spirit of Jesus.'²⁰⁰ Likewise, in the RCIA prayers, phrases such as 'light of Christ,' 'leadership of Christ,' 'following Christ,' et al, are common. In addition, the Christian community and the godparents are questioned to attest whether those aspiring to become catechumens "have chosen Christ as Lord" and if they are ready to assist them to "come to know and

¹⁹⁸ Skelley, 1249.

¹⁹⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §14.

²⁰⁰ Osborne, 98.

follow Christ.”²⁰¹ More than anything else, Jesus is central, since it is in his Baptism that we can understand our own Baptism. Additionally, in Baptism, we are immersed into his paschal mystery and are incorporated into his Mystical Body, which is the enduring grace of Baptism (“*res tantum*”). The centrality of Christ means the centrality of his paschal mystery. This is a concept originating from the patristic period and has gained popularity in liturgical discussions in the first part of the 20th century because it involves Christ’s whole life and his self-offering, which all are invited to share. It is for this reason that the paschal mystery became the “interpretive key that unlocks the meaning of the whole reform” of Vatican II in terms of liturgical renewal.²⁰²

6. The RCIA integrates a threefold and gradual process of Initiation

The continuous celebration of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist upheld by the RCIA is based on the ancient practice of the Church expressing the paschal mystery’s inherent unity. This sacramental integrity expresses the harmony between Jesus’ mission from the Father and the sending of the Spirit of unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit enfolding those who are initiated.²⁰³ In other words, an integral celebration of the initiation sacraments gives fuller expression to the paschal mystery and the unity of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.²⁰⁴ Since we can only understand Confirmation in its reciprocal relation to Baptism and we can only comprehend the Eucharist in mutual relation to Baptism, the necessary interrelationship of all three suggests that it is theologically fitting to celebrate them together. In short, the practice of celebrating Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist continuously conforms to the ancient tradition of the

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

²⁰² Rita Ferrone, *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 23.

²⁰³ Osborne, 101.

²⁰⁴ Mick, 29.

Catholic Church, the intrinsic unity of the sacraments of initiation, the harmony of the paschal mystery, and the unity of the Trinity in whose name we were baptized and in whose grace ...“we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

7. There is a renewed appreciation for the role of the Holy Spirit in the process

The Holy Spirit’s presence and role is very much connected to Baptism, even without citing particular references within the RCIA and the Rite of Baptism for Children. Such a pneumatological emphasis is important today, since some charismatic movements downplay Christian Baptism and emphasize the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as if, without it, Christians are not baptized ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’ We have to reiterate, therefore, the initiating role of the Spirit in the rite of Baptism, following the Baptism of Jesus in the scriptures, where the Spirit is the central figure in the event. In that light, the Spirit is powerfully present and active both in the baptized and in the baptizing local Christian community. The Spirit’s function is to reveal God’s presence in the depths of the heart of each of the baptized and to manifest this same divine presence in the Church’s collective memory of God celebrated in the sacraments of initiation.²⁰⁵

8. Initiation from the RCIA perspective has a Trinitarian foundation

The preceding discussion on the centrality of Christ and the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of initiation consequently highlights Christian initiation’s Trinitarian foundation. Indeed, we are initiated in the name of the Triune God. Embracing that identity, we are initiated into a life in communion with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

²⁰⁵ Osborne, 103-104.

It is in fact in the Baptism of Jesus that the first public manifestation of the Holy Trinity is described in the Gospels. In Luke's account of the Baptism of the Lord, after Jesus "had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove." Afterwards the Father's voice was heard saying, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:21-22). This event reveals the Father's affirmation of Jesus's identity as his Son and the Holy Spirit's empowerment of Jesus in his ministry as Son of the Father. This event memorialized in our Baptism also affirms our identity as sons and daughters of the Father in Jesus, and we too are empowered by the Spirit to be truly united in Jesus, as we all become faithful children of our Father.

Conclusion

We have seen how the RCIA itself affords a "new context and model for sacramental catechesis: evangelization, conversion, the response of faith, and mission," which are by nature formatively and dynamically responding to God's initiative.²⁰⁶ Pastorally, embracing the RCIA means committing ourselves to a profound renewal of our church's life as the Body of Christ and the People of God. It summons each and all to fully, actively, and consciously participate in the liturgy and the mission of the church in general. The RCIA process is a concrete contextual model for how we become a dialogic, participative and co-responsible community of disciples by our willingness to be an initiating assembly that supports, inspires and journeys with the catechumens in their conversion. At the same time, this process also gives life to the whole assembly of believers. The grace for both is mutually enriching. At its very foundation, the RCIA is

²⁰⁶ Thomas Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church*, 12.

Trinitarian and centered in the paschal mystery of Christ. Both dimensions do not only provide the theological understanding and reasons for celebrating Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist together. They also provide for the Christian community the ultimate challenge of what it means to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and what it entails to participate in the paschal mystery—the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

CHAPTER THREE: RCIA THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE REVITALIZING THE BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES OF BONTOC-LAGAWE

The BEC as a new way of being church is the result of the inspiring energy and life giving breath of the Holy Spirit that paved the way for participative, co-responsible, and dialogic church communities. Similarly, the RCIA as the ‘norm’ for Baptism that “clarifies for us what Baptism means and what is required for full initiation into the Christian community”²⁰⁷ is aimed at renewing the theology and practice of the rite of adult initiation and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in general. In this chapter, we will dwell on the question of how the RCIA’s theological and practical elements can help in promoting the growth of the BEC-type church. This will be answered by allowing the theology and practice of the RCIA to assist in achieving the four transformative directions of Bontoc-Lagawe towards becoming a renewed church. Additionally, we will expound on how the RCIA’s theological and practical elements can correct or respond to the challenging practices in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in Bontoc-Lagawe. The appropriate celebration of Baptism can indeed become the foundation and the basis for a renewal of the liturgy, because, as Alexander Schmemmann claims, it is in Baptism that the “church (can) reveal her own nature to herself (and) constantly renew herself as a community of the baptized.”²⁰⁸ How then, we ask, can the proper liturgical celebration of the sacraments of initiation provide vitality to BEC life in Bontoc-Lagawe? If BECs are intricately related with “renewal of individuals,

²⁰⁷ Lawrence Mick, *RCIA: Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 29.

²⁰⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 38.

communities, dioceses, renewal of parish life, and structures,”²⁰⁹ such a renewed theology and practice of the sacraments of initiation enlightened by the RCIA can surely further this BEC orientation towards renewal. Because the rite embodies a dynamic image of the church, we are very optimistic of the RCIA’s great contributions to a renewed and revitalized Church in and of Bontoc-Lagawe.

Four Transformative Directions and the RCIA Practice and Theology

1. Transformation from a priest-centered church to a dialogic, participative, and co-responsible church

The transformation from a priest-centered church to one with recognized lay ministries is an imperative vis-à-vis BEC and RCIA essentials. Two important trademarks of BECs are their being “dialogic, participative, and co-responsible church congregations”²¹⁰ that are led by lay ministers. This lay leadership does not reject the leadership of clerics. Instead, it accepts the “need and exercise in the church of leadership roles among the laity distinct from the clerical kind.”²¹¹ While BECs historically grew from places experiencing shortages of priests, the presence of an adequate number of priests, however, does not abolish church lay leadership and participation. Lay leadership and participation in liturgical, administrative, and pastoral aspects of church life is indispensable since as members of the Body of Christ and as People of God through Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist, those initiated are essentially to participate in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministries. They, too, have the right

²⁰⁹ James H. Kroeger, M.M. “Rekindling the BEC Flame: Questions and Reflections,” *Landas* vol. 18, no. 2 (2004): 305.

²¹⁰ Francisco Claver, S.J., *The Making of the Local Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications/Jesuit Communications, 2009), 111.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

to participate in the mystery of Christ through their full and active participation in the liturgy and the life and mission of the church.²¹² Thus, the ecclesiology of the Body of Christ and People of God embodied by the RCIA is very important because it promotes ecclesial sacramentality, the sacramentality of the liturgical gathering of the baptized, with each member having a role to perform. Similarly, the RCIA's emphasis on the assembly points to the corporate nature of the church's worship and communal witnessing to the faith. All these promote the BEC-type church.

The RCIA processes of preparing and accompanying catechumens in their journey of conversion led by lay leaders, catechists, members of the worship ministry, parents, and godparents concretize the goals of BEC lay leadership and participation. It also gives flesh to RCIA's emphasis on the church, embodied by the local Christian community, as the initiating and welcoming assembly who has the communal duty to hand on and nourish the faith they received from the apostles.²¹³ Such understanding of the roles of the assembly empowers BEC members to become an actual working body, actively participating in the process of comprehending, preparing, initiating, welcoming, and accompanying candidates for Baptism in their faith journey. This journey leads them together in living the ethical dimensions of the sacraments of initiation.

The above RCIA theology and practice, embodying a vision of the church as Body of Christ and People of God, subverts any form of individualistic living of the faith. This is a problematic case in Bontoc-Lagawe where some people just go to the sacraments to satisfy their piety and devotions without much regard to the communal and ethical

²¹² Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963) §14, at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/...council/...sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

²¹³ International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Study Edition (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), xv.

implications of these sacraments. Both RCIA visions of a Church as Body of Christ and People of God similarly enriches the Second Plenary Council of the Philippine's vision of the Church as community of disciples.²¹⁴ This vision entails that once we are baptized, we are incorporated into the Body of Christ, become the People of God, and join the community of Christ's disciples. That is why in the BEC-type church of Bontoc-Lagawe, we can only grow in Christian life through communion actualized by living the values of participation, dialogue, and co-responsibility, which are the touchstones of our way of being church. To understand these three values, it is important to go back to the foundational value of *communion* that originates from the mutual and all embracing love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Empowered from that fount of Trinitarian love, this church of communion is enabled to live up to its concerns "for community (*koinonia*), worship and the sacraments (*litourgeia*), the preaching of the Word (*kerygma*), ministry to others (*diakonia*), and witnessing to the truth of the gospel (*martureia*)."²¹⁵

Likewise, Paul Janowiak provides a deeper foundation to the "relational, dialogical, and participative character of the liturgy" and church life by re-rooting it back to the dynamism of the Trinitarian life, which calls us to "respond to the Trinity's own communion of mutual love and self-gift that, in the liturgy, we are invited to share."²¹⁶ The triune God's relational, dialogical, and participative character becomes the framework of how we envision "ourselves as believers, how that faith expresses itself in our worship, and how we will choose to live the faith we profess as Spirit-filled, resurrected Body of Christ in the world, in which 'we live and move and have our

²¹⁴ Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II)* (Manila: CBCP Secretariat, 1992), 40.

²¹⁵ Francisco Claver, S.J., *The Making of the Local Church*, 160.

²¹⁶ Paul Janowiak, S.J., *Standing Together in the Community of God: Liturgical Spirituality and the Presence of Christ* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011), x.

being.”²¹⁷ Therefore, “if this communal, participative, and relational ground of our being is true... then the prevailing ritual and rubrical images of lone rangers and isolated monads distort the harmony of Christian identity and worship.”²¹⁸

Thus, both the Trinitarian foundation of BEC life and RCIA theology converge for the promotion of a communal, participative, relational, corresponsable, and dialogic church life that makes any form of individualistic living of the faith an oxymoron. If then we are baptized and made partakers of the triune life, we cannot but live in communion, participation, and relation with others, as one body in Christ. In this regard, the RCIA emphasizes the need for creative ways to involve the different ministries and services of various people for its full implementation (RCIA, # 9-16). Hence, catechists, sponsors, godparents, friends, and relatives of the candidates and catechumens as well as deacons, priests, and the bishop have distinct roles to play for the Body of Christ to initiate members to become part of its own body.²¹⁹

The RCIA, consequently, shows that the initiation processes of catechumens is the responsibility of all the baptized, who acts as the initiating and welcoming assembly by acting as the *totus Christus* – the Body of Christ in union with the action of Christ, its Head. It also, exemplifies the image of the Church as basic sacrament (more foundational and prior to the sacrament of Baptism)²²⁰ embodying the communal, participative, relational, corresponsable, and dialogic life of the triune God. Thus, the RCIA constantly features the whole local Christian community, with the ministers and people with various

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Catherine Vincie, “The RCIA and the Liturgical Movement,” *Liturgy* 31 no. 2 (2016): 10.

²²⁰ Kenan Osborne, O.F.M., *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 100.

roles, as active participants and collaborators with the action of Christ in the initiation processes.

2. Transformation from a church whose spirituality is concerned primarily with individual piety to a church engaged in integral evangelization

The transformation from a church concerned primarily with individual piety to one engaged in total human salvation aims at the dynamic involvement of BECs with spiritual, developmental, and liberational activities. In this connection, PCP-II speaks of an

integrated spirituality that unites faith in the Lord with justice and charity to his brothers and sisters and joins together a hope for the world to come with an intense commitment to transform the world; a spirituality that seeks the salvation of the total human person;...that seeks for change not only in interior attitudes but in ecclesial and societal structures; ... (and) that witnesses through action to the faith.²²¹

This is a spirituality that moves a Christian together with his/her Christian community, motivated by faith and strengthened by worship, to “fully engage in the urgent moral, social, and ecological issues impacting on the lives of the people, especially the weak, vulnerable, wounded and oppressed.”²²² It calls for active participation in “dialogue, collaboration, and solidarity work” and promotes the building of basic human communities through ecumenical and inter-faith dialogues.²²³

This means that there should be no separation between the liturgy and the other aspects of Christian life since “the liturgy is...Christian life in a nutshell.”²²⁴ Moreover, “our worship is the ritual and symbolic experience of what the rest of our Christian lives

²²¹ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II)* (Manila: CBCP Secretariat, 1992), 69.

²²² Karl M. Gaspar, “Basic Ecclesial Communities in Mindanao: A Call to Continuing Missiological Relevance,” *MST Review* vol. 19, no. 1 (2017): 64.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ John F. Baldovin, S.J., “Is the Liturgy Hitting its Target?” *The Jurist* 72 (2012): 460.

is supposed to look like.”²²⁵ Our Christian life, therefore, must be celebrated and lived in Kevin Irwin’s matrix, “*lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*”²²⁶ (“as we worship, so we believe, and so we live”). While “the liturgy is not an end in itself (but) is only a means and expression of a life together in Christ,”²²⁷ our inability to live the interconnection “between faith, liturgy, and moral life is to run the risk of turning the liturgy into an idol; that is, making the liturgy itself the object of our worship, rather than the Triune God who is drawing us into his own divine life.”²²⁸

Furthermore, in Louis-Marie Chauvet’s book *Symbol and Sacrament*, he argues, “liturgy is the middle term between Scripture as the expression of Christian faith and the ethical life of Christians.”²²⁹ Thus, for Chauvet, in Baldovin’s view, “a stable Christian life rests on a tripod consisting of Scripture, Sacrament, and Ethics.”²³⁰ The Sacrament, for Chauvet is

... the symbolic place of the on-going transition between Scripture and Ethics, from the letter to the body. The liturgy is the powerful pedagogy where we learn to consent to the presence of the absence of God, who obliges us to give him a body in the world, thereby giving the sacraments their plenitude in the ‘liturgy of the neighbor’ and giving the ritual memory of Jesus its plenitude in our existential memory.²³¹

There is, thus, the distinct, coherent, and interrelated elements of “Christ-in-the-Scriptures,” “Christ-in-the-Sacraments,” and “Christ-in-the-brothers-and-sisters” that

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 55-56.

²²⁷ Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today*, 2nd revised ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 342.

²²⁸ John F. Baldovin, S.J., “Is the Liturgy Hitting its Target?” 460.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 459.

²³⁰ *Ibid.* For further readings see Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 178-9, wherein he explains Scriptures as referring to “everything pertaining to the understanding of revelation.” He identifies “everything that has to do with the celebration of the Triune God in the liturgy” as Sacrament. Ethics, for him, “includes every kind of action Christians perform in the world insofar as this is a testimony given to the gospel of the Crucified-Risen One.”

²³¹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Re-interpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan, S.J. and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 265.

form the foundation of a true Christian life.²³² Hence, Christian life rests on the dynamic flow from the written memory (Scriptures) to the ritual memory (Sacraments) and to the existential memory (ethics). In other words, there is a back and forth dynamic movement from the Word of God inscribed in Scriptures that flows into the ritual Sacraments and must be inscribed and verified in the life of Christians.

Moreover, what Chauvet calls “the tripod of Christian identity” is made manifest in the liturgy by means of what he calls *symbolic exchange* that is beyond commercial and utilitarian terms but a gift that is gracious. In the Eucharist for example, the structure of Gift-Reception-Return Gift (symbolic exchange) is intricately bodied forth. The *gift* of Scripture, which is the “Christian reading of the Bible,” is centered in Jesus Christ and the instituting event of the Church’s Eucharist. The *reception of the gift* is identified as ‘Sacrament’ and is represented by the reception of the *sacramental body* as God’s gift to be received “under the mode of oblation or thanksgiving.” The *return-gift* of becoming in reality the body and blood of Christ, signified by the communion in the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ, is identified as *ethics*.²³³

Similarly, in Baptism, we receive the gift of becoming children of God through our immersion into the water of rebirth and regeneration. The return gift of our oblation and thanksgiving to God for His gracious gift of making us and of regenerating us as his own children in Christ is ethically lived by our effort to become truly children of God.

All these are profound bases why BEC members must participate dynamically in liturgical, developmental, and liberational aspects of BEC life. Similarly, the above are telling us that BEC life must be firmly founded on Scriptures, celebrated in the

²³² *Ibid.*, 175-6.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 278-79. For further readings see Chauvet’s *Symbol and Sacrament* pages 278-80.

sacraments and lived out (ethics). Ultimately, “the touchstone of our liturgy is whether or not it is being lived out”²³⁴ communally and personally and embracing dynamically the elements of faith, liturgy, and moral life. For this to happen, BECs in Bontoc-Lagawe must constantly make Scriptures, embodied in sacramental celebrations, become alive in their Christian life as they strive to give the sacraments their fruition in the service of all creatures. They should, furthermore, give the liturgical anamnesis of Jesus its fullness in their everyday ethical commemoration. In short, the Christian life of BECs must be constantly and dynamically rooted upon the interlocking elements of Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics. All these elements of integral Christian spirituality—liturgical-developmental-liberational, scripture-sacraments-ethics, gift-reception-return gift, faith-liturgy-moral life—can be incorporated in the instructions within the RCIA, particularly in the mystagogy.

3. Transformation from a westernized church to an inculturated church

The transformation from a westernized church to an inculturated church means, for the Philippines, the crafting of a Filipino spirituality that embodies “the heart and soul of the Filipino people, their Spirit and character as a nation.”²³⁵ To achieve this, the inculturation process must seriously “look into human experience, social location, particular cultures, and social change(s) in those cultures.”²³⁶ This is so because the Church acknowledges that in peoples’ cultures God is secretly present (AG 9), the “*semina Verbi*” (AG 9) already exists, and the *vestigia Trinitatis* are also discernible in

²³⁴ John Baldovin, 459.

²³⁵ Manuel G. Gabriel, “Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Philippines: Some Missiological Challenges,” *Landas* 18 vol. 2 (2004): 285.

²³⁶ Stephen Beavans, SVD, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 15.

the web of God's creation, historical occurrences, and culture.²³⁷ BECs, therefore, "must promote the inculturation of the gospel because, ultimately, God promotes the inculturation of the gospel."²³⁸ Thus, it is the primary aim of the "acculturative task," Claver suggests, "to first discover those seeds—basic values like love, justice, kindness, mercy compassion, family, and so forth—and let them be perfected by the values of faith, not remaining simple seeds but blossoming out into real and living manifestations of the values of the gospel."²³⁹ Inculturation calls faith and culture to a dialogue of mutual enrichment, mutual critique, mutual transformation, and a process of continuous conversion. This dialogue is between the Spirit, who offers the gift of faith, and the local community, who are bearers of God's gift of culture.²⁴⁰ The purpose of this dialogue is to "integrate and synthesize faith and culture into a living whole."²⁴¹

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) beautifully puts the inculturation process into the context of evangelization when it points out that "our task of evangelization ... is the building up of a truly local church." A local Church is the actualization and embodiment of the body of Christ among a particular people, place and time. It is "a Church incarnate in a people" and, thus, an indigenous and inculturated Church. Nevertheless, in its particularity and being local, it is uniquely and beautifully in communion with the universal Church. The local Church, FABC continues, engages in constant "humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions"—the peoples' life-realities, including their meanings, values, aspirations,

²³⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 302-303.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

²³⁹ Francisco Claver, 132.

²⁴⁰ Francisco Claver, S.J., "Inculturation as Dialogue," *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 101.

²⁴¹ Claver, 132.

thoughts, language, songs and artistry. It assumes even the imperfections and fragilities of a people in order that they may be restored in Jesus Christ who took the frailties of human condition, except sin, and made them whole through his paschal mystery.²⁴²

Basic Ecclesial Communities have crucial roles in the on-going dialogue between faith and culture that results to the incarnation of the faith into a particular people, place, and time. Maria Fe Mendoza, R.G.S., in her articulation of the mission of BECs, emphasized that the “inculturation of the faith...communicated in Scriptures, tradition, liturgy, doctrine, and others, will truly have taken place when there results a transformation of culture beginning in the domestic church, which is the family and in the BEC.”²⁴³ Even the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippine’s (CBCP) “Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture” affirms the crucial role of BECs as vehicles in the inculturation process. The well-established BECs, the CBCP claims, already embody most of the trademarks of what inculturation is all about. In particular, the endeavor of communally integrating faith and life manifests itself in the BECs by the efforts of the laity and clergy to respond to many social problems by a thorough “analysis of the situation and prayerful reflection that accompanies every community decision and action.” BECs, therefore, despite their smallness, “are nonetheless living models of how the larger Church should go if it is to go at all in the direction of fully inculturating her faith.”²⁴⁴

²⁴² Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), First Plenary Assembly, *Final Statement*, §§9-19; Quoted in CBCP’s *Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture*, *Landas* vol. 13. no. 1 (1999): 22.

²⁴³ Maria Fe Mendoza, R.G.S., “Formation of Basic Ecclesial Community as an Authentic Community,” *Landas* vol. 18 no. 2 (2004): 281.

²⁴⁴ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Exhortation on the Philippine Culture,” *Landas* vol. 13, no. 1 (1999): 34.

In terms of liturgical inculturation, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (# 65) prescribes the adaptation of elements of initiation rites currently used by people into the Christian rite in mission areas. Similarly, the RCIA requires the proper adaptation of its rites and processes in view of the “needs and demands of the community and the candidates” and in order for the rite to express genuinely the candidates’ conversion experiences (RCIA # 32-35).²⁴⁵ Both church documents prescribe the inculturation or adaptation of initiation rites to cater to the conversion needs of a local community. The challenge in Bontoc-Lagawe is precisely how to integrate the faith, specially the sacraments of initiation, into a local people’s core cultural elements of “thinking, believing, symboling and valuing.”²⁴⁶ It is, therefore, important for the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe to constantly become YEAST for inculturating the faith into the manifold contexts of its people so that Bishop Claver’s pioneering vision of building a truly local church in and of Bontoc-Lagawe will continue. Hence, the theology and implementation of the RCIA harmonizes with these BEC goals and strategies for an inculturated church.

Inculturation must be a “prophetic dialogue” between faith and culture. The synthesis of doing mission today, Bevans and Schroeder claims, is prophetic dialogue. Dialogue is one of the operative values in Bontoc-Lagawe, which seems to be limited in terms of dialogue between hierarchy and laity, between communities, between community members, between BEC members and non-members and between faith and culture. This notion of dialogue can be deepened and expanded by the concept of prophetic dialogue as the mode of understanding and doing mission today. “Mission is dialogue,” they further claim, because “it takes people where they are; it is open to their

²⁴⁵ Lawrence Mick, *Renewing the Church as an Initiating Assembly*, 12-13.

²⁴⁶ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Exhortation on the Philippine Culture,” 9.

traditions, culture and experience; it recognizes the validity of their own religious existence and the integrity of their own religious ends.”²⁴⁷ More importantly, Christian mission is also partaking in the Trinity’s dialogical life and mission.²⁴⁸ And so, the reason why we engage in dialogue is because the Trinity is dialogic in nature. In Bontoc-Lagawe for example, in addition to the above-mentioned modes of dialogue, mission means dialogue with the poor, indigenous peoples, and members of other Christian churches. But dialogue must be prophetic because it summons people to conversion towards the dialogical communion of the Trinity. Mission as prophetic dialogue

“... needs to share in the life of the poor ...and speak out against what keeps them that way; it needs to appreciate and critique human culture and guard it against any encroaching leveling of cultural differences; and it needs to engage the truth of other religions while maintaining the conviction that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6).²⁴⁹

Most importantly, the dynamics of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery and its manifestation at Pentecost, taken together in their interrelationship, must always guide the inculturation process. First, it is the inter-penetration and interaction between the divine and human in Jesus that specifies the foundation of understanding the correlation between faith and culture. It is also the Incarnation that tells us of the need for the faith to truly make its home in people’s entire web of life. The pattern of the death-resurrection prescribes that in the mutual interaction between culture and faith, there occurs, in both, a progressive death of whatever death dealing, anti-Christ, and anti-Kingdom elements. In that way, an ever-new life of faith and culture that is Christ like, Gospel fulfilling and manifesting God’s Kingdom will continually grow. There is thus a new creation, a Pentecost wherein both culture and faith become more fully the

²⁴⁷ Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, 285.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 349.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

“realization of the Kingdom of God and the explicit manifestation of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.”²⁵⁰ Therefore, mission today has to engage in the process of inculturation that is guided by the dynamics of Incarnation-Death-Resurrection-Pentecost and ultimately summons people to conversion to Jesus’ way, truth, and life.

4. Transformation from a dependent church to an evangelized and evangelizing church

The transformation from a dependent church to a self-reliant, evangelized-evangelizing, and even mission sending church means ultimately that BECs should not simply be evangelized but, most importantly, BEC members themselves become evangelized-evangelizers. In other words, BECs are not simply be ministered *to* by the diocese, parish, or other BECs but is itself ministering and evangelizing its own Christian community, as well as reaching out to other Christian and non-Christian communities, specially to the marginalized. This can only happen if we stop treating the lay faithful as mere objects and recipients of our banking-type mode of faith formation. Instead, lay people should be empowered to become active subjects of evangelization. Within an expanded vision of ministry, BECs can become seedbeds for the promotion of priestly, religious, and lay missionary vocations.

Empowering BECs to become independent can happen if dioceses and parishes, in relation to BECs, uphold the principle of subsidiarity, which demands that matters must be taken cared of by the least centralized proper authority. Only those tasks that cannot be efficiently done at a more proximate or local level should be passed over to higher or more predominant entity.²⁵¹ On the one hand, the diocese or parish must “adopt

²⁵⁰ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 30.

²⁵¹ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2013), 383.

(an) attitude of help (“*subsidium*”) ²⁵² and support for the promotion and development of BECs. The parish or diocese should likewise desist from everything that would obstruct the independence of BECs and support them to grow in creativity, autonomy, and self-responsibility. On the other hand, BECs must perform their functions without handing them over to the parish or diocese and not deny their dignity and essential place as a locus of church life.²⁵³ In this way, BECs though small, can contribute something of their own ingenuity and initiative to assist in evangelization. Thus, BECs maintain their “agency” as a living church and offer their gift to the whole church. In the context of the RCIA, this would mean empowering and allowing the maximum participation of people to get involved in the whole process. The above discussion concretizes Chauvet’s matrix of gift-reception-return gift in the BECs wherein the baptized, acknowledging their baptismal gift, contributes their initiative for the evangelizing mission of the Church.

The RCIA Theology and Practice Enlightening the Practices of the Sacraments of Initiation in Bontoc-Lagawe: Responding to the Challenges of Present Norms of Celebration

1. From a disintegrated to an interconnected celebration of the sacraments of initiation

The practice of celebrating the sacraments of initiation separately is contrary to what the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults prescribes. The RCIA highly recommends the celebration of the sacraments of initiation continuously in accordance with the ancient tradition of the Catholic Church, the intrinsic unity of the sacraments of initiation, the

²⁵² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Teachings of the Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 115.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

harmony of the Paschal Mystery, and the unity of the Trinity. These compelling reasons behind the continuous celebration of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist can help BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe to understand, appreciate, and celebrate better the initiation sacraments of the Church.

As already stated in the first chapter, Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist traditionally belongs together in one liturgical structure since these sacraments are sequentially interconnected. Hence, to detach and divorce these sacraments from each other makes it difficult to understand altogether their integrated meaning. The overall interconnection of their meanings is key here. Schmemmann expressed the matrix of the interconnected meanings of the initiation sacraments in this way:

In Baptism we are born again of water and the Spirit, and it is this birth which makes us open to the gift of the Holy Spirit that opens to us access to the Church, to Christ's table in his kingdom. We are baptized so that we may receive the Holy Spirit; we receive the Holy Spirit so that we may become living members of the Body of Christ, growing within the Church into the fullness of Christ's stature.²⁵⁴

We see above how these sacraments, although distinct from each other, are not separate, since the meaning of one is accomplished and enriched by the other. M. Johnson clarifies the mutual interconnection between Baptism and Eucharist by emphasizing that while “the Eucharist itself is both the culmination and *repeatable* portion of the rites of Christian Initiation,” we should not forget that our liturgical and sacramental base is Baptism.²⁵⁵ Baptism is “the watery Spirit-filled womb and tomb to which we are called to return time and time again to find a welcome place in our displaced lives.”²⁵⁶

Furthermore, K. Osborne points to the ritual interconnection between Baptism and Eucharist. The first of these ritual interconnections is the part of the Mass we call

²⁵⁴Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism*, 116.

²⁵⁵ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, rev. and expanded edition (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 451.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

today as the Liturgy of the Word that is also called “the Mass of the Catechumens” in view of the fact that Catechumens cannot, for the mean time, be part of the “Mass of the Eucharist.” Secondly, the creedal profession emerged from “the various baptismal liturgies of the Church in the first three centuries,” especially the triple profession of belief in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit that accompanies the triple immersion of the catechumens in the baptismal water. Third, the prayers of the faithful, too, are literally “prayers of the baptized” who are gathered together to share their “hopes and needs with one another and with the Lord.” Fourth, the prayer that accompanies the “asperges” or “sprinkling rite,” which is sometimes done before the liturgy of the Eucharist, connects the liturgical act to Baptism. Fifth, the presence of the font at the entrance of the Church reminds us too of the Eucharist-Baptism correlation. Sixth, the kiss of peace, which is customarily exchanged among the baptized, is not done to the catechumens. And lastly, the words, “Behold the Lamb of God,” etc. is actually taken from the baptismal chapter of John’s gospel. All these are telling us of the close ritual kinship between Baptism-Eucharist since that is how they were actually celebrated as part of the rite of initiation.²⁵⁷

Consequently, the practice of the reception of first Holy Communion prior to Confirmation is a distortion of the proper order as prescribed in the RCIA. It also causes the incongruous insertion of Confession/Reconciliation within the initiation sacraments. The sequence of the initiation rites entails that one has to be born of water and Spirit before joining the celebration and reception of Eucharist. This has to be reversed so that we can have a sound theology and practice of the sacraments of initiation in our vicariate.

²⁵⁷ Kenan Osborne, O.F.M., *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*, 226-7.

2. From a private, non-ecclesial and non-Eucharistic to an ecclesial and Eucharistic celebration of initiation

The celebration of the sacrament of Baptism in private and not within the assembly of the faithful or within the Eucharistic community is inconsistent with the RCIA's call for communal celebration of the sacraments of initiation. This follows that all the sacraments must normally be celebrated at least in the presence of some members of the Christian community. This is so because in the case of Baptism, the Christian community is the body and the people into whom the recipients of the sacraments are initiated. Thus, the Christian community is the initiating and welcoming assembly. In Confirmation, we are anointed to become members of the Spirit-filled Body of Christ in this world. And in the Eucharist we build up, celebrate and receive who and what we are as Body of Christ because of our Baptism.

In this connection, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* emphasized,

[L]iturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the "sacrament of unity," namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it; but they concern the individual members of the Church in different ways, according to their differing rank, office, and actual participation.²⁵⁸

Thus, "Vatican II teaches that the *ecclesia*, or this organically structured body that is the church, is the subject of liturgical acts."²⁵⁹ But even before acting as the subject of a liturgical celebration, the gathering in Christ's name and memory is the "Christians' primary mark ... the 'fundamental sacrament' of the risen Christ."²⁶⁰ Thus, "the decisive ... sign of the celebration of faith is the assembly of the community itself" more

²⁵⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §26.

²⁵⁹ Yves Congar, *At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar*, trans. and ed. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2010), 16.

²⁶⁰ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), 34.

specifically called the liturgical assembly, followed by the liturgical actions/sacraments.²⁶¹ The utmost importance of the liturgical assembly, as the primary and fundamental sacrament of Christ's presence and acting as the subject of liturgical actions that are celebrations of the *ecclesia*, decisively entail the indispensable presence of the Christian community in every liturgical celebration. This also implies that the liturgy of the church is celebrated with each member of the body having a role to play, as a norm wherever and whenever a gathering is convoked in the name of the risen Christ and in his memory.

The ecclesial nature of the liturgy is emphasized in the RCIA's introduction as it asserts, "the initiation of catechumens ... takes place within the community of the faithful." The Christian community's presence is significant as it joins the catechumens in reflecting on the meaning of the paschal mystery, renew their own conversion, and provide an example to help the catechumens in generously obeying the Holy Spirit (RCIA, # 4).²⁶² Additionally, the RCIA # 9, in reference to the Christian Initiation's General Introduction # 7, emphasized that it is the duty of the community of the baptized to initiate adults.²⁶³ Thus, during the whole initiation process, from the pre-catechumenate up to the period of mystagogy or postbaptismal catechesis, the entire local Christian community must aid the candidates and the catechumens.²⁶⁴

In the absence of the assembly, as is the case of private, non-communal and non-Eucharistic celebration of the sacraments, ecclesial sacramentality – the church as the

²⁶¹ Klemens Richter, *The Meaning of the Sacramental Symbols: Answer to Today's Questions*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 37.

²⁶² International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 3.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

foundational manifestation of God’s presence – is dimmed and the communal nature of worship is weakened. For the sacrament of Baptism in particular, the private celebration eclipses the role of the assembly as the initiating body and welcoming community. To maximize the benefits from the liturgical rites, which are “the churches’ public, repeated rehearsals of its deepest identity, unity, values, convictions, and meanings,”²⁶⁵ the greatest number of the baptized must participate in liturgical rites. The repeated presence of the assembly during liturgical rites will surely serve as an opportunity for the baptized to renew and deepen their commitment to verify and inscribe in their existential memory the meanings and challenges of what they have celebrated and received.

Sacramental celebrations are not only communal and ecclesial, but also Eucharistic. The Fathers, Schmemmann argues, considered the “Eucharist as the ‘sacrament of all sacraments,’ the self-evident fulfillment of each of them.”²⁶⁶ The Eucharist is uniquely valued as “the sacrament of the Church” because in its celebration the church becomes what it is, reveals and realizes itself as the body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit and as the embodiment of God’s Kingdom in the world.²⁶⁷ This centrality of Eucharist is important because it is first of all a gathering – the Church embodying its unity with one another in Christ. And because this gathering manifests, realizes and makes visible the invisible unity in Christ, it is sacramental.²⁶⁸

In line with the above, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* stresses that the Eucharist, being the corporate act of the People of God in union with Christ, is central because it epitomizes God’s action of sanctifying the world in Christ and “the worship

²⁶⁵ Nathan Mitchell, “Ritual’s Roles and Risks,” in *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 59.

²⁶⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, 116.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

that the human race offers to the Father” through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist, throughout the liturgical year, likewise, memorializes and makes present the “mysteries of redemption.” All Christian life, therefore, flows dynamically from, ordered to, and destined to the Eucharist.²⁶⁹

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further clarifies the centrality of Eucharist and its relation to the other sacraments of initiation. “The Holy Eucharist,” it declares, “completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord’s own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.”²⁷⁰ The *CCC* noticeably puts Confirmation before Eucharist. Moreover, the *CCC* also made explicit the centrality of the Eucharist as

the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up to the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.²⁷¹

We can therefore speak of a two-fold interconnection of Baptism-Eucharist as articulated by Kenan Osborne. The water bath flows into Eucharistic fellowship and, retrospectively, we reassert our baptismal vows in every Eucharist. Moreover, Baptism as sacrament of faith is celebrated in the Eucharist as the ‘mystery of faith.’²⁷² In a nutshell, while Baptism is celebrated and nourished in the Eucharist, the Eucharist points back to Baptism as its origin and foundation.

²⁶⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2011), 10.

²⁷⁰ United States Catholic Conference, Inc., English translation *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image, 1995), 368.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Kenan Osborne, 231.

The above articulations of the importance of the Eucharist suggest that the growing divorce of Baptism from Eucharist disfigures our full and holistic understanding of both sacraments. If Baptism is celebrated as an autonomous and independent sacrament, it does not transparently symbolize and communicate its meaning as the entry into the Church and the perpetual source of our life. Conversely, the estrangement of Eucharist apart from the other sacraments reduces it to the rank of “one service, one ‘means of grace’” and devalues its status as the sacrament of the Church.²⁷³

3. Bringing home the Sacraments of Initiation into the Lenten and Easter celebrations

The integration of the RCIA process in the celebration of Lent and Easter is not done in Bontoc-Lagawe. Historically, “during the ‘golden age’ of Christian liturgy,” Schmemmann reveals, Baptism was performed on the paschal night as an organic part of the great annual celebration of Easter.”²⁷⁴ In the fourth and fifth centuries, Maxwell A. Johnson also attests that the Church preferred to celebrate the Christian initiation rites at *Pascha* (Easter).²⁷⁵ Similarly, the Lenten season, the forty-days preparation period for Easter, became the crucial period for the concluding preparations of the elect. The practice of pre-paschal, forty-day period of preparation for candidates of Baptism, penitents, and the Christian community in general, known as ‘Lent’ that emerged after Nicea “represents a harmonizing and standardizing combination of different, primarily initiatory and penitential practices in early pre-Nicean Christianity.”²⁷⁶ Patrick Regan provides the meaning of Lent in relation to Easter when he wrote:

²⁷³ Schmemmann, 120.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷⁵ Maxwell A. Johnson, *The Rite of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, 201.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 217-18.

The purpose and character of Lent are entirely derived from the great festival for which it prepares. The Pasch is not only an annual celebration of the passion and passage of Christ, but it is for Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries the yearly reminder of their own incorporation into the Paschal event through Baptism. Consequently, the approach of the Pasch renews in the memory of all the faithful their commitment to live the new life of him who for their sake was crucified, buried, and raised. But it also accuses them of their failure to do so....²⁷⁷

Because of the integration of initiation during Lent and Easter, Christians of the past are aware that the annual Lenten and Easter celebrations are also their participation in the paschal mystery of Christ.

The integration of initiation into Lent, Easter Vigil and Easter is emphasized by the RCIA's introduction. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Study Edition, containing the complete text of the rite together with the additional rites approved for use in the dioceses of the USA, states that "the whole initiation must bear a markedly paschal character since, the initiation of Christians is the first sacramental sharing in Christ's dying and rising."²⁷⁸ It further specifies Lent as the proper period for purification and enlightenment and the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy should take place within the Easter season. The RCIA also stipulates that as a general rule the celebration of the rite of initiation takes place at the Easter vigil and the rite of election takes place on the First Sunday of Lent.²⁷⁹

The incorporation of the catechumenate during Lent and Easter through the RCIA helps bring back the centrality of Baptism and of the paschal mystery into the Christian memory of the baptized. The presence of candidates and catechumens undergoing the

²⁷⁷ Patrick Regan, "The Three Days and Forty Days," in Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year*, 129.

²⁷⁸ International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: complete text of the rite together with the additional rites approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America*, Study Edition (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 4.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

process of conversion and the different final preparations for Baptism during Lent and the reception of initiation at the Easter Vigil is important because the meanings and challenges of the liturgical seasons and the sacraments being celebrated are personified in them. The candidates for initiation also embody the gathered assembly and remind them of their initiation experiences. In them is the ritual enactment of what Lent and Easter mean and of what initiation is all about for the Christian community. The journey of the candidates and catechumens towards conversion, reception of initiation sacraments, and mystagogy, embody and mirrors the continuous call to conversion, the constant reminder and renewal of the meanings and challenges of the birth in water and Spirit, and the continual mystagogy that all the baptized have to undergo. In short, they (catechumens) are us (baptized). Therefore, the celebration of the RCIA in the midst of the community challenges the community to deepen its own conversion.²⁸⁰ Equally, the assembly's presence mirrors to the catechumens what it means to be Baptized, Confirmed, and to receive the Eucharist. The gathering, likewise, reflects and passes on to catechumens their identity and mission. These elements coalesce to produce meaningful experiences of conversion/repentance, death and resurrection, rebirth through water and Spirit, becoming part of the Body of Christ and God's people which the seasons of Lent and Easter and the sacraments of initiation aim to accomplish in the catechumens and to renew in the gathered assembly. Afterwards, the Christian community and the newly initiated journey together to become what they have celebrated and received.

4. From minimization to maximization of liturgical rites and symbols

²⁸⁰ Thomas H. Morris, *The RCIA Transforming the Church: A Resource for Pastoral Implementation* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 12.

Amazingly, in Bontoc-Lagawe, there is the prevalence of minimization of sacramental symbols and ritual actions of the sacraments of initiation. RCIA theology, however, is telling us that we have to celebrate the sacraments of initiation in the presence of the community, within the Eucharistic assembly, and within the celebrations of Lent and Easter so that the symbolic and ritual meanings of the celebrations may redound to the candidates and to the entire community. To achieve this, liturgical rites and symbols must become transparent and visible icons that lead the baptized to the spiritual reality they signify and lead them to fulfill their ethical demands.

The minimalism in the celebration of the sacraments consequently dims the capacity of the rituals and symbols to convey their meanings. This contributes to the fact that a lot of people today find Baptism, the other sacraments, and the whole Church and its rituals ‘irrelevant’ and incomprehensible. This results in people dropping out of the Church, who then go searching elsewhere for the spiritual food without which people cannot live.²⁸¹ In other words, “if millions of people, ‘validly’ baptized, have left the Church and still leave it, if Baptism seems to have no impact on them whatsoever, is it not ... because of our weakness, deficiencies, minimalism and nominalism, because of our constant betrayal of Baptism?”²⁸²

One crucial element in Baptism that is usually omitted in Bontoc-Lagawe is the Blessing of Water. This blessing speaks of “Creation, Fall and Redemption, Life and Death, Resurrection and Life Eternal: all the essential dimensions, the entire content of the Christian faith, are thus united and ‘held together’ in their inner interdependence and unity in this one symbol” of water. The omission of the blessing of water, therefore,

²⁸¹ Schmemman, 7.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 44-45.

dislocates and mutilates all the above essential elements. Its treatment as simply a “preliminary and optional ceremony aimed at producing the ‘matter of the sacrament’” is ironic. To make things worst, Baptism loses its primordial meaning “as cosmical, ecclesiological, and eschatological act: cosmical, because it is the sacrament of the New Creation; ecclesiological, because it is the sacrament of the Church; eschatological, because it is the sacrament of the Kingdom.”²⁸³

The omission of the blessing of water and the practice of simply sprinkling holy water, rather than immersion or pouring water on the candidates of Baptism, is actually part of the widespread attitude of reducing the sacraments to validity and, thus, to the minimum. This is dangerous as “it only makes a caricature of Christ’s teaching. For Christ came into this world not to perform ‘valid’ sacraments; He gave us valid sacraments so that we may fulfill ourselves as children of light and witnesses of the Kingdom.”²⁸⁴ Similarly, the devaluation of symbols in liturgical celebrations, like the baptismal font and the attitude of “‘getting-it-over with-fast,’ impoverishes the richness and symbolic nature of the celebration ... and ignores the eloquence with which the baptismal font and other liturgical symbols speak to the assembly.”²⁸⁵

All the preceding minimalistic attitudes and practices in relation to liturgical symbols and rituals results in what Nathan Mitchell termed as the “loss of symbolic intelligibility.” The meanings of symbols and rituals ceased to be heuristic because the perceiver cannot connect them to his/her own experience. As a result, symbols and rites fail to achieve their target of leading people towards their symbolic implications.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* 40.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁸⁵ Timoteo J.M. Ofrasio, S.J., “The Baptistery and the Baptismal Font: Symbolism and Pastoral Relevance,” *Landas* 6 (1992): 18.

Moreover, Mitchell also claims that the “gradual cerebralization” (talking rather than doing) of liturgical actions prompted the loss of their tactile dimension. Both the loss of ritual and symbolic intelligibility and the loss of their tactile elements can be the direct effect of the attitudes and practices of minimalism, nominalism and ‘getting-it-over-with-fast’ in liturgical celebrations.²⁸⁶

To remedy the above problems, Klemens Richter suggests that since God’s saving mystery encountered people in bodily form through Jesus, “the symbolic quality of the liturgy must touch all the senses.” He then cites the following examples: “the sense of smell in the use of incense; the sense of taste in the enjoyment of the gifts of bread and wine; the sense of touch in feeling the water in Baptism; the chrism in Confirmation; the oil and imposition of hands in the anointing of the sick, and embracing or shaking hands at the sign of peace,” just to name a few. These liturgical symbols expressed in their transparent, visible, tactile and bodily expressions will certainly lead to the better understanding of the sacred mystery that they symbolize.²⁸⁷

Richter further emphasized the significant task, as part of liturgical reform, of recovering the clarity of essential signs to promote the better understanding of the faith. He made mention of distorted signs that need to be remedied. This includes the bread of the Eucharist that should signify nourishment. But now it took the form of a thin piece of white plastic-looking wafer. Furthermore, the pouring of water on the baptized signifying the washing away of his/her sins is downgraded to some drops of water. These

²⁸⁶ Nathan Mitchell, “Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation,” in *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 72-73.

²⁸⁷ Klemens Richter, *The Meaning of the Sacramental Symbols: Answer to Today’s Questions*, 31.

symbols have to be reformed by the use of bread that embodies nourishment for Eucharist and the pouring of water or immersion into water in Baptism to signify washing.²⁸⁸

The pastoral situation often warrants a less effusive response, especially in case of a large number of candidates to be baptized. In the long run, however, such minimization of rites and symbols diminish the comprehension of their real meaning and significance. They might even be viewed as mere accessories that can be randomly omitted rather than essential ritual components integral to the sacraments. As a result, the assembly could scarcely mature in appreciating the liturgy “as an authentic expression of an individual’s and community’s life of faith.”²⁸⁹

In the absence of the baptismal font, for example, the image of the Church as womb into “which men (and women) are reborn through water and the Spirit” is not sacramentally revealed in baptismal rites.²⁹⁰ Similarly, “water as womb ... an archetypal image connected with the realms of mystery and darkness as well as the primary images of life giving and regeneration,” are lost.²⁹¹ As J. Daniélo declares, “the Church is the mother of the sons (and daughters) of God; it is through Baptism that she brings them forth The baptismal bath is the maternal womb in which the children of God are begotten and brought forth.”²⁹²

It is also important that the positioning of the font in relation to the lectern/Ambo and the altar during Baptism should reflect the fact that Baptism is the ritualization of the Word of God and that Baptism is nourished and fulfilled in the Eucharist. If Christian

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁸⁹ Timoteo J.M. Ofrasio, S.J., “The Baptistery and the Baptismal Font: Symbolism and Pastoral Relevance,” 18-19.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² J. Daniélo, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 37.

ritual symbols then can truly be “a way to regulate social life; to shape personal and corporate identity; to review and renew values; to express and transmit meaning in symbolic word and act and to preserve tradition” and to serve as “normative for participant’s belief (doctrine) and behavior (ethics),” they have to be transparent and visible.²⁹³ Symbols like water, font, oil, lectern, altar, bread, wine, etc. that are central to initiation sacraments must be explicitly noticeable and properly positioned so that the symbols whose meanings are more powerfully revealed in their interconnectedness will become opportunities for “*meeting* ... that draws us into the dynamic, hospitable, yet perilous space of God’s own life.”²⁹⁴

In relation to the liturgical symbols we are talking about in this section, the RCIA’s General Introduction to Christian Initiation stipulates that the “water used in baptism should be true water and, both for the sake of authentic sacramental symbolism and for hygienic reasons, should be pure and clean.” It also prescribes that the baptistery or the area that the baptismal font occupies “be reserved for the sacrament of Baptism and should be worthy to serve as the place where Christians are reborn in water and the Holy Spirit.” The baptistery should be placed in a location in the church where it can be visible to the faithful. Similarly, the “baptismal font, or the vessel ... on which the water is prepared for celebration of the sacrament ... should be spotlessly clean and of pleasing design.” Furthermore, in order to show more evidently the connection “between the sacrament of Baptism and the paschal mystery,” the water hallowed at the Easter Vigil should be used in Baptisms within the Easter time. Moreover, outside the season of Easter, it is appropriate that the water to be used in each Baptism be blessed within the

²⁹³ Nathan Mitchell, “Liturgy and the Social Sciences,” *American Essays in Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 25-26.

²⁹⁴ Nathan Mitchell, “Ritual’s Roles and Risks,” in *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments*, 59.

celebration itself so that “the words of blessing may explicitly express the mystery of salvation that the Church remembers and proclaims.” In addition, when the Easter season is over, “the Easter candle should be kept reverently in the baptistery” and be lighted for baptismal celebrations so that the candles for the recently baptized may be accessibly lighted from its fire.²⁹⁵

From the foregoing discussions, it is an imperative in Bontoc-Lagawe to restore the importance of the baptistery and font as liturgical symbols. These symbols must be properly adapted to different pastoral situations. Similarly, the use of flowing rather than stagnant water “to express more fully the sign value of the baptismal font as a spring of living water which provides eternal life to those who drink from and are immersed in it” is equally important.²⁹⁶ Liturgical rites such as the blessing of water and Baptism by immersion, “to bring out more fully the image of the baptizand being buried with Christ and rising with him to new life,”²⁹⁷ must be practiced as long as the pastoral situation allows. Pastoral situation should not be a reason to neglect the dignity of liturgical symbols and rites since they manifest the meaning and essence of the liturgical celebrations. To continuously mute the liturgical rites and symbols by our sloppiness, giving in to people’s desire to shorten liturgical rites, and getting-it-over-with-fast is tantamount to muting the capacity of liturgical celebrations to manifest the sacred mystery they signify and the response of faith they evoke on those who are celebrating them. A catechesis on these rites and symbols must accompany the restoration of their

²⁹⁵ International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, xvii.

²⁹⁶ Timoteo J.M. Ofrasio, S.J., “The Baptistery and the Baptismal Font: Symbolism and Pastoral Relevance,” 34.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

place and dignity to maximize the appreciation of their ritual and symbolic meanings in connection to their scriptural-sacramental-ethical dimensions.

5. From simply sacramentalized to evangelized-evangelizers

The last problem is the increasing number of people in Bontoc-Lagawe who are sacramentalized but not evangelized as manifested by their non-participation in the life and mission of the church. They only come to the church to receive the sacraments. Longer, more thorough, communal and more elaborate formation programs exemplified by the RCIA periods of pre-catechumenate, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment and post baptismal catechesis/mystagogy can surely help remedy the situation. In retrospect, I have pointed out that one reason for the call to revise the rites of Baptism, prior to Vatican II, was to avoid the scenario of people coming too rapidly for Baptism without an intense journey of conversion. The catechumenate, therefore, with its new context and model for sacramental catechesis, evangelization, conversion, the response of faith, and mission can surely aid in evangelizing incoming members of the community of disciples in the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe.

The RCIA and Ecology

In an age of unbridled environmental destruction and particularly the unprecedented onslaught on earth's waters, Mary McGann proposes that "the practice of Baptism" must commit us "in a compelling way to the waters of the planet and to solidarity with all who share them."²⁹⁸ These can be achieved in three interconnected affirmations of what Baptism should do. As McGann says,

²⁹⁸ Mary E. McGann, RSCJ, "Committed to Earth's Waters For Life," in *Drenched In Grace*, eds., Lizette Larson Miller and Walter Knowles (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Press, 2013),182.

Baptism pledges us to follow Jesus, who in his deep incarnation embraced the waters of the Earth in all its beauty and suffering, and in his resurrection claimed them as part of God’s redemptive future; the practice of Baptism forms us as the body of Christ—a theopolitical community with social and ecological responsibilities that flow from the gospel we embrace and the discipleship we undertake; and third, that Baptism calls us to cultivate four restorative virtues: social-equity, bioresponsibility, sustainability, and frugality.²⁹⁹

Also, Lisa Dahill suggests the reinstatement of the “early church’s practice of baptismal immersion into living water” that baptizes candidates “not only into the human body of Christ, but also into bodies of real water with their own public, political, and ecological life, and into the Body of God... the biosphere.”³⁰⁰

Furthermore, Peter McGrail sees the relevance of *Laudato Si* for RCIA catechesis and practice. He suggests the exploration of chapters 4 (“Integral Ecology”) and 6 (“Ecological Education and Spirituality”) for catechetical instruction during the journey of conversion. He also proposes that the mystagogy must include the reliance of humanity on “our Sister, Mother Earth” (# 1) for life’s sustenance. Such an inclusion makes us recognize our dependence to the same Earth for the material symbols that we use in initiating people as Christians—water, oil, bread and wine.³⁰¹ These are various possibilities to make the RCIA responsive to the environmental crisis of our time. It makes us realize that if we do not protect the Earth and its waters, there will come a time that we will not be able to celebrate using the symbols of water, oil, bread and wine because by their contamination they can no longer signify the sacred mystery or spiritual reality they symbolize.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ Lisa E. Dahill, “Living, Local, Wild Waters: Inter Baptismal Reality,” (22 September 2018), accessed January 11, 2019, <http://www.allcreation.org/home/waters>

³⁰¹ Peter McGrail, “Initiation and Ecology: Becoming A Christian in the Light of *Laudato Si*,” *Liturgy*, 31 no. 2 (2016): 55.

Likewise, a Trinitarian anthropology tells us that human life is interconnected with the whole web of God's creation that are also sharers in God's goodness and likeness. We already mentioned this earlier in this chapter when we pointed out that in creation, culture, and history; we can discern vestiges of the Trinity (Cf. 31). And so, we are meant to be in relationship not only with other humans but also with all of creation, which are also encompassed by the Trinity's work of continuing creation, redemption, and sanctification.

How Do We Implement the RCIA Process in Bontoc-Lagawe

After all has been said, the ultimate question now is how to implement the RCIA process in the pastoral situation of the Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe. It would be fitting to start by showing at the outset that the RCIA is in line with the Vision-Mission-Goal of the vicariate and, in fact, helps in their fulfillment. The following are the vicariate's Vision-Mission-Goal.

VISION: We the Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe, rooted in the Word of God, envision an evangelized, evangelizing and witnessing inculturated Basic Ecclesial Communities.

Mission: Inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Blessed Virgin Mary, we commit ourselves to the following:

1. To be faithful to the Word of God and live the life and mission of Jesus Christ through the YEAST Ministries;
2. To build and nurture vibrant BECs with formation, Word of God and Sacraments;
3. To support on-going YEAST formation and to enhance needed skills, knowledge, and values;
4. To practice the core values of dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility among the clergy, religious and laity in mutual collaboration;
5. To work with ecumenical spirit among other religious denomination;
6. To foster dialogue between culture and faith;
7. To be agents of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation;
8. To discern and respond in faith on life's problems and opportunities; and
9. To be responsible stewards and accountable in handling temporal goods.

Goal: To form, develop, and strengthen a sustainable program in the areas of Youth, Education, Altar, Social concerns, and Temporalities (YEAST).

Based on the above Vision-Mission-Goal, the primary reason for the integration of the RCIA in Bontoc-Lagawe during the seasons of Lent and Easter lies in its capacity to cater in the evangelization and conversion of people and empower them to become evangelized-evangelizers. The extensive RCIA formation stages from the periods of evangelization to Mystagogy can greatly help candidates of initiation to experience thorough evangelization and deeper conversion. Hence, the primary argument for giving the RCIA process a try is its promise of assisting to achieve Bontoc-Lagawe's vision of forming BEC members as evangelized-evangelizers.

The RCIA can also aid in the inculturation of liturgical celebrations in the BECs as it challenges Christian communities to adapt pertinent elements of indigenous initiation rites into the rite of Christian initiation. BECs, too, have to adapt the RCIA rites and processes vis-a-vis the contexts and conversion needs and demands of the Christian community and the candidates. Bontoc-Lagawe BECs are also challenged to integrate suitable cultural elements of their thinking, believing, symboling and valuing into the sacraments of initiation. All these when achieved will result to a meaningful conversion and initiation experiences.

The theology and implementation of the RCIA precisely harmonizes with Bontoc-Lagawe's vision of building inculturated BECs. It also upholds Bontoc-Lagawe's mission to foster dialogue between culture and faith, promotes the values of dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility among the clergy, religious and laity in mutual collaboration, furthers the mission to build and nurture vibrant BECs with formation,

Word of God and Sacraments and supports the on-going YEAST formation in order to enhance needed skills, knowledge, and values. Furthermore, the RCIA advances the vicariate's goal to form, develop, and strengthen a sustainable program in the YEAST ministries. The RCIA, can in fact, be a sustainable evangelization process especially in the areas of Education and Altar ministries. Hence, the RCIA theology and practice is well aligned with vision-mission-goal of the vicariate and helps in their achievement. The RCIA, therefore, should be integrated into the vision-mission-goal of the vicariate and the current BEC structures, programs and activities so that it can help revitalize the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe to engage in integral evangelization, inculturation, and provide a truly sustainable YEAST ministry program.

Basically, we will try to implement the RCIA's integrated celebration of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist for those adult BEC members and high school students who are not yet baptized. For those who are already baptized, but not yet confirmed and have not received first Holy Communion, we will have first the celebration of Confirmation followed by the reception of first Holy Communion. We can do this by requesting the bishop to lower the age of Confirmation to between seven and sixteen years old. We will also devise a mystagogy-type catechesis for those undergoing pre-marriage preparations that reminds them of what happened in their initiation into Church life through Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist and what all these mean in relation to their married vocation. This will hopefully deepen their evangelization and conversion that started during their pre-initiation catechetical formation. In short, we will recruit the unbaptized adults in both BECs and Catholic and public high schools to undergo the RCIA process. Thus, we

will be doing a school and BEC based RCIA groups and an RCIA Mystagogy approach for pre-marriage formation.

Furthermore, since the RCIA calls for the adaptation of the local people's cultural rites of initiation into the Christian initiation sacraments, it is important to ask BECs if they have existing cultural rites of initiation. In case, there are, the rites will be studied by the concerned BECs, together with their respective lay leaders and pastors. They will then communally discern if there are pertinent elements in their cultural rites of initiation that can be adapted into the Christian rites of initiation. Similarly, cultural practices of gathering and eating should also be studied for possible adaptation into the Eucharistic celebration. These inculturation processes are important so that people can truly feel that the initiation sacraments are their celebration because they are celebrated and expressed in their cultural rituals, values, beliefs, symbols, and meaning-making systems. This would hopefully bring more indigenous peoples to the Church as they experience that their faith can be expressed in some elements of their culture and their culture, when transformed, becomes part of liturgical celebrations.

In addition, the RCIA implementation also means the recovery and maximization of the more tactile, visible, and sensible dimensions of sacramental rituals and symbols. We will, therefore, encourage the restoration of baptismal fonts that are to be filled with (flowing) water, especially in the main churches of mission parishes. Even if fonts will not be built in the BEC chapels, the vessels to be used for Baptism such as pail, pitcher, and basin should be procured and be designed, decorated, and taken cared off as important symbols. In addition, we will have to emphasize the proper positioning of the Ambo, Altar and baptismal fonts to emphasize their symbolic and ritual interconnections.

The Education and Altar ministries should prepare appropriate catechesis on these ritual symbols for the appreciation of their ritual and symbolic import in connection to their scriptural-sacramental-ethical aspects.

The establishment of the RCIA also demands the revision of the catechetical program of the vicariate. The catechetical approach that simply teaches people about the parts of the sacraments, their matter, form, effect, character, and minister, and simply teaches people what to say and do in the sacramental celebrations have to be deepened. It has to focus more on the scriptural origins, meanings, relationships, and the ethical challenges of these ritual and symbolic elements of the sacraments. Chauvet's theology of the interrelationship of the tripod of Christian identity embodied in Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics and the schema of understanding the sacraments in terms of gift-reception-return-gift will be helpful in this endeavor.

The primary groundwork to be done would be the presentation of the theology and practice of the RCIA with the aim of convincing the vicariate, mission parishes and BECs to adapt it as part of its evangelization program particularly under the Education and Altar ministries. The Altar and Education ministry staff and I will be devising systematic ways of sharing to the clergy, religious, and lay people what the RCIA is all about in terms of its, history, theology, and practice. Much of the RCIA history, theology, and practice will be based on the contents of chapters two and three of this paper. This information on the RCIA can be done during the annual vicariate, parish, and BEC pastoral assemblies, respectively. Shorter modular inputs on the RCIA essentials can also be given during clergy and religious sisters' district and vicariate meetings and recollections. The first people, who are to be convinced about the plausibility of the

RCIA in the vicariate, should be the clergy and religious sisters. This intensive information drive with the goal of imparting how the RCIA theology and practice can enhance the sacramental and pastoral life of Bontoc-Lagawe can take a year or two.

In case some of the clergy are willing to try the RCIA process in their mission parishes and BECs, an RCIA workshop module will be prepared by the Education and Altar ministries of the vicariate and mission parishes for a more in-depth understanding of the RCIA. This workshop module must build on and improve the contents and processes of the catechetical and formation programs of the vicariate in relation to the sacraments of initiation. For this workshop, we could invite some clergy or pastoral workers, who have immersed themselves extensively with the RCIA process to share their experiential knowledge in relation to the sacraments of initiation. Since there is no established RCIA program in the Philippines, resource persons will be difficult to find. But we could seek the help of some foreign missionaries, working in the Philippines, who have prior pastoral experience on the RCIA. RCIA knowledge from books, videos, and testimonies of people will be interactively used for this formation program.

After extensive workshops on the theology and practice of the RCIA, we will try to convince six BECs in three mission parishes for an experimental use of the RCIA process. We will also try to choose from two schools among the vicariate Catholic high schools for a possible school-based RCIA program in close coordination with the faith formation teachers of each school. We will start with those BECs and schools who are willing to work together as initiating and welcoming assemblies in recruiting, forming, and accompanying adult candidates in their journey of evangelization, conversion, initiation, and mystagogy. Thenceforth, we will recruit interested BEC and school-based

volunteers who will work more closely with the parish and vicariate Education and Altar ministries for the implementation of the RCIA. Afterwards, we will train these volunteers to spearhead the recruitment of possible RCIA candidates in the BECs/schools and subsequently support them in their upcoming RCIA journey.

After a cycle of RCIA implementation, we will gather all those who worked for the RCIA process in both BECs and the selected Catholic high schools to assess and evaluate the light and shadows in the implementation of the process. This assessment and evaluation process will help us make some revisions or adjustments in the approaches and processes we previously used for a more pastorally responsive RCIA process. After two cycles of integrating the RCIA process in the Lenten and Easter seasons in the selected BECs and high schools, we will try to expand to other BECs and high schools. The continuous processes of recruitment, formation, celebration, evaluation, revision/adjustment, and another cycle of implementation and expansion will be constantly employed.

In the end, we will not be imposing the RCIA as a diocesan policy in relation to Christian Initiation. It must rather emerge from the desire of BECs for full and active participation in initiating and welcoming new members. Initially, we will be using the RCIA process commonly practiced in the parishes of the United State of America. We will, however, eventually come up with our own inculturated RCIA process that caters to the needs and circumstances of the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe. Thus, this formation to renew the sacraments of initiation processes holds the promise of promoting the vicariate's vision-mission-goal and renewing the evangelization-catechetical approaches and the sacramental celebrations of the vicariate.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have traversed the path of looking at how the RCIA theology and practice can provide a venue of transforming the Bontoc-Lagawe vicariate into a participative church with recognized lay ministries, that lives the faith communally, is engaged in total human salvation, that is inculturated, self-reliant and missionary. We have demonstrated how the RCIA theology and practice corrects the problematic liturgical practices in Bontoc-Lagawe. The RCIA achieves this by inspiring and supporting an integrated, ecclesial and Eucharistic celebration of the sacraments of initiation within the seasons of Lent and Easter, by maximizing/boosting liturgical rites and symbols, and by empowering the baptized to become evangelized-evangelizers. In both endeavors we have proven how the RCIA theology and practice can help in revitalizing the existing BEC structures and guides and enliven the liturgical practices of Bontoc-Lagawe towards a more participative, co-responsible, and dialogic/relational Body of Christ, People of God, and community of disciples. This RCIA promise of revitalizing the Bontoc-Lagawe BECs relies on how it can be practiced in the rough grounds of the Bontoc-Lagawe BECs and start spreading its renewing effects from the ground-up, from the BECs to the mission parishes and to the vicariate level.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This whole paper endeavored to demonstrate how the RCIA can provide new impetus for renewal for adult initiation processes and to empower the Bontoc-Lagawe Church's journey as community of disciples, as Basic Ecclesial Communities. This purpose is accomplished in three chapters. The first chapter explored the worldwide emergence of small Christian communities, especially in the third world. This phenomenon represents a rediscovery of the early church's small Christian community or house church and an emergence of a new way of being church born out of the struggles of Christian communities to live their faith in different contexts. These Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are manifestations of the spontaneous combustion of the Holy Spirit that renews and empowers the Christian communities to live the message of the Gospel in response to their ecclesial-social contexts. Furthermore, SCCs are the Church's most basic unit immersed in the rough grounds of Christian living and often described as church of, by, with, and for the poor. Ultimately, SCCs bring about a genuine *ecclesiogenesis*, giving birth to new ways of being church from the base, which revolves on the axis of the Word and the laity.

The emergence of small Christian communities in the Philippines, initially called Basic Christian Community (BCC), began through the work of Maryknoll Missionaries and some young diocesan clergy in the Prelature of Tagum. The organization of the faithful into BCCs for better participation in the parish (liturgical) life flourished through Vatican II's vision of communion and participation. This vision animated the creation of

the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) to promote the establishment of a BCC-type church by organizing both chapel-based and neighboring family groups into BCCs.

During the martial law years, the BCCs of MSPC, led by the secretariat and staff, were challenged to organize and empower the poor, deprived, and oppressed through education for justice, works of conscientization, structural analysis and preferential option for the poor. Unfortunately, the infiltration of the MSPC secretariat and staff with the leftist ideological and political force made some of them amenable to armed struggle as a last resort. As a result, the hierarchy of Mindanao-Sulu distanced themselves from the MSPC secretariat and staff. Subsequently, the 1983 MSPC V decided to change BCC into “Basic Ecclesial Community” (BEC) to emphasize the *ecclesiality* and non-attachment of Christian communities to any ideology. Whereas, the martial law experience broadened the BEC’s focus on participation in the liturgy to include participation in social issues, the environmental issues in Bukidnon and Zamboanga furthered BEC participation to the realm of environmental concerns. However, prior to the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), BEC life is heavily focused on liturgical activities and marginal efforts were exerted to address social and ecological concerns.

Inspired by Vatican II, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) stirred the renewal of the Philippine Catholic Church and endorsed the establishment of BECs. The PCP II visions of renewed integral evangelization, community of Christ’s disciples and Church of the poor are to be actualized in the BECs, which embodies a church of communion, participation and mission. These PCP II visions, promoting a new way of being church already flourishing in the BEC-type church, promotes an

ecclesiology from below, an ecclesiology of the local Church, and the development of common values and directions among people at the base.

We can describe these Philippine BECs as grassroot church communities that embody Vatican II's *communio* ecclesiology concretized through dialogic, participative, and co-responsible Church life. Such ecclesiology and values are, further, concretized in lay leadership, regular meetings, communal faith expressed in corporate worship and collective discernment-decision-planning-action-evaluation based on their life of faith and in response to ecclesial-social concerns. These BECs should be dynamically engaged in liturgical, developmental, and liberational aspects of ecclesial-social life for them to be agents of integral evangelization.

The first Montañosa Vicariate pastoral assembly introduced the BEC-type church that endeavored to transform the Montañosa Church into a more participatory Church by: empowering lay ministries, engaging in integral evangelization, communally living the faith, inculturating the faith, and enabling a self-reliant and mission sending church. Bontoc-Lagawe embraced the above transformative vision for a more participatory church and initially established a BEC-type church by forming the Worship, Education, Social action, Temporality, and Youth (WESTY) ministries. Moreover, as a concrete act of inculturation, WESTY was later changed into Youth, Education, Altar, Social action, and Temporality (YEAST). These ministries form the acronym YEAST, which is a biblical and indigenous image that highlights the primacy of ministering to the youth and the centrality of liturgical concerns. The organization, formation, and mobilization of the BEC-YEAST ministries are the priority aim of Bontoc-Lagawe's evangelizing mission. These BEC-YEAST ministries embodying, in pastoral structures, liturgical celebrations

and mission, a participatory, dialogic, and co-responsible church reflect the dynamic life of the Trinity, who is the foundation and wellspring of the BEC-YEAST ministries of Bontoc-Lagawe.

After twenty-six years of transforming the church of Bontoc-Lagawe into a BEC-type church, some important pastoral-liturgical renewals are still needed. These include equally empowering men and women lay leaders: to fully and communally participate in the liturgy and in liturgically ministering to the BECs, to live out the liturgy in the developmental and liberational aspects of ecclesial-social life, to adapt pertinent elements from indigenous rituals, values, meanings, and symbols into the liturgy, and finally, to empower the faithful to become evangelized-evangelizers. Likewise, there are also some challenging practices in the celebration of the sacraments (of initiation) that should be addressed. These challenging practices include the following: the disjointed celebration of the sacraments of initiation (for adults); the private and non-Eucharistic celebration of Baptism; the non-integration of the initiation sacraments within the Lenten and Easter celebrations; the prevailing minimalism in the celebration of the sacraments; and, lastly, the practice of receiving Holy Communion prior to Confirmation. All these liturgical challenges in the BECs can be addressed through the help of the RCIA theology and practice.

In chapter two, we looked at some dimensions of the history and theology of the sacraments of initiation. While we argued that the Baptism practiced by John the Baptist is the immediate origin of Baptism, we also acknowledged Jesus as the center of Baptism since his Baptism, in relation to his life, death, and resurrection, is the basis of Baptism's meaning. Thus, the New Testament predominantly interprets Baptism as new birth

through water and the Holy Spirit and union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

From the New Testament times up to the Patristic period, Baptisms were generally conferred on adults by immersing them into water while the minister invoked the name of Jesus or the Triune name, followed by anointing or by the laying on of hands. To this basic components of initiation, Tertullian (3rd century) speaks about the episcopal imposition of hands and invocation of the Holy Breath and the culmination of initiation rites in the Eucharist, where the newly baptized partook of the Body and Blood of Christ for the first time. Thus, Christian initiation during the Patristic period generally celebrates Baptism, episcopal invocation of the Holy Breath, and first Eucharistic Communion, continuously. This integrated rites of initiation sacraments reached its full development and widest use from the third to the fifth centuries.

However, when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire, the influx of those becoming Christians made it challenging to follow the rigorous process of adult initiation. Likewise, due to the expansion of dioceses and some bishops having imperial duties, they could hardly be present for adult initiation. And since most adults are already baptized, Baptism of children became common, with an added boost from Augustine's teaching on original sin. Primarily, requiring episcopal presidency over the laying on of hands and consignation with chrism led to the collapse of the initiation rites' unity and gave way to the emergence of Confirmation that eventually grew as a separate sacrament in the Latin Church. Consequently, the completion in the Eucharist of the baptismal incorporation and sealing also become disconnected and postponed. This non-integrated celebration of Christian initiation was sustained by the

Scholastics' disjointed theological understanding of the initiation sacraments. Similarly, both the Scholastics' decision to define, know, and determine the essence of the sacrament apart from its form and a non-ritual-based approach to sacramental theology exacerbated the theological breakdown of the unity of initiation's sacramental vision and experience. This trend is embodied and sustained by the Council of Trent, reformation theology, and Catholic counter-reformation theology up to 1962.

This non-integrated sacramental vision and experience of initiation is countered, from the 17th to 19th centuries, by the desires of missionaries, in parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe, to restore the catechumenate and renew the liturgy. These desires, further inspired by modern liturgical historical scholarship and the Liturgical Movement, heralded the 20th century longing to renew the Church's liturgy by a return to the pattern of worship in the early Church. One such liturgical renewal is Pope Pius XII's restoration of the Easter Vigil to Holy Saturday evening in 1951 that restored a paschal focus for Baptism.

The emergence of new ways of understanding the sacraments based on Christ as the primordial sacrament and the Church as fundamental sacrament led to a Christocentric-paschal mystery focused and ecclesial understanding of the sacraments. Hence, we encounter God, in the risen Christ, through the liturgical assembly, and in the celebration of the sacraments. This new way of understanding the sacraments is furthered by the ecclesiological images of the Mystical Body of Christ and People of God that establishes the baptized, who are incorporated in the Body of Christ and formed as People of God, as participants in Christ's mystery and his threefold office (Priest, Prophet, and King) and corporately acts as the chief subject of sacramental celebrations.

These new sacramental theology and ecclesiology may have furthered the clamor to reform adult initiation and influenced the RCIA's vigorous sacramental and ecclesiological vision.

The various clamors for the reform of both adult initiation and the Rite of Baptism for Children grew out of the dissatisfaction with the prevailing practice outlined in the pre-Vatican II *Ordo Baptismi Adultorum (OBA)*. As a result, the OBA was reformed through Vatican II documents such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Lumen Gentium* that prescribed the restoration, adaptation, and the process of the catechumenate through the 1972 Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). The RCIA, which serves as the 'norm' for Baptism and embodies a robust church vision imaged by the Body of Christ and People of God, is generally a rediscovery of the ancient Church's initiation patterns and practices. The RCIA process, similarly, concretizes the centrality of the liturgical assembly as a corporate agent in the initiation of catechumens and embodies the dynamics of a communal faith journey and communal conversion among the catechumens and candidates and in union with the entire assembly. In addition, RCIA theology emphasizes conversion as an essential element of initiation that is focused on being transformed to the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ. The RCIA is also a place for serious theology and ministry and service for the entire baptized people whose individual and communal ecclesial identity is clarified by the RCIA. Moreover, the RCIA integrates a threefold and gradual initiation process based on a Trinitarian foundation and values the role of the Holy Spirit in the process. The foregoing basic descriptions and theology of the RCIA altogether complement the development of Basic Ecclesial Communities.

In Chapter three, we demonstrated how the RCIA theology and practice can revitalize the Basic Ecclesial Communities of Bontoc-Lagawe in two ways. On the first part, we proved how the RCIA practice and theology caters to the fulfillment of the five transformative directions of Bontoc-Lagawe towards becoming a BEC-type Church. We discussed how the RCIA's Trinitarian dimension furthers the Trinitarian features of the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe, embodied in its pastoral values of dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility. Moreover, the RCIA's ecclesiology of the Body of Christ and People of God also provides Christological and ecclesiological foundations for the above-mentioned BEC values. Furthermore, the RCIA process concretizes the mutual collaboration in dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility among the clergy, religious and laity by their involvement in different ministries and services. More importantly, the RCIA advances the sacramentality of the liturgical assembly, the role of whole local Christian community as subjects, actively participating with the action of Christ, in the initiation process, the corporate nature of church worship and communal witnessing to the faith. All these RCIA features can transform Bontoc-Lagawe into a more relational/dialogic, participative, and co-responsible church.

We also envisioned an RCIA Mystagogy, emphasizing the need for the baptized to live an integral Christian spirituality that embraces the liturgical-developmental-liberational aspects and the scripture-sacraments-ethics, gift-reception-return gift, and faith-liturgy-moral life dynamics. Practicing these dynamic elements of integral Christian spirituality can intensify Bontoc-Lagawe BECs' engagement in integral evangelization. The RCIA process also promotes the transformation of Bontoc-Lagawe into an inculturated church because it stipulates the adaptation of the local peoples' cultural

initiation rites into the Christian rite of initiation. Finally, the RCIA's thorough evangelization-conversion processes that empower and involve the maximum participation of the baptized also transforms the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe to become evangelized-evangelizing communities.

On the second part, we showed how the RCIA theology and practice could correct the challenging practices in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in Bontoc-Lagawe and provide norms of liturgical celebration. First, the RCIA, in accord with ancient tradition, the inherent unity of the sacraments of initiation, the paschal mystery's harmony, and the triune God's unity, prescribes the continuous celebration of the sacraments of initiation. Second, the RCIA calls for the communal celebration of the sacraments of initiation since it emphasizes the ecclesial nature of the liturgy and the duty of the baptized to initiate adults. Similarly, it is fitting to generally celebrate, culminate, nourish and renew Baptism within the Eucharist. This is so since in the Eucharistic celebration, the church bodies forth, in the highest degree, the unity of the baptized with one another in Christ, celebrates the mystery of faith, nourishes and re-asserts its baptismal faith, the perpetual fountain of Christian life. The RCIA clearly favors the integration of the initiation rites into Lent and Easter because Lent and Easter makes the paschal mystery, which is first celebrated in Baptism, more central to Christian memory. Furthermore, the catechumens and candidates of initiation who are undergoing the processes of dying and rising in Christ with the community of the baptized embody this paschal mystery remembrance and re-echo its meaning and challenges to the assembly.

In connection to the above, we realized that the RCIA's celebration in the presence of the majority of the baptized, within the Eucharistic assembly, and within the

Lenten and Easter celebrations aim to make the symbols and rituals speak more eloquently of the sacred mysteries they signify and convey their meanings and challenges to the candidates and to the assembly. This maximization of symbols and rituals inherent in the RCIA corrects the various ritual and symbolic minimization in sacramental celebrations. Likewise, the proper positioning of liturgical symbols, to reveal their interconnectedness, fosters the intelligibility and effusive significance of ritual symbols. Lastly, the catechumenate, with its new context and model for sacramental catechesis, evangelization, conversion, the response of faith, and mission, can surely aid in evangelizing incoming members of the community of disciples in the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe to become evangelized-evangelizers.

In the context of the current ecological crisis, the celebration of the RCIA must commit and immerse the baptized into the planet's bodies of water and the whole ecological life, which is part of the Body of Christ into whom we are all made part of in Baptism. As baptized, we are bound to protect creation which sustains us and provides us with sacramental symbols like water, oil, bread, wine, etc. so that we can continue using these fruits of the earth to signify sacred mysteries that leads us in our *Pascha* from this earth to fullness of life with God.

Conclusion

We can generally conclude this whole paper by affirming that indeed, the implementation of RCIA theology and practice in Bontoc-Lagawe will revitalize the BECs of the vicariate. The RCIA, as we have seen, caters to the fulfillment of Bontoc-Lagawe's transformative directions, helps correct the challenging practices of the sacraments of initiation in the vicariate, and assists in the attainment of the vision-

mission-goal of Bontoc-Lagawe. While the BEC-type church primarily embodies pastoral-ecclesiological structures for a participative church, the RCIA affords a theology and practice that concretizes, in liturgical preparation, celebration and post-baptismal catechesis, how a participative church looks like. Thus, the BEC-type church and the RCIA theology and practice are partners in promoting a theology (ecclesiology, Christology, Trinitarian theology, sacramental theology, pastoral theology, and spirituality) and practice that fosters and embodies communion, participation, dialogue, and co-responsibility among the baptized in working together for integral evangelization.

Recommendations

In connection to this paper, I would recommend a further research on how to do inculturation of the RCIA in terms of adapting the symboling, valuing, and thinking of a local people and how to adapt pertinent cultural rites of initiation into the RCIA. On the one hand, an exploration on some theological and magisterial principles, with the help of sociological and anthropological guidelines, is imperative to guide the RCIA inculturation processes. On the other hand, a study on how BECs do the actual inculturation processes is also needed to learn from the best practices currently used. Additionally, a further inquiry on how to inculturate the celebration of the initiation sacraments vis-a-vis the current ecological concerns in Bontoc-Lagawe, such as water crisis, deforestation, illegal mining, forest fire, and improper garbage disposal, not only in the mystagogy but also in the preparation and celebration of the RCIA. This will particularly look into how the RCIA ritual and symbolic elements from the natural world can be highlighted to point to the importance of these natural elements in sustaining the

corporal and spiritual well being of creation. Looking at how the other churches, Roman Catholic or not, celebrate their rites in relation to ecological awareness and action in response to the ecological crisis can give important pointers on the above undertaking. Another important study is to look at how the Small Christian Community and RCIA processes intersect or co-exist and work together in renewing parishes in the United States of America. This would also include studying the lights and shadows of SCC and RCIA partnership so that in the implementation of the RCIA in the BECs of Bontoc-Lagawe, we may avoid whatever is not helpful and learn from the best practices.

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