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The Significance of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
for the Christian Initiation
of Handicapped Persons

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION.....1
Statement of the Problem.....4

Chapter

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....6
Preliminary Observations.....8
Examination of the R.C.I.A......15
The Catechumenate.....15
The Post-baptismal Catechesis.....22
Contemporary Understanding of Christian
Initiation.....30
Handicapped Persons and the R.C.I.A......35

Chapter

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....40

REFERENCES.....42

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council is an event which resides in the distant memory of many Christian people. In the minds of some it evokes images of nuns stepping out of long dress and veil into pant-suits overnight, the exodus of many men from the clerical state, and an overall de-structuralization of order and authority within the Church. For many, the decade and a half since the Council has been a period of intense turbulence and upheaval, and the longing for a return to normalcy recurs with ever increasing strength.

For others, the Council offered a breath of fresh air in the life of the Church. The call to "aggiornamento" lives afresh in the minds and hearts of many who, as a result of the Council, find themselves at the close of the period of reform and reformulation, and on the doorstep of renewal. Voices of the prophets and prophetesses ring clearly: those who have not taken to heart the task of reformation are ill-prepared to meet the challenge of renewal. For it is the challenge of renewal which still lies before us, and it appears that those who have resisted change and its concomitant uncertainty and turmoil will continue to do so. The Church is no closer to a period of normalcy or stabilization than it was five, ten, or fifteen years ago.

In the midst of growing concern over peripheral questions such as

the mode of dress of women religious, and the extraordinary ministrations of the eucharist, little emphasis or attention is given to certain major reforms that have occurred within the Church. Church populations are the same as the rest of society in many ways, and somehow we would rather let our time and energy be consumed by those concerns which can only be properly referred to as sensationalist. The ingredients that go into altar bread seem to be a matter of life and death; which segment of the praying community recites the great Doxology in the eucharistic liturgy is a source of growing tension; and the question regarding the correct manner of receiving the eucharist is a pressing issue in many Church circles. At the same time, the Council has produced significant reforms, and fundamental changes which await implementation. Some of these touch the very heart of the Church's life, and are obscured by the current chatter over incidental questions. It is, and always will be, the task of educated Christians who are imbued with the Sacred Scripture, history, and tradition of the Church to sift through the peripheral and insignificant questions and bring to greater clarity the questions which are meaningful, life-giving and sustaining.

The Church has so frequently turned its glance to Rome for immense and earth-shaking changes. Expecting an obscure, delayed and moribund response, we have been blinded to progressive reform and refreshing change when Rome invites us to it. This is what has happened in the case of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the publication of which provided the impetus for changing the practice of Christian

initiation. Liturgist R. A. Keifer (1976) comments:

As far as the liturgical books are concerned, that is precisely the change Rome has undertaken, reversing a thousand years of practices and attitudes. This change has gone unnoticed, virtually without comment, and with scarcely a word of dissent. Under the aegis of an ecumenical council, with the approval of the Roman see, and over the signature of the Roman pontiff, the primary rites of initiation (those for the baptism and confirmation of adults and the baptism of children) have been turned upside down and inside out, heralding a cry to begin a reform and renewal of the most radical sort.

(p. 138)

The Second Vatican Council gave impetus to the revision of the rite of baptism and prescribed that the long-forgotten catechumenate, a time of true religious formation, should be restored. This restoration was to be undertaken in such a way that the period of catechumenate might be highlighted by appropriate liturgical rites at significant times. In addition, the Council prescribed that the rite of initiation should be revised in light of the restored catechumenate. In observance of these prescriptions, the Congregation for Divine Worship prepared a new rite for the Christian initiation of adults, officially called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (referred to hereafter simply as R.C.I.A.). After approval by Paul VI, the Congregation published this rite on the feast of the Epiphany in 1972, and declared that it

would replace the rite of baptism which as then part of the Roman Ritual. The English translation of the text, referred to in this study was published two years later.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the term "initiation" is used comprehensively in this paper to cover all of those acts by which Christians are formed. These include the preliminary rites (exorcisms, exsufflations, anointings, and signings); the act of immersion into water (together with the profession of faith); the post-baptismal ceremonies (anointings, consignation, imposition of hands, etc.); and the baptismal eucharist. The disintegration of initiation refers to the separation of the various elements just outlined, one from another, so that the different sacramental moments became distinct sacraments estranged by sizeable periods of time. An example of this is the current tendency to defer first eucharist until the age of reason.

Statement of the Problem

The problem which this paper intends to deal with is the applicability of this new rite to the process of initiation of handicapped persons. Does this new rite mean anything at all to handicapped persons who are to be initiated into the Church, or to those who are concerned about the initiation of the handicapped person?

In order to face this problem squarely, it is first of all necessary to pursue a thorough examination of the R.C.I.A. This will be accomplished by means of an overall description of the rite's structure, outline and

rationale. After the examination of the rite, the catechumenate will be examined historically in order to determine how its vital role in the life of the Church was lost until quite recently. By such a historical examination, it is hoped that insight will be gleaned which might facilitate the catechumenate's proper restoration. Related to the period of catechumenate is that of the post-baptismal catechesis, or mystagogia, which will also be examined historically with a view towards determining its importance within the process of initiation. Next, the shifting understanding of Christian initiation will be highlighted. Three major dimensions of this new understanding will be illustrated: a) the re-integration of the three sacramental moments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist into one liturgical event; b) the overarching importance of the local Church community as the focus or locus of the initiatory process; c) the experiential nature of the initiatory process, especially during the catechumenate.

Finally, in light of the research and findings on Christian initiation, several conclusions will be drawn regarding the significance of the R.C.I.A. for the initiation of handicapped persons.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Preliminary Observations

At this point it is opportune to observe that Christian initiation refers to that process by which one becomes or is made a Christian. The concern is one of incorporating men and women into the life of the Church, and this through the sacramental and liturgical life of the community. It is a question of being introduced, accepted and affirmed in a group of people with whom one shares common ideals, visions, concerns, faith -- indeed his or her very life. Initiation is a process through which one must pass in order to belong to the community. It is a matter of being initiated into, and so belonging to the body of Jesus Christ alive in the Church. The question, then, becomes one of method: How does one become a member of the body? What must one do so that he/she can belong? How does the Church receive, accept, and affirm those whom God has chosen to be incorporated or initiated into the body of His Son Jesus?

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the word "initiation" was not a familiar one in Roman Catholic circles. Even today, people are unfamiliar with the language of initiation. In days past, one was baptized as an infant, received first eucharist sometime after first confession and later was confirmed. But to speak of initiation was extremely problematic because there was "so little to initiate people

into, and little or nothing to celebrate" (Keifer, 1976, p. 142).

But things are changing, and this is so largely because of the reforms prescribed by the Council, such as the one under present consideration.

Today there is increasing agreement that the sacraments of initiation - baptism, confirmation and eucharist - belong together, most appropriately during the Easter Vigil, whatever the age of the candidate. This point is extremely problematic largely because it is so new to the mind of the contemporary Church. Nonetheless, the threefold dimension of the one rite of initiation finds root in the earliest liturgical practice of the Church. "There is reason to believe that in Rome itself the primitive unity of Christian initiation was by and large substantially preserved until at least the twelfth century" (Mitchell, 1976, p. 54). Much of the current debate on the process of initiation ends in confusion and disagreement, yet most lines converge on this critical point: the three moments of the rite of initiation, once unified and synchronized, became disintegrated and disjoined one from another as the years of the early Church passed. What was once a single rite of initiation by baptism, confirmation and eucharist, came to be viewed as three separate and distinct sacraments. Furthermore, the natural sequence of the rite was broken by placing first penance before first eucharist, and putting off confirmation until well after first eucharist. What was considered normal sacramental sequence prior to the Second Vatican Council - baptism, penance, eucharist, confirmation - was far removed from the early initiatory practice of the Church and it is to this richness that the Church, through the directives of the

Council, urges us to return.

An Examination of the Rite

The R.C.I.A. prescribed by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in January of 1972 is the final step in the reformation of Roman Catholic initiation policy which has altered the baptism of infants and the practice of confirmation by bishops. The new rite is a text of 185 pages that, in addition to the complete rite of adult initiation, contains an abbreviated form of the same rite for use under extraordinary conditions, and a short form to be used in case of impending death. Also included are rites in preparation for confirmation and first eucharist for those baptized as infants but who did not receive substantial catechesis later; a form for children who were not baptized in infancy; and a form for admission into communion with the Roman Church for people who have already been baptized in a different communion.

This paper discusses only the complete rite of initiation contained in the first chapter of the R.C.I.A., as well as the paragraphs of the introduction regarding the complete rite of adult initiation. Aside from the fact that the entire text is far too long to be examined within these pages, it is fairly safe to assert that in the complete rite of adult initiation we have in toto the definitive articulation of what the Roman Catholic practice of initiation is to be. As a result, the rationale contained in the complete rite of adult initiation will be found in the other rites of the R.C.I.A. as well.

The importance of the new R.C.I.A. lies not as much in its rubrical

prescriptions as in its overall stance vis-a-vis the local and universal Church. It is only in a very minor way an exposition of ceremonial details. It primarily illustrates what the Church can be and become by continually renewing its process of initiation.

The complete rite of initiation of adults includes in addition to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist the rite of the catechumenate. An explanation of the various dimensions of the catechumenate is given before the actual text of the rite of the catechumenate. The explanation of these various dimensions is not only good, but vitally essential because the great majority of the initiation process pivots around the catechumenate. It is for this reason that the catechumenate will be examined at length in this study. In the text, the catechumenate is described not as a pedagogical or didactic undertaking as it was in the past. Rather, it is regarded as a liturgical and ecclesial dynamic within which "conversion therapy" (Kavanagh, 1978, p. 128) is carried on. Catechesis is concerned with conversion in Christ and with the process of striving to live accordingly, not only before, but after initiation as well. It is the period of the post-baptismal catechesis, or mystagogia which has as its direct aim the continuation of the process of conversion therapy after the sacraments of initiation have been received.

Far from being the responsibility of religious educators and priests alone, the initiation of catechumens occurs in the midst and with the support of the entire community of the faithful. That the process of Christian initiation takes place in a series of stages in the

midst of the community requires that these various stages or steps be given distinct liturgical forms. By this means, the catechumenate is no longer relegated to the classroom, but is given to the whole ecclesial community focusing upon the critical issues of conversion in faith and continuing renewal of life. Catechumens are no longer unknown inquirers at private educational classes but men and women already members of the ecclesial body whose faith-development and faith-living are of vital interest to the Church which comes together for the worship of the Father with Jesus, and through the Spirit.

What follows is a brief outline of the various components of the full rite with a short description of each.

Evangelization and Precatechumenate

While the rite of initiation begins with the admission of the candidate to the catechumenate, there are preparatory stages which are regarded as vitally important for what is to come after. These preliminary stages are called by various names to describe the period of inquiring and investigating on the part of the beginner. For the Church's part, this is a time of building up confidence and communication with the ones who are seeking, and spreading the good news by proclamation in word and, more importantly, deed. Through faith in action, the ecclesial community has not only called beginners to itself, but has taken on responsibility for them.

The Catechumenate

Since the historical development of the catechumenate will be treated at greater length later, only a brief consideration will be

given here.

Only what has been prescribed regarding the pre-catechumenate gives grounds for the document's assertion that the process of becoming a catechumen is of very great significance. For it presupposes that the candidates for admission to the catechumenate are already familiar with the essential elements of the faith, and have a desire to share the faith in prayerful relationship with God in Christ among the members of His body.

While not members of the faithful as yet, catechumens hold an all important place in the life of the Church, and offer a real example to the ecclesial community by evidencing in thier own lives the recurring need for conversion in Christ which is essential for the life of the whole Church. The document indicates that the catechumenate is to last for several years and is described as consisting of religious formation brought about through the appropriate means. The catechumen during this time should demonstrate not so much the intellectual mastery of concepts dealing with the faith, but rather, growth in the disposition of faith in Christ as a reality lived and celebrated in common which was already manifest when the beginner was admitted to the catechumenate (Kavanagh, 1976). Needless to say, this last mentioned observation is of singular importance in considering the question of the adaptability of the rite to the initiation of handicapped persons.

Period of Purification and Enlightenment

When it is clear that the catechumen is cooperating with grace

and disposing himself/herself to conversion of life, he or she may go through the process of election and begin preparation for the reception of the sacraments of initiation. The step of election or preparation is referred to as a period of enlightenment and purification, and is described as a time during which the catechumen should be imbued with the spirit of repentance and knowledge of Jesus. The period of election should take place during Lent, the liturgical season which has as its elan the preparation for the culmination of the Christian mysteries in the celebration of Christ's pasch during the Easter vigil.

The Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism, confirmation and eucharist together comprise the step by which the elected catechumens are admitted to full membership within the Church and consequently partake of the many blessings of the adopted children of God. The R.C.I.A. prescribes that this will take place in the context of the eucharistic liturgy of the Easter vigil. However, if the sacramental initiation takes place at another time of the year, the event should be imbued with the spirit of Easter. Within the Easter vigil, the sacraments of initiation are administered in the following manner. Just after the homily is delivered the elect, their godparents and the ministers go to the place of baptism where the presiding minister offers a few words of exhortation. Shortly thereafter, the litany of the saints is sung. Next, the following sequence is observed:

- Blessing of baptismal water
- Renunciation of evil
- Anointing with the oil of catechumens if this
has not been done already
- Profession of faith
- Baptism by immersion or infusion
- Anointing with chrism if confirmation is deferred for
some reason
- Clothing with a white garment
- Confirmation
- The paschal eucharist, beginning with the preparation of
the gifts.

Perhaps one of the most important developments in the new rite is the matter of the ministration of confirmation. The R.C.I.A. makes it quite clear that confirmation should occur immediately following baptism within the same liturgical event. The initiate is not to be baptized unless he or she is confirmed immediately thereafter, given that no extraordinary circumstances are present. The relationship between these two sacramental moments evidence the all-pervasive unity of the mystery of Christ's pasch in which He and the Spirit come with the Father upon those who are baptized.

The theological significance of what has been said regarding the relationship between baptism and confirmation is of such weight that one must ask how it can be construed as applicable only to adults and not to infants or children, especially if these are baptized during the eucharistic liturgy of the Easter vigil. If the theological point is

taken seriously, it seems undeniable that all who are accepted for baptism, regardless of their chronological age, must receive confirmation during the same liturgical celebration. It appears that this was the initiatory policy of the Roman Catholic Church prior to the early middle ages. It is still the discipline of the Orthodox Churches. Those who insist on deferring the confirmation of infants and children, more recently even until adolescence and well after first eucharist must consider the theological principle articulated clearly in the R.C.I.A. This principle would require the formulation of chronological age as a serious obstacle to the reception of confirmation. If such a formulation were accepted, it could be applied equally to the practice of baptism of infants. Age construed as a serious obstacle to the fruitful reception of confirmation would, by the same logic, posit a serious obstacle to the fruitful reception of baptism.

Period of Post-baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogia

Conversion in Christ does not come to a close with the reception of the sacraments of initiation. On the contrary, conversion becomes a communal concern every time the initiation process is relived in the presence of the people of God at prayer during the Easter vigil. The post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogia is illustrative of the principle of pedagogy which maintains that it is difficult to communicate meaningfully about key experiences with a person who has not shared the same experiences. Though the period of post-baptismal mystagogia is a dynamic which finds its root in the early Christian experience as we shall see in the course of this study, its meaning is as profound

as it ever was. The new rite prescribes that the Sunday liturgies of the Easter season should include instructions within the homily for the newly baptized, as well as for the entire community. It also suggests that the neophytes retain their special place in the community during this period. Sometime around Pentecost Sunday, some form of celebration should be held to mark the close of the period of mystagogia.

Historical Precedents

Catechumenate

In the course of this study it has already been pointed out that the catechumenate is of crucial significance in the life of the Church. It is not an over-exaggeration to suggest that without it, the whole process of initiation is impossible. Community is something of a gift, and it is clear that the focus for the reception of such a gracious gift as communitas is the catechumenate. For it is here in the Church nascent, the Church ever at birth, the Church in formation, that the newness and freshness of hearts open to sharing the good news of Jesus is found. It is in the catechumenate that the Church realizes itself as a body which waits, hopes, and ardently expects new life in and from the Christ. It is here that the Church is reborn and where the potential for future possibilities lies. If there is a lively hope in the future glory of the resurrected and triumphant body of Christ, it must be found planted in the womb of that body, the catechumenate.

Despite what has been said above, the catechumenate is little known in the life of the Church. In the few years since the promulgation

of the R.C.I.A., the catechumenate has not been restored to the mainstream of the Church's life, where it does indeed belong. For the contemporary Church, the catechumenate, catechesis and catechetics are words largely concerned with instruction, didactics and pedagogy. For many, the catechumenate is a period of instruction and teaching, during which the catechumen is viewed as one who should assimilate that which he or she is taught. It is knowledge-centered, insofar as knowledge is understood as conceptual, abstract and theoretical. Yet we have already seen that a renewed understanding of the catechumenate sees it as the focus where "conversion therapy" is carried on (Kavanagh, 1978, p. 128). It is life in Christ, not the assimilation of abstract principles, which is the "stuff" of the catechumenate. And it was life in Christ which was the end or purpose of the earliest catechumenate, not the intellectual assimilation of facts.

It is to the early Christian experience that we again must look to regain insight into the living catechumenate. This is accomplished by means of a historical examination of the role of the catechumenate in the early Church. By this process of historical examination, we shall see the richness of the early catechumenate, and its dissolution during the course of Christian history up until its proposed restoration in the 1972 R.C.I.A.

Focus: De Catechizandis Rudibus (Augustine, 1946). Regarding the early Christian initiation practice, all evidence indicates that the catechumenate held a central place in the life of the early Church. This period of religious formation is evidenced in the writings of Cyril of

Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, and in the writings of the layman Origen. All of these writers at one point or another give considerable attention to the question of the Christian nurture and formation of those to be initiated. We will focus now on the content and context of Augustine's De Catechizandis Rudibus which is the classic example of the early Church's understanding of the catechumenate, and one which was to shape the entire history of the catechumenate.

Context. Augustine's classic treatise on the nature of catechesis must not be viewed outside of the historical context within which it was written. It must not be forgotten that De Catechizandis Rudibus was written at a time when a process of initiation without a vibrant period of religious formation would have been unheard of. When catechists and religious educators used this classical instruction on catechesis as their model for a highly instructional, didactic mode of catechesis, they overlooked the vital and all important context within which it was delivered: the vibrant and living catechumenate. Overly systematic, instructional catechesis can never find its justification in Augustine's De Catechizandis Rudibus again, thanks to the advancement of historical theology and the rebirth in the study of the ancient Christian writers which has placed the writers of the early Church in their proper Sitz im Leben.

The text is divided into two parts: The first fourteen chapters contain the material and method of instruction. The second part contains two model catechetical sessions: one long, another short.

Augustine wrote the text in 405 A.D. at the request of Deogratias of Carthage who was at the time charged with the task of the religious formation of those to be initiated into the Church. Because of the reticence of Deogratias regarding the challenge of catechesis, Augustine encouraged him to be enthusiastic and loving, for it is by these two qualities that the catechist will move the beginner to assimilate the faith. For Augustine, the great emphasis is on the fact that even though the beginner is slow, lethargic, hesitant, even sleepy, it remains the responsibility of the catechist to educate the beginner through love, joy, and enthusiasm as well as good method. Augustine's focus is on those who have little or no knowledge of the Christian faith, those who are resistant, disinterested, and hard to teach. As a result, his insights are of inestimable value for those who are commissioned with the responsibility of providing for the religious formation of the same type of person today. Though this treatise does have a heavy instructional overtone, Augustine's main emphasis is on the need for personal conversion. It is not so much the assimilation of Christian facts, but the conversion of life which is at the heart of Christianity.

Augustine's instruction is directed to the rudes which normally means raw, unpolished, ignorant, or untaught. Our particular concern in this paper lies with the handicapped, physically and mentally. One, then, might wonder if the instruction under consideration does not offer invaluable insight regarding the instruction of these people, especially those of the latter group. But it must be kept in mind that there is a

a fair amount of agreement that "the term...has no reference whatever to the intellectual attainments and qualifications of the candidates" (Christopher, 1946, p. 4).

During the time of Augustine, there were four groups of beginners in the faith: accedentes, catechumens, elect and neophytes. It was to this first, most basic group whose members knew little or nothing of the faith, that this instruction was directed. Because Augustine used such a very simple, direct, unsophisticated approach, this instruction is so very helpful in the religious formation of the handicapped, especially mentally handicapped persons. For Augustine, nothing is taken for granted pedagogically. He was the first to utilize for religious instruction many sound principles of pedagogy and psychology as, for example, not to confuse the candidate with too much matter, but to explain a little, clearly and thoroughly and to adapt the instruction to the candidate's intelligence. He gives throughout an exhortation to meet the educational needs of his subjects, and urges that groups of people be distinguished so that differing needs might be met. It is because of his sensitivity to individual needs that Augustine is so helpful for those who work with the handicapped. Because he took so little for granted, assumed so little as given, and recommended the tailoring of each instruction to the needs of each beginner, his instruction is so helpful in the religious formation of handicapped persons. This, also, is the reason why "upon it are based almost all subsequent works on catechetics" (Christopher, 1946, p. 8). Also, this is the reason why it has been viewed as "sheer balm for those who deal with the very simple or the very young" (Stoyan, 1958), p. 18).

Content. Augustine's De Catechizandis Rudibus is based on the Sacred Scripture. His method is to offer a brief exposure to the Scripture which would then be expounded upon throughout the Christian's life in the liturgical celebrations of the Church. Within this framework, Augustine aims at communicating "the truths that are most necessary concerning the unity of the Catholic Church, temptations, and the Christian manner of living in view of the future judgement" (1946, p. 43) Regarding the beginner, Augustine also recommends that the catechists should rather "say much on his behalf to God, than say much to him about God" (Augustine, 1946, p. 43). In this way, the beginner would be more effected through prayer and example which are the true tools of the trade of the catechist.

Later Developments in the Catechumenate. In the centuries following Augustine, we witness the dissolution of the vibrant, lively catechumenate. In the period from the fifth through eighth centuries, there was a recasting of the whole concept of the catechumenate, and hence of religious formation. The challenge of expansion was again upon the Church and a simplicity of approach marked by brief and concise formulae succeeded the lively catechumenate. Formulae and compact instructional principles paved the way for the question-and-answer method of religious formation usually attributed to Alcuin of York in the ninth century, because of the work ascribed to him, Disputatia puerorum per interrogationes et responsiones, (1851). In this work we find the first clear evidence of the question-and-answer method. The question-and-answer, compact formula method grew in strength while the living and vibrant catechumenate fell comatose. The twelfth century

Elucidarium (1851) attributed to Honorius, (early twelfth century), set forth yet another variety of very simple questions and answer to the most complex of the Christian theological questions. Another method came about during this time which was based on Augustine's Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, (1845), which had as its aim the offering of easy, simple, clear and concise answers to the most profoundly complex theological questions. This method is best exemplified in the twelfth century Hugh of St. Victor's (d. 1142) De quinque septenis seu setpenariis (1854) which listed all of the teachings of the Catholic Church in groups of seven: seven capital sins, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc. This method may be a helpful mnemonic tool for the student of theology, but it is no substitute for the vital catechumenate.

The work of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74 A.D.) on this subject follows fairly much the same pattern (1939). The firm roots of a catechism for children are found in John Gerson's (1363-1420 A.D.) On Drawing the Little Ones to Christ (1706). But it is with Luther (1483-1546 A.D.), Bellarmine (1542-1621 A.D.), and Canisius (1521-97 A.D.) after him, that we find the catechism for children containing all of the doctrinal truths, questions and answers, completely devoid of any of scriptural base, and without reference to the liturgical life of the Church. Removed from any relationship to the praying community, the process of catechesis became formal and systematic. The catechism of Luther, (1871) with that of Bellarmine (1951) and Canisius (1933-36) was to set the tone of Christian religious formation for some four hundred years to come.

At the dawn of the Second Vatican Council, it became clear that the religious formation process was in need of a significant renewal. It

was obvious that there was a pressing demand to move away from moralizing, grouping everything in sevens, and analyzing the most profound religious concepts within the process of catechesis. The process was sufficiently distorted so that the only means of restoring religious formation to its proper position was to focus again on God's saving action in biblical times, made present to men and women in every age in joyful liturgical celebration. It is to this that the Church invites us in the proposed restoration of the catechumenate as recommended in the R.C.I.A.

The Post-baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogia

Keeping in mind that the mystagogia is the continuing formation of the neophytes in the faith and life of the Church, let us examine in detail the classic example of the mystagogia as exemplified in the Fourth Mystagogical Catechesis (1970) of Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 A.D.). In order to accomplish this, it is of great importance to see this sermon in its proper context. We shall then observe the process of initiation in the fourth century Church of Jerusalem. Our main concern, however, is directed to the method, content and style of Cyril's address. There is no more enlightening treatment of the mystagogia than Cyril's Mystagogical Catecheses (referred to henceforward as M.C.) In the fourth Mystagogical Catechesis, Cyril expounds upon the great mystery of the eucharist which the newly baptized have participated in and experienced for the first time.

Context. Cyril of Jerusalem was probably born about 313 A.D., that critical year in the history of the Church when the Emperor

Constantine, feeling an attraction to Christianity, granted Christians the right to practice their religion. The toleration soon developed into favor as the Emperor began to see in Christianity, rather than in non-Christian religions, the influence he needed to cement together his widespread and very divided subjects. Soon, in 325 A.D., he convened a council at Nicea in an effort to restore the unity which the followers of Arius threatened to destroy. Cyril grew up in this milieu, when the definition that the Son is consubstantial with the Father was opposed for many differing reasons by a wide variety of groups. Cyril attempted to steer a middle course in the midst of the controversy, but was driven out of Jerusalem by the members of the Arian sect.

Soon after the council at Nicea, Constantine decided to build a basilica in Jerusalem on what was traditionally held to be the site of the tomb where Jesus had been buried. While the foundations were being excavated, some find was made which was interpreted as miraculous proof that here indeed was the site of Jesus' passion. By the end of the century there had grown up the legend of the discovery of the true cross by Helena, the mother of the Emperor. A rock hill was discovered, which was identified as the hill of Calvary, as well as a tomb cut from rock which was taken to be that of Jesus.

It was here that Cyril preached his mystagogical sermons. They are usually dated about 348 A.D., only thirteen years after the dedication of the Basilica, and a few years before he was consecrated a bishop. Bishops sometimes delegated their catechetical duties to a priest.

Sometimes laymen, like Origen, fulfilled this function.

Even before the dedication of the Basilica in 335, pilgrims began to make journeys to the Holy Land. One such pilgrim, a woman named Aetheria from Spain or southern France, came to Jerusalem about the end of the fourth century. The detailed and lively account (Aetheria, 1948) that she wrote helps us to recapture the atmosphere of the Holy Week ceremonies celebrated on the location of the original events, and the enthusiasm of the new Christians as they applauded various points of the mystagogic catechetical sermons as they were preached.

Perhaps the chief source of interest in these sermons lies in Cyril's theology of the eucharist. The eucharist is a sacrifice of propitiation (M.C.5:8); it can be offered for the living and the dead (5:8,9); the bread and wine are "transformed" into the body and blood of Christ (4:6; 1:7; 5:7); the presence of Christ is brought about by the Epiclesis by which God the Father is asked to send down the Holy Spirit upon the offerings to transform them into the body and blood of Christ (1:7; 5:7); prayer in the presence of the body and blood of Christ has a special offering (5:9); each particle of the Host is precious as it is the body of Christ (5:21); the spiritual effect of Holy Communion is obtained through our bodies, which absorb Christ's body and blood (4:3).

What follows is an outline of the overall composition of the rite of initiation in Cyril's time. It is presented here, in context, because of the excellent view of the ancient initiation process which it offers.

The Ceremonies of Initiation

Preliminary Rites:

- Admission to the catechumenate;
- Preparation for baptism by:
 - scrutiny
 - lenten liturgy
 - instruction
 - lenten penance
 - confession of sin
 - pre-baptismal bath

Rites of Initiation:

- Opening (Apertio);
- Renunciation of the devil;
- Contract with Christ;
- First Anointing;
- Stripping;
- Second Anointing;
- Blessing of the Font;
- Baptism;
- Washing of the Feet;
- White Garment;
- Confirmation;
- The Kiss;
- The Lighting of the Candle;
- Entry into the Church Building;

For the first time the initiates enter the building

to attend the whole Mass, moving from the Baptistry
where the preceding ceremonies had taken place;
- Offering of Milk and Honey:

The initiates are offered two chalices, aside from the
chalice of wine; one with water and the other with a
mixture of milk and honey. The third chalice symbolized
Christ's flesh under three images:

promised land flowing with milk and honey;
baby-food on which the initiates feed;
and the sweetness of Christ's word.

At this point, the eucharistic liturgy proceeded in the following
manner. Despite different languages and local variations of rite, the
celebration of the eucharist of the fifth century conforms in essentials
to a common pattern.

* - The Offertory:

Cyril does not mention the Offertory in M.C.

Initiates did not bring gifts to the altar in the
offertory procession. Cf. Ambrose, In Ps. 118 Expos.,
Prologue, 2;

- The Lavabo:

Origin is Jewish. Cf. Ps. 26. Purity of heart is
needed by those who approach God;

- The Kiss of Peace:

The position varies. It is after the Lavabo for Cyril.
In it is the fulfillment of Jesus' command in Matt. 5:24;

* - Dialogue before the Eucharistic Prayer:

This is not mentioned in Cyril;

- The Eucharistic Prayer:

- preface and sanctus;

* - narration:

The absence of a Last Supper narrative from
Cyril's account is not decisive evidence that
his liturgy was without one;

- epiclesis:

For Cyril the change from bread and wine into
Body and Blood occurs here;

* - anamnesis:

This is implicit in Cyril's liturgy. One can
do no more than infer its existence;

* - prayer of offering:

There is no mention of this in Cyril's liturgy;

* - epiclesis over the people;

This is not mentioned in Cyril's liturgy;

- commemoration of the living and dead:

Cyril mentions prayers for peace among the
Churches, good government, those in need, and
twofold commemoration of the dead:

intercession of the saints;

prayer for the dead;

- Communion:

- Lord's prayer:

It is sometimes suggested that Cyril was the first to introduce this prayer into the liturgy;

* - breaking bread

There is no mention of this in Cyril's liturgy;

* - mixing of bread and wine

There is no mention of this in Cyril's liturgy;

- preparation for communion:

Here short ejaculatory- type prayers with suggested responses from the Psalms are said;

- reception of communion:

Initiates received the bread in the palm of the right hand, and the wine from the chalice held by the minister. The elements were not always consumed immediately, but applied to the senses first;

- post-communion:

A simple prayer of thanksgiving was said.

* Asterisks indicate where Cyril's liturgy differed from the more general pattern.

Content. The Mystagogical Sermons were preached shortly after the Christian's initiation into the Church community. After the process outlined above was complete, the homilies and instructions of the following weeks of Easter would expound upon the great mysteries of which the neophytes had recently partaken.

Perhaps the chief source of interest in the Mystagogical Catecheses of Cyril lies in his theology of the eucharist. Though traces of his eucharistic theology are found in the other Catecheses, the fourth catechesis is almost exclusively concerned with the Real Presence of Christ in the eucharist. The bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ (M.C. 4:6; 1:7; 5:7), thus transforming those who eat and drink His Body and Blood (M.C. 4:3).

Cyril justifies his explanation of the Real Presence by an exegetical exposition of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 11:23 ff. In this pericope, which is the earliest extant testimony on the institution of the eucharist pre-dating Mark's gospel by about eight years, Paul points out the abuses in the Corinthian's worship and sets forth his teaching on the eucharist. The Apostle recounts the Last Supper; it is a teaching that he learned from the primitive community which he offers as a corrective against the abuses of the Corinthian community.

Cyril, then, using this as a point of departure, develops his teaching on the Real Presence in nine chapters which, in contemporary terminology, would be better referred to as paragraphs because of their brevity. In paragraphs one through six Cyril explains his assertion that the bread and wine are truly changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. For Cyril, Paul's authority is recognized as sufficient for his own position. There is no room to doubt Paul who hands down the explicit words of Jesus as he received them from the earliest followers of Jesus. Also for verification, Cyril cites the miracle at Cana as an example of Christ's ability to change common elements. Cyril explains that Christ's Body

and Blood are given to the Church in the figure of bread and wine, and that the eucharist is not sarkophagia (the eating of flesh and drinking of blood common in the non-Christian cults). It is a spiritual food of the New Covenant prefigured by the loaves of proposition of the Old Covenant; a food which sanctifies both body and soul of the recipient. Faith, Cyril insists, is necessary to see in the bread and wine the Body and Blood of Christ.

In the seventh and eighth paragraphs, Cyril develops the theme of the prefigurements of the eucharist in the Old Testament. In paragraph nine he reiterates his understanding of the Real Presence in the eucharist based on the authority of Christ through the teaching of Paul.

In the preceding exposition, the context and content of Cyril of Jerusalem's fourth Mystagogical Catechesis has been examined. This exposition has indicated that the content of the mystagogia should be at once rich and simple. Cyril's unique contribution to the contemporary scene is the insight that the deepest mysteries of the faith can be explained with classical eloquence and unaffected simplicity. His focus in the mystagogical period is the eucharist; all else that he says is related to this most fundamental Christian mystery. The contemporary Church could profit immensely if it would prayerfully reflect on the method, style and content of Cyril of Jerusalem's Mystagogical Catecheses.

Contemporary Understanding of Christian Initiation

Contemporary understanding of the practice of Christian initiation has undergone a major shift as evidenced by the R.C.I.A. This shift is especially clear in three areas. Two very important studies: J.D.C. Fischer's (1965) Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West,

and Burkhardt Neunheuser's (1964) Baptism and Confirmation have been of extraordinary value in dealing with the various changes in the Church's practice of initiation. Since Fischer's book gives a fairly comprehensive account of how initiation changed in the medieval west, it is not necessary to reproduce his findings within the scope of this paper.

Kavanagh's (1978) Shape of Baptism and Mitchell's (1978) Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation offer very satisfying explanations of how and why the ancient tri-dimensional rite became dismembered and dislocated. Granted that the early Christian Church's initiation practice revolved around the three sacramental moments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist, how did the more "normal" practice of baptism-penance-eucharist-confirmation come into being? Mitchell (1976) attributes this change in practice to the "problem of accumulated symbolism" (p. 71). As the life of the Church advanced in years, this problem of accumulated symbolism emerged. Many symbolic acts clustered around a central axis: The paschal mystery of Jesus. Insofar as people are made aware through catechesis of how the various symbols in the ritual art are related, the rite can maintain its cohesiveness. But a group of accumulated symbols will begin to dismember if sufficient catechesis is not offered.

"The law of accumulated symbolism has done its work: the heavy symbolism of Christian initiation has, under the influence of declining catechesis and theological misunderstanding, forced the original architecture of the rite to collapse in separate and distinct sacraments with separate and distinct effects" (Mitchell, 1976, p. 72).

As previously noted, the understanding of initiation as one multi-dimensional rite rather than a long, drawn out series of sacraments conferred according to one's psychological development, is quite foreign to many minds in the Church. Nonetheless, theologians and teachers of the Church have recommended that the threefold sacramental rite of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist is truer to the earliest Christian tradition, and suggest it as normative initiatory practice for the Church. This marks the first major area in the shifting understanding of the Church's initiatory practice.

A second area is that of the Church as community. In the discussion thus far it has been mentioned frequently that initiation is a process of becoming a member of, or belonging to, the Church. The Church, then, is a key issue. "What one does about initiation will depend on one's theology of the Church, one's vision of the church" (Hovda, 1976, p. 153). While it is safe to say that prior to Vatican Council II there was relatively little said or written about the Church as a community, there is an ever-increasing awareness of its importance. But there is room for questioning whether such a phenomenon exists in fact. If the Church is not a community - why? If the Church is a community - how can it grow as such? At present, the Church does not appear to be the focus of a strong corporate identity. Rather, it appears as a transient and loosely associated structure which, like other structures, invites something less than avid enthusiasm and full commitment.

Prerequisite for the full implementation of the R.C.I.A. is a development of some consciousness of the Church as community. Prior to this task of developing community, the Church must raise the very

fundamental question regarding the desirability of such an experience of Church as community. The answer to that fundamental question may well be negative, in which case the successful implementation of the R.C.I.A. will be very difficult. However, if the answer is affirmative, the R.C.I.A. stands a chance of being implemented, and the Church stands a chance of recovering its true identity as the people of God. But, as it stands at present, it appears people can be partially assimilated into the Church, but they cannot be initiated. The reason is that the Church seems to function more as an aggregate than as a community.

"The Church is incapable of initiating because it is incapable of living and acting as a community of faith into which people can be initiated" (Keifer, 1976, p. 148). Church understood either as a sacred structure or as a hierarchical structure of those who give grace, and those who receive grace, is a Church without need of initiation.

A great deal of effort, and many years will be required before "church" again means "people of God," and not simply individuals with faith, but a shared faith in common life.

"That is, people who share prayer, who share problems of life, who share the exploration of Jesus' death-resurrection gospel, who share discipline, who share celebration, who share mission, and who therefore present a corporate and consensus moral and sign posture to the world" (Hovda, 1976, p. 160).

The Church will become what Hovda envisions only when at least a core group in each local Church decides that community is indeed a priority and commits itself to work toward its realization. Until this occurs, the

reality of the situation remains: There is nothing to initiate people into (Keifer, 1976).

A third area of this shifting understanding is a most important one. There is growing agreement that the initiation process is primarily experiential and only secondarily instructional. It is the responsibility of Christian catechists to find out in practice whether people can learn to pray together, whether they can share problems and questions and insights, whether they can undertake the discipline of a common church life, etc. A Church that attempts to do something to bring about regular initiation experience for its members each Easter will find itself in a position to uncover its identity as a community of faith in Christ. The Church will no longer be able to simply exhort its members to take their own stands on social, political and economic questions. Its shared life and prayer will bring its members together, and its common faith will prompt them to preach the gospel with their lives. The Church will speak to social questions as a body in light of the limits of its own vision, but with the brilliance of its own faith and Spirit.

The norm of pastoral care becomes, not the preservation of a faith already assumed to be present and nurtured mainly outside for formal structure of the liturgy, but the radical transformation of life and values publicly celebrated as a corporate responsibility (Keifer, 1976, p. 139).

The R.C.I.A. recommends that the process of catechesis is supposed to be one in which the whole local Church joins with the candidates in

gestures of shared life and mutual support. Lent and Easter annually call all to community and to experience a common beginning anew. However, if catechesis is understood as the assimilation of a body of facts, or the intellectual appropriation of a new concept, it can take place in a classroom, rectory parlor, or in one's own library. However, if catechesis is understood as an initiation into the principles of the life of a community of faith then more than intellectual assimilation is required, not simply desired. This area of experiential catechesis is of great importance for the implementation of the R.C.I.A. Through catechesis, the community is both built and passed on. The catechumenate is in a sense the Church in germ, and it is in the process of catechesis that the Church as community uncovers its true identity as the people of God.

Handicapped Persons and the R.C.I.A.

It is important to consider that at present there is a growing awareness of the rights of persons within society, culture and Church. This includes handicapped persons who, in years past, may have been barred from full initiation and participation in the life of the Church on the basis of their handicap. While persons with physical handicaps were often excluded from the fullness of life within the Church, those with mental handicaps were by far the more gravely victimized. Those with mental handicaps present far more of a threat, and instill a greater fear than do those with physical handicaps. Contemporary society is still marred with traces of inaccurate theories which attribute mental or emotional handicaps to a mysterious act of God (Hegeman, 1963), or to some suffering due to unforgivable sin committed in the past (Selle).

There is a repulsion and fear of persons with mental handicaps, a far greater threat than one would like to admit (Hegeman, 1963).

Be that as it may, the Church as the people of God is called to receive those persons who, under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, seek initiation into the Body. Handicapped persons are not to be prohibited from receiving the sacraments of initiation solely on the basis of their handicap. There is no documentation or literature which would warrant such a position. Nonetheless, there exists a bias, due to the fear which stems from ignorance, which still exists in the Church and prevents handicapped persons from full participation in the life of the Church.

In an attempt to refute this bias, it would be helpful to point out that rather than presenting greater challenges and obstacles to the initiation process as prescribed by the R.C.I.A., mentally handicapped persons have a sort of co-naturalness or congeniality with the new rite. This is eminently clear in at least four areas.

First, conversion, not intellectual ability is the "stuff" of Christian initiation. In all of what has been said thus far regarding the initiation process, it is evident that while in the past there was a heavily intellectual approach to the initiation process, the new rite focuses much more on the conversion of life, and personal assimilation into the body of Christ. The arguments used against admission of the mentally handicapped to the full participation in the life of the Church based on intellectual deficiency are defeated entirely by the rationale of the new rite which looks very skeptically at an overly intellectual grasp of the truths of the faith.

By returning to this conversion-centered view of initiation, the Church has moved away graciously from a real theological and pastoral hazard with which it struggled during the days of the conceptual, intellectual approach. With a focus on the worthiness of the subject for the sacramental initiation into the Church, demonstrated through the mastery of difficult formulae, theories and concepts, the perspective of the sacrament as the gracious gift of God was lost. And this is the very nature of a sacrament. Entirely lost was the view that the sacrament is given by God, through the Church, because of His own graciousness, regardless of the worthiness of the recipient. The move away from the intellectual approach recaptures this dimension, and includes within the scope of the Church's initiation discipline, those who daily demonstrate a continuing struggle for conversion in Christ but do not have the facility to evidence particular intellectual assimilation of facts.

The second area of importance is that of the catechumenate as a community of faith. The new rite places extraordinary emphasis on the catechumenate as the focus or locus of the building of a Christian community of faith. Without this primary building block of community, one might question if the initiation process is even intelligible, for the question is one of initiating people into something. While there are some difficulties which the handicapped present in community (Bissonier, 1967), they have a natural proclivity for community. Because of their love, simplicity and honesty, they know their need of others, of God, and have a great desire to love and be loved (Vanier, 1979). Again, there is no intention of underestimating the difficulties of

community. Yet, if it is accepted as a value to be hoped for and worked toward, then the Church could indeed learn well from those who know their need of others, of God, and have a great desire to give and to love. Again, then, the mentally handicapped seem to have a certain co-naturality with the high values of the R.C.I.A. Would that the Church at large knew its need for community with the same clarity.

The third point is strongly related to, and dependent upon, the second. If that period after sacramental initiation is seen as essential to the process of initiation, then one would do well to take a close look at the example of the mentally handicapped. Concomitant with their need for community is the need for a continuing source of strength and group support. The handicapped have a great need and desire for support, given and received in a sustained and on-going context. It would be grossly unfair to allow mentally handicapped persons to be initiated into the Church unless it accepts also the responsibility of providing for their continued and sustained nurture and support. Yet isn't this continued nurture and group support entirely what the new R.C.I.A. prescribes as normative in its treatment of the post-baptismal period called the mystagogia?

Fourthly, and finally, the new rite places great emphasis on the value of symbol in Christian initiation. Since the Second Vatican Council, much of the new theology of sacraments and liturgy has been concerned with symbol. Liturgy and sacramental life in general have undergone a shift from formulae, rubrics, and quick and hurried gestures, to a new focus of communication and meaning: Symbol. A more profound yet subtle category of meaning and communication, the world of symbol is at once

rich, complex, and utterly simple. Interestingly enough, the growing number of people who are exposed to the mentally handicapped "have been struck by the permeability of the even profoundly deficient for symbolism" (Bissanier, 1967, p. 53). While the world of concepts, ideas, and abstract principles communicated by highly technical words is beyond the grasp of most mentally handicapped persons, the world of symbol is very familiar to them.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding pages, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has been examined. By means of a thorough examination of the text itself, in light of historical precedents, three dimensions of the contemporary understanding of the meaning of Christian initiation have been illustrated. From an examination of the appropriate texts, it is clear that there is nothing which would warrant the exclusion of a person from the process of Christian initiation on the basis of his or her handicap. Rather than present serious obstacles to the process of initiation, handicapped persons have a certain co-naturality or congeniality with the elan of the rite in at least four areas.

When this study was first designed, its objective was to determine whether or not the R.C.I.A. is adaptable to the initiation of handicapped persons. There is no doubt that R.C.I.A. is adaptable. The rationale for making the assertion that the rite is adaptable to the initiation of handicapped persons is quite simple. Within the R.C.I.A. itself, in part IV of the introduction entitled "Adaptations by Episcopal Conferences which use the Roman ritual," adaptation is spoken of as something required, not simply desired. The authors recognize the limitations of the rite, and encourage the ministers to adapt the rite to meet the needs of the community. What, then, could possibly lead one to think that the rite could not be adapted to meet the needs of those with mental or physical handicaps?

But after careful consideration of the question of the significance

of the R.C.I.A. for the initiation of the handicapped persons one finds that its significance does not lie in the area of adaptability.

Based on the literature one is led to conclude that the significance of the R.C.I.A. for the initiation of handicapped persons lies in the faithful implementation of its most salient features.

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