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2019

**Fostering the Spiritual Practice of the Period of Purification and  
Enlightenment of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**

Claude Laterreur

FOSTERING THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE  
OF THE PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT  
OF THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

BY

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THESIS-PROJECT  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY  
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY  
AT BARRY UNIVERSITY

MIAMI SHORES

2019



## Acknowledgements

I wish to extend a heartfelt thank you to my family, that is, to my wife Lina, to my son Claudio and his wife Marisa, and to my younger son Ian and his wife Tina, for their unconditional support during the twelve years that it took first to complete an MA in Pastoral Theology and currently a Doctor of Ministry. Without their love and persistent encouragement, this "work of love" would not have been possible.

Thank you also to Fr. José-David Padilla, O.P., Director and Mentor, for his continued interest in this thesis-project and for his personal commitment to make of it a meaningful endeavor in spite of the numerous and concurrent demands placed on his available time.

Finally, nothing is more gratifying to me than to thank Fr. Gerald Austin, O.P. for his unwavering confidence in my abilities and for his silent but felt inspirational influence in bringing this thesis-project to completion.

## Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Shortcomings of a Period of Purification and Enlightenment	8
1. A failing ministerial situation	8
2. Significance of the current ministerial practice	12
3. Ministerial issues deserving consideration	15
4. Theological issues deserving consideration	17
5. A theological perspective on the Christian initiation process for adults	19
6. The adopted methodology for the development of the thesis-project	21
7. Research, scope, and limitations of the thesis-project	22
8. Conclusion	24
Chapter 2 : Attending to a Current Practice Relevant to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment	26
1. An overview of the current situation	26
2. A qualitative research involving RCIA participants	28
a) Focus group with current participants	28
b) Summary of the responses of the focus group	29
c) Survey with former RCIA participants	31
d) Summary of the responses of past participants	31
3. Interpreting the responses of both current and past participants	35

4. Qualitative research involving RCIA program directors	47
a) Interviews with RCIA program directors	47
b) Summary of the responses	47
c) Interpreting the responses	50
5. A cursory evaluation of the gathered comments	56
a) The essence of the comments	56
b) Conclusion	57
 Chapter 3: Situating the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in History	 58
1. A Christian initiation rooted in biblical accounts	58
2. Development of the catechumenate in the Patristic Era	65
3. The fall of the catechumenate	85
4. The catechumenate: a breath of life	94
5. Defining the restored catechumenate	102
6. The Period of Purification and Enlightenment	109
 Chapter 4: Purification, Enlightenment, Catechesis, and the "Word"	 121
1. A theology of purification	121
a) Defining purification	121
b) Purification in the Old Testament:	122
c) Purification in the New Testament:	127
2. A theology of enlightenment	133
a) Defining enlightenment	133
b) Enlightenment in the Old Testament:	134
c) Enlightenment in the New Testament:	138
3. The nature and meaning of The Period of Purification and Enlightenment	146
4. A misunderstanding of the faith formation process	154
5. A liturgy of the Word misunderstood	168
6. Conclusion	178

Chapter 5: An Analysis of Gospel Readings Relevant to the Study of the Third Period	180
1. Introduction	180
2. The origin of the choice of the gospel readings within the scrutinies	180
3. The intended meanings of the three gospel readings under study	185
a) An introduction to <i>The Gospel according to John</i>	185
b) <i>The Samaritan Woman</i> , (Jn 4:4-42)	188
. Historical Context	188
. Literary context	191
. Synthesizing the meaning of the text:	194
c) <i>The Man Born Blind</i> , (Jn 9:1-41)	198
. Historical context	198
. Literary context	201
. Synthesizing the meaning of the text:	203
d) <i>The Raising of Lazarus</i> , (Jn 11:1-45)	210
. Historical context	210
. Literary context	214
. Synthesizing the meaning of the text	216
e) Conclusion to Section 2	223
4. John's theological frame to the gospel readings	225
5. Conclusion to the Chapter	230
 Chapter 6: Formulating a Revised Praxis	 231
 Part I: A study of relevant chapters from the <i>Gospel According to John</i>	 231
1. Introduction	231
2. The essence of the meaning of the <i>Prologue</i> (Jn 1:1-18)	235
. The Word of God	235
. The Word is life	237

. The Word came to what was his own	238
. The Word is "grace and truth"	239
3. Proclaiming the messages of the gospel readings associated with the scrutinies	240
a) Introduction	240
b) The essence of the meaning of <i>The Samaritan Woman</i> (Jn 4:1-42)	242
. Jesus is living water	243
. The place of true worship	244
. The mission	245
c) The essence of the meaning of <i>The Man Born Blind</i> (Jn 9:1-41)	247
. Light opposed to darkness	247
. The sin of the blind man	250
. Son of Man, Son of God	250
. The blind man and baptism	251
d) The essence of the meaning of <i>The Raising of Lazarus</i> (Jn 11:1-44)	252
. From the beginning	252
. That you may believe	252
. Our friend Lazarus is asleep	253
. Martha's faith	253
. Resurrection and Life	254
. Mary's faith	253
. Jesus' prayer	255
e) Conclusion to the three gospel readings under review	256
4. The essence of the meaning of <i>The Entry Into Jerusalem</i> (Jn12:12-19)	257
. The great crowd	257
. Jesus, the Son of God	258
. The disciples misunderstood	258
. So the Pharisees	259
5. Conclusion to the gospel readings	259



Part II: Celebrating the Rites of the Third Period as Intended by the USCCB	261
1. Introduction	261
2. The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens	263
3. The Rite of Election or of Enrollment of Names	265
4. The Scrutinies	268
5. The Presentations	271
6. Celebrating the sacraments of initiation	273
7. Conclusion to the celebrations of certain rites	274
Part III: Outlining a Program of Initiation for the Third Period	276
1. Introduction	276
2. A proposed outline	276
3. Conclusion to the proposed outline	279

## Abstract

The ministerial concern that motivated this thesis-project arose from a suspicion that the management of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, also known as the Third Period, is not producing the expected results envisaged for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

This concern is significant because the guidelines for this period are not addressed as they are proposed by the USCCB for the reality of the United States, thus depriving the RCIA participants of valued knowledge and of occasions of deep personal reflection and of spiritual illumination. At the parish of San Pedro where I minister, contrary to the guidelines, the focus was chiefly on catechesis, that is, on teaching more doctrine, thus neglecting moments of contemplation or of spiritual development.

A research of the qualitative type eventually confirmed that the RCIA at San Pedro and surrounding parishes was not meeting its objective of providing a comprehensive and significant means of personal transformation that leads the participants into a deeper experience of the celebration of the Easter Sacraments.

To make the experience of the participants more meaningful, the thesis-project, in particular, sought to unearth and interpret for their spiritual benefit the profound meanings of the three gospel readings proclaimed during the Scrutinies: The Samaritan Woman, The Man Born Blind, and The Raising of Lazarus. In terms of spirituality, it sought to define ways by which an experience of total emptying of the self could foster their understanding of their transformation and their renovation into the ways of Christ.

The outcome of the thesis-project is that, on one hand, parish faith formation facilitators need a better training in knowing the guidelines in matters related to the RCIA according to their implementations for the United States reality. On the other hand, parish faith formation facilitators must attend to the diversified needs of their audiences if their priority is to guide them to their spiritual wellness in their new life in Christ, amid his Church.

## Introduction

The Church has always taken seriously the process of initiation into the Roman Catholic faith: from the very beginning of the Christian era it has deployed countless energy at satisfying the basic requirements set forth by Christ. It was and is, after all, responding to the last missive of Jesus, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:15-16). The command is clear on two points: the necessity of proclaiming the good news to all nations is affirmed and the consequential requirement to baptize those who believe is clearly laid out. From that moment on, the Apostles and their followers have embraced an initiation process into the Church that calls for a biblical-inspired-formation and a sacramental rite. The Church today, having learned from the past and in truthfulness to its roots, has the spiritual responsibility to abide by the message contained in the Great Commissioning and hold fast to a welcoming of all believers into its opened heart that respects the wishes of its Founder.

The early centuries of the Church thus witnessed the development of an initiation process which became increasingly demanding, out of which a lasting commitment to the faith was expected of neophytes. In time, however, the sheer number of inquirers burdened the Christianization process to the point of making it impossible to retain its long-acquired priceless significance: little by little the concept of initiation into the Body of Christ lost the momentum it had earned painfully over the years, only to become a notion bearing little fruits. Nevertheless, a few hundred years ago a number of nations felt the need to revive an initiation process structured on the guidelines established by early

Church Fathers. This new inspiration grew slowly and spread across many Roman Catholic communities of the world. Eventually, Vatican II realized the necessity of standardizing a catechumenate, encompassing one vision, in response to the efforts of various Episcopal conferences. At first, a document titled "General Catechetical Directory" was prepared by the Congregation for the Clergy that served later as a basis for the "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults" approved by Paul VI in 1972 and disseminated across all continents thereafter.

While the primary purpose of the Directory is the proclamation of the faith, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is particularly designed for "adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith"<sup>1</sup>, an objective which is secured by a celebration of the three sacraments of initiation. Additionally, the Rite is particularly rewarding in that inquirers embark on a spiritual journey that takes them from their present secular location and transforms them into faith-bearing disciples of Christ. The intentions of the United States Bishops who mandated the use of the Rite within all dioceses is to provide a clear and meaningful path to conversion and to ensure that it results in the formation of faithful and enduring Roman Catholics blessed with a sense of service. This could-be mission statement, when examined closely, reflects what the first disciples were commissioned to achieve and how the early Church catechumenate was eventually structured to accomplish.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is divided into four successive periods during which an inquirer progresses from a level to the next, from a questioning of one's

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<sup>1</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #1, 2.

faith to a profound relationship with Christ: a spiritual progression which is always formative and increasingly demanding, leading to the birth of a Roman Catholic Christian. Additionally, a participant learns to listen to his or her calling and is encouraged to live his or her Christian life accordingly. The four periods of formation are punctuated by three separated steps, taking an inquirer to his or her acceptance as a catechumen characterized by a welcoming into the Church. Following this step, the names of the catechumens are enrolled by the diocesan Bishop, an exercise that testifies to a state of readiness of his or her advancement to the sacraments of initiation. Lastly, and this is the final step, the now elect participate in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation that incorporates their transformed persons into the Body of Christ and, concurrently, makes them a full member of the Church. The Rite, however, allows for some flexibility in its implementation by recognizing that all Roman Catholic communities are not the same, that their needs may be different, and that their cultures may be disparate. This flexibility, while allowing for local adaptations, is at the source of problematic situations for the Church and may limit the desired effects of the initiation process.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is designed in such a way that by the end of the Third Period the elect should have experienced a conversion of heart and mind, have significantly changed their ways of living, and have developed a fitting spiritual life commensurate with their adoption as sons and daughters of God. The Rite has thus far witnessed its fair share of success stories in the United States, stories of persons who could shame many Catholics-by-name-only. On the other hand, many participants of the RCIA program have become nonchalant vis-à-vis their Christian obligations, attending

for one thing the Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and then disappearing from Church premises, falling into the category of "spiritual-but-not-religious". This is a dire situation which seems to suggest that the Rite is not producing the fruits, at least in part, envisaged by Vatican II and by the bishops who inherited the undertaking of making it work.

The indifference on the part of many RCIA participants concerning their knowledge of what it means to be a Roman Catholic may be the result of a number of factors. Inherent to the Rite and aside personal issues, it is possible to enumerate concerns that may contribute to a less than effective initiation process. The first cause that comes to mind is the duration of the evangelization segments: in most parishes, the pre-catechumenate (the First Period) has a duration that does not exceed three months and the catechumenate (the Second Period) hardly goes beyond five months; a situation that does not compare favorably with the two to three years of intense formation that postulants experienced in the Early Church. Another issue is the content of the first two periods of formation: the Rite limits itself to providing broad-brush guidelines without outlining the substance of a preferred program with the result that Directors of Religious Education or their representatives can include in their programs of formation whatever they choose, often to the detriment of a right formation. To the list of possible issues, we can add the problematic of having an unqualified person responsible for the execution of the Rite. Typically, a Director of Religious Education or delegate selects the preferred topics to be discussed, enlists the better-equipped human resources to lead the varied sessions, and sets the tone for the celebration of the different rites contained in the Bishops' manual, all in an effort to maximize the benefits of a RCIA program. These objectives, however, are not always met satisfactorily. It can be ascertained then that if a Director of Religious

Education or delegate is ill equipped for the task at hand, the initiation process will inevitably suffer from the beginning and participants will be short changed ultimately .

Further complicating the execution of the Rite is the way the Period of Purification and Enlightenment (the Third Period) is dealt with by some parties responsible for its realization. In many instances this period is approached in the same manner as with the two previous periods: it is used to provide instructions at the expense of its true purpose, that of creating an atmosphere whereby the participants are prepared in knowledge and spirituality for the Easter Vigil. At this juncture, the knowledge to be dispensed in the Third Period should focus on the person of Christ and offer a deeper understanding of his mission to which we are all called to participate with joy. Furthermore, this Period should witness the culmination of the "beginnings of the spiritual life"<sup>2</sup>, which has taken root in the First Period, into a mature spiritual life worthy of a disciple of Christ. These two essential components of the Third Period are meant to anchor the daily living of a Christian on the Ways of Jesus and thus fortify his or her resistance to the negative forces encountered while living his or her faith. The Period of Purification and Enlightenment becomes sort of a last chance to acquire the spirituality so necessary to maintain a working relationship with Christ.

Given the spiritual importance of the Third Period in relation to the first two periods, it follows that the heart of this thesis-project will focus on the Third Period, particularly on how it can be enhanced to ascertain that those investing in a conversion undertaking receive a solid educational and spiritual foundation so necessary for a sustained relationship with Christ and for a persisting live in the faith according to their calling. This objective will largely be attained by means of an interpretation of the

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<sup>2</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #42, 17.

messages contained in the gospel readings chosen for that Period, which reveal something of the purpose of their author and that is to bring about an unwavering belief in Jesus such that the hearts of readers/listeners are permeated with an unconditional love for others. A case in mind is the Samaritan Woman who, hearing Jesus speaks, eventually believes and leaves behind a life possession to announce the Good News to the people of her village.

During the development of the thesis-project, references will be made to the Rite itself but the focus will always be on its Third Period, which is essentially preoccupied with faith formation as it concerns itself with a deeper knowledge of Christ and with an intensified spirituality, under the light of purification and of enlightenment. These last two subjects will be studied to some length to elucidate their meaning in relation to the purpose of the Third Period along with a theology of faith formation, which should contribute to the enhancement of the formation process. The thesis-project will then investigate to a greater length a theology of the Word, especially with respect to the three very important gospel readings of the Period in order to draw out their profound spiritual meanings.

The thesis-project will limit itself to a situation relevant to the parish of San Pedro, in North Port, Florida, where the concerns regarding the execution of the Rite first came into light. Concurrently, the collaboration of other parishes will be sought but only in so far as it could shed some light on the situation at San Pedro and only as it could provide some suggestions for a revised and improved praxis.

The thesis-project will contain six chapters. The first chapter will point to a suspected deficient ministerial situation at San Pedro whereas Chapter Two will define



the current situation at San Pedro by means of a detailed qualitative analysis. The third chapter will endeavor to uncover the historical foundation of the current Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults from biblical times to Vatican II and to expound on the meaning of the Rite as a whole. The following chapter, Chapter Four, will look to uncover the nature and meaning of purification and enlightenment, complemented with an understanding of what faith formation entails. Chapter Five will specifically address the heart of the matter, that is the origin of the three readings chosen for the Scrutinies and their implied meanings and significance for the participants involved with the Rite. Lastly, Chapter Six will mainly recommend a revised praxis for an improved Period of Purification and Enlightenment program at San Pedro.

## Chapter 1

### The Shortcomings of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment Introduction

This thesis-project has for preoccupation a current ministerial praxis in my parish of San Pedro, which in some ways does not appear to deliver on the expectations germane to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This chapter serves to define the current situation at San Pedro, to identify potential ministerial and theological issues, and to offer a rationale for the application of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Furthermore, it presents a practical methodology that is employed to identify the problems with the current praxis at San Pedro, to reflect on theological insights, and to propose subsequently a revised praxis.

#### 1. A Failing Ministerial Situation

The current situation at the parish of San Pedro, located in the Diocese of Venice, North Port, Florida is such that the Period of Purification and Enlightenment of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (henceforth called "the Third Period") is not disclosing the full meaning of its *raison d'être*. The Bishops of the United States have characterized this period as one of "more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction".<sup>3</sup> However, the parish of San Pedro where I serve as a catechetical facilitator, is presently more concerned with catechesis than with purification and enlightenment. The intent of the Third Period is to create an environment in which the RCIA participants, who have been fittingly catechized in the faith, are given

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<sup>3</sup> International Commission on English and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults - Study Edition* (Washington, DC: Liturgy Training Publications, 1985), #139. This document is henceforth referred to as RCIA-Study Edition.

the opportunity to enhance their relationship with God. Presently, this is not happening at San Pedro Parish with the result that the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (henceforth referred to as RCIA) is not delivering on its obligations and the participants are shortchanged in their formation into the Catholic faith.

The guidelines contained in the RCIA and published with the approval of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (henceforth referred to as USCCB) serve as the foundation for the RCIA program at the parish of San Pedro. The program consists of the following periods and steps: the First Period spans from September to November and is one of first evangelization into the Catholic faith; it is followed with the Rite of Acceptance into the order of catechumens. The Second Period typically starts at the end of November and consists of a suitable catechesis leading to a basic understanding of Catholicism; it is followed with the Rite of Election which is celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent. This rite introduces the Third Period, that is the Period of Purification and Enlightenment which occurs during the forty days of Lent; it is a time for greater spiritual preparation by means of examinations of conscience and a deeper knowledge of Christ. This period is followed with the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil. The last and Fourth Period, the Period of Mystagogy, typically invites the neophytes to a greater comprehension of the mysteries of the faith; it normally parallels the Easter Season<sup>4</sup>

In addition to a misguided use of the Third Period as it regards to purification and enlightenment, it is also deficient when it comes to the rites of exorcism. Presently, the purpose of the exorcisms is not explained as much as it should be; the explanation of

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<sup>4</sup> Table 1 at the end of the chapter (Page 25) situates the Third Period within the context of the RCIA and provides additional details.

these rites is often overlooked to make room for other catechetical activities. Even the presentations of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer, two vital components of the RCIA, are not given the importance they deserved.<sup>5</sup> The celebration of these events deserve more attention because their current management is sending the wrong message: it is suggesting that their spiritual significance is not of great value.

In any given year, the parish at San Pedro will have in its RCIA process anywhere between one and five catechumens and about five to seven candidates. Because of the small number of RCIA participants, both catechumens and candidates are catechized together and participate in the same liturgical activities.<sup>6</sup> However, the rites celebrated within the RCIA are adapted to satisfy the requirements of the RCIA; for example, at the Rite of Election the catechumens are addressed separately from the candidates. These participants come from different work, cultural, and religious backgrounds but all share the same vision, that is to become members of the Roman Catholic Church. Their expectations are high but reasonable; they want to be well informed about the Good News of Christ and to know how to become a faithful follower of his teachings. It follows then, that the main function of a catechetical facilitator is one of catechizing the RCIA participants in the Catholic tradition and to accompany them in the celebration of associated rites. Another function is to be an inspiration to and a guiding light to the participants; it must be recognized, however, that transformation will not happen without

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<sup>5</sup> "The presentations normally take place during the period of purification and enlightenment, after the first and third scrutinies. But for pastoral advantage and because the period of purification and enlightenment is rather short, the presentations may be held during the period of the catechumenate, rather than at the regular times. But the presentations are not to take place until a point during the catechumenate when the catechumens are judged ready for these celebrations" RCIA-Study Edition, #104, 55.

<sup>6</sup> Since catechumens and candidates are grouped together at the parish of San Pedro for the purpose of the RCIA, they are henceforth referred to as participants.

the mediation of the Holy Spirit in the life of each participant. Finally, a catechetical facilitator is to ensure that the liturgical components of the conversion process are carried out as per the guidelines of the USCCB and that their significance is well understood.

In a sense, a catechetical facilitator is accountable for leading the inquirers<sup>7</sup> on their journey to conversion from being catechumens to becoming elect, to being fully initiated with the sacraments of initiation. Candidates, as it concerns them, are offered the occasion to become knowledgeable about the Christian faith and to complete their initiation in the Catholic tradition. Catechetical facilitators should take the responsibility of discipleship very seriously; a misstep may be an occasion for a participant to drift away from an invitation to a higher calling. Additionally, the task of a catechetical facilitator is made more demanding as participants typically involve persons of various ages, ranging from eighteen to as much as sixty-five years of age. These are typically blue-collar workers representing, for example, the retail industry and the construction enterprise, and have for the most part a high school education. While English is, for most of them, their only language, some participants speak English and Spanish. Their belief systems are also diversified: most of them have a Protestant background in the Methodist tradition while some have a Baptist heritage and still others show no religious affiliation. Most of these inquirers become catechumens while others are considered candidates since their baptisms have been sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church; these candidates, however, have not done their First Communion nor have they been confirmed. The candidates baptized in the Catholic tradition have for the most part done

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<sup>7</sup> An inquirer is a person who shows an interest in becoming a member of the Roman Catholic family; he or she becomes a catechumen once an intention of joining the Catholic community is demonstrated by means of the Rite of Acceptance. At the Rite of Election, a catechumen becomes an elect and then a neophyte at the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.

their First communion but have not received the sacrament of confirmation. The mission of the RCIA program in my parish is, in conclusion, to take the participants wherever they happen to be on their individual journey and to guide them in the development of a lasting faith in the Catholic tradition.

## 2. Significance of the Current Ministerial Practice

The main preoccupation that I have is with the spiritual component of the Third Period which does not seem to receive at San Pedro the consideration it deserves. Indeed, the Word contained in the three gospel readings of the Lenten Season during the cycle A of the Lectionary are not explained as much as they should be: they are addressed but not to the theological depth that would bring out their inspiring implications. Catechetical facilitators would do well to remember that these readings are designed to bring about a renewal of the total being by means of a reflective understanding of the Word enunciated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of the Third Period. It is for this reason that the gospel readings on The Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:4-42), The Man Born Blind (Jn 9:1-41), and The Raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44) were specifically chosen to transform one's person into the way of Christ who is the Living Water that defeats sinfulness, the light that overcomes the darkness overshadowing the world, and the source of life that conquers death forever. Consequently, this thesis-project will bring out through the lens of Biblical Theology the profound messages of these three readings that the evangelist had in mind when he included them into the *Gospel according to John*; the results of this analysis should then assist catechetical facilitators in their task of enlightening the participants during the Third Period.

Furthermore, if knowledge equals appreciation, the conversion proper of a participant will be difficult to achieve without these revealing stories which are intended to emphasize a purification of the mind as well as a spirituality aimed at enhancing one's relationship with a just yet merciful God; two objectives which are possibly a reflection of the young Church's purpose for inserting them in their prebaptismal preparations. It follows that not explaining adequately the implications of these stories and not encouraging the exercise of spiritual activities may rob the participants of occasions of developing a satisfying encounter with the divine and of securing an habit of self-examination, both important aspects of one's spiritual life.

It becomes clear then that the focus of my parish on do's and don'ts of Christianity during the Third Period and the indifference toward its objective, which is "to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their consciences and do penance"<sup>8</sup> is not doing justice to the participants in their transformation efforts. Moreover, the only official catechetical material used<sup>9</sup> is a series of ten videos bearing the title *Symbolon: The Catholic Faith Explained* which includes lectures on such topics as "Interpreting the Bible", "The Story of Salvation", and "Divine Revelation". These videos, although worthwhile in themselves, will provide accrued benefits to the participants in as much as they are developed further in group discussions, an opportunity which is not always seized upon by catechetical facilitators leading the sessions. The inevitable result is that participants often remain on their thirst for more information.

Additionally, if it is desirable for participants to benefit spiritually from the Third Period, the catechetical facilitator should display an intense faith and a profound

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<sup>8</sup> RCIA-Study Edition, #139, 77.

<sup>9</sup> Each parish of the Diocese of Venice has complete autonomy when it comes to choosing the material to be used in its RCIA program.

knowledge of the Scripture in order to "enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior."<sup>10</sup> To arrive at this level of enlightenment, a catechetical facilitator will need to go deeper than just provide catechetical material: this material can be forgotten in time and the personal effects catechetical facilitators may have as role models on participants can fade away once the human connection is no longer present. If it is desirable for participants to deepen their knowledge in the ways of Christ, to enhance their spirituality, and to develop lasting practices of faith, catechetical facilitators must instill emotions and feelings into their minds and hearts. Unless the participants truly understand Jesus' transformative action, unless they feel in their hearts and minds the generosity of the gifts offered by God, they are not receiving what is due. Hopefully, the enlightenment provided during the Third Period aided with the celebrations of rites<sup>11</sup> will plant spiritual seeds that will contribute to a lasting conversion of the heart.

If the celebrations of certain rites during the Third Period are to add meaning to the journey of the participants into the Light and to strengthen their spiritual attitude in their efforts of conversion,<sup>12</sup> they should be celebrated as per the recommendations of the USCCB. Efforts should be expanded to give the liturgical components of the Third Period the significance envisioned by the RCIA<sup>13</sup>. Failure to follow the recommendations

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<sup>10</sup> RCIA-Study Edition, #139, 77.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, #139, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, #139, 77.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, at the Liturgy of the Word of the First Scrutiny, the celebrant should clearly explain the meaning of the First Scrutiny relevant to the spiritual journey of the participants. The same should be done during the liturgies of the Second and Third Scrutinies. Furthermore, the exorcisms performed during the Scrutinies do not appear to have much effect on the hearts and minds of the participants; their purposes and meanings need to be emphasized during the weekly formational sessions. Additionally, the presentations of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer are not done in accordance with the recommendations of the RCIA. Efforts need to be expanded to correct these lacunae in order to impact a further movement of the soul. RCIA-Study Edition, # 144, 147, 151, 157, 178.



might signify that the participants are not receiving all the spiritual benefits they deserve; it is putting the Third Period at risk and the participants at a disadvantage.

The proposed thesis-project, then, will address specifically the issue of faith formation, which, for example, will include an understanding of the RCIA, elements of catechesis, reflections on the Word of the Lord, and considerations on certain rites. The thesis-project will also elaborate on the desirability to counteract the lacunae of the Third Period in order to enhance the initiation experience of the participants.

### 3. Ministerial Issues Deserving Consideration

As intended in the Study Edition of the RCIA, the Third Period is meant to be an occasion of deep personal reflection on one's past, present, and future, and of spiritual illumination with the aim of transforming a perplexed mindset into a spirit inspired by the way of Christ. The program at the parish of San Pedro does not seem to bring the members of the RCIA to an understanding of the significance of a spiritual life structured around the message of Christ.

The title of the Third Period draws attention to the purpose of this particular time in view of the Easter sacraments: it is to be a period of purification and enlightenment. Such a purpose does not seem to be a priority for the person responsible for the application of the RCIA at San Pedro Parish. The focus of the program is on catechesis with a touch of liturgical celebrations when the Third Period should allow for the inspiration of a new way of life by way of prayer, liturgical symbols, and testimony of life.

With respect to the ministry of spirituality, the Third Period does not seem to encourage an awakening of the minds toward a spiritual self-consciousness nor does it stimulate personal reflections on one's way of life. The concept of spirituality is not addressed specifically nor is it alluded to in veiled terms. The Lenten Season offers the faithful an excellent occasion to revisit their spirituality and strengthen their encounter with Christ. During the same period, the participants, hand-in-hand with the community which is walking with them to the Passion of Christ, should be offered the occasion of investing in a spiritual life.

Furthermore, the Liturgy of the Word, which includes the homilies proclaimed before the Scrutinies of the Third Period and the discussion sessions following the dismissals, does not seem to give worth to the messages inherent in the gospel readings associated with the Scrutinies. The life changing messages they contain are missing today in our ministry to the RCIA community; a lacuna that does not do justice to the words and deeds of Jesus and that needs to be corrected.

As well, the rites of the Third Period include specific elements such as exorcisms and presentations of prayers, both central to the Catholic faith. Presently, the purpose of the exorcisms is not explained as much as it should be and the presentations of the prayers are pushed outside of the Scrutinies. This is an area of the rites that warrants more attention because of the implicit message that is passed on to the participants, that is if these rites can be neglected or pushed aside then what else can be disregarded in the liturgical life of the Church?

This thesis-project will address the ministerial issues just outlined, but it is also important to remember that they are not to be interpreted in a void; rather the

investigation must be done with the participants in mind. That said, a holistic approach to a ministry of conversion entails knowing the spiritual location of each participant and walking patiently with each one of them to the sacraments of initiation. It is an accompaniment that demands a comprehensive understanding of their religious background and a thoughtful presence in the transition to their more intense faith. It also means knowing the subject matter thoroughly, recognizing the purpose of the Third Period, and imparting a catechetical facilitator's *savoir faire* as to effect a spiritual change in the hearts of the participants. As well, the participants must be made aware that their *cheminement* to conversion implies the involvement of the whole community, the same community they yearn to join at baptism. After all, the presence of the ecclesial community affords them the motivation to persist in their decision and in their hope to become one of its members, brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### 4. Theological Issues Deserving Consideration

The concerns arising from the deficiencies identified with the Third Period bring me to consider a number of theological issues. The two main issues under reflection are under the broad topics of spirituality and of the Liturgy of the Word.

The first theological reflection will address the question of spirituality under four basic elements: servant leadership, meaning of the Word, purification, and enlightenment; all important aspects of the walk with the participants to the sacraments of initiation. To this end a number of theologies will be explored briefly such as Ecclesiology, Christology, and Spiritual Theology, but within the larger subject of Biblical Theology which is the focus of this thesis-project.

First, having explored the meaning of catechesis, a theology aimed at servant leadership will accentuate the qualities required of a catechetical facilitator in order to make his or her message meaningful to participants, that is to make theirs the truth of the faith contained in the gospel readings of the Third Period.

Second, a theology aimed at being mentally and spiritually alert to the meaning and proclamation of the Word is essential in order for the participants to best benefit from the explanations given on the key episodes under review. These episodes should be explained with the participants in mind, that is by attending to their “personal spiritual quest”<sup>14</sup> for the unique purpose of engaging them in their reality, which implies accepting their culture and recognizing their social/economic background. This theology should answer the questions, What is a Liturgy of the Word? What is the best way to influence the listener's total being?

Third, a theology focused on purification should encourage a total emptying of the self such that a person by means of inner reflections and examinations of conscience will show a contrite heart and erase the evil influences of the past and turn once-and-for-all to Christ. Such a theology should provide answers to, What is Christian purification? How best to achieve it as a reality?

Fourth, a theology of enlightenment should point the participants to the Easter sacraments, to a belief in Christ such that there is no turning back. This theology will illustrate what needs to be done to become a follower of Christ. In an unmistakable manner this theology should “stir into flame the gift of God” so that participants will not

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 42.

be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord.<sup>15</sup> It will provide answers to, What does the RCIA mean by "enlightenment"? How should it impact the lives of the participants?

A second theological issue will be directed at the Liturgy of the Word, specifically at the manner the three referenced gospel readings should best be interpreted to deliver, in the most inspiring format, their messages to the RCIA participants. It seems that the participants are not fully benefiting from their contents; they are not sufficiently touched by the overwhelming spiritual richness of the stories. It remains that the three stories referenced earlier need to be unearthed, interpreted, and clearly explained for the benefit of the participants. A theological reflection on these powerful anecdotes should tell the catechetical facilitators what is at stake so as to be confident about their meanings and to be well equipped to disclose their spiritual value.

##### 5. A Theological Perspective on the Christian Initiation Process for Adults

The RCIA process derives from biblical accounts and demands of catechetical facilitators to lead the participants as the case may be to the waters of baptism, to the Spirit of confirmation, and to the altar where the sacrifice of the Eucharist is celebrated. Examples of such biblical accounts tell us that Philip proclaimed the good news to an Ethiopian eunuch which he followed with baptism (Acts 8:26-40) and that, later, Paul instructed his listeners before they were baptized (Acts 13:46-49; 16:13-15). We also know that, in the early Church, Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) believed in a catechetical instruction period;<sup>16</sup> he was followed by Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170-235) who insisted

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Tim 1:6-8. All biblical references are from the *New American Bible*, Saint Joseph Edition, Last Copyright: 1992. This document is henceforth referred to as "NAB".

<sup>16</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology", #61, quoted from Leslie William Barnard, trans. *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997), 60-61.

on a vigorous examination before one could be baptized.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386) describes clearly in his *Procatechesis* what is expected of catechumens, including a heartfelt submission from them.<sup>18</sup> Shortly later, John Chrysostom (ca. 349-407) insisted on a thirty day period before baptism, whereby the catechumens became enlightened and received pre-initiation rites such as blessings and exorcisms.<sup>19</sup>

In time, however, the mass of people seeking baptism forced the Church to loosen its admittance norms into the catechumenate and, as a consequence, the period of instruction was made by design shorter and shorter. For all intents and purposes, the catechumenate was progressively diminished and ultimately fell into disuse. Recently, following the Second Vatican Council, Balthazar Fischer chaired a group of twelve scholars familiar with the rites of initiation celebrated in different world regions; their purpose was to come up with a revised catechumenate, later known as the *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*,<sup>20</sup> that was approved by Paul VI in 1972. The revised catechumenate ultimately served as the basis for similar efforts in episcopal conferences.<sup>21</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson picked up in 1999 the standardized version issued by the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops and proceeded to explain its evolution and interpretation in great details.<sup>22</sup> My thesis then, will focus on Catholic

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<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students with Introduction, Translation, Commentary and Texts* (Bramcote Notts: England: Grove Books, 1976), 15-20.

<sup>18</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, #4. Quoted from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310100.htm> (accessed on January 8th, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Paul Turner, *The Hallelujah Highway: A history of the Catechumenate* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000), 68-69.

<sup>20</sup> The *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum* was later translated and adapted in the United States in 1974 and replaced by the standard translation of 1988. Turner, 157.

<sup>21</sup> Turner, 156-157.

<sup>22</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson's intention "is to offer a text that is as up-to-date as possible in order to provide for teachers and students a reliable guide for solid grounding in the classic liturgical and

interpretations of early Church documents as they pertain to the RCIA as well as on biblical interpretations of the three gospel readings for the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent during the cycle A Lectionary.

## 6. The Adopted Methodology for the Development of the Thesis-Project

The situation at San Pedro Church calls for a method that considers the Third Period of the RCIA process as it is formulated and experienced. Having attended to the situation and having summarily reflected on the deficiencies at San Pedro Church, it follows that the chosen method must allow for an interrogation of the Scripture, Tradition, and recent developments to determine ways of improving the current conditions of the Third Period. To that purpose, Richard Osmer's method<sup>23</sup> is best suited to serve as the overriding tool to respond to the needs of San Pedro Church. This method is specifically chosen because it addresses four tasks that are designed to ultimately bring about a revised praxis.

First, the descriptive-empirical task emphasizes the need to gather all the relevant information for discerning the patterns associated with the expressed concern. A research is conducted that incorporates various methods of investigation for the purpose of finding answers to the question, What is going on?

The second task involves an interpretation of the gathered data. Osmer describes this task as one of "a spirituality of sagely wisdom"<sup>24</sup> characterized by a considerate

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sacramental tradition leading to an informed pastoral practice in the churches today. *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, 2nd revised and expanded ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), XIV.

<sup>23</sup> The method is described at length in his book titled *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Osmer, 81.

mindset and wise judgment. This task is accomplished with the purpose of answering the question, Why is this going on?

The third task, a normative undertaking, looks at theological concepts originating in the Scripture, Tradition, and current literature to direct our findings and thoughts toward an appropriate practice. This task asks the question, What ought to be going on? in an attempt to introduce theological and ethical thoughts in the solution-making stream.

Finally, the last task, which aims at being pragmatic, proposes a revised praxis whereby the ministerial issues are corrected in favor of an enlightened spirituality and a meaningful understanding of the scriptural passages chosen for the Scrutinies. The revised praxis attempts to answer the question, How might we respond? The formatted recommendations are made in an effort to situate the rites of the Third Period in their proper context as to follow the intent of the RCIA.

## 7. Research, Scope , and Limitations of the Thesis-Project

The nature of the ministerial question and associated concerns inherent to this thesis-project lead me to believe that the research method most appropriate for this investigation is of the qualitative type. Keeping in mind that the Third Period calls for the deepening of a personal spirituality, a solely quantitative approach to this topic would not have yielded the information necessary for developing means of improving the current practice. However, a qualitative analysis suits well the ministerial concern at hand and provides the necessary data. It follows that the techniques most appropriate for the task includes a survey of past participants, and a focus group of current participants and



interviews of Directors of Religious Education,<sup>25</sup>. The interviews are directed at a number of Director of Religious Education (DRE) mainly because they are possibly more inclined to participate in an open dialogue. The DRE's are chosen across the Diocese of Venice in an attempt to find out what is happening outside the boundaries of San Pedro Church; that information is then correlated with what is occurring in my parish. The data gathered from the DRE's does not directly contribute to the formulation of the problem at San Pedro Church but provides clues as to what is done in their parishes in order to be more effective in our approach to the Third Period. A survey is aimed at past participants in an attempt to find out what is lacking in the program at San Pedro Church and how the participants think the program can be improved. Lastly, a focus group consisting of current participants is convened in an attempt to discover the strengths of the program as experienced today and how it can be improved to satisfy their interests.

The thesis-project addresses the concerns relevant to the Third Period of the RCIA as it pertains to my parish of San Pedro. In many instances, references are made to the RCIA itself but the focus is always on the Third Period, which is essentially preoccupied with faith formation as it affects spirituality, including purification and enlightenment. The thesis-project investigates to some length a theology of the Word, especially with respect to the three referenced gospel readings of the Third Period to draw out their profound spiritual meanings.

The collaboration of other parishes is sought but only in so far as they shed some light on the situation at San Pedro Church and only as they provide some suggestions for a revised praxis with respect to the Third Period. The thesis-project is only concerned

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<sup>25</sup> Should the DRE not be responsible for the RCIA Program in his or her parish, the person responsible for the RCIA Program will be interviewed instead.

with the faith formation of adults as described above; it does not address directly the issues of community participation nor of the training of catechetical facilitators as these are important factors that deserve separate attention. The thesis-project limits itself to activities of the Third Period, and thus excludes sacramental theology; it limits itself primarily to Catholic biblical theology and Catholic ethics if and when applicable. The thesis-project addresses briefly a theology of the liturgy in the revised praxis as it relates to the Scrutinies and reflects on the purpose and meaning of the Presentations.

## 8. Conclusion

This chapter saw to an elaboration of the problematic situation at San Pedro caused by a leadership that seems to misread the objectives of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment and to misapply the directives relevant to the Third Period of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The following chapter attempts to identify specific areas of concern by means of a qualitative research with participants of the San Pedro parish and Directors of Religious Education chosen throughout the Diocese of Venice in Florida.

**Table 1 - Structure of the Revitalized Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**

	<b><u>FIRST PERIOD</u></b>	<b><u>SECOND PERIOD</u></b>	<b><u>THIRD PERIOD</u></b>	<b><u>FOURTH PERIOD</u></b>
FOR:	Period of Evangelization and Pre-Catechumenate.	Period of the Catechumenate.	Period of Purification and Enlightenment. Centered on spirituality.	Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy.
DURATION:	Unlimited	From one to a few years	Lenten Season	Weeks of the Easter Season. Paschal Time
CONTENT:	First proclamation of Jesus Christ to awaken the faith. Initial conversion.	Learning period of Christian life. Nurturing and conversion. Prayers of exorcisms.	Reflections centered on conversion. Scrutinies, Exorcisms, and Presentations.	Deepening of the sacramental experience and of the life in the Church.
NAMES:	"Inquirers"	"Catechumens"	"Elect"	"Neophytes"
AIMS:	Awakening the faith.  (Evangelization)	Education of the faith.  (Catechesis)	Consecration of the faith.  (Spiritual consciousness)	Growth in the faith.  (New Experience of the sacraments and community)
	<b><u>RITE - 1st STEP</u></b>	<b><u>RITE - 2nd STEP</u></b>	<b><u>RITE - 3rd Step</u></b>	
FOLLOWED WITH:	Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumenate.	Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names.	Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.	
PURPOSE:	Welcoming into the Church.	Ratification to the Sacraments of Christian Initiation	New birth as Christian. Starts the life of the Baptized.	

Adapted from a handout provided by Fr. Gerald Austin, O.P.  
in his Sacraments of the Church class

## **Chapter 2**

### **Attending to a Current Practice Relevant to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment**

#### **1. An Overview of the Current Situation**

The Study Edition of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is explicit: the Third Period of the Rite should be one of accrued knowledge into the person of Jesus, the Christ. The direct implication is significant: it is no longer sufficient to speak of Jesus in his cultural, social, and religious milieu featuring his message, the interaction with the RCIA participants must now be elevated and be focused on the "Word" himself, the Son of God, the Third Person of the Trinity. The Apostle John gives catechetical facilitators direction on the substance of what teaching about the "Word" entails when he says that [Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me."] Jn 13:44-45. The ultimate purpose of teaching about the Word is revealed in Jesus' prayer that we "may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us," Jn 17:21. Jesus, the Christ, is the mediator of the Father; the Third Period must attend to underscore his divinity, otherwise its effectiveness will likely suffer.

A deeper knowledge of Christ will result in an enhanced belief in his capacity as the "sent one" and in his transcendent nature such that an ever increasing relationship with his Person will ensue, a relationship that will encourage a transformation of one's ways into the ways of his Father. Moreover, to arrive at that level of spirituality, the RCIA-Study Edition recommends intense self-examinations and doing penance in an

effort to purify one's heart and mind over sustained instructions that will accomplish little more than what has already been achieved for a participant in view of the sacraments of initiation.

That said, the program of the Third Period at San Pedro does not meet the recommendations of the United States Bishops. For instance, the scheduled activities for the Wednesday following the Rite of Election typically call on the catechetical facilitator to lead a presentation/discussion on the Four Marks of the Church. On the Wednesday which follows the 2nd Sunday of Lent the schedule insists on the Presentation of the Creed and a presentation/discussion on the subject of the Trinity. The Lord's Prayer is scheduled to be presented on the Wednesday after the Third Sunday of Lent; no additional details are given to fill in the remaining session. The Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday of Lent is to be occupied with a video (no subject is provided) and with a presentation/discussion on Vices and Virtues. Finally, the fifth Wednesday of Lent is filled in with a presentation/discussion on the Triduum whereas the last Wednesday prior to the Easter Vigil is occupied with a practice for the reception of the sacraments of initiation. If there is free time to be filled in, once the scheduled activities have taken place, it is up to the catechetical facilitators to use as they see fit.

The Presentations of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer are not done as suggested by the bishops, rather the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are casually handed out during Wednesday sessions without the presence of the community. The Scrutinies, however, are celebrated on their assigned Sundays but it should be noted that our parish priests do not generally like to celebrate them with the result that the parish Director of Religious Education (DRE) is obligated to rely on a retired priest of a nearby community to

perform the Rites associated with the Scrutinies, including the intercessions, the exorcisms, and the laying of hands, after which the participants are dismissed. The Gospel readings assigned to the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent of Cycle A of the Lectionary are read but it is up to the officiating celebrants to decide if they want to address during their homilies the principle themes of the readings; there has been instances in the past when these were not proclaimed at all. Apart from this, the respective themes of *The Samaritan Woman*, *The Man Born Blind*, and of *The Raising of Lazarus* are always presented to and discussed with the RCIA participants after their dismissal following the Scrutinies.

At this juncture, it is important to ask what current participants think of the Third Period program at San Pedro and how they would like it to be improved given its distinct purpose. To that end, a focus group approach was chosen to identify their views of the program and to solicit their ideas for its improvement in the future. Additionally, a survey was mailed to past participants to obtain comments on their past experiences with the Third Period and to collect their thoughts for its enhancement. This phase of the thesis-project is what Richard Osmer refers to as a descriptive-empirical task, which is performed in order to evaluate an existing program and gain a better understanding of its elements.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. A Qualitative Research Involving RCIA Participants

a) Focus group with current participants: The focus group was comprised of five persons: one catechumen, three candidates, and one initiated in the Roman Catholic faith. The catechumen was previously a member of the Nazarene Church; of the three

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<sup>26</sup> Osmer, 47.

candidates, one candidate was baptized in the Methodist tradition while another as a Presbyterian; and the third and remaining candidate was baptized as a Roman Catholic but did not complete her initiation into the Church. The initiated Roman Catholic joined the program to enhance an understanding of his faith. Just as the religious background of the participants is diversified so is their age: it varies from 18 to about 65 years old. As for their working situation, one is a student, two are employed in different industrial sectors, and two are retired. It became evident from the start of the RCIA program that these participants, irrespective of their standing in life, were determined to enhance their knowledge of the Catholic faith and were eagerly anticipating the Easter Vigil celebration.

The focus group discussion took place just before the start of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, that is before the participants gained knowledge of what the Third Period would entail for them. This point in time for the focus group was chosen because the journey of the participants into the faith had somewhat matured and yet, there was still so much more for them to experience. Eight questions were carefully drafted with the aim of achieving an open and meaningful interexchange between themselves and myself.

b) Summary of the responses of the focus group: The first two questions discussed with the focus group participants were about their up-to-now experiences with the RCIA program, prior to the beginning of the Third Period. On the topic of what the program had contributed to their knowledge of Catholicism, all respondents had a very positive view of the outcome. The program, they cited, offers an opportunity to learn about the Church, to realize there is continuity within the Church's purview and that, as

an instrument of the Holy Spirit, it deserves respect. They have also appreciated a broader understanding of the Bible and what it represents for their Christian existence. On how the program can be improved, their answers became demanding and specific: for instance, they want an explanation of the rites celebrated within the RCIA program and an account on the configuration of the church including the significance of its different parts. On the breakdown of the Mass, the participants expressed the requirement for the reasons and meanings of all its intrinsic parts, not just a succinct depiction of the liturgies of the Word and of the Eucharist.

Looking forward to the Third Period, the participants anticipate an awakening to the realities of the faith, a transformation into a better person. The process to that purpose, as they expressed it, includes a mix of instructions and spiritual exercises; the instructions, however, should be of the type that reshapes mentally and religiously a total being. They are also visualizing specific explanations on the prayers written on the cards in the church pews and on the proper manner of praying the Rosary. These activities, they believe, will provide for a deeper understanding of what "Church" means and ultimately result in making of them better Christians.

On whether they would prefer instructions on a variety of faith-based subjects over spiritual activities, they did not show a preference of one over the other but would welcome the use of videos to enrich one or the other experience or both. With respect to the three Gospel anecdotes read before the Scrutinies, they would much prefer discussions on their meanings over simple instructions, but discussions that would include the historical context of each story. However, they would not reject reasoned instructions if they complement the discussions.



The importance of spirituality in their lives is highlighted in this fashion: they contend that living according to Christian principles and values is worth more than accumulated knowledge about the faith, which a person may forget over time, or attending Mass without a genuine disposition of the mind and soul. Spirituality, they recognize, is the foundation that holds a Christian person together, that makes one's life worth living.

c) Survey with former RCIA participants: The current RCIA participants have provided useful insights on the RCIA at San Pedro as it is managed today along with comments that can be explored to improve its efficacy. With this information in mind, past participants were next surveyed to corroborate in part the views of participants in the present program and to supply comments on their own experiences on programs that changed over a number of years. To that effect, eighteen questionnaires were mailed out to participants who have benefited from the program over the last five years; from this mailing, four questionnaires were returned with the mention "Return to Sender". Of the fourteen delivered questionnaires, six addressees have responded anonymously and voluntarily for a success ratio of 43%; a ratio well over the expected average of 10 to 15% for such a mailing. Any attempts to obtain additional responses would have been very difficult given the limited data on hand, namely names of past participants with their addresses available to the parish DRE and the RCIA team.

d) Summary of the responses of past participants: The first question asked of the past participants was in an attempt at finding out what they felt about their experiences with the RCIA program. The majority of the responses ascertains that they profited from their RCIA experiences but in different ways: two of them mentioned they

acquired an inestimable knowledge of the faith whereas two others indicated they became better persons. A fifth person considered himself/herself slightly more spiritual. The sixth and last respondent admitted that the Church community really opened up to him/her and hence felt enticed to actively participate in the life of the parish, particularly as a "core member" of the volunteer team supporting the Youth Program. The next question aimed at finding out, now that they had experienced different programs (apparently, some of the past participants experienced the same program while others did not), if spirituality was important to them? The answers varied from an almost indifferent "somewhat", to "crucial", to an absolute "utmost". The person who revealed that spirituality is of the utmost importance added that it is the cornerstone of his/her entire life, without which he/she feels that his/her soul may not be acceptable to God on the last day. In between these last responses, a simple "yes" translated as "I walk the walk" emerged while another respondent mentioned that he/she strives to be more virtuous. A last and sixth person volunteered that he/she needs guidance and attends Mass to increase his/her faith.

The following five questions addressed the activities of the Third Period, in particular the recommendation for an "intense spiritual preparation". The first question of this series was written with the purpose of finding out if there were occasions of intense spiritual preparations that were built within their respective programs for the Third Period. The answers oscillated between a clear "Don't recall", to "lacking", to there was such a preparation including discussions on the Scrutinies. The person with the "lacking" comment indicated that the sacrament of Reconciliation was barely touched upon with the effect that he/she still struggles with spiritual preparation in general. A fourth person thought there was an adequate preparation, particularly since it coincided with Lent, an

opportune time to dispose one's being to the celebration of Easter. Another person pointed out that he/she is not sure whether it was "intense" or not, since the Third Period did not offer anything different to what he/she was accustomed of doing beforehand. The sixth person apparently equated "intense spiritual preparation" with Baptism, which he/she understands as one of cleansing and purification from sins.

The second question of that group had for purpose of discovering if there were any exercises that called for interior reflections. Again the respondents expressed their views clearly: "Yes", "Not that I remember", and "Don't recall". One of the respondents, however, remembered having one or more exercises that called for an interior reflection, once a "prompt" was provided and instructions given. A follow-up question was posed with the intention of determining if the past participants would find such introspections beneficial for their spiritual lives. There were two planks to the question, one "Don't know", and a "Not Applicable". Of the remaining two respondents, one answered a brief "Very", and the other indicated that the need for interior reflections depends on each person, that is on what he/she wants to get out of the program.

The fourth question of this group was formulated to disclose what the participants would like to occur in order to make the Third Period more spiritual. Three respondents did not have a relevant answer to the question. The remaining three, however, have offered substantive suggestions. One of them would like more time to pray, meditate, reflect, and have the opportunity to individually discuss varied topics with knowledgeable Catholics, deacons, or priests. The last part of this suggestion is similar to the wish of another respondent who mentioned that it would be beneficial for each participant to have spiritual direction throughout the program and to adapt the program to the spiritual needs

of each. One last respondent suggested that more time should be spent to explain what Jesus was doing during the last days of his life, that is during the days corresponding to the Lenten Season. The last and fifth question of this series was meant to detect how the topics of purification and enlightenment were covered during the Third Period. One respondent did not recall while two more referred to the answers of a previous question, which are covered above in the responses to the first question of this group. One answered that everything was more intense and spiritual; two others added that the teachers did an excellent job by explaining all relevant material.

The next two questions, Questions 8 and 9, were asked with the intention of determining if the three Gospel stories read before the celebration of the Scrutinies were given proper attention. The first part of Question 8 asked if the meanings of these readings were explained during the weekly sessions and/or during the homilies on the Sundays they were read. Four respondents answered with a "Yes", while another with "A bit". The sixth respondent did not recall the specifics but remembered that the instructors and the officiating priests did address them. On whether the readings were discussed after the dismissals (the second part of Question 8), five respondents said "yes" and one did not recall. A follow-up question (Question 9) sought to find out what else could be said or discussed about these readings to meet their expectations. Most respondents agreed that their expectations were met while two mentioned there are always a possibility of learning more through discussions.

The last question of the survey was intended to bring out recommendations the participants would have in order to improve the Catechumenate. First, on the RCIA program as a whole, two respondents reiterated their suggestions for additional time spent

with knowledgeable teachers and the opportunity for personal spiritual direction. The idea of additional opened discussions came up; another suggestion called for a shortened program; and a wish was expressed for an improved connectivity from one week to another. One respondent found that the program provided for a life changing opportunity while another simply wrote that he/she enjoyed the program. Second, on "the Third Period" itself, two participants had no response. Two participants want more time spent on the preparation for Reconciliation and another seems to wish for additional time spent on the sacraments. Lastly, one respondent wished for a greater focus on asceticism as a means of purification and enlightenment.

### 3. Interpreting the Responses of both Current and Past Participants

The comments of current and past participants of the RCIA signal a malaise surrounding the activities of the program at San Pedro. While some activities seem well suited and deliver on their intentions others do not produce the results that are expected. The program, additionally, seems to be incomplete and/or ill-designed. The interpretive task that follows, Osmer's Second Task of Practical Theology, attempts to explain and understand the comments of the participants with respect to the program in order to underscore its efficacy in some areas and to highlight its shortcomings in other areas.

The first area of investigation concerns the Rite as a whole and in particular the experiences the participants lived during its administration. All offered comments were favorable: the knowledge received has changed their perception of the Church and has generated respect for the institution, which they see as a positive element in their daily living. The information dispensed during the weekly sessions has changed their approach

on life and has given them the tools to speak confidently about their religion. In this regard, the program as a whole is initiating a transformation of the participants, which began with an acquisition of faith-related knowledge, an enhancement of their spirituality, and a deeper relationship with Christ. The practical effect, as some have insinuated, is an incorporation into a community of believers that calls for a participation in its life and its mission in view of the Kingdom.

The comments of the participants suggest that the program has many positive elements but a number of them underline changes that could be made to the program in order to improve the end results. For instance, the participants would welcome a step-by-step explanation of the rites associated with the RCIA, in particular of the Rite of Acceptance,<sup>27</sup> of the Rite of Election,<sup>28</sup> and of the rites celebrated at the Easter Vigil. They also would appreciate details on the role of ushers, the meaning of crossing one's self with Holy Water in the vestibule of the Church, and a detailed account on each part of the Mass, both liturgically and spiritually. Each of these suggestions and others may sound trivial but to the participants they signify a better understanding of Catholicism, which is of prime importance for defending one's faith in a world that challenges everything on its path.

Another recommendation calls for a better week-after-week connectivity of the different subjects presented. Why, for instance, is the concept of "Jesus" discussed during

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<sup>27</sup> The Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcoming as it is often referred to is the first step of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Publicly and for the first time, those who have completed the period of the Pre-Catechumenate (the First Period of the RCIA) declare openly their intention of becoming members of the Church, and in return, the Church accepts them. RCIA-Study Edition, #41, 17.

<sup>28</sup> The Rite of Election or the Rite of Enrollment of Names as it is also known, corresponds to the Second Step of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The Rite closes the Period of the Catechumenate (the Second Period) and marks the beginning of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment (the Third Period) during which the elect are "encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity", prior to the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation. RCIA-Study Edition, #118, 63. See Table 1 at the end of Chapter 1 for additional details.

the eighth week of the program while the visit of the Church is scheduled for the first week? Why is the Paschal Mystery presented on the ninth week, the four Marks of the Church on the eighteenth week, while the discussion on the idea of "Church" does not occur until the Period of Mystagogy? These examples point to a lack of natural and theological flow from one subject to the other that would allow for a logical and progressive understanding of Catholicism. This is something that could be easily accomplished; it is simply a question of better planning.

There is also a proposal in favor of allowing personal time between a participant and a knowledgeable catechetical facilitator for private discussions on a variety of subjects germane to the development of his or her faith. The perception of a lack of availability on the part of catechetical facilitators is possibly due two reasons: either catechetical facilitators have not made any offers for personal meetings outside the classroom or, if they have, the offers must have been veiled such that the participants did not perceive them. Irrespective of the circumstances, encounters should be proposed by all catechetical facilitators at the beginning of the program; denying participants of private discussions can only put a damper on their conversion journey. Additionally, the denial of such encounters is in contradiction with the spirit of the program and counterproductive to the teaching mission of the catechetical facilitators.

Lastly, a suggestion is expressed in support of more opened discussions during the weekly sessions. It seems that acquiescing to this suggestion is not only reasonable but should be a requirement of the program if the needs of the participants are to be addressed properly; catechetical facilitators should remember that they are not leading weekly sessions for their own benefits but for the wellbeing, both theologically and

spiritually, of the participants who have been drawn in the program by the loving hand of the Holy Spirit.

Another area of investigation sought to find out if spirituality is important to the participants and how they value its contribution to their lives. The answer is summed up in a decidedly "Yes". It appears that Christian living for the participants is much more than a presence at weekly informational lessons or attending Mass on Sundays without being involved in the celebrations; spirituality, for them, simply makes life worth living and this inspirited life is the result of accepting and enhancing a true relationship with God. Their lives, which may have been somewhat ordinary in the past, is now blessed and ordained to do good. In this respect, the RCIA program, instead of being just another program, is true to its purpose by encouraging an ever liberating conversion of the mind and soul. However, the catechetical facilitators involved in the program must not sit on this success alone, but always endeavor to improve its potency by delivering on all aspects of the program.

Our attention is now turned to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment and its *raison d'être* as a moment of "intense spiritual preparation". At this juncture, the responses of the past participants will be interpreted first since their perspective on the subject is different from the one of the current participants, namely because they have already benefited from the sessions of the Third Period whereas the current participants had not lived the same experience at the time the focus group met.

The first question asked the past participants if the Third Period was in effect one of "intense spiritual preparation"? It seems that their answers revolve around their understanding of the word "intense". Although they were subjected to similar instructions



on different aspects of the faith and received a comparable formation inspired by the message of Christ, their answers vary greatly from a recognition that the Third Period was indeed "intense" to a confession that it was no more than what he/she had expected. One respondent's answer felt somewhat in between, suggesting that he/she is still "struggling with spiritual preparation in general". The answers suggest that the program for the Third Period was somewhat of a disappointment in the eyes of some participants while others think it was well suited to their needs. Granted that it is impossible to please completely everyone in the program and granted that it is impossible to tailor a program for the Third Period that will consider all the individual needs of the participants, this unpleasant reality should not stop catechetical facilitators from adapting each session to reach as many participants as possible. For the remaining few who may feel left out, catechetical facilitators should offer to meet with them outside the classroom environment and interact with them individually on their issues of concern.

The second question on the same theme asked if there were any spiritual exercises that called for "interior reflections". One would think that the question is very specific and, yet, only three respondents answered affirmatively while another remembers of one occasion. The last two respondents have no recollection of such exercises. The responses of these last two respondents suggest that they either do not know what "interior reflections" are, or if they do, the exercises were not conducted in an appropriate fashion, that is they were not explained properly and their purpose within the Third Period was not accentuated. A follow-up question was addressed to those who had no recollection of spiritual exercises with the aim of determining if such exercises would be beneficial for their lives. Only one respondent replied with a clear "very" while the other answered with

a plain "Don't know". The one who replied "very" apparently knows what "interior reflections" are, but does not recall having experienced them. He would, however, welcome them as part of his spiritual formation. The respondent with the "Don't know" answer is possibly not cognizant of their potential benefits and/or is not interested in having them as a means of furthering his spiritual life. Discounting what precedes, it becomes clear that catechetical facilitators need to explain clearly, for the benefit of all participants, the make-up, the meaning, and the purpose of such exercises in order to ascertain their correct understanding. The Director of Religious Education at San Pedro has a share in this responsibility: the catechetical facilitators are under her purview and if they partly fail in their task of spiritual leadership she also falls short in her duty vis-à-vis the parish. Ultimately, it is up to the DRE to ascertain that spiritual exercises are effectively conducted and that catechetical facilitators are sufficiently prepared for their proper execution. These exercises are too important to assume that the participants are already familiar with their potential and/or that catechetical facilitators can introduce them without due consideration.

The fourth question on the subject of the Third Period asked how was purification and enlightenment reflected in the weekly discussions? One answer is not relevant to the question, another is general in nature, while three other responses are devoid of specific comments. Only one respondent really addressed the question and provided a lengthy response, which demonstrates that he understood the question and took the time to comment on it. The other five respondents either understood the question but decided not to expand any efforts at providing an answer or did not remember the details of how purification and enlightenment was introduced in the weekly Lenten sessions. In the

former case, the five respondents who did not reply may not have wanted to provide a lengthy explanation as did the first respondent whereas in the latter case, it is possible that catechetical facilitators were not explicit enough in their approach of making purification and enlightenment a part of their discussions. When all is said and done, it possibly becomes a question of a lack of motivation on the part of the five respondents or again the catechetical facilitators failed their commission of religious educator.

As a logical follow-up, the respondents were asked what they would like to see added or to make the Third Period more contributive to their conversion journey. While two respondents, apparently satisfied with the program of the Third Period, did not have any particular activities in mind, two others stressed the need for more time spent on the sacrament of Reconciliation. Although Reconciliation is not one of the sacraments of initiation, it is nonetheless implied that it is part and parcel of the conversion process of the candidates, most of whom are Roman Catholics and, in many cases, have not availed themselves of its many graces. As well, those candidates from other denominations who have not experienced the potential of this sacrament, must accept the invitation to unite themselves with Christ through this sacrament of mercy. It is only appropriate for all candidates to receive this sacrament before approaching the Altar where Christ offers himself and before receiving Holy Communion. Before doing so, however, it is only fitting for the candidates in-the-know to have a refresher moment on the sacrament of Reconciliation and those who were not as fortunate to be adequately informed about its role and meaning. On the same question, one participant mentioned there should a greater focus on asceticism as a source of purification and enlightenment. The suggestion has merit but it must be recognized that asceticism, in its extreme application, is not for

everyone. The subject, however, could be touched upon before the Lenten season along with fasting, abstinence, and sacrifice if only to make the participants aware of its existence and of its possibilities, minimally or austere.

A similar question was asked but with the intent of finding out how the RCIA process, as a whole, could be made more spiritual. In addition to suggestions of more prayers, meditations, and reflections, one recommendation called for one-on-one sessions with knowledgeable and/or spiritual Catholics. On prayers, one would think that it is already a *fait accompli*, but apparently not: some catechetical facilitators will lead their weekly sessions and dismissals without a prayer at the beginning and at the end of these gatherings. Other than praying is an important and rewarding manner of associating oneself with the Saints and God, catechetical facilitators are not teaching by example as they should in the presence of participants eager to learn about the ways of Christianity. On the contrary, catechetical facilitators should insist on a prayerful life and what better way to demonstrate its legitimacy than by praying in the classrooms. On more meditations and reflections, it is a rightful recommendation: one that is beneficial, particularly during the Third Period, as a means of enhancing an encounter with Christ and as a way of developing a profound habit of communication with God. The recommendation to meet with knowledgeable and/or spiritual Catholics is a worthwhile suggestion that deserves consideration. The participants are right in insisting on the availability of catechetical facilitators for personal meetings outside the classroom environment to exchange views or respond to specific questions at their spiritual and/or theological location, on their own terms; the recommendation is attractive, feasible, and should be allowed to become a reality.

The last set of questions directed at the past participants were in reference to the three Gospel stories read before the Scrutinies. The replies to whether or not their meanings were explained are unanimous: yes, the diversified meanings of the stories were verbalized during the weekly sessions and/or the homilies of the third, fourth, and fifth weeks of the Third Period. But the answers do not tell if the explanations were superficial, suitable, or insightful. The degree of satisfaction matters, and judging by the direct answers to this question the explanations given were at least suitable; otherwise the respondents would have reacted differently. We must, however, remember that improvements are always possible when it comes to interpreting the Gospels. A similar question was asked but this time it involved explanations given about the same readings but after the dismissals. The majority of the respondents answered affirmatively, but again it is not known to what degree of satisfaction.

On the issue of whether or not the meanings were discussed satisfactorily, Question 9 gives us a measure of appreciation in this regard. Three respondents admit that the explanations met their expectations whereas two said they would have liked more discussions. A sixth respondent had no response. The question then becomes how low or high is an individual's bar of satisfaction? For some it may be low while for others it may be high. There is also the question of how complex the subject matter is? And how is it possible to satisfy the individual needs of everyone? Whatever the situation, as one respondent mentioned, there is always room for more discussions.

Although the same topics were covered with past and current participants, the views of current participants on the Third Period vary significantly from those of past participants as they reflect on the topics from a different marker: the past participants

have reflected on the Third Period from an accomplished reality whereas the current participants could only view the Third Period in terms of expectations. What follows is an interpretation of what current participants would like to see happening during the Lenten season.

The first question regarding the Third Period was written to uncover their expectations for that phase of the RCIA. Not knowing exactly what the Third Period involves, but having heard briefly about its function, the current participants are looking forward to what they call an awakening, an epiphany affecting their minds and souls. They are hoping for a transformation of the whole person whereby the past is set aside and their person is reenergized into a new being. They expect a spiritual change of some sort, but they do not suspect how profound that change will be: they do not know how their relationship with Christ will be changed forever. They have been prepared for that moment during the previous weekly and Sunday sessions; catechetical facilitators will now provide for a deeper experience of Christ and for activities that will assist them in their spiritual quest; it will be up to them to realize the awakening they have long for.

The Third Period calls for an "intense spiritual preparation" which has for purpose to illumine the whole person, to favor a deeper knowledge of and a thoughtful relationship with Christ. With this goal in mind, the current participants will welcome a mix of instructions and spiritual exercises that will support their rapprochement with Christ. At that moment, they will prefer instructions that will allow for their appetite for the truth to be satisfied, that is instructions in the form of discussions that will have spiritual value for their daily living of the faith. For instance, they will not be looking for a presentation on "The Life of the Church" at that moment, but what Baptism means for

them to their life in Christ, to their membership in the Catholic Church. In terms of spiritual exercises, they will appreciate guidance on how to do a proper examination of conscience and will welcome time to carry out introspections. In effect, they are looking for simple but meaningful ways of connecting with Christ, like explanations of the prayers on a card in the Church pews and of the proper way to pray the Rosary. Their approach to Christ seems to be more practical in nature but not necessarily adverse to deeper ways of relating to him.

A follow-up question was asked to find out how instructions and spiritual exercises will help them in their walk to the sacraments of initiation. The question sought to find out specifically how these activities would "inspire" them in view of their on-coming Baptism and/or Confirmation, and their participation at the Eucharist. Their answers, although written with the Third Period in mind, could apply to the Catechumenate as a whole and are telling: they include instructions and exercises that will lead to a "greater understanding and appreciation of the Church" and that, they believe, will contribute to their transformation into "a better Christian". In their mindset, seemingly, the replies anticipate a better relationship with God made practical by being a better Christian. If this transformation occurs, they will be better prepared for the sacraments: their whole being will be ready for a new beginning with and in Christ. Then, the Third Period will have delivered on its promise and the catechetical facilitators will have accomplished their task of awakening their hearts and minds to the ways of Christ.

On the question of having more instructions on a variety of faith-based subjects as opposed to introspections, they will prefer a mix of all that is relevant to their conversion journey, including a mix of prayers, of informational lessons, of examinations of

conscience, and of reflections. They will also welcome the visioning of videos that will support the learning and transformational process. They are asking to experience Christianity in its fullness, not only through a deeper knowledge of the truth, but by feeling in their very being the presence of Christ. Essentially, they are looking for a spiritual link to the heart of Jesus. The idea of visioning videos is not unique: videos, because of their visual effects, have been known to contribute to a learning process. The videos they anticipate viewing are in the category of spiritual instrument, that is as a way of stimulating one's faith while adding to its understanding. It must be remembered that all means of teaching are good in as much as they contribute to the wellbeing of the participants. On whether current participants will prefer discussions on the meanings of the Gospel readings read during the Scrutinies or further instructions on various aspects of the faith, the responses of the participants are unambiguous: they will much prefer discussions that will focus on the readings. Their reply is not surprising: they have always appreciated the discussions following the dismissals, which begin when the Rite of Acceptance is celebrated. During that period, the Second Period of the RCIA, the participants have shown a vivid interest during the discussions on the readings as if they added value to their religious experience. But now, the participants probably expect more from the readings: these readings indeed contain consequential messages proclaimed by Jesus and not discussing them will be doing the participants a great disservice. Furthermore, it would be contrary to the recommendations of the USCCB for the conveying of a "deeper knowledge" of Christ and for preparing the participants spiritually for the sacraments of initiation. These readings are an essential component for understanding the true nature of their conversion and it belongs to the RCIA leadership to



ascertain their profound spiritual and theological comprehension.

#### 4. Qualitative Research Involving RCIA Program Directors

a) Interviews with RCIA program directors: The RCIA participants contributed to the identification of problem areas with the praxis of the RCIA program at San Pedro and concurrently suggested ways of improving its content. Their suggestions will potentially satisfy the thirst of future participants for a better understanding of the Roman Catholic faith and for an enhanced spiritual life. I am now directing my attention to what other parishes are doing with their RCIA programs with the view of borrowing relevant elements from their praxis; these elements when combined with the recommendations of past and current participants will allow for a an improvement of the San Pedro program. To this end, five RCIA Program Directors<sup>29</sup> from the Diocese of Venice were interviewed and each were asked the same questions. Although I know them professionally, they were reminded they were free to reply to the questions as they saw fit, even to veer off if they so wished to mention related activities that might benefit the program at San Pedro. Finally, they were informed they could skip any questions they deemed inapplicable or inappropriate. The selected Program Directors have extensive RCIA experiences ranging from ten years to as much as twenty-five years, except for one who has 3 years of experience in that field but has had varied management experiences in the business world.

b) Summary of the responses: The questions asked of the interviewees can be grouped into five categories. The first category of questions focused on the RCIA

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<sup>29</sup> These Program Directors are not necessarily Directors of Religious Education; for the most part, they are assigned the responsibility of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and, in some cases, perform other parish duties.

program as a whole and served to open the discussion on the Third Period. To begin with, the Program Directors agree that a RCIA program is much more than the dispensing of instructions and certainly more than alluding to the sacraments of initiation. The key word that summarizes their thinking is "formation": a formation that addresses the needs of the participants while developing in them a thirst for a meaningful relationship with Christ, the epicenter of the Christian faith. It follows that the essence of Christianity must be explored and explained convincingly such that the participants will, one day, become evangelizers themselves. Knowing that a Christian living outside a communion is nothing more than an individual without a vision, the Program Directors insist that Christian formation is not complete unless the community is involved, a necessary condition for a life lived in Christ.

The second category of questions aimed at discovering if anything was done differently in their parishes during the Third Period from the first two periods of the RCIA. The responses from the Program Directors reveal a consensus: yes, because the Third Period offers a unique and indispensable moment for a proper preparation to the reception of the sacraments of initiation. A common denominator on which they all concur is the obligation to lead the participants in exercises of reflection, which are complemented with various forms of retreat, parish missions, and/or adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. They are also committed to prepare adequately the candidates for the Penitential Rite in view of the sacraments of the Eucharist and/or Confirmation, as appropriate.

Furthermore, the Program Directors expand efforts at explaining the requirements for the reception of the sacraments of initiation and at defining their eye-opening

meanings. An essential ingredient of this preparation is the reciting of prayers, which they encourage by devoting more time to its practice with the hope of developing a healthy habit on the part of their participants. These participants, however, are not left alone when praying, the community is also invited to pray for them and for the success of the program. The Scrutinies deserve particular consideration because of their spiritual significance; to that effect, the Program Directors dedicate the necessary time for their clear comprehension. Lastly, a number of various tools are at their disposition such as videos, pamphlets, leaflets, and books to enhance a purifying and enlightening process; this material is also available to the participants.

The third category of questions addressed the Gospel readings assigned to the Sundays when the Scrutinies are celebrated. Each story, *The Samaritan Woman*, *The Man Born Blind*, and *The Raising of Lazarus*, has a distinct meaning and purpose, which the presiders convey to the RCIA participants and the community and the catechetical facilitators to their audiences. What the presiders and catechetical facilitators are in effect doing is engaging their listeners by instilling into their hearts and minds the *raison d'être* of Christ. They, therefore, talk to the stories as if the RCIA participants (and the community during Sunday Masses) are part of the stories, that is active players "following" Christ. The symbolism of each story is extracted and laid out in front on their eyes and thus contributes to the participants' conversion process. The approach to the Scrutinies<sup>30</sup> is more spiritual than doctrinal in an attempt to stimulate a deeper relationship with Jesus and his Father.

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that three of the Program Directors insist on a dismissal after either the Scrutinies or the Presentations. One parish does not subscribe to the idea of a dismissal while another will have dismissals only during the three Sundays of the Scrutinies.

The fourth category dealt with the Rites of Exorcism and the Presentations. All but one parish perform the Rite of Exorcism within the celebration of each Scrutiny. It is interesting to note that one parish has the participants face the community when the Rite of Exorcism is celebrated instead of having them face the altar. As well, the members of that same community raise their hands in the direction of the participants in a gesture of prayerful unity while the celebrant prays over them with his hands outstretched. One parish prefers a meaningful "accompaniment" with the participants throughout the Third Period instead of celebrating the Rites of Exorcism. On the question of the Presentations, three parishes present the Creed and the Lord's Prayer after the Scrutinies whereas one parish will present The Creed but not the Lord's Prayer. Lastly, one parish does not present the Creed nor the Lord's Prayer preferring to discuss the Creed in class; nothing is said about the Lord's prayer.

The final and fifth category was comprised of one question: what would the Program Directors like to change to make the experience of the Third Period more meaningful? The wish list, not surprisingly, differs from one parish to the other: suggestions include a greater involvement of the participants with the community and having a reception after the Vigil celebrations. In between, we find intentions for a greater spiritual moment and a greater participation by the participants at the parish mission. Finally, one parish reminds that the Third Period is about intensifying the conversion process and nothing less is acceptable.

c) Interpreting the responses: A careful examination of the data from other parishes suggests they are performing certain spiritual activities unexplored by San Pedro. Taken as a whole, their programs contain the ingredients mentioned in the RCIA-

Study Edition for a satisfactory implementation of the Third Period. Individually, however, not one program seems to satisfy completely the three principle elements of the Third Period, that is the requirement for the dispensation of profound Christocentric material, the obligation to provide for introspections, and the celebrations of complementing rites. What follows is an interpretation of their comments, carried out with the objective of keeping in mind what could be valuable for the San Pedro program.

What makes the programs of the chosen parishes somewhat different from San Pedro's, in general, is their greater emphasis on the formation of the mind and heart, understood as an approach for developing a lasting channel of communication between the participants and God, through Christ. What they are suggesting is that communication implies an exchange between two parties: on the one hand the participants are encouraged to relate to Christ and God in various ways and on the other they are asked to listen to what He has to say, through their daily activities. With this approach, the participants should realize that God is not some distant uninvolved deity, but that He has a prime interest in their welfare, both corporal and spiritual. Ultimately, it is up to each participant to develop the channel of communication that fits his or her personality and thereafter work to enhance the type of relationship he or she wants to have with Christ and God.

A word that has a particular place in the programs of the parishes visited is "community", not in the sense of a passive presence of the participants within the assembly of the faithful but as members of a "faith community" deeply involved in the life of its Church. It is apparent that Church is emphasized as a communion, that is members partaking in the same Body and Blood of Christ and sharing in the Church's

missionary responsibility. Thus, and fittingly, participants are no longer just individuals and the community is not just a gathering of people; together they are in a productive relationship with each other, sustaining each other, present to each other, just like Christ through his Church maintains a living presence among the faithful. Furthermore, in this manner of thinking, the participants are evangelized to become evangelizers themselves.

One of the preferred tools highlighted by the Program Directors is the championing of reflections during the Third Period as a way of fostering spiritual moments with God. It is an accepted reality that reflections, by themselves, offer conversations with Christ so necessary for the fortification of a developing union but when they are combined with group retreats and/or parish missions, as some parishes do, they form a powerful instrument of transformation whereby participants are invited to set aside their past and embrace the Light that shines on them. In addition, and it should not be forgotten, the spiritual trio composed of reflections, retreats, and parish missions offer a unique manner for a mental and spiritual preparation in view of a Penitential Rite. In so doing, the focus is on Reconciliation, that is on repentance and forgiveness as it should be. In response to the needs of the participants, the process of confession should be explained step-by-step as to lessen their "anxiety" burden.

The RCIA programs of the Third Period at the visited parishes also allow for an in-depth discussion of the three sacraments celebrated at the Easter Vigil, including their meanings and purposes. The Program Directors, thus, recognize that the Third period should be the preferred time for their presentations/discussions. These sacraments, the participants should be told, are not an end in themselves but inaugurate a new beginning with Christ, a new moral and religious life which should continue to flourish until the day

of Judgment. The Program Directors, and all agents of the RCIA process should take notice, also insist on a keen preparation for the forthcoming Scrutinies, that is on stressing their meanings and purposes and on ensuring that the participants will have the proper dispositions during the celebrations of the rites within the Scrutinies.

The Program Directors, knowing full well the intentions of the Bishops, really want to do their outmost in regard to the three Gospel readings privileged for the Scrutinies. These stories, *The Samaritan Woman*, *The Man Born Blind*, and *The Raising of Lazarus*, they know, are at the heart of the Third Period and together with the Scrutinies are meant to purify and enliven the hearts and minds of the participants. In conformity with this purpose and their objective to be true to the stories, their teachings should not be cavalierly dispensed but be doctrinal in nature in an effort to stimulate understanding and spiritual in order to enhance devotion. That said, the focus should be on conversion, a progressive transformation that takes the participants to new heights in their discovery of "heavenly things". All agents of the RCIA should approach these Gospel stories with the respect and the wonderment they deserve in the hope of instilling in the participants an enduring love of Christ who is the "living water" that makes eternal life possible, the "light of the world" that brings about belief, and the "life" that points to his glory. It is a worthwhile endeavor to dig up the symbolism of each story and to communicate its intrinsic value such that they are engraved into the spirit of each participant.

The Program Directors are also well aware that an eight to nine month Catechumenate is of insufficient duration to cover most of the aspects of the Christian faith and thus voluntarily look for occasions to provide further exposure to its truths. The

dismissals are such occasions and present a great moment in time for further discussions on the readings of each Sunday during the Catechumenate, when particular attention should be given to the scriptural function of each story, the purposeful interaction between them, and the theological meanings of each.

Of the four parishes that believe in dismissals throughout the Catechumenate and more so during the Lenten season, one of them plan for dismissals only during the Sundays when the Scrutinies are celebrated while a fifth parish does not arrange for dismissals at all. These two parishes are clearly missing out on a great opportunity, that of allowing the participants to discuss the Sunday readings with informed catechetical facilitators who are capable of addressing their particular and relevant theological preoccupations; an opportunity which is not available within the Liturgy of the Word. What's more, catechetical facilitators can offer, in most cases, different perspectives on the Sunday readings from what the officiating celebrants do in their homilies.

On the question of exorcisms, four parishes perform them as part of their Scrutinies. The Program Directors of these parishes realize that exorcisms are an effective means of sanctification and fortification for a person combating weaknesses of the flesh and of the spirit. It should also be said that exorcisms are acts of purification that can only contribute to an increased spirituality in the hearts predisposed to the will of God. The parish that does not allow for the Rites of Exorcism to be celebrated does not consent neither to the presentations of the Creed nor of the Lord's Prayer, preferring instead to discuss the faith elements of the Creed and to remain silent on the Lord's Prayer. Discussing the Creed is certainly commendable and should be carried out by all parishes: the Creed is an abstract of the main articles of the faith and their right



understanding is necessary to a Christian way of life. The Lord's Prayer, just as deserving of attention, is the preferred way taught by Jesus for addressing his Father, and thus deserves to be dissected. It becomes apparent then, that the idea of not presenting the Creed and the Lord's Prayer during the celebration of a Mass sends the wrong message to the participants, that of suggesting they are not important instruments of conversion. On the contrary, with the Scrutinies, the Presentations are meant to educate the participants on being "with Christ" and to serve as a strengthening agent in their spiritual journey.

The Program Directors seem to realize that their programs for the Third Period reflect the spirit of the Bishops, but nevertheless agree that improvements can be introduced to the core of their programs. For instance, some Program Directors would welcome a much closer involvement of the participants with the community, hoping that this would lead them to become more than just people "assisting" Mass a few times a year. Another wish expressed by some is to create additional spiritual moments for the participants to develop a stronger relationship with Christ and thus one day participate in the building up of the Church. Also mentioned, is the need to stress the importance of participating, as part of the community, in activities like the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday to commemorate the Passion of Christ, and like attending one parish mission in an effort to stimulate their faith within a communal setting. Lastly, and the suggestion may sound banal at first but on second thought it has merit: one Program Director expressed the idea of having a reception after the rites of the Easter Vigil in order to celebrate the "new beginning" of the participants and their "sending" into the world. This would be accomplished with the spirit of letting them know that the community is with them and stands by them, just as Jesus promised the Eleven, "behold,

I am with you always, until the end of the age." Mt 28:20 All of the above intentions or wishes are certainly worthwhile considering, particularly as they would contribute to firming up the hearts of disciples of Christ. The suggested improvements would also add to their living experience within the Church; this is not a small thing since it is the door by which Christians find their way to the Kingdom.

##### 5. A Cursory Evaluation of the Gathered Comments

a) The essence of the comments: The investigations carried out with the current and past participants support the claim that the RCIA program for the Third Period at San Pedro is not in total conformity with the wishes of the United States Bishops expressed in the RCIA-Study Edition; consequently, the conversion journey of the participants may be jeopardized and their encounter with Christ may seriously suffer. Furthermore, an analysis of the comments in regard to the Gospel stories read before the Scrutinies illustrates that the theological and spiritual meanings of the stories are not relayed completely: it is true that they are considered but not reflected upon as warranted for a better understanding of their inspiring messages. Finally, certain rites which are meant to complement the process of purification and enlightenment are not celebrated as per the recommendations contained in the RCIA-Study Edition.

A similar investigation conducted in parallel with five Program Directors of the diocese of Venice provides information that when compared with data from San Pedro shows important differences between their programs and the one at San Pedro: it appears that their programs as a whole and in spirit show a higher degree of agreement with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

b) Conclusion: The investigations of the remarks made by RCIA participants and by Program Directors point out that improvements can be introduced into the San Pedro program. However, before some of their comments can be considered and included into a revised praxis, it is appropriate to look back at history to uncover what the Scripture, Tradition, and commentators teach about the Christian initiation process in order to have on hand predated and genuine information on the subject .

With that purpose in mind, we now turn to the third undertaking of our study, that is to what Richard Osmer calls the normative task, whereby theological and spiritual notions are unearthed in order to direct our research and purpose to its end. It is a matter of reflecting on the good practices<sup>31</sup> of the past which gradually led to the identification of values and the elaboration of norms that are still valid today. To this end, the following three chapters will throw light on the subject of this thesis-project and advise on a proper course of action. In particular, Chapter 3 will investigate the history of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults from its humble and unstructured origin to the present days. Chapter 4 will be mostly preoccupied with defining in theological terms purification and enlightenment, and their correlation with the character and function of the Third Period. We will also attempt to understand in this chapter what is meant by "faith formation" and what a liturgy of the "Word" implies. In Chapter 5, we will address the core of the thesis-project, that is the meanings of the three Gospel stories under review according to informed interpreters, supplemented with theological inputs from the *Prologue* and *The Entry Into Jerusalem*.

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<sup>31</sup> Osmer, 4.

## Chapter 3

### Situating the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in History

#### 1. A Christian Initiation Rooted in Biblical Accounts

The public life of Jesus began with a baptism, followed with three years of ministry, including intense instructions dispensed to the twelve disciples. Jesus did not preach about baptism during this time, choosing instead to direct his efforts at proclaiming the Kingdom of God. His message of hope was an essential part of his inspiring ministry, which he accompanied at times with deeds that spoke louder than words. These deeds, however, were performed in support of his ministry of the word and, together, they had a definite impact on the crowds following his footsteps.

Jesus' teaching spoke of love, mercy, and fairness in a world filled with social injustice, religious abuses, and political oppression; in spite of its promising content it was not, for the most part, an easy sell. We are told of the story of Martha, a friend whom Jesus loved, who experienced doubts but finally came to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. (Jn 11:5-27) More striking is the episode relating the story of Jesus walking on the sea toward the boat of the disciples: recognizing Jesus, "Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus." At some point, he became frightened and began to sink. Out of fear he cried out for help. Jesus, filled with compassion and disbelief, [stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"] (Mt 14:21-31)

The disciples had heard Jesus' parables, had witnessed his miracles, and had learned about his Father, still they were not getting it. He had showed them the light in the darkness, the way to the Father, and the true meaning of life; at long last, it took the

resurrection to solidify their faith. Such is the legacy that Jesus left behind for his followers, then and now, to observe and honor. His ministry is the Good News to be proclaimed to the children of his Father; it is an invitation to discipleship, to share the truth that he is with those who have heard the voice of the Father.

Although Jesus' focus was on instructions does not mean that he was opposed to baptism. He felt, rather, that faith in the Father and compassion for others were a prerequisite to an incorporation into the divine family. His three years of incessant ministry sets the tone for a serious catechumenate, which must be first concerned with teaching what Jesus taught and second, with preparing the RCIA participants (henceforth referred to participants) for their welcoming into the Body of Christ; it means teaching about the light that shows the way to eternal life and walking with them to their baptism..

Teaching Christ's message, however, is not a simple matter: unless it resonates in the hearts and minds of the participants it will not take roots and catechetical facilitators will not do justice to the mission imparted to his first followers. The mission is certainly worthwhile but its success is not always guaranteed: some potential participants will inquire about the program and not finding a match with their aspirations will simply walk away. Other inquirers will participate for a while but will come to a mental or spiritual barrier and simply quit. Still others will find assurance in the process and will persevere to the end. Jesus experienced a variety of similar faith-based situations and, nevertheless, kept pursuing his ministry until its fulfillment. Catechetical facilitators must embrace Jesus' perseverance and persist in bringing their mission to term.

Christ completed his teaching of the remaining Eleven with the command, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is

baptized will be saved: whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mk 16:15-16) These words of authority signal for many Christians the origin of the catechumenate. Although the directive entails the necessity to instruct all human beings with the truth of the faith and to baptize those who believe it does not constitute a formal process of Christian initiation. The process itself would be slow to develop and it would be up to the disciples to secure its foundation.

Jesus knew his disciples would face an onerous challenge in laying out the map to eternal life. He also knew that they would fail at times and that at other times success would come easily. The disciples, despite the difficulties, would persevere because of their faith in the One who had called them by their names. Jesus also knew that formalizing a program of instruction and of initiation would not occur overnight, but his trust in the men he had chosen would ultimately prevail.

The physical presence of Jesus was no longer felt that his disciples were already at work proclaiming the Good News. Peter, for one, would say at the Pentecost event "repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; . . . For the promise is made to you and your children and to all those far off, . . . Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were baptized that day." (Acts 2:38-41) Peter's words were meant to bring hope to those who were suffering, to convince his anguished listeners that the way of life was upon them. From Caesarea, the centurion Cornelius, a God-fearing man, sent three of his devoted attendants to summon Peter in order to hear what he had to say. On his arrival from Joppa, Peter heartedly explained to Cornelius and the people there that he was commissioned "to preach to the people and testify that (Christ) is the one appointed by

God as judge of the living and the dead. . . . that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name." The centurion believed and was baptized. (Acts 10:1-48)

*The Acts of the Apostles* reveal another miracle of the word that points to a foundation of the catechumenate. This story is all too familiar: the Apostle Philip, in a vision, is enjoined to meet with an Ethiopian eunuch who was on his way to worship in Jerusalem. Philip ran up to him and heard him reading a passage from Isaiah. Curious, he asked him "Do you know what you are reading?" And the Ethiopian to reply: "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" Philip understood the intervention of the angel and proceeded to explain the person of Jesus and his message of mercy and joy. While on their way, the Ethiopian noticed some water and exclaimed: "What is to prevent me from being baptized? The chariot was ordered to stop and "Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him." (Acts 8:26-38)

There are not that many passages in the gospels and in *The Acts of the Apostles* that include the main elements of an initiation practice. The stories of Peter and Philip are exceptions and have the merit of establishing the ground works of an incorporation into the church that is faithful to the commissioning of the Apostles. For a person outside the circle of the Apostles, Jesus' directive may seem banal. The Eleven, however, knew better and were at work planting the seeds of a conversion process, a process framed around instruction and baptism. Today's catechumenate, in a strict sense, reflects the initiation spirit of the apostolic era: a period of instruction followed with baptism. A sequence of events confirmed by Paul Turner: "Although the full accuracy of historic detail cannot be

substantiated, these stories reveal the faith of the writer's community, and that people in the apostolic church advanced through several stages toward baptism."<sup>32</sup>

The teaching of the first disciples can be characterized as historical and kerygmatic: they were preaching that "the risen Christ spoke of a new life in our daily living, a life that yields a new beginning with the Second Coming."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Paul expected his followers to renounce their evil ways and to embrace a new life in Christ. His own conversion, however, was not of the same genre. It can be branded, rather, as unusual in that the path to his new life "with Christ" was certainly more dramatic. He received his call to faith in a resounding manner: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4) In his vision, Paul suddenly received the knowledge of faith, the knowledge the Apostles had received at the hands of Jesus. Shortly afterwards, Ananias laid his hands on him and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then, "He got up and was baptized." (Acts 9:18) In Paul's conversion development, again we can perceive the same movement of initiation observed at the hands of the Apostles Peter and Philip, that is a movement from invitation to faith, to instruction, to baptism.

Paul's numerous letters expose a writer focused on preaching and instructing. He was tireless in his efforts to transform the very being of his listeners, "But thanks be to God that, although you were once slaves of sin, you have become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted." (Rom 6:17) To the Thessalonians, he affectionately writes "You know what sort of people you were (among) you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Tuner, *The Hallelujah Highway: A History of the Catechumenate* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy: Training Publications, 2000), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Thierry Maertens, *Histoire et Pastorale du Rituel du Catéchuménat et du Baptême*. Paroisse et Liturgie No 56 (Bruges, Belgium: Biblica, 1962), 41. (My translation)



great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit." (1Thes 1:5-6) Paul does not hint at baptism in these examples, but limits himself to teaching and spreading the word. Baptism, nevertheless, was important for him: *The Acts of the Apostles* relate the story of Paul who, on arriving in Ephesus, discovered that the few disciples there had received the baptism of John. In response, [Paul then said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." When they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid [his] hands on them, the holy Spirit came upon them,] (19:4-6). Another story in *The Acts* tells of a woman by the name of Lydia, a worshipper of God, whom "the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what Paul was saying. After she and her household had been baptized, she offered (Paul and his companions) an invitation" to sojourn in her household. (16:14-15)

It becomes apparent that the process of initiation in the New Testament rested on the proclamation of the gospel and a conversion to faith before the rite of baptism could be dispensed.<sup>34</sup> The gospels and *The Acts of the Apostles* were written by authors whose first preoccupation was the spiritual wellbeing of their communities: this was accomplished by demonstrating that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah announced in the Book of Isaiah and that he is the Son of God sent to deliver humanity from the effects of the Fall. The words and deeds of Jesus took precedence over everything else. It is not that the authors of the Gospels believe that baptism was meaningless, on the contrary, it may be that baptism was already a *fait accompli* in their communities. The gospels and *The Acts of the Apostles* were written some forty years after the resurrection event, and later;

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<sup>34</sup> Maertens, 41. (My Translation)

consequently, the practice of baptism was probably well established by then just as preaching the Good News was a reality.

An outsider, at first glance, may be tempted to conclude that the writings of the New Testament do not adequately provide a justification for a catechumenate. To some extent the statement would be true if consideration is given to all the components of the restored catechumenate. The New Testament, however, was not meant to serve as a roadmap to a structured catechumenate; it was meant to proclaim the Good News. Relevant to this discussion, Johnson mentions that "It is quite possible that there was some sort of preliminary period of instruction (or catechesis) for new converts, but . . . we know nothing about it or the extent of what such teachings may have been."<sup>35</sup> If Johnson is referring to a formalized "period of instruction", he is more than likely correct. However, it must be admitted that the New Testament does provide the basic ingredients for the eventual development of an organized catechumenate, including an invitation to faith, an instruction in the ways of Christ, a profession of faith, and a rite of baptism. The initiation process in the early Church was not as detailed as it is today, but it was practiced in the same spirit. A basic element that seems to be missing is purification. Maertens, however, quickly reminds that "In fact, the Word purifies because this Word is Christ himself whose name is proclaimed in his message and to whose name a candidate for baptism confesses his faith, and in his name he is baptized."<sup>36</sup> It becomes difficult then for an observer not to agree with Paul Turner that "The catechumenate, as such, was still to develop, but its seeds were planted in the apostolic ministry of the New

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<sup>35</sup> Johnson, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Maertens, 55. (My translation)

Testament."<sup>37</sup> The Patristic Era that followed would provide a vision of a catechumenate that would be comprehensive and formalized although not universally adopted.

## 2. Development of the Catechumenate in the Patristic Era

The Fathers of the Church considered the initiation process into the Church an important part of the Christian heritage received from the immediate followers of Christ. They developed a process reminiscent of the apostolic era but accentuated pre-baptismal preparation and ritual meaning. A document that seems to have greatly influenced their approach is the *Didache*, a manual of Church Order,<sup>38</sup> which possibly originated in Syria and written at the turn of the first century.<sup>39</sup> Its place in history as "the most ancient text of the Christian tradition"<sup>40</sup> suggests that it offered a vital link between the New Testament and the patristic writings. The principal merit of the *Didache* is that it complements in parts the biblical accounts by stressing the moral life and providing guidelines for an appropriate baptism.<sup>41</sup>

The author of the *Didache* is categorical: there are two ways of being, "a way of life and a way of death".<sup>42</sup> He sets in evidence the gospel writings in such a way that it

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<sup>37</sup> Turner, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Cuming explains that Church Order "was a literary form characteristic of the early centuries, . . . It would contain rules for Christian life and Church discipline and liturgical forms, often attributed to the twelve apostles." Geoffrey J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students With Introduction, Translation, Commentary and Notes* (Bramcote Notts, England: Grove Books, 1976), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Turner, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Maertens, 65. (My translation)

<sup>41</sup> The *Didache*, possibly a contemporary document with *The Gospel According to John* or composed shortly after, was probably written for a congregation that was "in the process of developing a strict code of ethics (or at least that he hopes they are) and establishing the most important early Christian sacraments and ceremonial practices (baptism, Eucharist, set prayers, and days of fasting)." Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 459.

<sup>42</sup> This approach reminds of the Apostle Paul's opposition of life to death and his insistence on a moral life, "As to his death, (Jesus) died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God.

becomes clear there is only one option for Christian living, "you should love those who hate you . . . Give to everyone who asks, and do not ask for anything back."<sup>43</sup> By contrast, the adherents of the path of death "love what is vain and pursue a reward, . . . (they) turn their backs on the needy, oppress the afflicted, and support the wealthy."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, "My child, night and day remember the one who speaks the word of God to you; honor him as the Lord. . . . For if you can bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect".<sup>45</sup> In addition to its moralistic stance, the *Didache* emphasizes briefly the necessity to baptize in water, with accommodations not seen before, and insists on the Trinitarian formula. It prescribes as well a prebaptismal fast for "the one baptizing and the one being baptized . . . along with some others if they can."<sup>46</sup>

The purpose of the didachist is simple yet demanding, that is to witness "to the importance of moral conversion as an expression of adherence to Christ."<sup>47</sup> By its contents, the *Didache* provided a contextual springboard for the Fathers to utilize in order to achieve an enhanced initiation process; in its own right, it is considered an important step in the development of the catechumenate. Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) does not refer to the *Didache* as such but his approach to the baptismal event shares the same preoccupations.

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Consequently, you too must think of yourself as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires." (Rom 6:10-12) John, the Apostle, uses light and darkness to convey a similar message, "Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8:12)

<sup>43</sup> Bart D. Erhman, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers . . . Didache, #1* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 417, 419.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, #5, 427.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, #4 and 6, 423-427.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, #7, 429.

<sup>47</sup> Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Christian Initiation of Adults: A Commentary*, Revised ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1988), 8. (Henceforth referred to as RCIA - A Commentary)

The young but animated Church of the *Didache* epoch witnessed Christian communities struggling with persecutions for their unshakable faith and their steadfast rejection of false gods. It was an age that experienced the emergence of martyrs who would choose to die rather than forfeit their belief in Christ, in the One who dispensed hope with his own death. Justin Martyr was of that period: a principled Gentile searching for the truth. In his studies he came across the Christian philosophy and was impressed by the logic of Christian thought and the personal witness<sup>48</sup> of those who called themselves disciples of Christ. Once baptized, he became an unwavering defender of Christianity: he wrote, in particular, two apologies (ca 150) to the emperor Antoninus Pius. His *First Apology* is of significance for the development of the catechumenate: it describes a process of initiation that is true to the guidelines contained in the *Didache* and, additionally, provides for a theological understanding of baptism. In many respects, the *First Apology* appears as a juxtaposition of the *Didache*.

From his own experience, Justin understood that a conversion of the heart cannot occur without a conviction of mind. The art of instructing, therefore, has for goal "to persuade, to convince, to invite belief and to cause those who heard them to reform their lives."<sup>49</sup> In the movement toward baptism a first interest is detected that leads the participants to be "persuaded" in the belief "that the things we teach and say are true".<sup>50</sup> They are then enjoined to pray and fast for the forgiveness of their past sins while the community, in support, is invited to do the same. For Justin, the journey to conversion is not simply a matter between participants and teachers; the process demands the active

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<sup>48</sup> Turner, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology", #61. Barnard, 66.

participation of the whole community, a distinguishing element of a catechumenate in evolution.

In contrast with the *Didache*, which speaks of a baptism in water, Justin refers to a "washing in water" whereby one is "born again in the same manner of rebirth by which we ourselves were born again."<sup>51</sup> The washing offers a regeneration of the heart for those who are convinced of their right doing. The emphasis on baptism is not so much on the remission of sins but on a washing that illuminates the mind "in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold all the things about Jesus."<sup>52</sup> Justin's "washing" has a powerful transformative effect: it changes a person such that it is reborn in Christ.<sup>53</sup> This rebirth, however, is not a one-time affair; rather, it signifies that the baptized candidate must live his daily activities according to the teachings received. The celebration of the Eucharist followed before the assembly for "this food is called among us eucharist (*εὐχαριστία*) of which no one is allowed to partake except who believes that the things which we teach are true, and has received the washing that is for the remission of sins and for rebirth, and who so lives as Christ has handed down."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>53</sup> The affirmation is not without precedent: the Apostle Paul, some decades earlier, said, "are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of Life." (Rom 6:3-4) In the Letter to Titus which is attributed to Paul, the "slave of God and apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faith of God's chosen ones" reminds Titus that Christ "saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior". (Ti 2:1, 5-6) It should also be noted that *The Gospel According to John* understands "rebirth" in a similar fashion: Jesus in a conversation with Nicodemus says, "Amen, Amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." (Jn 3:5) These references make clear that we are indeed reborn in Christ through baptism, a topic well understood by Justin Martyr. Just as the *Didache* is in continuity with the teachings of the New Testament, Justin highlights what has been already mentioned in the New Testament.

<sup>54</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology", #66. Barnard 70.

Justin's references on the baptismal initiation process, possibly *en vigueur* in Rome around ca. 150, serve to enhance our understanding of a catechumenate over and above the *Didache*. The prebaptismal information clearly shows stages in the process of initiation without specifying details, for instance, on the instructions given and the length of the period. His emphasis on baptism, however, provides an understanding "consistent with one who is, after all, a Christian philosopher, and one that will continue to be characteristic of Eastern Christianity in general."<sup>55</sup> Justin advanced the cause of the catechumenate but it was up to Tertullian (ca. 150-220) to strengthen its structure by etching a baptismal preparation and presenting an ordered baptismal act.

A codified catechumenate was far from reality by the turn of the second century. The signs of a concrete configuration, however, are emerging in the writings of Tertullian: his references to customs and his use of vocabulary point to a serious catechetical formation prior to an elaborate celebration of the sacrament of baptism. Standing strong on a disciplined life and a belief in the orthodoxy of the Church, Tertullian, a convert in late life, advocated for a longer period of catechetical formation believing that the baptism of the Eunuch by Philip (Acts 8:26-40) and Paul's baptism after his conversion (Acts 9:10-19) were exceptions rather than the rule, that is they were occasions of a special dispensation by God.<sup>56</sup>

Tertullian's writings suggest that the baptismal preparation period may have lasted a number of years. In his *Apology*, he writes that it is the "custom for persons wishing initiation into sacred rites, . . . to go first of all to the master of them, that he may explain

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<sup>55</sup> Johnson, 51.

<sup>56</sup> Turner, 28.

what preparations are to be made."<sup>57</sup> The statement reveals that a "teacher" was involved in the initiation process and that he had the unique responsibility of "preparing" the candidates. The preparation, among other things, involved a learning period, "Let them come, then, while they are growing up; let them come while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ."<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, Tertullian did not believe in an expedited baptism preferring appropriateness to dishonor, "it is becoming that learners desire baptism, but do not hastily receive it: for he who desires it, honors it; he who hastily receives it, disdains it: in the one appears modesty, in the other arrogance; the former satisfies, the latter neglects it."<sup>59</sup> Tertullian believed that if the baptismal preparation is adequate the candidate will amend his or her life and will demonstrate an unwavering adherence to the articles of the faith, which has "begun and is commended by the faith of repentance. We are not washed in order that we may cease sinning, but because we have ceased, since in heart we have been bathed already."<sup>60</sup>

In continuity with Justin Martyr, Tertullian thinks of baptism in terms of a "washing" and of a "new birth" without, however, insisting on a regeneration of the heart; rather, he refers to baptism as a "costly merchandize" that points to eternal life, a grant from the Lord to those worthy of receiving its blessing on account of their diligent labors

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<sup>57</sup> Tertullian, "Apology," #8, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm> (accessed on December10, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> Tertullian, "On Baptism," #18, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0321.htm> (accessed on December10, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> Tertullian, "On Repentance," #6, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0320.htm> (accessed January 11, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, #6.



for its divine benefits.<sup>61</sup> For Tertullian, the essence of the waters utilized during baptism is of secondary consideration, what is critical is that "in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin, (the waters), after invocation of God, attain the sacramental power of sanctification; for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens, and rests over the waters, sanctifying them from Himself; and being thus sanctified, they imbibe at the same time the power of sanctifying."<sup>62</sup>

Tertullian also believed that an anointing should be performed, that the candidates should be signed with a cross, and that they should receive an imposition of hands with an invocation of the Holy Spirit. The community is not left apart, he enjoins the newly baptized to pray with their brothers and sisters and ask that the Lord's grace and gifts be given them in abundance.<sup>63</sup> What amazes and at the same time overwhelms Tertullian is the seemingly contradiction in the baptismal act: it is simple and without pomp in appearance, yet "a man is dipped in water, and amid the utterance of some few words, is sprinkled, and then rises again, not much (or not at all) the cleaner, the consequent attainment of eternity is esteemed the more incredible."<sup>64</sup> His treatise *On Baptism* clearly demonstrates that the baptismal event is a meaningful encounter with the Lord and that the preparations leading to its celebration must be taken seriously.

Tertullian's views on the preparation for the baptismal font and his inclusive elements for an "esteemed" baptism are not followed with a celebration of the Eucharist. As well, references to the contents of the instructional material is also lacking. Tertullian, seemingly, preferred to echo the *Didache* and to enhance parts of the contents of the *First*

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, #6.

<sup>62</sup> Tertullian, "On Baptism," #4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, #20.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, #2.

*Apology* of Justin Martyr in response to attacks by heretical forces. Notwithstanding, the case of the catechumenate under Tertullian made a giant step toward a form of normalization; it was now up to Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215) and Origen to firm up its structure.

The inquisitive Clement left Athens possibly after he was baptized to attend a school in Alexandria. A respected and informed Christian by the name of Pantaenus was the "master" of this theological school. Clement attended the school with other students who may not have been baptized but were impressed with its dispensed teachings; it was actually "more of a philosophical and theological academy than it was an institution for prebaptismal or catechumenal instruction."<sup>65</sup> It remains that the school was sometimes referred to as a "catechetical school" and did offer instructions to catechumens, to those about to be baptized.<sup>66</sup> Eventually, Clement succeeded Pantaenus as the "master" of the school and became a strong defender of the faith against pagan religions.

Clement of Alexandria presided over a school that dispensed an education over a number of years; there is apparently no evidence that the philosophical and theological schools of the time offered short term classes. It can be pointed out then, that the catechetical instruction that the school provided happened over a period of time possibly extending to three years. Clement himself suggests that much: referring to the Mosaic Law he writes, "husbandmen derived advantage from the law in such things. For it orders

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<sup>65</sup> Johnson, 64. Similar schools flourished in some cities of the Roman Empire. For instance, it appears that Justin Martyr opened such a school in Rome, which also provided catechetical instruction.

<sup>66</sup> Clement of Alexandria is credited as the earliest known user of the term "catechumens" in the Patristic era, *katēkhōmenos* (Greek), *catechumenus* (Latin). For example, Clement of Alexandria uses catechumens to designate "those newly catechized and not yet purified", "The Instructor," Book 1, Chap. 6, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02091.htm> (accessed on December 12, 2016). A contemporary, Tertullian, apparently employed the same term to refer to "those about to enter the water", Turner, 30. The term, however, has an antecedent: it occurs in Paul's Letter to the Galatians, "ho katēchōmenos, is qui catechizatur" to mean "One who is being instructed in the word" (6:6).

newly planted trees to be nourished three years in succession, and the superfluous growths to be cut off, to prevent them being loaded and pressed down; and to prevent their strength being exhausted from want, by the nutriment being frittered away, enjoins tilling and digging round them, so that [the tree] may not, by sending out suckers, hinder its growth. And it does not allow imperfect fruit to be plucked from immature trees, but after three years, in the fourth year; dedicating the first-fruits to God after the tree has attained maturity. This type of husbandry may serve as a mode of instruction, teaching that we must cut the growths of sins, and the useless weeds of the mind that spring up round the vital fruit, till the shoot of faith is perfected and becomes strong. For in the fourth year, since there is need of time to him that is being solidly catechized, the four virtues are consecrated to God, the third alone being already joined to the fourth, the person of the Lord."<sup>67</sup>

It is difficult, however, to insinuate from this only example that Clement insisted on a three year catechumenate; he may have referred to the Mosaic Law to illustrate the necessity of conducting catechetical instructions with a serious and determined mindset over a reasonable timeframe. Tertullian in his book *On Repentance* suggests a similar scenario and emphasizes a preference for diligence, "Hasty reception is the portion of irreverence; it inflates the seeker, it despises the Giver. And thus it sometimes deceives, for it promises to itself the gift before it be due; whereby He who is to furnish the gift is ever offended."<sup>68</sup> Justin Martyr, on the other hand, seems to suggest a catechetical period shorter than three years: the short description of the pre-baptismal preparation in his *First*

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<sup>67</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Miscellanies," Book 2, #18, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02102.htm> (accessed on December 12, 2016).

<sup>68</sup> Tertullian, "On Repentance," #6.

*Apology* implies a fast onward movement from persuading, to believing, to living according to the truth, to praying, and to fasting for the remission of sins.<sup>69</sup> The ambivalence surrounding the issue of the catechetical period would remain even with Origen who wrote in the first fifty years of the Third Century. Notwithstanding, Clement of Alexandria's major contribution to the catechumenate is not over a proper term to designate those about to enter the waters of baptism nor is it about an appropriate period of instruction, it is about the content of the pre-baptismal catechesis.

It was fitting for a philosopher such as Clement of Alexandria to search for the truth and this truth he found in Christ. It is not surprising then, that he would place Christ at the center of his teachings. He would say that: "The proof of the truth being with us, is the fact that the Son of God Himself having taught. . . . For the Son of God is the person of the truth which is exhibited; and the subject is the power of faith, which prevails over the opposition of every one whatever, and the assault of the whole world."<sup>70</sup> Clement believed in orthodox values and such things as persistent persecutions, emerging heresies, and the rise of apostasy probably had a determining effect on his mindset. It follows that the catechesis to be taught, he maintained, must of itself reveal nothing but the truths of the faith and the hidden mysteries, which he termed "illumination". Referring to the Apostle Paul, who symbolically compared infants in Christ to "milk" on account that the Corinthians were not ready for the "meat" that would elevate them to a spiritual level, (1 Cor 3:1-3) Clement writes that "If, then, *the milk*" is said by the apostle to belong to the babes, and *meat* to be the food of the full-grown, milk will be understood to be catechetical instruction - the first food, as it were, of the soul. And meat is the mystic

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<sup>69</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology," #61. Barnard, 66.

<sup>70</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Miscellanies," Book 6, #15.

contemplation; for this is the flesh and the blood of the Word, that is, the comprehension of the divine power and essence."<sup>71</sup> This "meat", so necessary to effect a complete transformation of the self, is what Clement of Alexandria calls "faith", which "from instruction is compacted into a foundation, which, being more substantial than hearing, is likened to meat, and assimilates to the soul itself nourishment of this kind."<sup>72</sup> At this moment of his or her formation the catechumen has come to the knowledge of God; a conversion occurs that takes a person from a self-inflated wisdom to the simple truth in Christ, the Son of God. The catechumen has attained a spiritual wellbeing and his or her readiness for baptism is affirmed.

For Clement of Alexandria, the knowledge of Christ inevitably brings the catechumen to imitate his life and to follow his walk to the Jordan for baptism. And so, "Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. . . . Truly, then, we are the children of God, who have put aside the old man, and stripped off the garment of wickedness, and put on the immortality of Christ; that we become new, holy people by regeneration, and may keep the man undefiled."<sup>73</sup> His message asserts, independent of the length of the period of instruction, that unless catechetical instruction leads to an unwavering faith and a life in Christ, it is not in harmony with the true mission of an instructor. Clement of Alexandria effectively brought to light what Justin Martyr identified as "illumination" and what Tertullian meant by "learning"; he was able to add meaning and significance to the previously bare-bone structure of the catechumenate. By

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<sup>71</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Miscellanies," Book 5, #10. The italics are those of the author.

<sup>72</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," #6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, #6.

the end of the second century, the Fathers of the Church had exposed the necessary elements, albeit unbundled, for a successful catechumenate, but had failed to assemble all these elements in a clear program of initiation of adults. This task fell squarely on Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170-235) who was not to disappoint earlier Fathers.

At the end of the second century, the Church could count on its missionary efforts and its catechetical determination to spread the Good News. By the beginning of the third century, Rome had become the center of Christian unity and the papacy as an institution began to strengthen its authority. The Church was well established in Palestine and Syria. Egypt had developed its own Christian center in Alexandria with a respected catechetical school; Africa could boast of its Church in Carthage. During this time, there were many attacks by a variety of philosophers and pagan writers such as Celsus and Lucian of Samosata, all wanting to discredit the Church in general and its teachings in particular. It is during this period, late first century and early second century, that the Church witnessed the arrival of defenders of the faith such as Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Hippolytus.

This last imposing personage, Hippolytus (ca. 170-235), was a presbyter in Rome, a controversial figure who dared criticize the theology of Pope Zephyrinus, declared himself bishop, and died in exile from a sentence of hard labor. A major work in the life of the Church, the *Apostolic Tradition*, is ascribed to this martyr and saint; it is undoubtedly the most circulated text in the history of the catechumenate.<sup>74</sup> Its origin is

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<sup>74</sup> Although from Rome, the "Apostolic Tradition" was a well-known document in the Early Church and its "influence was widely felt in the East: Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Ethiopia all treated it as an authoritative document, to be copied and re-edited. A version of its anaphora is still in use in Ethiopia today." Hippolytus, "Apostolic Tradition", #15, Cuming, 5.

not definitive: it is likely that Hippolytus contributed to an earlier document (ca. 215) which served as a basis for important additions in the first half of the third century.<sup>75</sup> The intention of the initial writer was to "present the tradition of the church, purportedly as handed down from the apostles. . . . Not an innovator, he must have observed some dissent from the tradition and hoped to stop it."<sup>76</sup>

Hippolytus offers in the *Apostolic Tradition* a series of guidelines, a "tradition", for the proper administration of certain matters pertaining to community churches. The segment of the document that deals with the "catechumenate" is of particular interest since it possibly influenced the restored catechumenate of 1972. This segment can be divided into four sections: catechesis, preparation for baptism, baptism, and life after initiation. During the catechesis stage, those desiring to "hear the word" are brought "to the teachers before all the people arrive, and shall be questioned about their reason for coming to the faith. And those who have brought them shall bear witness about them, whether they are capable of hearing the word. They shall be questioned about their state of life: has he a wife? Is he the slave of a believer?"<sup>77</sup> The "catechumens" who had demonstrated a good life and had met certain conditions, such as having an honorable

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<sup>75</sup> Cuming believes that Hippolytus is the sole writer of the "Apostolic Tradition". His conclusion is based on a work by E. von der Goltz who in 1906 [suggested that X was in fact the "Apostolic Tradition" of Hippolytus, hitherto believed lost. His suggestion was taken up and elaborated, first by W. Schwartz in 1910 and finally by R. H. Connolly in 1916. It is now accepted by the great majority of scholars though some prominent orientalist still have reservations.] Cuming, 4. Maxwell E. Johnson believes differently: he postulates that two different sources contributed to its formulation, "a possibly older Roman core (focusing on the role of bishop) and a later North African source (with more detailed instructions regarding the roles of presbyters and deacons) which were conflated to produce the final form of the text." Additionally, he does not ascribe the "Roman core" to Hippolytus, [If any "Hippolytus," and specifically a "Hippolytus of Rome," had anything to do with this document, we know nothing about it!] Maxwell, 103-104.

<sup>76</sup> Turner, 37-38. It can be noticed in earlier writings that a consensus on the subject of Christian initiation was far from being a reality.

<sup>77</sup> Hippolytus, "Apostolic Tradition", #15. Cuming, 15.

position, were invited to hear the word. The instruction period could last as long as three years. However, if a person was keen, the period of instruction could be shortened; time was irrelevant, only his or her conduct was of importance.<sup>78</sup> After each instruction, the "catechumens" were invited to pray by themselves followed by an imposition of hands by their teachers after which they were dismissed.

The second stage consisted in preparing for baptism the ones chosen, presumably, by the same teachers who knew about their degree of involvement and their commitment to the conversion process. A second examination would take place but this time it would not be about their past life but about their way of life; those "*competentes*" or chosen (or elect) were admitted to hear the gospel<sup>79</sup> but only after their sponsors pledged for their readiness to be baptized. This period of preparation, which lasted until the Easter vigil, entailed a daily exorcism possibly by the teachers who taught them and a determining exorcism by the bishop "in order that he may know whether he is pure. And if anyone is not good or nor pure, let him be put aside, because he has not heard the word with faith, for it is impossible that the Alien should hide himself forever."<sup>80</sup> Hippolytus does not speak of a confession of faith as advocated by Tertullian nor of a persuasion in the faith articulated by Clement of Alexandria; he does, however, insist on a constant

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<sup>78</sup> By the time the "Apostolic Tradition" was written, the three year instruction period was not a norm. On the contrary, Paul Turner believes that the three year period of religious instruction mentioned by Hippolytus may have been to coincide with the length of philosophical studies. He writes, "evidence indicates that this was not widely implemented. . . . (rather) formation was adapted to individual circumstances." Turner, 38.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson believes that up to that time, the formation received "had more to do with an apprenticeship in learning to live as Christians rather than in doctrinal instruction." Johnson, 98. It appears that the catechetical schools were used mainly for that purpose. Johnson's position on instruction might explain why some catechumens took as long as three years to demonstrate a behavior consistent with their increasing faith. It may also account for the additional instructions qualified as "anything else" to be given by the bishop after baptism.

<sup>80</sup> Hippolytus, "Apostolic Tradition", #20. Cuming 17.



demonstration of faith during the period of formation. The distinguishing aspect of this stage is not so much the instruction the catechumens received but the effect this preparatory stage was meant to have on their personal lives, socially and spiritually.

The third stage involved the conferral of baptism: at daybreak, the first action to occur was the blessing over the water of baptism; this water was usually flowing in the font or poured over it. Of course, if a difficulty arose any water was acceptable. The "chosen" or elect would remove their clothes and any "alien objects"; they would then be baptized one by one, the children first,<sup>81</sup> the women after the men.<sup>82</sup> Once the elect was out of the water, a priest performed a second anointing; this time with the oil of thanksgiving. The elect was then invited to put on his or her clothes and to enter into the church where the bishop again anointed the elect with the oil of thanksgiving. The bishop proceeded to sign him or her on the forehead while giving him or her a kiss saying, "The Lord be with you". The elect responded, "And with your spirit". The elect then prayed with the community and gave the kiss of peace at the appropriate time. The sacrament of Baptism was immediately followed with the celebration of the Eucharist.

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<sup>81</sup> Hippolytus advocated for the baptism of children: if they were old enough they would speak for themselves or if too young a family member would speak for them. "Apostolic Tradition", #21. Cuming, 18. On the contrary, Tertullian, a contemporary from Carthage, was visibly against the practice. He would argue, "in the case of the little children. For why is it necessary - if (baptism itself) is not so necessary - that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? Who both themselves by reason of mortality, may fail to fulfill their promises, and may be disappointed by the development of an evil disposition, in those for whom they stood?" "Baptism," # 18.

<sup>82</sup> Hippolytus does not separate the women from the men at the baptismal font. However, he insists that after each instruction, men and women, separate from the faithful, go to pray in different places in the church. Furthermore, he specifies that "only the faithful greet one another, men with men and women with women; but the men shall not greet the women." "Apostolic Tradition", #18. Cuming, 16. It is only fitting then, by inference, that Hippolytus would insist that the men should be baptized separately from the women, although he remains silent on the question.

After the celebration of "holy baptism" there was yet another stage, which assumed that instructions on the resurrection and things written had already occurred. During this last stage, the bishop decided what needed to be said to the neophytes, that is a secret that unbelievers were not worthy to know about, for [This is the white stone of which John said, 'A new name is written on it, which no-one knows except him who receives the stone'.]<sup>83</sup> The new name is the name of the elect who has just been baptized in Christ and who has received the promise of eternal life from the One who is living bread. It appears that, during this period, the bishop explained the deeper mysteries of the faith: a last effort at crystallizing the meaning of the Good News and at inviting the neophytes to discipleship.

The process of Christian initiation described meticulously by Hippolytus shows a preference for examinations, for attestations of proper behavior, and for rituals that enliven and promote the spiritual wellbeing of the whole person. This does not imply that Hippolytus did not believe in instruction, on the contrary, he implicitly understood that once a candidate had "heard the word with faith" and accepted the significance of the "resurrection of the flesh", the verbal mission of the Church had been accomplished; it was now up to the candidates to live their faith.<sup>84</sup> The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus

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<sup>83</sup> "Apostolic Tradition", #21. Cuming, 22. Hippolytus is referring to *the Book of Revelation*, chapter 2, verse 17: on the "white stone" was inscribed a magical name "whose power could be tapped by one who knew the secret name." And the new name is "a reference to the Christian's rebirth in Christ." (NAB - The Book of Revelation, Note 2, 17, p. 389). In this, we may also see a reference to "The Bread of Life Discourse" in John 6:22-59; in particular to "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." (Jn 6:47-51)

<sup>84</sup> Maertens believes that the Second Century catechesis is on the same axis but situated at both ends: at the one end are the instructions on the moral life following the example of the "two ways" mentioned in the *Didache* and, at the other end of the axis, are the doctrinal teachings being developed

has for merit to sum up the practices of earlier writers who were driven by an ideal modeled on the life of Christ and to enlarge on these practices in an effort to provide a well thought-out catechumenate.

It is now apparent that the *Apostolic Tradition* and its detailed approach to baptismal initiation influenced to some degree the catechumenate of the twentieth century (Table 2 which follows compares both approaches to Christian initiation). The implied reference to a lengthy period of instruction in the *Apostolic Tradition* and the organization of rituals throughout the initiation process are felt in today's baptismal event. However, what seems to be lacking in the *Apostolic Tradition* is a mention of faith-based instructional elements that would give additional weight to its structure. Clement of Alexandria had anticipated this flaw in the initiation process and in response he had designed his instruction to the catechumens around the person of Christ. Origen, a former student of Clement of Alexandria, followed suit but taught with the whole Scripture in mind and expanded his teachings to include moral issues.

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during the century. At the beginning of the second century, the catechesis is mostly present after baptism but later in the century it tends to move before the baptismal event. It appears that the main elements of the catechesis included such things as a focus on conversion resulting from a verifiable faith, an appropriate understanding of the sacrament of baptism, the meaning of the laying of hands, the implications of the resurrection and its redeeming power, and a teaching on the person of Christ, not as a separate subject but as an overriding theme to all given instructions. Maertens, 69-71. (My translation)

**Table 2 - Comparing the Apostolic Tradition and the Revitalized Catechumenate**

<u>Apostolic Tradition:</u>		<u>Revitalized Catechumenate:</u>	
		<u>Inquiry:</u>	Examination of inquirers Verification of documents
<u>Initial Catechesis:</u>	First examination Instructions - 3 years Prayers in the church Greetings	<u>Pre-Catechumenate:</u>	Duration varies "Inquirers" Evangelization Awakening of the faith Initial conversion
<u>Prebaptismal Preparation:</u>	Second examination Testimonies by sponsors Election to baptism Further instructions Daily laying of hands Daily exorcisms Exorcism by the bishop Before the baptism: Thursday - washing Friday - fasting Saturday - Praying Hand laying by the bishop Exorcism by the bishop Breathing on the elect by the bishop Signing by the bishop	<u>Catechumenate:</u>	Rite of acceptance From one to a few years "Catechumens" Liturgy of the Word and Dismissal Learning of Christian life Nurturing conversion Minor exorcisms may take place Blessings may take place Anointings may take place
		<u>Purification and Enlightenment:</u>	Rite of election Lenten period "Elect" Centered on spirituality Reflections centered on conversion Scrutinies Presentations Exorcisms
<u>Baptismal Celebration:</u>	Blessing of water and oils Undressing Renunciation to Satan Three-fold interrogation and profession of faith and immersion each time Anointing with oil of thanksgiving Putting on of clothes Handlaying by the bishop Anointing with oil of thanksgiving by the bishop Signing of the forehead by the bishop Giving of a kiss by the bishop Prayer with the community	<u>Celebrating Baptism:</u>	Presentation of the elect Invitation to prayer Litany of the Saints Prayer over the water Renunciation of sins Profession of faith Baptism proper
		<u>Celebrating Confirmation:</u>	Invitation to the baptized Laying on of hands Anointing with Chrism
<u>Eucharistic Celebration:</u>	Presentation of offerings Thanksgiving Includes milk and honey	<u>Celebrating the Eucharist:</u>	As per the rite
<u>Postbaptismal Catechesis:</u>	Further instruction by the bishop Living the Christian life	<u>Mystagogy:</u>	Weeks of the Easter Season "Neophytes" Growth into the faith Living the sacraments

Origen (ca. 185-253) was a brilliant mind with an ascetic disposition who became a respected philosopher and biblical adept. In time, he was tortured for his beliefs in Christ and suffered greatly until his death a few years later.<sup>85</sup> Living his faith fully and expecting the same from catechumens, he became very concerned about the seriousness of baptismal formation, which was already decreasing in quality in some *milieux*. He therefore determined to struggle for the purity of the Christian life as it was practiced earlier in the Second Century, “If we judge things according to the truth..., we have to recognize that we are not faithful. They were truly faithful then when martyrdom struck from the birth [of the Church], . . . when the catechumens were catechized in the midst of martyrs and of the death of Christians who confessed the truth to the end, when these catechumens, surmounting these trials, attach themselves without fear to the living God. . . . Then the faithful were fewer, certainly, but they were truly faithful, advancing by the harsh and narrow way that leads to life.”<sup>86</sup> He would thus advocate for a catechumenate of quality by relying on the Scripture; in particular, he “used the Jordan event of Jesus’ own baptism as his primary model for interpreting Christian initiation.”<sup>87</sup>

In his presentations, which were possibly written after the *Apostolic Tradition* (ca. 215), Origen likens the conversion of a Christian to the departure of the Israelites from Egypt and then associates the entrance of a catechumen into the catechumenate to the crossing of the Red Sea.<sup>88</sup> Lastly, the crossing of the River Jordan reminds of baptism

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<sup>85</sup> Turner, 32.

<sup>86</sup> Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries* (New York, NY: W. H. Sadlier, 1979), 55.

<sup>87</sup> Johnson, 71.

<sup>88</sup> Considering that Origen was a biblical exegete and commentator, it is more than likely that he knew about the Apostle Paul’s reference to the crossing of the sea, “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all of them were

whereby "We mortify our members, and we are renewed, regenerated by the Spirit of God."<sup>89</sup> The symbolism hints at a movement from simple instruction to instruction on the mysteries, while baptism opens the door to the Kingdom, that is the Promised Land. Origen explains: "When, from the darkness of error, you are led to the light of knowledge, when, from a terrestrial life, you are converted to the beginnings of the spiritual life, you leave Egypt and you enter into the desert, that is into a kind of life in which, in the midst of silence and calm, you practice the divine laws and you are impregnated with the celestial oracles. Then, when you have undergone their formation and direction, after having crossed the Jordan, you hasten to the Promised Land that is when, by the grace of baptism, you arrive at the evangelical precepts."<sup>90</sup> In so doing, Origen insisted on a moral and doctrinal formation that favored a passage from the "way of death" (Egypt) to the "way of life" (the Promised Land), from abandoning idolatry to espousing the commandments of the church; crossing the red sea is the symbol that he used to signify there was no turning back.

The concept of catechumenate grew progressively from an understanding, rooted in the apostolic era, that preaching the Good News should precede the conferral of baptism. In the writings of Justin Martyr, the concept takes form; it evolves over time and with the *Apostolic Tradition* a solid structure appears, which is cemented a few years later in the works of Origen. More than a century later around the years 380-384, Egeria, a pilgrim from Spain attests to a well established catechumenate in Jerusalem, possibly under the influence of the devoted and committed bishop Cyril. During the same epoch,

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baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ." (1 Cor 10:1-4) Origen, seemingly, appropriated the passage and expanded its theological meaning.

<sup>89</sup> Jean Laporte, "Models from Philo in Origen's Teaching on Original Sin", Johnson, 72.

<sup>90</sup> "Homilies on Numbers", 26, Dujarier, A History, 57.

signs of well-organized catechumenates are visible in Milan where bishop Ambrose officiates, in Hippo where Augustine's writings reveal "a picture of an intense period of formation punctuated by a series of rich liturgical celebrations"<sup>91</sup>, and in Constantinople under the reformist John Chrysostom. However, as the catechumenate became an ideal, signs of weaknesses were already appearing within its structure.

### 3. The fall of the catechumenate

With the conversion of Constantine in 312, Christianity was accepted as a legitimate religion and was rapidly presented with a privilege status across the Roman Empire. Some historians maintain that Constantine had an ulterior motive in making this unprecedented move, that of using Christianity as a unifying force within the state. Regardless of his initial intention, he converted eventually and was baptized on his death bed. As a defender of Christianity, Constantine pursued vigorous campaigns against pagan practices, started a large building program benefiting the Church, raised monuments, and changed the Roman law to accommodate Christian values. Whether real or feigned, his new found love for the Church enticed him to accord a privilege status to the clergy and to name Bishop Hosius of Cordoba a counselor. A number of scholars believe that Constantine's stance ushered in a governance of the Church by the state that eventually led to the subordination of spiritual interests to political considerations. As a likely consequence, many conversions were recorded for self-centered interests.

Around the turn of the fourth century, social and political accommodations occasioned a relaxation of the catechumenate in many localities. An extraordinary measure was proposed around the year 305 to counteract this new reality at the Council

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<sup>91</sup> Turner, 62.

of Elvira in Spain. The Council promoted, among other things, a minimum formation of 2 years that could last up to 3 years if a catechumen was found with a grave fault. Shortly later, the Council of Nicea of 325, recognizing that some postulants substituted a pagan life for a Christian existence after a brief instruction period, prescribed the following: “it is proper that in the future, this is no longer be done since time is necessary for the catechumen (in view of baptism).”<sup>92</sup>

Less than a few decades before, persecutions enticed catechumens, because of their belief in the sacrifice of the Cross, to accept martyrdom. Their unshakable faith often encouraged pagans to become Christians. With the Constantine regime the desire to imitate Christ to his death eventuality disappeared: the political climate, the social transformation, and the religious freedom that ensued resulted in an openness that encouraged a less demanding ecclesiastical commitment to a purposeful catechumenate. The sudden turnabout resulted in three adverse and critical consequences for the catechumenate: the first was a contraction in spiritual motivation such that it generated a problem in the discernment of the faith. A second consequence was possibly more dramatic: the lengthy delays in the reception of baptism willed by many catechumens grew to be counterproductive to a pure faith. Finally, the quality of the formative task gained during decades of inspired efforts gave way to the quantity of candidates seeking baptism, so much so that it became impractical to offer a lengthy period of instruction.

First, the rise of a *laissez-faire* attitude resulting from rapidly changing social, political, and religious environments contributed to a decrease in right motivation with the result that what were obstacles to Baptism began to disappear gradually. A spouse, for example, wanting to marry a Christian would simply fake his or her true motivation.

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<sup>92</sup> Dujarier, *A History*, 69.



As well, a slave desiring to please his or her master would not divulge his or her true self, preferring false pretences to the truth demanded of a Christian conviction. Furthermore, many persons became Christians simply by satisfying the minimum requirement of an entry into the catechumenate and then not abiding by the process. Ambrose, a former Provincial Governor and Bishop of Milan from the year 374, summarizes the situation: “And here is one who comes to the Church because he is looking for honors under the Christian emperors; he pretends to request baptism with a simulated respect; he bows, he prostrates; but he does not bend his knees in spirit.”<sup>93</sup> Likewise, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo from 395, abounds in a similar manner: “For if he wishes to become a Christian in the hope of deriving some benefit from men whom he thinks he could not otherwise please, or to escape some injury at the hands of men whose displeasure or enmity he dreads, he in reality does not wish to become a Christian so much as he wishes to feign being one. . . . If he has come with a counterfeit motive, desirous only of temporal advantages, or thinking to escape some loss, he will, of course, lie.”<sup>94</sup> These candid admonitions, given a human nature tainted by the Fall and influenced by attitudes of detachment, had little effects on ill-intentioned candidates.

The motivation problem gave rise to a second consequence: postulants wanting to become Christians because of self-interests had no immediate desire for baptism. These persons were, in fact, using Christianity for their own advancement and gratification at the expense of the spiritual benefits to be awarded during the immersion in the waters of regeneration.<sup>95</sup> The prevalent reason given was the severity of the penitential discipline

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<sup>93</sup> "In Psalm", 118, 20. 48-49, Dujarier, A History, 80.

<sup>94</sup> "The First Catechetical Instruction", V, 9, Dujarier, A History, 81.

<sup>95</sup> This situation was already noted in Tertullian's works. In exasperation he writes, "a presumptuous confidence in baptism introduces all kind of vicious delay and tergiversation with regard to

for those who relapsed into serious sin after baptism. The far-reaching and often public penances delivered by the clergy discouraged many from walking to the baptismal font. An already alarming situation became troublesome with the involvement of children who, at the insistence of parents, entered into the catechumenate but were baptized at an older age.<sup>96</sup> Although guilty of the same wrongdoing, many Church Fathers opposed, later in life, the spiritually damaging practice: "It is not sufficient to be conceived," wrote Augustine, "it is necessary to be born again to come to eternal life."<sup>97</sup> The same concern troubled John Chrysostom who abounded in a more forceful manner: "Is it not the utmost stupidity to postpone the gift? Listen you catechumens and you who put off your own salvation until the last gasp!"<sup>98</sup> Basil of Caesarea, on the other hand, was definitely more convincing: "Catechized since you were young, do you still not give your accord to the truth? You do not cease studying, have you not yet arrived at knowledge? You who are tasting life, explorer until old age, will you finish by becoming Christian?"<sup>99</sup> The catechumenate was indeed falling into disarray and many bishops, witnessing the challenge, counterattacked and promoted an early baptism: many converts were baptized without a true faith and as a consequence the spirit of the Christian initiation process was weakened.

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repentance; for, feeling sure of undoubted pardon of their sins, men meanwhile steal the intervening time, and make it for themselves into a holiday-time for sinning, rather than a time for learning not to sin. Further, how inconsistent is it to expect pardon of sins (to be granted) to a repentance which they have not fulfilled!" Tertullian, *On Repentance*, #6.

<sup>96</sup> A case in mind is that of Augustine who received catechetical instructions at a young age but was baptized at the age of 33, after a true conversion. Other Church Fathers who were introduced to the catechumenate at an early age but baptized as adults, include Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. Dujarier, *A History*, #30, 116.

<sup>97</sup> "Quaest. ad Simpl., 1,2,2, Dujarier, *A History*, 84.

<sup>98</sup> "Baptismal Instructions", 179, Dujarier, *A History*, 84.

<sup>99</sup> "Homélie sur le Saint Baptême", 1,3,7, Dujarier, *A History*, 82-83.

The final issue that brought about a deficient catechumenate revolved around the impracticality of absorbing large numbers of postulants. The religious peace inaugurated by Constantine opened the door to countless Romans who desired the advantages of baptism: many were attracted as a result of the abolition of persecutions while others sought the sacrament for selfish reasons. A few decades later, the barbarian invasions severely aggravated the challenge already imposed on Christian formation: influenced by the Roman way of life and the missionary work of the faithful, more and more invaders inquired about baptism. The sheer number of people longing to adhere to the faith made it impractical for the Church to sustain the rigorous structure of the catechumenate.

The increasing challenges to the Christian initiation process resulted in the function of "catechumen" to lose its luster and a great deal of its significance: being a catechumen was no longer commensurate with conversion and the concept of catechumenate by association lost a great deal of its attraction. Many bishops gave in to the signs of the times and hurried catechumens into baptism with the result that many catechumens were baptized but few were completely converted. The title "catechumen" no longer expressed the original reality witnessed in the Church of the martyrs nor did it apply meaningfully to adults who had elected to delay their baptism. The catechumenate was badly ill and facing dissolution, but its downfall was not to continue without an attempt by some bishops to reverse the trend.

The Church did not abandon hope: it tried to rally its troops by stressing the necessity of a true faith, a profound trust in Christ irremediably linked to the sacraments. In light of this projected ideal, Basil the Great explained, "Faith and Baptism are two modes of salvation, of kindred origin and inseparable. For on the one hand faith is

perfected through baptism, and on the other hand baptism is founded on faith.”<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the Church campaigned hard and fast to promulgate the concept of an ideal Christian life. It emphasized the notions that to remain in sin was not an appropriate manner to express his or her Christianity and that sinners who do not repent should not be welcomed into the Church. Nevertheless, the fundamental question remained unanswered: is it right to hastily baptize and hope that with later instructions sinners will willingly change their evil ways and turn to God? The Church was caught in a dire situation and would need to compromise: it would have to decide between supporting a traditional catechumenate that would discourage a large number of inquirers or promoting an early entry into the Church and thus encourage conversions at the expense of a living faith.

The compromising situation was well understood by Cyril (ca. 315-386), bishop of Jerusalem, who intuitively highlighted the dilemma around the middle of the fourth century, "The honesty of purpose makes you called: for if your body be here but not your mind, it profits you nothing. . . . Even Simon Magus once came to the Laver : he was baptized, but was not enlightened; and though he dipped his body in water, he enlightened not his heart with the Spirit: his body went down and came up, but his soul was not buried with Christ, nor raised with Him. . . . If anyone is conscious of his wound, let him take the salve; if any has fallen, let him arise. Let there be no Simon among you, no hypocrisy, no idle curiosity about the matter."<sup>101</sup> Likewise, the great bishop Gregory of Nyssa (ca, 335-394) witnessed the situation from Cappadocia in the latter part of the fourth century and expressed openly the view that Baptism conferred in this manner is

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<sup>100</sup> St. Basil the Great, "De Spiritu Sancto" 12:28, Dujarier, A History, 85.

<sup>101</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, Chapters 1, 2, and 4, quoted from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310100.htm> (accessed on January 8, 2017).

useless and above all an insult to the goodness of God, "It is evident that when those evil features which mark our nature have been obliterated (by baptism) a change to a better state takes place. . . . But if, when the bath has been applied to the body, the soul has not cleansed itself from the stains of its passions and affections, but the life after initiation keeps on a level with the uninitiated life, then, though it may be a bold thing to say, yet I will say it and will not shrink; in these cases the water is but water, . . . for I observe him the same man as he was before."<sup>102</sup>

By the end of the fourth century, the foundation of the catechumenate was largely weakened but a new Lenten structure was put in place in many communities to neutralize a disappointing initiation practice. The postulants were expected to attain full conversion following a participation in four distinct initiation phases: a proclamation of the Gospel, an acceptance as catechumens, an intense formation during Lent including fasting and exorcism, and baptism proper. In essence, the catechumenate would retain its principle elements but would sacrifice its depth of penetration with a much shorter period of formation, which sometimes lasted a few hours. An examination and an admission were still part of the practice, there were still sponsors, but the overall process was not as demanding in its organization and as impressive in its implication as in earlier times. Augustine depicted the expectations in this manner, "You have been led to the threshing floor of the Lord, you have been ground by oxen, that is, by those who have announced the Gospel to you. Once catechumens you were garnered. You have been given names, you have begun to be milled by fasts, by exorcisms. Afterwards you came to the fountain,

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<sup>102</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, Chapter 50, quoted from the St. Pachomius Library website which directed the inquiry to <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205.toc.html> (accessed on January 8, 2017).

you have been baptized, you have become one single body. You have been baked by the fire of the Holy Spirit, and you have become the bread of the Lord.”<sup>103</sup>

The efforts by the Church to safeguard a rite of initiation were fruitful but deficient in its product compared to the rite of the previous century; it no longer represented the sanctity of a profound and sincere conversion. The Church, in spite of continuous exhortations and calls to purity, did not impress many postulants; these continued to come with little preparation, if any, and still with false motives. In the end, few of them were submitted to a rigorous admission procedure and the baptism that was celebrated was conferred too readily. The “ideal” that became the driving force of the catechumenate vanished, giving way to a practical approach.

Cyril of Jerusalem again took pen in hand and with a sense of frustration delivered an alarming *état de fait*: “We are the servants of Christ. We welcomed you. We had the responsibility of doorkeepers, but we left the door open. Perhaps you came in with your soul spattered with the mud of your sins and with your intentions soiled. You came in; you were admitted; your name was recorded. . . . If your soul is dressed in avarice, change your clothes before you come in; take the garment off; don’t cover it up. Take off fornication and impurity, and put on the shining white garment of chastity. . . . Consider the honor that Jesus is bestowing on you. Up till now you have been called a catechumen, one who hears from the outside. You heard hope, but you didn’t know it. You heard mysteries, but you didn’t understand them. You heard the scriptures, but you didn’t understand their depth. But now you are not hearing a sound outside you but one within, for now the Spirit lives in you and makes your mind God’s home.”<sup>104</sup> In the last

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<sup>103</sup> Cited in Hamman, *La Messe*, 233, Dujarier, *A History*, 92.

<sup>104</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, Chapters 4, 6.

sentence, a persistent Cyril invites the baptized to a true conversion, now that Christ lives in them; he knows, however, that the task will be difficult giving the signs of the times.

It was on the fifth century that befell the sad privilege of witnessing the almost extinction of the catechumenate practiced in the years of Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus: evangelization had become seriously deficient, postulants were not mentally inclined to learn about the mysteries, catechumens often perceived the Church as a means to end, spiritual fervor in the communities declined rapidly, the concept of sponsorship began to disappear, the intentions of the Church were still honorable but difficult to implement, and baptism became a right or insurance for many. Sadly, baptism became for many a commodity, a case of minimum cost with maximum benefits; a small price to pay to avoid hell while enjoying the pleasures of the earth. In the end, the liturgical signs, emptied of their meanings, were no longer valuable to the conversion process. The faith reality was no longer a living reality so that the whole initiation process became superficial at best.

The Church has, from the beginning of its foundation, demanded an authentic and living faith from postulants even if, in the fourth century, it had unhappily surrendered to the idea of conferring baptism with little verification of the catechumens' true intentions. The clergy truthfully wanted to provide for adequate formation but its intentions sometimes remained abstract leaving a void between formal declarations and practices. The Church would agree that the catechumenate grew from the resurrection of Jesus and reached its apogee in the third century as a result of missionary work, a period during which its members lived their true faith., The peace of Constantine, however, changed the Christian horizon: Christianity became the official religion and the mass of people

seeking baptism forced the Church to loosen its admittance norms. Inevitably, the requirements of the catechumenate were loosened and the period of instruction was made shorter and shorter to satisfy the demands for Christian initiation. For all intents and purposes, the catechumenate as an institution, was progressively reduced and ultimately fell into disuse. At the same time, infant baptism progressively filled the gap left by a drained catechumenate and became accepted as the norm. From the sixth century on, many efforts were made by the Church to revitalize the catechumenate but without much success.

#### 4. The Catechumenate: A Breath of Life

By the end of the fifth century, the established Churches of the West were experiencing a crisis of tragic proportion: a drastic decline in adult baptisms. The decline, however, was largely compensated by an increase in infant baptisms which allowed the Church to flourish. Another phenomenon was occurring around the same time, that of an influx of adult conversions "in the mission countries of Northern and Eastern Europe" where baptism "was administered quickly with little catechetical preparation."<sup>105</sup> The destructive climate afflicting the catechumenate in the churches of the martyrs had reached the peripheral churches of central Europe.

The catechumenate that animated a Christian ideal was now hanging by a small and damaged thread, only perceptible in isolated locations for centuries to come. At the beginning of the sixth century, a Syrian who wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite advocated for a formation based on the proclamation of the scriptures in view of a full participation in the mysteries of the church. With the purpose of improving the

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<sup>105</sup> RCIA - A Commentary, 15.



catechumenate, he wrote: "Catechumens, the possessed and penitents should follow the instructions of the holy hierarchy and listen to the singing of the psalms and to the reading of the divinely inspired writings."<sup>106</sup> The ultimate test for a true conversion, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, resided in the demonstration of a love of God in everyday life. Some two centuries later, the *Gelasian Sacramentary*, from the region of Chelles in France, contained an instruction for presbyters: they are "to catechize the unbaptized with inspiring words and exhort them to a moral life after they recognize the Christian truth".<sup>107</sup> The instruction included as well a prescription for prayers and rites celebrated in steps. By the tenth century, the catechumenate had become so unfamiliar in the Holy Roman Empire of Emperor Otto 1 that the terms and rituals of the process of formation had to be meticulously explained.<sup>108</sup> Adding to the disarray, the *Roman Pontifical*, a twelfth century document, is noteworthy for its silence on baptismal formation and associated rites.<sup>109</sup> Shortly after, possibly at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III ordered a revision of the *Roman Pontifical*, called the *Pontifical of the Roman Curia*, which basically enriched the *Gelasian Sacramentary* with rituals, but failed to address the issue of faith formation.<sup>110</sup> It is somewhat apparent that the catechumenate, after the last efforts of the fifth century, went largely into obscurity. The human spirit to effect a change may have been present at times but the accompanying will was visibly lacking. It took the missionary work of religious orders in foreign nations to inject into the catechumenate a semblance of life, albeit localized.

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<sup>106</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy", (3:3, 6), Turner, 78.

<sup>107</sup> Turner, 95-96.

<sup>108</sup> Turner, 103.

<sup>109</sup> Turner, 108.

<sup>110</sup> Turner, 112.

The simple lives of the missionaries, compounded with their physical and spiritual involvement within the communities they served, attracted countless natives to the faith. They were, however, badly equipped in their attempt of preparing adults for baptism. In the Americas for example, around the years 1521 to 1536, Toribio Motolinia, the "Poor", had no ritual books for a proper adult Christian formation program. Possibly in disbelief, he writes: "the missionaries had little context or guidance for establishing expectations about prebaptismal instructions and ritual moments for adults completely unfamiliar with the Christian milieu."<sup>111</sup> Left to their imagination, the missionaries in "New Spain" devised a program of instruction that included such topics as God and creation, the Adam and Eve story, Jesus, justice, and the sacraments.<sup>112</sup> A few years later, in Japan, the Jesuit Alessandro Valignato and friars from his Society "labored to provide solid catechetical formation to those seeking baptism."<sup>113</sup> The sustained efforts and accommodations of these missionaries resulted in a promising endeavor, which, unfortunately, remained localized. Notwithstanding, a catechumenate, worthy of the *Apostolic Tradition*, was distance away from becoming a reality.

In 1567, the First Council of Goa in India, in an effort to address the disheartening problem, recommended instructions over a period of three months; in spite of this valiant attempt, the catechumenate in many missions would not last more than two or three days and included the very basic elements of the faith. Shortly later in 1614, the *Roman Ritual*

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<sup>111</sup> Turner, 119.

<sup>112</sup> Hundreds of miles away, the Council of Trent of 1545 to 1563 did little to regenerate a lasting catechumenate: "with regard to those of adult age who enjoy the perfect use of reason, persons, namely, born of infidel parents, the practice of the primitive Church points out that a different manner of proceeding should be followed. To them the Christian faith is to be proposed; and they are earnestly to be exhorted, persuaded and invited to embrace it. . . . [T]he candidate for baptism is thus better instructed in the doctrine of the faith which he is to profess, and in the practice of the Christian life." *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests*, Johnson, 367.

<sup>113</sup> Turner, 125.

(*Rituale Romanum*)<sup>114</sup> was revised and rightly included elements of a catechumenate but the commission responsible for its publication withdrew from the document the content relevant to the catechumenate and replaced it with an "extensive ritual of adult baptism, formed from many catechumenate rites."<sup>115</sup> Instead of advancing the cause of the catechumenate, the revised *Ritual* had for effect to limit the universal application of norms and procedures. Aware of the predicament, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith encouraged in 1665 the "missionaries to spend at least forty days preparing adults for baptism. . . . (in an attempt) to correct the lack of unity among the church's missionaries throughout the world."<sup>116</sup> It seems this undertaking did not have the universal success that was anticipated; for instance, if there was success in Africa it did not last two centuries.

Efforts to establish a worthwhile catechumenate in Africa befell on Charles Lavigerie who in 1878 structured a catechumenate for his missionaries. His approach was simple but productive. In summary, he instructed his missionaries to [establish among their neophytes three distinct orders. The first will be the order of "postulants," to which will be taught only the fundamental truths of the natural order, clarified by revelation . . . The second will be that of "catechumens," to which will be revealed the essential truths of Christianity, but without speaking to them about worship and the sacraments other than baptism. Finally the third order will be that of the "faithful" for whom there will no

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<sup>114</sup> According to Balthazar Fischer, the *Rituale Romanum* became "the only liturgical book that was not reformed by the end of the sixteenth century". Balthazar Fisher, "The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Rediscovery and New Beginning," *Worship* 64 #2 (March 1990): 99. The comment is significant in that it asserts that a formal and universal document on the catechumenate was not in existence by that time.

<sup>115</sup> Turner, 131.

<sup>116</sup> Turner, 140.

longer be secrets.]<sup>117</sup> He suggested that the first two stages should last as long as two years whereas the third stage, that of the "Faithful" just baptized, could presumably last a lifetime. Local necessities and circumstances, however, could dictate variations in the length of the formation period. Nonetheless, a non-traditional catechumenate took roots in Africa where it progressed gradually, namely on account of its liturgical dimension and the relentless efforts of the missionaries.<sup>118</sup>

The success of the missionaries and the timely realization that something had to be done<sup>119</sup> influenced Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* to call in 1963 "for the revision of both the 1614 order of adult baptism (*Rituale Romanum*) and the 1962 version in stages,<sup>120</sup> for the restoration of the

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<sup>117</sup> Charles Lavigerie, "Instructions to Missionaries", Turner, 146.

<sup>118</sup> The Secretariat offers an interesting appreciation on the various attempts at revitalizing a catechumenate: "In all of these attempts the catechumenate must be understood in the broadest sense. On the one hand, the catechetical revival of the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation periods contributed significantly to the development of catechumenates. Candidates received serious and systematic preparation for baptism over an extended period of time. On the other, there were marked differences between these modern catechumenates and their ancient counterparts. Impoverished liturgical and sacramental theology, especially in the area of the sacraments of initiation, resulted in praxis devoid of the catechetical breadth and the richly symbolic liturgical expression characteristic of earlier ages. Rather, catechetically, contemporary catechumenates were often no more than schools of religion in which candidates memorized catechisms." RCIA - A Commentary, 17-18.

<sup>119</sup> The United States Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy explains that the "great streams of the catechetical movement, liturgical revival, and pastoral need intersected not only in mission lands, but in dechristianized areas of Europe" brought about the restoration of a Christian initiation process for adults that included both catechetical formation and liturgical celebrations. RCIA-A Commentary, 18. Furthermore, Th. Maertens, a Belgium scholar, insisted that a reform of the catechumenate was necessary but not at all cost: "a reform of the rites is essential, but it will be of value only if a well thought-out pastoral, inspired by the missionary movements of the Church and preoccupied with an wholeness outlook, motivates this reform." *Histoire*, 307. (My translation)

<sup>120</sup> Paul Turner seems to be referring to Balthasar Fischer who, in 1961, "served on the preparatory commission for the Council, and after the Council, chaired the twelve-member Study Group 22, which revised the catechumenate. . . . Aware of the missionary success with a catechumenate in stages and of the growing interest in modern Europe, he persuasively crafted a series of changes in the order for adult initiation that built on the insights of the optional 1962 Order and dramatically altered the baptism of adults in the *Roman Ritual* for the first time since its publication in 1614. The study group completed a provisional text by 1966 and received approval from Rome to experiment with its application." Turner, 156 - 157.

catechumenate";<sup>121</sup> a revision that would include ritual stages in the preparation for initiation interjected within a vigorous intellectual and moral formation program. Vatican II, preoccupied with the insight that God "wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4),<sup>122</sup> and wishing that "all men may know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent and may be converted from their ways, doing penance",<sup>123</sup> issued the following order: "The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and brought into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time."<sup>124</sup>

In 1965, Vatican II, in its *Degree on the Church's Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes)*, echoed the same order but gave it additional direction: "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 sufficient duration, during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher."<sup>125</sup> It is noteworthy to mention that *Ad Gentes* added to its decree a significant omission of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, that is an introduction to and the participation of the whole community an initiation to the Christian life. The three main features of the catechumenate so dear to the Fathers were finally going to be assembled in

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<sup>121</sup> Turner, 159.

<sup>122</sup> Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II, Vol 1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, "Sacrosanctum Concilium" (Newport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975). #5, 3.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, #9, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, #64, 21.

<sup>125</sup> Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II, Vol 1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, "Ad Gentes Divinitus" (Newport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975). #14, 828.

the restored rite: instruction on elements of the faith, introduction to a life of faith within the context of a loving community, and the celebration of appropriate rites to enhance a relationship with the divine. Vatican II heard the cries of its ministers, saw poorly prepared catechumens, and thus responded to an urgent need for a formalized catechumenate program when, in real time, initiation into the Church was done on a makeshift basis in most countries. The final document, the *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum* (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) was promulgated in 1972 by the Congregation for Divine Worship; it offered "a vision of faith as a developing reality that brings the believer into relationship with God and all believers."<sup>126</sup>

The *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum* was initially translated in English on a provisional basis in 1974 and replaced in 1988 with a standard translation, which became the official document on the initiation of adults across all dioceses in the United States. The new rite quickly became popular in the United States for two reasons: it renders "an undeniable service to the catechumens by communicating a sense of belonging and a sense of engagement."<sup>127</sup>

In the first instance, the catechumenate conveys a true sense of welcoming into an unparalleled temporal and spiritual movement, that of Church. Participants are offered the opportunity to set aside their individualistic mentality and to adopt an openness to others; "they come to understand that the church is *Mater Ecclesia*, Mother Church . . . Lay men and women discover that they themselves, together with their ordained ministers, constitute the church."<sup>128</sup> This realization is not foreign to the *état de fait* that the first members of the early Church shared among themselves, that of community, that

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<sup>126</sup> RCIA - A Commentary, 23.

<sup>127</sup> Fischer, 104.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

of being the Church, that of being the Body of Christ. Sharing in the Body of Christ is a free gift from God that needs to be etched into the hearts and minds of all participants; a truth of endless value that is too often relegated behind articles of the faith.

The second advantage of the United States catechumenal process is that it offers a meaningful apprenticeship into a life centered on Christian values. Balthazar Fischer reminds that *Ad Gentes* means what it says [when it states that "Catechesis is not a mere expounding of doctrines and precepts but a training period for Christian life."]<sup>129</sup> It is not to say that doctrines and precepts are not important, it is admitting that if explained by themselves, in a vacuum, they will soon evaporate. However, if they are detailed within a context of Christian living their impact on the lives of the participants becomes all together motivating, particularly in a world in which values are constantly defaced. The restored catechumenate reverses the downward movement of values orchestrated by negative forces and gives worth to a life live under the guidance of a loving and truthful Church. The catechumenate aims at transforming a secular being into one in communion with Christ and, of necessity, with the world.

From the early years of the Church, it was meant for a baptismal initiation to include a formation period, an allegiance of faith to Christ, a commitment to the service of others, and the celebration of baptism. These activities, in time, were crowned with rituals that increased their potential by allowing the catechumens to receive the benefits of prayers and the gifts of the sacraments of initiation. Today's restored catechumenate aims at accomplishing the same purpose with its formation periods and rites celebrated at specific intervals: the Church intends for the catechumenate to be a changing agent and not just a mechanical process leading to a graduation without consequences. The restored

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 105.

catechumenate strives to impress future Christians with an awareness of their relationship with God and the serious responsibilities that flow from it. The sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and of the Eucharist are the decisive ingredients of that process, which provide the catechumens with the blessings and the gifts needed for their salvific journey. It took fifteen hundred years for the rebirth of the catechumenate to occur and now that it has attained a high level of maturation, it deserves a lasting existence.

#### 5. Defining the Restored Catechumenate

It often comes as a surprise to a person inquiring about the faith in the Catholic tradition to hear that he or she will have to participate in an intensive period of formation. These persons have heard of the Catholic Church from various sources or have witnessed the faith of their spouses but have not totally realized the demands that an initial call by God entails for a spiritual life. It seems that the seeds of faith have been planted and that their initial response is maturing but the commitment to proceed is not secure. The desire of the inquirers to be baptized, however, normally prevails and softens the burden of a rigorous formational and liturgical period. And so, the majority of the inquirers quickly comprehend and accept that to become a member of the Catholic Church entails a conversion of the mind and heart, a necessary element leading to baptism. They will soon discover that it has been this way since the mission of the Church was clearly spelled out by its Founder.

The initiation process for adults into the Catholic Church is referred to as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; it is the extended period during which a person is initiated by means of catechesis and liturgical exercises into the fundamentals of the



Catholic faith. The modern rite of initiation has its roots in the apostolic era from which it has inherited its purpose. The Patristic epoch that followed enhanced its core to give it additional meaning and significance. The result is that the present rite "presents a vision of faith as a developing reality that brings the believer into relationship with God and with all believers. It contains a vision of the Church as a people brought together by a common experience of conversion and faith in Jesus Christ and gifted with the life of the Spirit through baptism."<sup>130</sup> The primary goal of the rite then, is to effect a permanent conversion, of mind and heart, of those individuals desiring a fellowship with Christ, of those individuals wanting a way of life in imitation of Christ.

The focus of the rite is on conversion: the product of a program with a beginning but without an end, a process that spans over months of spiritual enlightenment and continues with a lifetime of service to self and others in the Christian spirit. The conversion involves an individual reflecting on the meaning of his or her life with the purpose of putting aside the past and of embracing Christian values. Furthermore, the conversion of a postulant, far from being an isolated endeavor, admits that no one is self-sufficient in matters of spirituality: "The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place."<sup>131</sup> All these elements are variables, which can affect a spiritual conversion; it is a reason why the rite of initiation is structured in such a way as to progressively elevate the participants into full communion with the faithful, into the Body of Christ. Ministers, catechetical

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<sup>130</sup> RCIA - A Commentary, 23.

<sup>131</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #5, 3.

facilitators, sponsors, godparents, and community all contribute, in their own ways, to the success of a participant's journey to conversion.

The journey to conversion, within the framework of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, involves four distinct but connected periods and three enhancing steps that guides an inquirer to the baptismal font. The movement is from an initial conversion of the heart to an appreciation of the plan of salvation, to a spiritual conscientiousness, and finally, to communion within the Christian community. This movement to conversion, of itself, provides knowledge on the Christian faith but to be efficacious, rites are required. The ultimate goal of the spiritual movement is to ascertain that the catechumens possess a reasonable knowledge of the faith supported by rites and demonstrate a "personal commitment to Christ and therefore, to a way of life on the gospel; . . . (and an) integration into the ecclesial community."<sup>132</sup>

The inquirers, accepted as participants in the RCIA, are introduced to the Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate. It is during this period that evangelization begins: the burgeoning faith is introduced to the living God and to his Son, the mediator of salvation. With this first proclamation of the Good News comes "the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love."<sup>133</sup> An encounter with the way, the truth, and the life opens their hearts to the first mysteries of the faith and provokes an initial spiritual awakening, that is a desire to belong to Christ and a hope for baptism. At this stage, the participants begin to feel the presence of God in their daily living. While the inquirers are exposed to the message of the gospels, a growing examination of the individuals' calling occurs such that their first

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<sup>132</sup> RCIA - A Commentary, 24.

<sup>133</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #37, 15.

intentions are clarified; the outcome is typically a nascent interior joy and peace different from past experiences. It is also an opportune time for the parish leadership and community to show their support to the participants by offering prayers suited to their spiritual undertaking.

The participants who have demonstrated an acceptance of their call to the Christian faith and have learned the basics of the Catholic catechism can advance to the first step of their journey: The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. The rite implies that the catechumens, those to be instructed, declare their intentions to join the Church and the Church in return accepts them as members. It is expected that by now, the inquirers are experiencing the beginning of a transformation and are progressively embracing a personal rapport with Christ. Before the rite is celebrated, moreover, it is expected that "sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate and, if necessary, to purify the candidates' motives and dispositions."<sup>134</sup> The rite itself "consists in the reception of the candidates, the celebration of the word of God, and the dismissal of the candidates."<sup>135</sup> To give the inquirers a sense of belonging and to make the rite fully consequential, it is important that the celebration take place with the involvement of the assembly of the faithful.

The Period of the Catechumenate follows immediately the Rite of Acceptance. It is designed to explain the dogmas and precepts of the Church while emphasizing God's generous plan of salvation. It is a period of further catechesis accompanied with the liturgy of the word; it is "about providing the fundamental skill for living the Christian

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<sup>134</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #43, 17.

<sup>135</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #44, 17.

way of life. . . . by living the essentials of the Christian life with Christians."<sup>136</sup> The opportunity is offered to get closer to God in prayer, to expose one's faith towards others, and to live in hope of the Resurrection. An important effect of the period, which should include the celebration of appropriate liturgical rites,<sup>137</sup> is to "purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing."<sup>138</sup> The catechumens are dismissed after the liturgy of the word to allow them, with the assistance of ministers, "to experience the Word as a two-edged sword, which furthers their personal and communal conversion."<sup>139</sup>

The step that crowns the Period of the Catechumenate and "marks the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation" is called the Rite of Election or Enrollment of names. The catechumens who have expressed the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church and who have been judged by the authority of the diocese as to their readiness for their Christian initiation are "encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity."<sup>140</sup> The rite is celebrated preferably at the cathedral to show unity with other catechumens of the diocese; a symbol that extends to all the faithful. The rite is observed on the First Sunday of Lent during the Easter solemnities to indicate its direct association with the Easter celebrations.

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas H. Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church*. revised ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 45.

<sup>137</sup> Of primary consequence is the celebration of the Word at the Sunday Mass and during celebrations "held in connection with catechetical or instructional meetings with catechumens ". " These "celebrations of the Word may conclude with a minor exorcism or with a blessing" presided by a "priest, a deacon, or a qualified catechist appointed by the bishop for this ministry." Additionally, "During the period of the catechumenate, a rite of anointing the catechumens . . . may be celebrated wherever this seems beneficial or desirable." This anointing is to be performed by a priest or a deacon. RCIA - Study Edition, #'s 81, 84, 89, 91, 98.

<sup>138</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #75, 37.

<sup>139</sup> RCIA - A Commentary, 50.

<sup>140</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #118, 63

The third period of the initiation process is called Purification and Enlightenment. At this developmental stage, the focus is not so much on instruction as it is on personal reflection in order "to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance."<sup>141</sup> The participants have become familiar with the teachings of the Church and have come to understand what living in community implies; the task that remains is one of purification of the heart and mind in view of the Easter vigil. The spirit of the period is similar to that of a retreat: it encourages profound reflections and demands a separation from all that is contrary to Christian values. Repentance is expected so that the hearts are cleansed from impurities and made ready for the sacraments to come. The desired end-result is a spiritual enlightenment and a heartfelt commitment to the cause of Christ: the elect are to "personally and corporately move forward on their journey to new life and growth in Christ."<sup>142</sup> In the task of becoming a new man or woman, the elect are aided by liturgical rites that strengthens their efforts in charting an uncompromising future. The Period of Purification and Enlightenment is the subject of this thesis-project and, appropriately, will be discussed further in the section that follows.

The formation phase of the initiation has brought the elect to understand the meaning of faith and to realize the implication of an existence in Christ; at this moment it should be the judgment of the catechetical leadership that the elect are now ready for their incorporation into the Church. The third and final period leads to the Easter Vigil when the celebrations of baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist occur with the community witnessing their new birth. The spiritual values of these sacraments grace the

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<sup>141</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #139, 77.

<sup>142</sup> RCIA - A Commentary, 63.

elect "with adoption as children of God and are led by the Holy Spirit into the fullness of time begun in Christ."<sup>143</sup>

The initiation takes its full significance as it occurs during the Triduum when the Paschal mysteries come into the view of the worldwide Christian assembly; it is not only in continuity but in harmony with the Paschal celebrations that span from Holy Thursday to the evening prayer of Resurrection Sunday. Within this context, the elect first receive the sacraments of baptism which unites them to "Christ in a death like his; buried with him in death, they are given life again with him, and with him they rise again."<sup>144</sup> A new life begins, a life immersed in the Body of Christ and incorporated into the Catholic Church; no less a real membership that demands a firm commitment toward the community. This action is immediately followed with the sacrament of confirmation; anointed with chrism, the elect receive the Holy Spirit in abundance and are thus set apart "for service for the mission of the reign of God. They are now, as it were, branded or marked for charity and justice."<sup>145</sup> The celebration of these two sacraments signify the indivisible bond between the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father; the same bond that now unites the elect with all the members of the Body of Christ. Finally, the celebration of the Eucharist crowns the two previous sacramental events in that it confers on the neophytes the strength of "the gifts they have already received and are given a foretaste of the eternal banquet."<sup>146</sup> Together with the faithful and in harmony with their acquired

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<sup>143</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #206, 123.

<sup>144</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, XV.

<sup>145</sup> Morris, 203.

<sup>146</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #217, 125.

faith, "they must be the sacrament of the Lord's continuing presence in the world by their participation in his life and ministry."<sup>147</sup>

The process of full integration into the community does not end with the reception of the sacraments of initiation; a Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis is needed to solidify their understanding of the term "priesthood of the faithful". Together with the community, this is a time for the neophytes "to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the eucharist, and in doing the works of charity."<sup>148</sup> This period, which is also referred to as Mystagogy, introduces the neophytes to a deeper understanding of the paschal mystery such that they become one with the Risen Christ, one with the mission entrusted to his disciples. It is a period of appreciation rather than one of catechesis. The official formation of the neophytes typically continues until the Pentecost festival; they are not dismissed, however, until they truly understand that the initiation endeavor is not an end in itself; it is only the beginning of a lifelong journey to the promised Kingdom, a journey, hand-in-hand, with all the members of the Body of Christ.

## 6. The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The RCIA participants have received during a few months an intense formation into the tenets of the faith. They were given pertinent knowledge that can be transformative if inspired by the works and deeds of Jesus. The participants who were moved by the experience and have accepted the invitation of Christ are now ready to profess their unity with the community of the faithful; correspondingly, the Church

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<sup>147</sup> RCIA - A Commentary, 74.

<sup>148</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #244, 151.

"judges their state of readiness and decides on their advancement toward the sacrament of initiation."<sup>149</sup> The participants are henceforth chosen,<sup>150</sup> that is elected to participate openly in the life of the Church and to prepare actively for the reception of the sacraments of initiation. From a focus on instruction, the following period will actively attend to a spirituality of the person in view of the Easter vigil. This is The Period of Purification and Enlightenment, which takes a conscience to task, expects signs of repentance, and presents an in-depth vision of Christ.

The Third Period, as it is often referred to, focuses on the personal disposition of the participants rather than on their knowledge of the religion espoused by their Christian brothers and sisters of the Catholic tradition. The invitation received originally at the hands of the Father is given complete acceptance by the participants at the Rite of Election. In turn, Christ delights in the fact that if the participants open their hearts and minds they will accept to die "to the darkness of evil and rise into the light of life, in short, the Paschal Mystery."<sup>151</sup> This simple yet telling prospect, is of the realm of a true conversion and is an integral part of the plan of salvation.

The Third Period gains its full significance as it occurs during the Lenten Season. The moment solicits a spiritual preparation for a privilege encounter with Christ,<sup>152</sup> a

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<sup>149</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #119, 63.

<sup>150</sup> The choice is not that of the participants, rather it belongs to the teachers aided, supposedly, by inputs from sponsors, and then formalized by an ecclesial authority at the Rite of Election. This is reminiscent of a similar process described by Hippolytus in the *Apostolic Tradition*. Morris, rightfully assumes that in this choice, the teachers, the sponsors, and the ecclesial authority represent God: "as in the great scriptural tradition of election, it is about God's choice of the catechumens to embrace the mission of Jesus, the mission of the reign of God." Morris, 150.

<sup>151</sup> Jay Freel Landry, "The Paschal Mystery: The Christian Vocation and the Heart of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults," *Catechumenate* (Nov. 2007): 14.

<sup>152</sup> It is interesting to mention that two writers compare The Period to a Lenten retreat. First, Morris believes the rite points to its foundation in that it "preserves the element of spiritual recollection and it places the entire experience within the context of the Church's liturgical prayer." (Morris, 166) On the other hand, Robert D. Duggan, suggests that the



relationship that will be called upon to combat the hardships of a modern world. It is only fitting then, that "the Period" should bring about a purification of "the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance."<sup>153</sup> Another intended purpose of "the Period" is to enlighten the same hearts and minds with a profound and meaningful understanding of our Savior. The dual purpose of "the Period" is accomplished by subjecting the participants to a consequential explanation of the Word accompanied by the rites of "scrutinies" and "presentations", both destined to foster a complete spiritual turnaround of the person. For one thing, the "scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good."<sup>154</sup> The presentation of the Creed, for another, will suffuse, "the vision of the elect with the sure light of faith" whereas the Lord's Prayer will fill "them with a deeper realization of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father."<sup>155</sup>

The word "scrutiny" implies re-generation, in that the "old" is replaced over time with the "new". During The Period, the Church celebrates three scrutinies from the Third Sunday of Lent to the Fifth Sunday; during this time the participants are gradually informed about the mystery of sin from which they seek deliverance and look for hope in

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"powerful prayers for deliverance and healing" of the scrutinies point to the inner workings of a Lenten retreat. (Robert D. Duggan, "Coming To Know Jesus the Christ: The First Scrutiny," in *Commentaries: Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*," ed. James A. Wilde (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 44. These authors, however, were not the first to make such an association, Thomas of Jesus, a Carmelite, published in 1613 a work called *On the Manner of Procuring Salvation for All Ages* in which he suggests "that special houses might be set up for catechumens, which would provide for a retreat-like program of preparation and a full revival of the liturgical rites of the early Christian catechumenate." Fischer, 100. At the parish of San Pedro there is a retreat during The Period, but it only lasts a good part of a day.

<sup>153</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #139, 77.

<sup>154</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #141, 78.

<sup>155</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #147, 79.

the Paschal Mystery.<sup>156</sup> Morris expresses the challenge in these terms: "it is a time of focusing on God's gifting presence, and how that presence uncovers and reveals attitudes and lifestyles that are contrary to relationship with God - namely, sin - as well as raising up those attitudes and gifts that deepen the relationship with God."<sup>157</sup> What is of concern at this stage is not what the participants know and hopefully value, but their disposition toward God, their commitment to the Christian purpose, and their outright hope for salvation. It is a time to ascertain that their faith is maturing and to evaluate their readiness for the approaching sacraments of initiation. Mario Righetti summarizes the

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<sup>156</sup> The concept of setting aside sin, embracing repentance, and hoping for forgiveness saw its beginning in the stories of the Gospels. For example, in Luke, *The Pardon of the Sinful Woman* is a clear illustration of the movement from sin to absolute faith. (7:36-50) Similarly, the Apostle Paul reminds the community of Rome that "sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires. And do not present the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness, but present yourselves to God as raised from the dead to life and the parts of your bodies to God as weapons for righteousness. For sin is not to have any power over you, since you are not under the law but under grace." (Rom 7:12-14) Shortly afterwards, we find in the *Didache* directives concerning sin: "Abstain from fleshly passions. . . . Do not entertain a wicked plot against your neighbor. . . . nor be found of money or vain. . . . (rather) Every day seek out the company of the saints, . . . (and pray as follows to our Father) forgive us our debt, as we forgive our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." " (*Didache*, #1, 2, 3, 4, and 8) About a century later, Tertullian bore witness to the polarity between sin and remission, "But as sins are in the flesh yet are not visible . . . so people of this sort are filthy in their spirit, which is where sins begins: for the spirit is the master, and the body the servant. . . . (repentance should come and be followed with remission). . . Let them first ask for salvation , so that you may be seen to have given to one that asketh." ("*On Baptism*", #4, 10, and 18) During the same epoch, Origen articulated the same message but expressed it in practical terms "Another group (of candidates) is formed of those who have shown to the best of their ability their intentions to desire nothing but what Christians approve. Among these (Christian instructors) , certain ones are appointed to inquire about the lives and behavior of the candidates, to keep access to the public assembly from those guilty of secret sins, but to welcome others with their whole hearts, to make them better each day." ("*Against Celsius*", 3:51, Turner, 33.) With the idea of sinfulness in mind, Hippolytus advocated for two examinations: the first one is an inquiry into the lives of the postulants, a practice in vogue today when Directors of Religious Education conduct interviews of inquirers. The second questioning, however, is directly in line with what The Period stands for: "And when those who are to receive baptism are chosen, let their live be examined: have they lived good lives when they were catechumens? Have they honored the widows? Have they visited the sick? Have they done every kind of good work? And when those who brought them bear witness to each; 'He Has', let them hear the gospel. From the time they were set apart, let hands be laid on them daily while they are exorcised." ("*Apostolic Tradition*", #20, Cuming, 17). This line of questioning in the context of the RCIA corresponds to a self-examination on one's past life. The struggle between sin and grace illustrates a persistent human reality, that of a balancing act between good and evil; it is no wonder that the rite gives it so much importance.

<sup>157</sup> Morris, 171.

situation; "The scrutinies are a complex of liturgical actions, whereby through the accompanying prayers, exorcisms, anointings, and renunciations of Satan, the Church attempts to purify the soul and body of the 'competens' of any possible demonic influence, in order to assure his [her] fruitful reception of the grace of baptism."<sup>158</sup> The challenge is to use the available tools of the rite to encourage a change in the participants' mindsets; such a tool is the gospel readings of the scrutinies.

The readings chosen for the three successive scrutinies have the unique feature of galvanizing a transformation of the hearts and minds of the participants involved.<sup>159</sup> During the scrutinies, the participants are offered the graced privilege of listening to the words of Jesus, and of responding, if they so choose, to an invitation to surrender to the truth. In the stories of The Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:4-42), The Man Born Blind (Jn 9:1-41) , and The Raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), the words and deeds of Jesus touch the very hearts of human lives, instill confidence in the ways of God, and point to salvation. Jesus gives credence to his own teachings: what he teaches brings to faith, and from faith the expectation of baptism. It is the same movement that is visible in the catechumenate: instructions cultivate faith and faith exacts baptism. The aim of the Third Period is to deliver such a faith: a faith that renounces the works of Satan and embraces, without condition, the spirit of Christ.

The three readings of the scrutinies are designed to yield faith, and from faith a disciple of Christ. Such is the revealing truth of *The Gospel According to John: The*

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<sup>158</sup> Mario Righetti, "Manuale di storia liturgica", 55, Vol. IV, quoted from Michel Dujarier, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Historical and Pastoral Reflections* (New York, NY: Sadlier, 1979), 115.

<sup>159</sup> Robert D. Duggan sees in the scrutinies "a progressive movement via the thematic development from one Sunday to the next." He continues, "Rather than a straight-line development, perhaps a better image is a development that spirals around these mysteries, reaching deeper levels at each successive celebration." Duggan, 45.

*Samaritan Woman*, for one, accepts Jesus' spring of "living water" that wells up to eternal life (4:14) and rejects at once her evil past (4:29). In the story of *The Man Born Blind*, the blind man sees the "light" of Jesus and without hesitation proclaims "I do believe, Lord, and he worshiped him." (9:38) Finally, in the anecdote on *The Raising of Lazarus* Martha, doubting at first (9:21), hears the word of "the resurrection and the life", and exclaims "Yes Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah." (9:27) In all three stories, a dramatic yet significant change occurs: Jesus' interlocutors all "hear" Jesus, all "see" Jesus, and all come "to believe". The three wounded personages of the stories, at first, received instructions from Jesus: these instructions brought them to an irreversible faith; and from faith to a committed disciple in view of a baptism yet-to-become a reality. In a like manner, the participants in "the Period" are asked to put aside their past (the Samaritan woman), to witness the power of Christ (the blind man), and to opt for a fellowship with Jesus (Martha); if the enlightened faith of the participants conquers their past, the reception of the sacraments of initiation will soon become a reality. After the reading of each one of these Johannine stories, the task of the minister is to make the sin-to-grace experience come alive: his or her efforts must be directed at making "the connections between the scriptural proclamation, the journey of the elect, the life situations of this particular community and the ritual that is about to take place."<sup>160</sup> The intercessions and the exorcisms which follow are intended to complement this purpose.

The prayers of intercession that accompany each homily set the tone for the ritual of exorcism. The prayers implore the participants to "sincerely reject everything in their lives that is displeasing and contrary to Christ",<sup>161</sup> to "put all fear behind them and press

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<sup>160</sup> Duggan, 47.

<sup>161</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #153, 82.

forward with confidence",<sup>162</sup> and to "have horror of sin, which distorts life".<sup>163</sup> These prayers supplement the homilies and initiate an action that will free the participants "from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil." Concurrently, "They receive new strength in the midst of their spiritual journey and they open their hearts to receive the gifts of the Savior."<sup>164</sup> The rite of exorcism<sup>165</sup> is celebrated to reinforce the action of purification and enlightenment already in progress through the intense self-reflections of the participants. It is a rite focused on spirituality with the aim of opening the participants' souls to the power of Christ, that is the power to forgive, to free, and to save. Did not Jesus forgive the paralytic of all his sinful past (Mk 2:9), freed the Gadarene Demoniacs from their demons (Mt 8:32), and saved the Sinful Woman on account of her faith (Lk 7:50)? Is not the celebrant imploring similar actions through the power of God?

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<sup>162</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #167,96.

<sup>163</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, 174, 104.

<sup>164</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #144, 78.

<sup>165</sup> The rite of exorcism is far from being a patristic era invention as we might be tempted to believe: it has its roots in the very ministry of Jesus. A case in mind is that of the boy possessed by a demon in a story of Luke: a spirit has seized a young boy who could not be dislodged by the disciples. Touched by the supplication of his father, Jesus "rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and returned him to his father." (Lk 9:42) The earliest writer in the early Church to mention an exorcism is Tertullian; his exorcism, however, takes place during baptism. "*On Baptism*", #7 and 8 The first writings of an exorcism before baptism is found in Hippolytus: "And when the day of their baptism approaches, the bishop shall exorcized each of them, in order that he may know whether he is pure. And if anyone is not good or nor pure, let him be put aside, because he has not heard the word with faith." ("*Apostolic Tradition*", #20, Cuming, 17) A similar reference is found one and half century later in the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem: "We are trying to get pure gold. Can the impurities be removed from it without fire? In the same way, the soul can't be purified without exorcisms. . . . so too the exorcists inspire fear through the Holy Spirit and, so to speak, rekindle the soul inside the retort of the body. Our enemy the devil departs, but salvation and the hope of eternal life remain. Purified of sins, the soul henceforth possesses salvation." ("*Procatechesis*", #9) A few years later, Augustine would confirm the celebrations of exorcisms in Hippo: "What we begin in you by exhortations made in the name of your Redeemer, bring to completion by the appropriate examination of your soul and by heartfelt contrition. By our prayers and exorcisms, we engage in combat against the deceitful ruses of that old enemy." "Sermon 216", #6-7, Dujarier, *The Rites*, 120. Dujarier concludes that during this period "we can establish at least three types of exorcisms: (1) The daily exorcisms of those in immediate preparation for Baptism, administered by clerics; (2) the major scrutinies which marked off the principle stages of immediate preparation for Baptism and which always included a solemn exorcism; and (3) the exorcism which was celebrated during the Easter Vigil." *Ibid*, 119.

In one of the prayers of exorcism, he prays "In your love free them from their infirmities, heal their sickness, quench their thirst, and give them peace."<sup>166</sup>

The woman from Samaria (Jn 4:4-42) is possessed by an evil spirit, a personal sin that engulfed her total being for years, past and present: she has had "five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband." (4:18) Her situation is dramatic: as an outcast from society she can no longer be herself. Jesus did not dismiss her presence nor did he judge her intentions; on the contrary, he welcomed an open dialogue. With words of wisdom, Jesus effects a gradual change in her heart: from believing that he is a simple Jew, to seeing in him a prophet, to conceding that he is "possibly" the Messiah. This sinful woman that she was, ultimately believes with the town's people that he is the "savior of the world." (4:42) In essence, the story presents Jesus as "living water", the source of goodness that freed the woman from her past, forgave her sins, and opened the door to her salvation.

Similarly, the blind man (Jn 9:1-41) was born with his blindness, a social sin attributed by contemporaries to evil behaviors of the past. Jesus, the "light of the world", took pity on him and gave him his sight. Jesus did not question his past nor judge his present state of mind; he took a mixture of clay and saliva and "smearred the clay in his eyes, and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam." (9:7) At that very moment the man began to see (9:7) and he came to believe (4:38). The caring action of Jesus cured the illness of the afflicted man, freed him from all evil, and set him on the path of salvation.

In the story of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), Martha seems to have persistent doubts in her soul: she is not totally convinced about the true identity of Jesus. In all likelihood,

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<sup>166</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #154, 85.

there is possibly a part of her under the influence of some small evil disposition. It is only after Jesus explained that he is "the resurrection and the life" (11:25) that she comes "to believe that (he is) the Messiah," (11:27). Still, her doubt persists, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." (11:39) The raising of her brother finally cemented her belief in Jesus, in whom she saw "the glory of God" (11:40) An action of Jesus was ultimately required to effect a final change in her heart: a change to accept Jesus' true identity totally. Jesus certainly forgave her little sin, freed her from all doubts, and showed her the way to the "life" that he is.

The actions of Jesus in these three revealing stories suggest that he practiced a form of exorcism whereby a conversion ensued: a passage from evil to the Truth, whether from a personal sin (the woman from Samaria), from a social sin (the blind man who, according to the signs of his times, inherited his blindness,), or from an individual sin (the persistent doubt in the heart of Martha). The exorcisms performed during the scrutinies emulate the liberating actions of Jesus: they are designed to quash evil, evil understood as the absence of God, with the action of grace. Lastly, the presentations of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer join forces with the Scrutinies in the process of enlightening the participants before being blessed with the Body of Christ.

A normal reaction would be to ask, What do the Creed and the Lord's Prayer have in common with the scrutinies, if we think of the scrutinies as a moment focused on self-reflection and purification? After all, the Creed is a profession of faith whereas the Lord's Prayer is an appeal to the goodness of God.<sup>167</sup> The rite responds to this concern in this

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<sup>167</sup> The Creed did not make its entrance into the catechumenate until late in its development, possibly not until the latter part of the fourth century. It was originally introduced in the liturgical celebrations of the Church as a "tradition" similar to other teachings; in time, the catechumenate adopted this "tradition" but referred to it as "presentation". One of the earliest testimony of the presentation of

fashion: the Creed, which "recalls the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race, suffuses the vision of the elect with the sure light of faith. . . . (whereas) The Lord's Prayer fills them with a deeper realization of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father."<sup>168</sup> The rite informs that these two prayers are not just simple ways of telling God that we believe in the reality of the Trinity and that we confess our dependence on his goodness; rather, they give life to a conversation with the God, which otherwise would bear little fruits. It could be argued that the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, if prayed, not recited, engender a profound bond with God, a caring and personal union, a communion with the divine.

Of the Eucharist, Augustine once said, "For we have become His Body, and through his mercy we are what we receive."<sup>169</sup> Can we not say then, that by uniting

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the Creed comes from Cyril of Jerusalem, "Within these verses are contained all instruction in the faith. This is what I want you to retain verbatim, and which each of you must carefully recite, without writing it on paper, but by engraving it by memory in your hearts. Be careful that in reciting it, no catechumen hears what has been handed down to you. Keep this faith as the only provision you need for your journey all the rest of your life, and receive no other. See now, my brothers, and keep the traditions which you have now receive and write them in bold letters within your hearts." "Catecheses", V, 12, Dujarier, *The Rites*, 138-139. Similarly, Augustine mentions this tradition, "It is the Creed that inscribes in you that to be saved you must believe and confess. It is true that, what you will hear in very few words in order to submit it to your memory and for you to confess verbally, will be for you neither new nor amazing. . . . To make you learn it, however, a short collection of truths were put together sequentially; a matter of lighting up your faith and of preparing yourself to confess it without burdening your memory." "Sermon 214", #1, Maertens, *Histoire*, 131 - 132, (My translation). As for the Lord's Prayer, although it appears in early documents of Church Fathers, it was not "presented" until later and then only after the Presentation of the Creed: "According to Augustine, the ceremony was celebrated on the sixth Sunday of Lent, and the recitation took place on the morning of Holy Saturday. In many places, this more formal recitation was reduced to a simple proclamation of the Our Father during the baptismal Mass." Dujarier continues, for Augustine, [The Lord's Prayer was understood as a prayer reserved to Christians, and *baptized* Christians at that. As Augustine said, "How can someone say 'Our Father' if he has not been baptized."] Dujarier, *The Rites*, 140 -141. Both Creed and the Lord's Prayer became a fixture of the catechumenate and, presently, the "Creed is more than memorization of words and concepts. Knowledge of the Creed is, in an initial way, exposure to all the movement of salvation it articulates." As for the Lord's Prayer, knowing the words is not the point, most Christians easily remember them, "Knowing the pattern of prayer it embodies is the point. Once we know the pattern, then we know how to pray as a disciple of Jesus." Morris, 178.

<sup>168</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #147, 79.

<sup>169</sup> Augustine, "Sermon 229". From notes given out by Fr. Gerard Austin in his class on "The Sacraments of the Church", The Blessed Edmond Rice School for Pastoral Ministry, Fall 2008.



ourselves intently with God in the proclamations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, we move closer and closer to the divine, possibly becoming more divine? The comparison is not of the same order, but it bears a relationship with Augustine's interpretation of the power of the Eucharist, a power of God attested in the writings of the Psalmist: "You guide me along the right path for the sake of your name. Even when I walk through a dark valley, I fear no harm for you are at my side; your rod and staff give me courage." (Ps 23:3-4) The power of these proclamations is so real that Aidan Kavanagh ventured to write, "Without them neither baptism nor eucharist makes sense, for if we do not believe what we confess and pray, then all collapses into rubble of infidelity, urges, programs, ideologies and confusion. We become something less than a Rotary Club with hymns."<sup>170</sup>

The Christian edifice holds together by its teachings, its rites, its tradition, its prayers; if one stone is removed, the whole edifice is at risk. The visionaries who assembled the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults clearly understood this hard fact: the rite dutifully includes all of the necessary components for a participant to mentally and spiritually attain his purpose, that is the incorporation into the Body of Christ, into the Church. It is only fitting then, that the last rites before initiation should include the Creed and the Lord's Prayer: together, they constitute "the summary statements of our initiation formation and, when one can assent to them with his or her own life, then it is a clear indication that the person is ready for the celebration of the initiation sacraments."<sup>171</sup>

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment is designed to elicit a passage from a reasonable knowledge of the faith to the realization of a personal encounter with Christ. In this period of formation, the participants learn to have confidence in his or her faith

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<sup>170</sup> Aidan Kavanagh, "The Presentations: Creed and Lord's Prayer," in *Commentaries: Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, ed. James A. Wilde (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 41.

<sup>171</sup> Morris, 178.

and to trust in Christ. The participants are no longer what they were; their identity has been pierced with a love of God and community. Along the way, the process of conversion supplanted secular aspirations and yielded a spiritual being endowed with the way, the light, and the life of Christ. What remains to happen is a resounding "yes" at the baptismal font.

## Chapter 4

### Purification, Enlightenment, Catechesis, and the "Word"

#### Introduction

This chapter has for purposes to exhibit the theological concepts of purification and enlightenment particularly as they are handled in the context of the Third Period. The chapter also discusses the nature and meaning of the Third Period while keeping in mind the vision of the bishops of the United States for its application. Another section of the chapter investigates what is meant by faith formation while entertaining concepts such as ministry, catechesis, vocation, and the character of a catechetical facilitator. Lastly, the chapter attempts to define what is meant by Liturgy of the Word in an effort to delineate the how's of an effective catechesis.

#### 1. A Theology of Purification

##### a) Defining purification

The word 'pure' normally brings to mind the idea of something that is no less than one hundred percent of what constitutes its main ingredient or ingredients. For instance, it is expected that pure orange juice is pressed from oranges only and that pure water is distilled to the point that only two elements remain: hydrogen and oxygen. The process of purifying ascertains that the end result is typically achieved over time and will yield something that is free from foreign constituents. In religious circles, a similar understanding of purity should be expected, except that absolute purification of a human being is impossible, only God can be characterized as "pure". Good human acts even if accrued over time lead to partial purity: a person may desperately strive to be freed from

temptations, to be cleared of guilt, but the fact remains that as long as evil exists, perfect purity of heart and mind is unattainable on earth. For human beings, purification is a process; it is working toward an ideal that seems to be evading the most sincere efforts. Nevertheless, abandoning the struggle is unthinkable for a Christian; faith demands actions, but actions permeated with purity.

#### b) Purification in the Old Testament

To the average person, water is simply a commodity that sustains life or a substance utilized for various cleaning purposes. It is a component of the cycle of life without which the earth would not subsist. In the creation episode, for example, water recedes to give existence to land (Gn 1:9) whereas in Exodus 15 water becomes a means of subsistence: the Israelites who had gone three days without fresh water [grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" he appealed to the Lord, who pointed out to him a certain piece of wood. When he threw this into the water, the water became fresh.] (vv. 24-25) In the Hebrew Testament, water is not only used for its natural properties: it is often associated with a new beginning, a regeneration, or with purification: concepts adopted by many religions of the world.

For the Israelites, purification with water sometimes took the form of healing: water, they thought, could cleanse their bodies of imperfections. It became, for instance, a healing and purifying agent for persons stricken with leprosy and ostracized by the priestly class: Naaman, an army commander under King Aram, was diagnosed with the sickness and was sent to the prophet Elisha for a cure. Elisha gave him the following message: "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean." (2Kgs 5:10) Naaman obeyed the directive and was cured on the spot. The

obsession with uncleanness took a dramatic turn in the Book of Exodus in which the writers made it an ominous offence against the Law for anyone who did not wash before offering a sacrifice. Aaron and his sons, for instance, were strictly directed by the Lord to clean themselves before entering the meeting tent, "they must wash with water, lest they die. Likewise when they approach the altar in their ministry, to offer an oblation to the Lord, they must wash their hands and feet, lest they die." (Ex 30:20-21) It is noteworthy to mention that these acts of purification did little to purify the minds and hearts of the persons involved; they were little more than deeds destined to ascertain that a person was physically cleaned for reinsertion into the Israelite way of life or was pure for religious activities. By their very nature, these cleansing acts were more symbolic of a state of purity than conducive to a lasting transformation process by which a person grows increasingly pure over time; those involved in the rituals were purified on the outside but their souls could remain tainted.

There are in the Hebrew Testament, however, a few instances in which the concept of purification takes on the deeper meaning of spiritual washing. In the first example, a repentant David asks a compassionate God to have mercy: "Thoroughly wash away my guilt and from my sin cleanse me." David will not be satisfied with a one-time intervention that will make him "whiter than snow", he wants a permanent transformation: "A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit." The contrite David wishes to wipe away all guilt and be the faithful servant that he once were: "Restore to me the gladness of your salvation. . . . and my mouth will proclaim your praise." (Ps 51:3-17) The Psalmist understands what purification signifies and makes of David the personification of its essence: unless a heart is oriented to the will of

God purification is impossible. In this second example, the Lord offers a stern indictment of Israel and Judah: two nations with sick heads and faint hearts that have "forsaken the Lord". The Lord does not remain silent: "Your new moons and festivals I detest; . . . Your hands are full of blood!" The denunciation is meant to shock the two nations and bring them to their senses. In the same breath, God desperately tries to evoke a turn of events: "Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good."<sup>172</sup> And if Israel and Judah repent, "Though your sins may be like scarlet, they may become white as snow: . . . If you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land". (Is 1:4-19) A path to repentance is laid down by God and if a moral cleansing is accepted, good will prevail. Both instances, David's prayer and God's exhortation and promise, have little to do with a washing in water, but rather refer to a spiritual washing, which implies repentance in the former case and a change in the evil ways of Israel and Judah in the later case.

God's willingness to stand by his people was not damaged by their wrongdoings; rather, it reinforced his determination to stand by them. Not only will he remain present among them, he will reward them for embracing a pure way of life. His reward, however, is conditioned on the state of their hearts and spirits. Should they abandon their sinful practices, repent, and observe his ordinances, he will bless them forever: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees." (Ez 36:25-27)

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<sup>172</sup> A similar exhortation appears in Jeremiah 4:14, "Cleanse your heart of evil, Jerusalem, that you may be saved. How long will you entertain wicked schemes."

This passage illustrates the true meaning of purity: possibly written during Ezekiel's exile in Babylon at a time when Jerusalem was in danger of being devastated, the concerned prophet focuses on the heart and spirit, the two principles that animate for better or for worst the whole being, since in biblical thought the heart "is the seat of thinking and loving, so it will be a way of looking at life from God's point of view. The new spirit, on the other hand, is the power to live as an entire nation, not just as individuals."<sup>173</sup> Thus, the water sprinkled by God has the power to transform wickedness into righteousness; all that he demands is for people to redirect their hearts and spirits to his ways.

From the beginning of creation, God's economy was for man and woman to live in a state of purity, a state of love and joy. His creatures were to be happy and live under the shadow of his benevolence, walking on the path of goodness with pure hearts and minds. On account of disobedience, evil entered the world such that humanity lost its sense of purity and found itself in disarray. God felt compelled to intervene by making himself present in the lives of his people, starting with Abraham in whom he found a faithful servant. His descendants<sup>174</sup>, however, often proved to be challenging by contravening incessantly God's statutes. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah and the infidelities of David are two vivid examples of disobedience to his will, but he, nevertheless, would not alter his position toward humanity and would stand steadfast by his people.

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<sup>173</sup> Lawrence Boadt, "Ezekiel", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, R. E. Brown (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), #86, 325.

<sup>174</sup> God's promise of goodness to Abraham applied to his descendants as well, "reaching a climax in the golden age of Daniel and Solomon." Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, New Edition (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2001), 4- 5. God was faithful to his promise but the response from the Israelites did not always meet his expectations.

God knew his people were faltering constantly; he also realized that the simple acts of purification demanded by the Law and the reprimands of his prophets did little to improve their spiritual wellbeing. His efforts to bring them to a sense of heartfelt guilt included forewarnings: "The people of Judah have done what is evil in my eyes, says the Lord. . . . Therefore, beware! days will come, says the Lord, when . . . In the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem I will silence the cry of joy, the cry of gladness, . . . for the land will be turned to rubble." (Jer 7:30-34) Efforts at instilling a sense of remorse into their hearts often went unanswered: "how long will this people spurn me? How long will they refuse to believe in me, despite all the signs I have performed among them?". (Nm 14:11) Nevertheless, God stood by them: [With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you. Again I will restore you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin Israel; . . . Yes, a day will come when the watchmen will call out on Mount Ephraim: "Rise up, let us go to Zion, to the Lord, our God." . . . You will be my people, and I will be your God.] (Jer 31:3-4, 6; 30:22)

God's unwavering love<sup>175</sup> was inscribed into the hearts and minds of the Israelites, always working at keeping them faithful to his covenants, at bringing them back to a sense of enduring purity. If they constantly failed to keep their words it was not because of God's lack of purifying love, it was because of "man's wickedness on earth" (Gn 6:5). Ultimately, what would be needed to counteract the weight of evil on the world would be the self-emptying of his only Son: "What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race" (Jn 1:5); the Life that would reset humanity on a golden path.

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<sup>175</sup> Jordan Aumann, however, mentions that "God's initiative . . . demands a response from Israel, both by obedience to the law given on Sinai and by religious worship." Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 5. An initiative which never received a lasting commitment from the part of Israel.



### c) Purification in the New Testament

In the New testament, the person of Jesus is animated by an unique relationship with his Father; a relationship constantly governed by his persistent desire to accomplish his will. Jesus' mission, that of realizing his Father's plan of salvation, is a clear indication that he has not "come to abolish the law or the prophets" but to fulfill them (Mt 5:17). He understood that the ways of the Israelites were not in line with his Father's covenants, their only God; he therefore set out to correct their infidelities and establish a new order, one of purity of hearts and minds at the service of others.

The first sign of purity in the New Testament is found in the person of Mary. In the *Gospel according to Luke*, this young girl without sin from the beginning is approached by an angel and informed that she will become the mother of the Son of God: "Hail, favored one! . . . Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:28, 31-32). Although the announcement makes it clear that she will not bear a son from the action of a man (Lk 1:35), her virginity nevertheless raised questions. Jesus himself had to intervene with the Pharisees who were questioning the whereabouts of his Father: to their questioning, he sharply answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." (Jn 8:19) The situation of his birth is transparent: his Father is not of this earth. Mary, his mother, acknowledges as such when she emphatically declares: "behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed." (Lk 1:48) In her docile resignation and resolute obedience, Mary has perfected the idea of purity; thus becoming an archetype of what is expected of every "handmaid" or "servant" of the

Father. Her purity is not from washing but rather from an interior disposition<sup>176</sup> to submit to God's will.<sup>177</sup> As a result, the cross that she will bear is not for her but for humanity to be blessed.

Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, was already advanced in age and barren. Nevertheless, an angel appeared to her husband Zechariah and announced that she would bear a son who "will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God." (Lk 1:15-16) John the Baptist, their only son, became a recluse living in the desert preaching: "I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me . . . will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire." (Mt 3:11) This holy man obtained his purity not from washing or otherwise but by an action of God: "the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah in the desert." (Lk 3:2)<sup>178</sup> John's way of living and his outspoken invitation to a righteous life attracted many countrymen and countrywomen but none were as blameless as Jesus, the Word of God.

Jesus did not need to be baptized but willingly accepted to set an example for his followers: Ambrose, referring to Luke 3:21, mentions that "this is justice, to do first

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<sup>176</sup> According to the law of Leviticus, a woman who had conceived a son needed to present herself to the Temple for purification forty days after his birth, otherwise she would remain unclean (Lv 12:1-8). Thomas Aquinas, however, observed, "the Blessed Virgin brought forth a male child without receiving the seed of a man. Therefore she had no need to come to the Temple to be purified." And added, "Although the Blessed Virgin had no uncleanness, yet she wished to fulfill the observance of purification, not because she needed it, but on account of the precept of the Law." Just as her son accepted to be circumcised "as an example of humility and obedience" so did his Mother accept to be purified. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Q.37, a.4, "Christ's Circumcision", <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4037.html> (accessed March 8, 2017).

<sup>177</sup> Her obedient and confident faith in accepting to become the mother of the Son of God is "as powerful as those (words) spoken later by her son in the garden before his death, "Father, . . . not my will but yours be done." (Lk 22:42).

<sup>178</sup> The writer of the *Gospel according to Matthew* highlights the true nature of John the Baptist in a testimony of Jesus, "I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist;" (Mt 11:11).

thyself which thou wishest another to do, and so encourage others by thy example."<sup>179</sup>

Ambrose, however, was not to limit himself to this simplified explanation which parallels God's commandment of loving thy neighbor as thyself. He articulates his thought: "Our Lord was baptized because He wished, not to be cleansed, but to cleanse the waters, that, being purified by the flesh of Christ that knew no sin, they might have the virtue of baptism".<sup>180</sup> The waters of the Jordan which previously cleaned Naaman from leprosy (2Kgs 5:10) were purified with the baptism of Jesus: henceforth, the waters of baptism united with the action of the Holy Spirit will cast aside the past of the sinner and make room for a new life in Christ.

In appearance, John's water baptism of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk 3:3)<sup>181</sup> seems to be in contrast with Jesus' baptism "with the holy Spirit and fire." (Lk 3:16)<sup>182</sup> In reality, they are complementary: [the water baptism of John will be followed

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<sup>179</sup> Ambrose quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Q.39, "The Baptism of Jesus", a.1., <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4039.html> (Accessed on March 23, 2017).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Whereas proselyte baptism "was a ritual washing of initiation for converts to Judaism", John's baptism "is an acting out of the recipients' interior disposition and a symbol of the forgiveness they hope to receive." John R. Donohue and Daniel J Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 62. Jesus' baptism, on the other hand, is one of immediate forgiveness and of an incorporation into the Body of Christ, such that the Christian lives for Christ who is the origin of the promise of the Kingdom. The Spirit in Jesus' baptism reminds of a passage that Jesus read from a scroll in Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor." (Lk 4:18) In a similar way, at a Christian baptism, the Holy Spirit, who has purified John the Baptist, descends on the baptized, anoints the baptized, and is with the baptized on his or her journey to the Kingdom. From a Christian belief, the Holy Spirit as "the principle of Christian sonship, is also the principle of Christian activity." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, R. E. Brown (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 789, #30. The Apostle Paul is unyielding about the reality of the Spirit's influence: [For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, Abba, "Father!"] (Rom 2:14-15)

<sup>182</sup> Luke's reference to fire reminds of a passage in Malachi in which fire has the power to purify: "Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying [silver], and he will purify the sons of Levi," (Mal 3:1-3). The "he" refers to Elijah (3:23). In the New Testament, it refers to John the Baptist.

by an "immersion" of the penitent in the cleansing power of the Spirit of God],<sup>183</sup> that is to say the washing of the sins of the repentant is actualized by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>184</sup> The waters of the Jordan, purified by the presence of Christ, symbolize the power of the Spirit of God to effect a transformation of the hearts of the penitents such that they are now joined to the Lord and become one spirit with him. (1Cor 6:17) On account of baptism the flesh is no longer enslaved to sin and the soul is open to the grace of God; body and soul are absorbed in the Body of Christ such that the Apostle Paul could say: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me," (Gal 2:20).

The baptism of Jesus offers a new beginning to his followers; once baptized in the waters of renewal and of the Spirit that is, the "living waters" wished for by the Samaritan woman,<sup>185</sup> (Jn 4:15) the baptized are on track for a life oriented toward the Kingdom. It took, however, one more definitive action to complete the purification by baptism, that is the passion of Christ. More to the point, what would baptism be without

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<sup>183</sup> "The Gospel according to Matthew" in *New American Bible*, Saint Joseph Edition (New York, NY: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 1992), 14, Footnote 3, 11.

<sup>184</sup> Irenaeus interprets this action of the Holy Spirit as an anointing. Referring to the following passage from *The Acts of the Apostles*, "you (the Apostles) will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8), Irenaeus rewrites the sentence as follows: "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power." This anointing, however, is not restricted to the Apostles, but is for the benefit of all the baptized on account of their faith in Christ. The immediate effect of this anointing is a renewal from "old habits into the newness of Christ. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in Carl E. Olson, "A Scriptural Reflection on the Reading for January 13, 2013, the Baptism of the Lord," <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/blog/1879.html> (accessed March 26, 2017).

<sup>185</sup> The Samaritan woman, at first, does not understand that the "living waters" referred to by Jesus are much more than just physical water: these "living waters" are a gift from God; this gift is the "live giving revelation of the heavenly, . . . (Jesus) alone makes God known (Jn 1:18, 3:13) and this offers the possibility of eternal life to those who are born again of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5)." Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 117. These "living waters" are the gift of life received at baptism and imply a purity of the heart and mind turned toward God.

the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ?<sup>186</sup> These two events, together, allow the plan of salvation to advance in maturity. To some extent, they are the crowned jewels of Christianity without which life in communion with God would be impossible. In other words, the crucifixion<sup>187</sup> and the resurrection are two changing agents that allow the conversion process to grow in purity; the process started at baptism<sup>188</sup> is perfected over time and will come to maturity on the last day. Paraphrasing the words of the Apostle Paul, in baptism we are born into Christ, we are offered a new beginning, that is we have died into his death and because he was raised from among the dead we too are offered a new life. (Rom 6:3-4)

The movement from the baptism of Jesus to his death on the cross, to his rising from the tomb are not disjointed events,<sup>189</sup> rather they form a unity of intention and

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<sup>186</sup> One author in particular, Luke Timothy Johnson, argues that "The resurrection of Jesus is the starting point of Christian faith." He goes on: "In the earliest Christian writings, the conviction that Jesus was alive in a new and more powerful fashion was connected to the experience of the Holy Spirit, so that having this Spirit and being able to confess "Jesus is Lord" went together (1 Cor 12:1-3)." Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 389.

<sup>187</sup> Just as Jesus' handing over of his Spirit (Jn 19:30) may be a symbol for the pouring out of the Spirit on John's nascent community, the water and blood that flowed out of Jesus' pierced side may be a symbol for the Eucharist and Baptism. Moloney explains: "The author (of the *Gospel according to John*) presupposes the readers' knowledge and experience of the "water" of Baptism (cf.3:5) and the "blood" of Eucharist (cf. 6:53, 54, 55-56), and links them with the cross." Moloney, 505-506. Moloney's understanding of these two symbols reinforces the idea that baptism, the cross, and Jesus' resurrection are closely intertwined together and form a cohesive whole, an integral part of God's plan of salvation.

<sup>188</sup> Baptism cannot be viewed as an independent event that occasions an once-and-for-all definitive change of hearts toward righteousness, but rather, with faith, the Christian is [identified with the phases of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection and so can "live for God"]. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians", *The New Biblical Jerome Commentary*, 785, #20.

<sup>189</sup> Reflecting on a passage in the *Letter to the Romans* from the Apostle Paul, "just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all. (Rom 5:18), Fitzmyer offers this comment: "The Christian has been endowed with a new life through Christ, who now reigns supreme instead of sin and death. But this new life means a reshaping of human beings. Through baptism, they are identified with Christ's death and resurrection and their very being or "self" is transformed. The outlook of the newly justified person is such as to exclude sin from his or her conduct." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, R. E. Brown (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 847, #62. The human nature of the baptized has been touched by Christ's divinity such that the "self" is now oriented toward God.

accomplishment by a compassionate God wanting to counteract sinfulness in the world and concurrently to pave a path to heaven. These three seemingly separate actions can be summarized with the simple, yet revealing term "God among us". God generously combined his divinity with our humanity<sup>190</sup> in the person of Jesus so that everything he said and did cannot be other than purifying: his baptism, his death, and his rising from the dead are a foundation for understanding purity in a Christian sense.<sup>191</sup>

The purity that Jesus radiates is not of the kind understood by reason alone or embraced by secular promoters, for what they define as purity has no ultimate end other than in itself. On the contrary, the purity that emanates from Jesus is a purity of the heart and mind with a promise: "Rid yourself of all malice and all deceit, insincerity, envy, and all slander; like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk so that through it you may grow into salvation, for you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Pt:2:1-4) The spiritual milk tasted at baptism is the love of Christ for humanity that supports a spiritual journey to the Kingdom: "So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrifice offering to God for a fragrant aroma. . . . Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure, or greedy person, that is, an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God." (Eph 5:1, 5) In

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<sup>190</sup> Aumann provides additional light on that reality: "The Word condescended to "humanize " himself, so to speak, by assuming human nature, but in so doing, he elevated that nature to the supernatural order by "divinizing" it through its union with the divine Person." Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 11. In so doing, the purification process of the human race took form, which continued with the baptism of Jesus.

<sup>191</sup> Fitzmyer believes that through "baptism the Christian is actually identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The early church preserved a recollection that Jesus referred to his own death as a "baptism" (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50). . . . Paul's symbolism is sufficiently preserved if the baptized person is thought of as somehow under the water." A direct association is possible if the Christian remembers the baptism of Jesus by immersion. Fitzmyer continues, "Identified with Christ in death, the Christian dies to the law and to sin (Gal 2:19; Rom 6:6,10; 7:4). Identified with Christ in his resurrection. one shares a new life and the very vitality of the risen Christ and his Spirit (1 Cor 6:17)." Joseph J. Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1408, #113.

reading this passage, it is difficult not to think about the two paths of the *Didache*, the path of life and the path of death: one path is opposed to the other just as purity and impurity are opposed to each other. In a similar way the Apostle Paul opposes the Spirit to the flesh and concludes his argument: "Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with his passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit." (Gal 5:16-25) A Christian then, has been immersed in the waters of the Jordan and has been blessed by the Father through his Son in the Spirit; his or her purity proceeds from the action of Christ and is realized by living in the Spirit.

## 2. A Theology of Enlightenment

### a) Defining enlightenment

The word "enlightenment" can bring back to memory the Age of Enlightenment, a philosophical movement that persisted in the Eighteen Century. The proponents of this intellectual society developed ideas supported by reason alone, attributing to them a legitimate quality on account of their source: the power of logical knowledge. Liberty, government, and separation of state and church are some of the ideas on which they labored to advance their reductionist ideology. Since human beings cannot survive by reason alone, the movement was short lived. A similar movement, called Gnosticism, gained notoriety in the early years of Christianity by placing undue emphasis on inward knowledge. Its adepts [were "people who knew", and their knowledge at once constituted them a superior class of beings, whose present and future status was essentially different from that of those who, for whatever reason, did not know.]<sup>192</sup> It is worth noting,

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<sup>192</sup> John Arendzen, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6., "Gnosticism", (New York, NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06592a.html> (accessed May 4, 2017).

however, that both cerebral systems, the Age of Enlightenment and Gnosticism, were not freed from ignorance and miscomprehension in spite of their pretention to the truth. It is true that the word "enlightenment" supposes knowledge but a knowledge that has authority and legitimacy, a knowledge free from errors. In Christian circles, "enlightenment" takes on additional meaning: it contains a spiritual element brought on by the light of Christ.

#### b) Enlightenment in the Old Testament

The word light, a derivative of enlightenment, is often used in the Old Testament in connection with God. In the *Book of Isaiah*, for instance, God has chosen Cyrus to liberate the Jews from the Babylonians and, in so doing, lets him know that he is the Lord: "there is no other, there is no other God besides me. . . . I form the light, and create the darkness, I make well-being and create woe; I, the Lord, do all these things" (45:5, 7). The one who is speaking is the only true God, the master of the universe, through whom all good things are possible. The lesson is clear: to be with God, to trust in God, it is to be safe (45:22). Indeed, God is authoritative, he is the "I Am", but he is also preoccupied with the wellbeing of his people: "The Lord preceded them, in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to show them the way, and at night by means of a column of fire to give them light. Thus they could travel both by day and by night" (Ex 13:21). The Israelites were in a difficult situation: as they were marching out of Egypt they could have opted for the shorter but more dangerous road through the land of the Philistines. Foreseeing the danger, God directed them by way of the desert to the Red Sea, showing them the road by day and by night. The Israelites were informed of the imminent danger and changed their plan accordingly; in return, God demanded trust in his ability to guide them



to the promised land. In the first instance, God is enlightening Cyrus by revealing his true self and outlining his authority over all that exists. In the second instance, God enlightens Moses and his people about his intentions: they will feel his presence although from a distance and they can count on him to lead them to their destiny. In return, all he wants is for his people to be responsible, to be faithful to the covenant.

It was explained in the previous section that the uninterrupted presence of God among his people was, in itself, a purifying factor. The writers of the Hebrew Bible recognized God's actions as purifying and have attempted to highlight the benefits of those actions in their daily living, a consequence of being loyal to the covenant. Their focus was on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and on his intimate relationship with his people. One of their tasks, so it seems, was to make God known as who he is really, the definite "I Am". In their efforts to enlighten the people of Israel, they portrayed an omnipotent God impressing the anointed king of Persia, and a caring God leading his people out of Egypt; in both cases it is God who intervenes. There are, however, biblical accounts in which the Hebrew authors reveal the identity of God further, but from a different perspective.

In the eyes of the writers of the Hebrew Bible, God is supreme, God dominates the whole world. What better way to express this belief than with the words of Isaiah: "No longer shall the sun be your light by day, Nor the brightness of the moon shine upon you at night; The Lord shall be your light forever, your God shall be your glory" (60:19). The writer implies that the Israelites, who depend on the moon and the sun for their everyday activities, need above all else the glowing presence of the Lord for their subsistence. The sun and the moon will pass, but the Lord is the spiritual guide who will

take them to the promised land where happiness awaits those who persevere. It is not a matter of choice, it is a matter of survival. God is light and its rays have many forms; they can be expressed, for example, in words, in justice, and in hope.

The psalmist recognizes the validity of God's word and prays with confidence: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path. . . . give me life in accord with your word. . . . My life is always at risk, but I do not forget your teaching. . . . My heart is set on fulfilling your laws; they are my reward forever." (Ps 119:105, 107, 109, 112) The Word of God is thus equated with light, a means of subsistence without which life is in constant peril of falling into darkness. With God's teaching, however, his life-giving laws sustain righteousness such that peace of mind and of heart is ascertained. God's dominant light reaches beyond the horizon into the deep fabric of the soul; rejoicing in the light and accepting its wholesome benefits is a sure guaranty of reward.

The Word of God is as pure as gold, a blessing that keeps on giving; the light that the word projects reaches even the just, "You, Lord, are the Most High over all the earth, exalted far above all gods. The Lord loves those who hate evil, protects the lives of the faithful, rescues them from the hands of the wicked. Light dawns for the just; gladness, for the honest of heart." (Ps 97:9-11) The light of God is with the just and allows justice to flourish; it stands with the weak, it liberates from oppression. It is a light that knows no evil, that confronts all the wrongs of society. This light brings gladness to the hearts of those who live on its pathway.

The endless rays of the light provide hope even during the most dismal moments of one's existence: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom do I fear? The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom am I afraid? . . . Though war be waged against me, even then

do I trust." (Ps 27:1, 3) In today's challenging environment, hope does not come easily: the lost of a longtime-held job, a strange disease devouring one's body, the death of a parent, all circumstances that affect a quality of life, even of the most emotionally balanced persons. The light of God, however, can change all that; it suffices to believe in his goodness so that one's outlook on life can be transformed.

A ray of light, called faith, can also provide the hope that gives meaning to one's life. Just as a ray of sunshine brightens the day, hope brightens the soul. To those who hear God's word, who practice justice, who live in hope, God will keep his promise: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream; . . . I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, To reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds." (Jer 17:7-8, 10) Just as faith alone cannot guaranty salvation, hope by itself will not lead to eternal life: rather, God demands that these two typical marks of a Christian appear in the intentions and the deeds of a true believer; otherwise they are nothing more than the traits of a false disciple.

Just as God was present every day in the lives of the Israelites, he expected them to be faithful to the commandments left with Moses. He knew, however, they would not abide by their word the same way that he would; he had witnessed their fall much too often. He, nevertheless, stood by them and his prophets warned them against disobeying his will. At the end, only one option remained feasible in order to change the downward trajectory of the human race, and that was the sending of his only Son. The people had the light but preferred darkness; only the "Wonder-Counselor" foretold by Isaiah could reset a new beginning: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; . . .

For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests; . . . From David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever." (Isaiah 9:1, 5, 6) God's Son would display his authority over all the earth, would be wiser than Solomon, and would be a great defender of his people. The Son's mission would be simple yet demanding: it would be to proclaim the Good News.

c) Enlightenment in the New Testament

The Word of God in the Hebrew Bible implies, among other themes, justice, freedom, protection, and hope. God is with his people: his word is revealing and his actions edifying. In a context of continued divine interaction, enlightenment denotes a recognition of the unequivocal "I Am" and God's free offer of love. Amidst iniquities, Isaiah reaches to the wisdom of God and prays for his upfront intervention: "He shall come to Zion a redeemer to those of Jacob who turn from sin, says the Lord. . . . Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; But upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory." (Is 59:20; 60:1-2) The prophet imagines a new Zion, risen in splendor and free of violence, under the futuristic rule of an all-powerful God. These prophetic verses speak of a glorious nation but presupposes that the Israelites will have turned away from sin and have endorsed the articles of God's covenant. Isaiah's intervention may have been a prayer, but a prayer that offered little hope because the relationship the Israelites developed with their God was not to last: personal and communal weaknesses and self-interests made it impossible for the relationship to mature. The light of God was offered but was disregarded by many: "Sin directs the

hearts of the wicked; their eyes are closed to the fear of God. . . . In their beds they hatch plots; they set out on a wicked way; they do not reject evil." (Ps 36:2, 5) Confronted with the hardened hearts of the Israelites but hoping in a reversal of their evil ways, God would send another light; this light, this time, would be among his people for everyone to see and witness.

The new light of God, the Messiah anticipated by the prophets, took flesh and "made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." (Jn 1:14) The Son, personified in Jesus, radiated the light that overcame darkness and proceeded to brighten the days of those in dire need of hope. He endeavored to bring his followers to faith with words and deeds that spoke of his authority in an attempt to encourage a change of behavior in the hearts and minds of his Father's Chosen People. His approach was different: whereas the task of the Father was to reveal himself from a distance, the goal of the Son was to reveal the Father by being present among the people of his days. He achieved the plan of his Father by tracing a path by which his followers would recognize his Sonship and accept his vision for humankind: his way would be the enlightened way to the truth and to eternal life. (Jn 14:6)

When Thomas addresses Jesus on where he is going, Jesus declares: "I am the way and the truth and the life." (Jn 14:5-6) In his unconditional reply Jesus is not explaining that he will serve as a tour guide to some unknown destination or that he will map out the way to salvation. Rather, he is emphatically saying that he is "the source of life and truth. . . . the revelation of God."<sup>193</sup> Assuredly, Jesus did not leave his disciples

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<sup>193</sup> PHEME PERKINS, "The Gospel According to John," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. J. A. Fitzmyer, R. E. Murphy, R. E. Brown (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 974, #181-182. Aumann speaks of the same reality but in different terms: "to say that Jesus Christ is the way means that no one can go to the Father except through him, for there has been given to us no other name under

wondering about what that meant, he immediately added: "If you know me, then you will also know my Father. . . . Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:7, 9) The accent is on "know" and "seen"; in other words if the disciples have listened to his words and have witnessed his deeds, they have in fact heard the words of the Father and seen his works (Jn 14:10). Jesus is "the way" because he is one with the Father (Jn 10:30), and therefore "he is the channel through which the Father's life comes to men."<sup>194</sup> He, moreover, is not implying that the disciples will be left on their own, like orphans, in their mission to the nations; on the contrary, another advocate will be given by the Father for that purpose, the "Spirit of truth, . . . it remains with you, and will be in you." (Jn 14:17) Jesus, then, is the way, the "spring of water welling up to eternal life." (Jn 4:14); the source of grace from which the ultimate truth emerges and from which life without end is generously made available.<sup>195</sup>

The affirmation by Jesus that he is "the way" is meant to clarify the definite "I Am" (Jn 8:58), that is he is more than the mediator to the Father, he is one with the Father. The word truth included in the affirmation, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (Jn 14:5-6) gives greater clarity to his identity: he is the way because he is the truth. In his function of Messiah, Jesus is much more than a way to the gate, he is the gate that opens to salvation: "Whoever enters through me will be saved." (Jn 10:9) The only way

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heaven by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12)." Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006), 52.

<sup>194</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII - XXI* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 628.

<sup>195</sup> It is interesting to note that the opinions of the Church Fathers vary on the subject: for the Greek Fathers, "the way is directed toward a goal that is *the truth* and/or *the life*." On the other hand, the Latin Fathers "understood that the way leads to both the truth and the life. In this interpretation, both truth and life are eschatological, divine realities." A modern view, however, suggests that "the way" is the focal point and that the additions of "the truth" and of "the life" serve to explain what is meant by "the way". In such an understanding, the "and" in between the nouns could be easily replaced with "that is to say". Brown, *Ibid*, 620-621.

to salvation is through Jesus because he is "THE TRUTH (*alētheia*), the only revelation of the Father who is the goal of the journey."<sup>196</sup>

The author of *The Gospel according to John* ascertains that Jesus is "the truth"; his assertion is supported in a reply of Jesus to Philip who asked: "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us?" Philip, obviously, had not grasped both natures of Jesus; he had been following the human Jesus but had failed to realize Jesus' true origin. Jesus, incredulous, continues, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:8-9) The disciples knew that Jesus had a close relationship with his Father but had not realized how intimate it was. The author of *John* clarifies the situation: the Word was with God from the beginning and he is "the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." (Jn 1:1, 14) Thus, Jesus, the Son, and the Father are one. But Jesus who is of the world was sent by the Father for a specific reason: "For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." (Jn 18:37) The verse alludes to the divine/human reality that God is manifested in the Son and that the Son who is one with the Father has come to do his will, to speak the truth. The truth is the revelation of the Father such that anyone who believes "will be truly my disciples, and (he or she) will know the truth, and the truth will set (him or her) free." (Jn 8:31-32)

The relationship between God and mankind, broken in the first days of the creation, had to be restored: with the coming of Christ, humans are no longer slaves to the past but brothers and sisters in the same Father and God (Jn 20:17). Unless a brother or sister believes in the redefined relationship, he or she "has already been condemned, because he (or she) has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (Jn 3:18) But if one believes, he or she knows that the Father is not passive, for he does his works

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<sup>196</sup> Brown, *Ibid*, 630.

through Jesus and anyone who believes in him will do the works that he does "and will do greater ones than these, because (Jesus is) going to the Father." (Jn 14:12) Thus believing and works are not disjointed realities; rather, a true disciple will demonstrate his or her faith by speaking the words of the Son and doing deeds that expresses a love for his or her neighbor. It becomes clear, then, that Jesus is the embodiment of the truth and that his whole life is a testament to the truth, to the Father, the one who sets free.

To the extent that the Father is truth so is Christ and the truth that he proclaims is from his light: "the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8:12) Jesus, the source of life, the light that overcomes evil, is the saving truth that God loves all of his children and wants them to love their neighbors as he does. It is a simple reality but full of consequences, it "is so true that, if our lives are not in fact filled with loving concern for others, it is proof positive that we have not really allowed the love of God to penetrate to the center of our being."<sup>197</sup> Failure to abide by the truth signifies a declination of God's invitation to a greater purpose, that of a personal communion with his eternal being. God, however, understands our struggles with evil and hence does not expect instant conversions. But he does want his creatures to listen to the liberating message of his Son; he does hope that they will acknowledge its veracity and work to its realization. Once the roots of faith have penetrated our souls does not mean that we may distance ourselves from Christ; on the contrary, our souls still need to be nourished with his constant light which "becomes for us the perfect ideal whom we ought to emulate and after whom we should become configured."<sup>198</sup> Only Christ

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<sup>197</sup> Demetrius R. Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John's Gospel*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 135.

<sup>198</sup> Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 55.



possesses the knowledge that points to eternal life: he is the way by which our souls and minds are enlightened and are thus directed to the truth that gives life.

Christ is the way because he personifies the truth and the life: "The words that I have spoken to you are both Spirit and life" (Jn 6:63).<sup>199</sup> But Jesus does not act on his own, he does so at the discretion of his Father who is the One from whom all originates. The Father has given his Son the responsibility of the creation, the same Son who is the shepherd who leads his sheep through the gate "because they recognize his voice" and know that he has come "so that they might have life and have it abundantly." (Jn10:4, 10) It is astonishing how Jesus, with so few words, can explain his mission from the Father, that is to care for his sheep as if they were his own: "No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one." (Jn 10:28-29) A life given to Christ by the Father is given in fullness and no one, not even Satan, can snatch it away. This life under the care of Jesus is ordained to live in harmony with the will of the Son and of the Father and is destined for a life eternal.

Eternal life is a favorite subject of the author of *John*; it is one reason for the Gospel's designation as spiritual. When John speaks of eternal life, he is not referring to a natural life that will outlive its physical death but to a supernatural life participating in God's own life. This participation, however, does not come by chance: for John it is made possible only "through the instrumentality of a divine person who could bridge the infinite gap between the human and the divine."<sup>200</sup> The offence of Adam and Eve was of human hands but directed toward God such that only God could effectively atone for

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<sup>199</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 631.

<sup>200</sup> Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 56.

humanity's sin. It is for this reason that the Son came among humans, who were dead to sin, to rectify the disastrous consequence of their wrongdoing: "What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (Jn 1:3-5) Just as natural life came to be through the breath of God acting on the clay of the ground (Gn 2:7), eternal life emerged when Jesus "handed over (his) spirit" so that those who believe may receive the breath of life, the Holy Spirit (Jn 19:30; 20:22). In John's thought process, "the communication of this gift of the Spirit to future generations is associated with the living waters of Baptism which beget a man anew (Jn 3:5)."<sup>201</sup>

To the Samaritan woman who was by the well of Jacob, Jesus said: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (Jn 4:13-14) The water and the Spirit of baptism open the door to the heart of Christ in which believers become one with him as he is one with the Father, sharing in their glory (Jn 17:20-22). This signifies that the living waters of baptism blessed by the Spirit make the believer a child of God, a partaker in his divinity<sup>202</sup>, as inferred by a reading of Psalm 82:6 by the author of *John*: [I said, "You are gods" '? If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I

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<sup>201</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 507.

<sup>202</sup> When Jesus mentions that the Father will send another advocate so that the disciples will not remain orphans, he stresses that "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you." Moloney explains: "This knowledge, a fruit of the presence of the Paraclete, is the revelation of the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son, and the oneness that exists between Jesus and the believer." Moloney, *John*, 403. A prayer of Jesus attests the same reality: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (Jn 17:20-21)

said, 'I am the Son of God'?). (10:34-36)<sup>203</sup> The Word of God makes possible a transition from darkness to light, from death to life: a life which develops an ever-increasing union with the divine, a share in the oneness of God. This union is more than a relationship between mortals; it is a gradual integration into the intimate communion of the Trinity. The believer moves gradually from the physical reality of life to the ever-absorbing realm of the spiritual life; in time, the creature of God is no longer the sinner that characterized his or her existence but becomes glorious within the glory of God. The more we listen to Jesus' call, the more we accept his way of life, [the more we will begin to share in the life that Jesus offers us. His words are immensely encouraging: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish" (Jn 10:28).]<sup>204</sup>

The promise of eternal life, however, is not without condition: "Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." (Jn 14:21) Love seems to be a small price to pay for a glorious existence with the Father: an eternal life without anxieties and compromises. Jesus' statement, however, implies that if one chooses to live in darkness, away from God's love, such a person will not receive the gift of life: "Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned." (Jn 15:6) In *The Gospel according to John* there is little room for a person who is hesitating between believing and not believing: "For John love and keeping the commandments are so much a part of the life coming from faith that one who does not behave in a virtuous manner

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<sup>203</sup> In 2 Peter 1:3-4, we find a similar reference to a share of the believer in the divine nature: "through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire."

<sup>204</sup> Dumm, 151.

does not have life at all."<sup>205</sup> It's simple yet challenging, either one is with Jesus or not: the choice is between receiving his words and abiding by them or dismissing them and facing death. With the treason of Judas, the disciples soon learned the implication of not abiding in Jesus; they also discovered what it meant to be faithful to his words: "ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." (Jn 15:7-8) The call to discipleship was clearly expressed in the story of *The Good Shepherd*: the shepherd "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. . . . he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice." (Jn 10:3-4) The disciples heard the call of Jesus, the response of Peter reveals their true hearts: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68) Jesus has the words that can enlighten our ways and performs the deeds that expose his glory and that of the Father.

### 3. The Nature and Meaning of The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

The process of believing begins with an interior disposition to hearing with an open mind and to searching the truth with an unbiased heart. Such a person will be attentive to its inner voice, waiting for a summons from God: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him," (Jn 6:44). Having heard the call from God, it remains for the listener to turn his or her ears to his teaching: "It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me." (Jn 6:45) Seeds of faith are planted through God's word and this initial faith encourages the development of a relationship with the Son. This relationship, however, does not evolve by itself: it demands a greater knowledge of Christ who, in

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<sup>205</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 675.

turn, is willing to speak of what he knows and to testify to what he has seen. . . . about heavenly things. (Jn 3:11-12) In time, the deeper knowledge of Christ brings to a confession similar to that of the Apostles: "Now we realize that you know everything and that you do not need to have anyone question you. Because of this we believe that you came from God." (Jn 16:30) It is the beginning of the Lenten Season and RCIA participants should be directed at knowing that a meaningful faith is attainable only through Christ, in becoming "one" with him as he is "one" with the Father. Additionally, it should be no surprise to them that the reward of a faith in Christ is a unique and lasting life, unattainable on earth: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life." (Jn 6:24)

The writers of the textbook on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults wrote that the Period of Purification and Enlightenment is "intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance."<sup>206</sup> When writing these words they may have been thinking about the Psalmist who, having reflected on his sin, writes a Prayer of Repentance: "Wash away all my guilt; from my sin cleanse me. For I know my offense; my sin is always before me. . . . Restore my joy in your salvation; sustain in me a willing spirit." (Ps 51:9, 14) The Psalmist had chosen the fruits of the flesh and lost his purity; he knew he had offended God and that his relationship with the One, who had done so much for him, was seriously damaged. He could have walked away and remained in his sin, instead, with a humble and a contrite heart he asked God for forgiveness and hoped for reconciliation; "Rescue me from death, God, my saving God, . . . Lord, open my lips; my mouth will proclaim your praise." (Ps 51:16-17) It is the

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<sup>206</sup> RCIA-Study Edition, #139, 77.

beginning of Lent and the RCIA participants have arrived at a crossroad: they have to choose between remaining in their habits of the past or opting for a gratifying life in God's goodness. The Third Period affords them the rewarding opportunity of attending to their hearts in a way never imagined before: they are to open their hearts and question their consciences, leaving no stones unturned. A decision is warranted: should they choose Christ, they will have to erase all that is immoral in their lives, present their repentant hearts to a forgiving God, and walk to "the cleansing with water by the power of the living word."<sup>207</sup> In essence, the participants are to purify their hearts and minds, by emptying themselves of all that belongs to the flesh and embracing the way of life offered by God.

The Rite also stresses the importance of enlightening "the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior"<sup>208</sup> At this juncture of the program of initiation, the intent is to intensify a discourse on Christ, on the person of the Father whom he revealed, and on "the Spirit of truth." (Jn 14:17) There is in *The Book of Proverbs* a passage written by a Sage that sheds light on the goal of enlightenment: "My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands, Turning your ear to wisdom, inclining your heart to understanding; . . . If you seek her like silver, and like hidden treasures search her out: Then will you understand the fear of the Lord; the knowledge of God you will find; For the Lord gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Prv 2:1-2, 4-6) The unknown writer invites his readers to search for Wisdom in whom resides the truth, that is the knowledge of God that saves "from the way of evil men" and keeps the pious ones on "the paths of the just." (Prv 2:12, 20) The

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, XV, #5.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, #139, 77.

Sage teaches to reach out to a knowledge that is beyond superficial, beyond the knowledge of the illuminated or of the Gnostics.

For an elect and a candidate these last references imply a knowledge that seeks to transform an everyday person into one who makes his or her trust in God a consuming affair of the soul. The writer of *The Gospel according to John* would not have objected to this understanding of knowledge but, preferably, would have referred to its significance: in the last prayer before his arrest, Jesus says to his Father "Give glory to your son . . . so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him. Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ." (Jn 17:1-3) The message is explicit: the only true knowledge is of Christ and of the Father, not a knowledge from reason alone, but a knowledge that causes the participants to realize that they are children of God and thus called to eternal life.

Enlightenment, then, is recognizing that the words spoken by Jesus to the disciples came from the Father and to accept them as if spoken directly to one's heart and mind. In essence, it is appreciating that Jesus' words reveal the Father and, by ricochet, that Jesus is the one sent by the Father. (Jn 17:8) It is an invitation to believe, not in a simple or uninterested manner, but truly believe that Jesus is "the Father's only son, full of grace and truth." (Jn 1:14) and "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12) who enlightens not darkens all souls.

In the story of *The Good Shepherd* there is an interesting play with the word "know" that helps to understand the meaning of purity and enlightenment in the context of the Third Period. Jesus says to his disciples: "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay

down my life for the sheep." (Jn 10:14) With so few words and yet so telling, Jesus is affirming his oneness with his Father; he is the faithful Son to whom God has entrusted his dear children. Furthermore, he not only knows his Father's children but knows each and everyone of them by name. This knowledge is not an artificial knowledge, it is of the most intimate kind: it is a knowledge of the heart. Likewise, God's children know who he is, they know his voice, and will not listen or follow anyone else. This knowledge is akin to the knowledge that the Father has of his Son and the Son of the Father; it is an uncompromising and all-inclusive knowledge. This is pure knowledge in which all is summed up: by sharing the same knowledge between themselves, the Father and the Son are affectively "one". (Jn 10:30)

In a similar sense but not in the same measure, Christ expects to have a similar relationship with each one of his Father's children, that is to be "one" with them so that they may be in him and him in them: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me through their word (the disciples' word), so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (Jn 17:20-21) The expectation is for God's children to be enlightened, that is to acquire a "deep knowledge" of the Son and of the Father and through that knowledge to be "one" with them, so that the whole creation may know that God sent his only Son to deliver humanity from slavery to sin and bring them "to perfection as one" (Jn 17:23). At this stage of the Rite, participants should endeavor to develop an ever closer relationship with the divine so as to become "one" with the three persons of the Trinity. The initial belief experienced by the participants is to transition to an unyielding faith whereby a mystical union with God emerges.



The author of *John* insists that faith brings to Christ, and in Christ life is satisfied: “whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” (Jn 6:35) God, through his Son, is life-giving and the life given cannot subsist without being truthful to the Son: “but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (Jn 3:18) The preferred way to Christ is to abide by the words of *The First Letter of John*: “The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn 2:3-4). It is not enough for participants to say that they have faith and live as if they do not; as Christians they have the responsibility of demonstrating their faith in their daily lives.

The author of *John* summarizes his thinking by teaching a new commandment, a commandment he received from Christ: “Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him to cause a fall.” (1 Jn 2:9-10) Love, then, must overshadow all the works of a disciple of Christ: there is not a more perfect way to purity than to be at the service of others, emulating in every details the life of Christ. During Christ's ministry to the marginalized, he provided the essentials of what purity demands, that is *The Beatitudes* which are an invitation to love without holding back. And to love as Jesus did means that "it is the duty of the Christian to work out his fundamental situation by creatively giving to each concrete situation a Christian meaning, by responding to it as a child of God and a sharer in the kingdom."<sup>209</sup> The good deeds done to others are of extreme importance and are pleasing to God, for “whoever lives

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<sup>209</sup> W. K. Grossouw, quoted from Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 14.

the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done by God.” (Jn 3:21) Acknowledging Christ but living contrary to his words and deeds has dire consequences: eternal damnation. God will not accept in his fold anyone who pays lip service to his or her faith. Faith demands action and that means putting into practice what Jesus taught every day of his ministry.

The moment of truth has arrived: each participant should be asking, What kind of Christian do I want to be? Am I trying to please someone in my entourage or will I be satisfied with being an ordinary, in-the-pew Christian? Or better still, do I want to be a true disciple of Christ? Members of the community of the author of *John* were facing similar challenges: some were true believers while others were expressing doubts about Jesus' true identity. Other members had left the community altogether. Hoping to reverse the dramatic situation, the author wrote his Gospel so that its members "may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name." (Jn 20:31) The participants in the RCIA program are at a similar juncture as were the members of the author's community: they have come to know of Christ but may be failing to grasp what his divine identity stands for or worse what it implies for their daily living. The way to the Son of God has been mapped out: the final decision rests with them. Will they be satisfied with being average Christians or will they move into a closer relationship with Christ?

If Christ is the fulfillment of all that has been promised, it naturally follows that he is [the embodiment of authentic spirituality and, quite logically, from our point of

view the spiritual life must be a participation in the "mystery of Christ".]<sup>210</sup> The participants, who have been initiated to the mystery of Christ, must now devote their time and energies toward a greater participation in the life of Christ. It is "a time of focusing on God's gifting presence, and how that presence uncovers and reveals attitudes and lifestyles that are contrary to relationship with God - namely sin - as well as raising up those attitudes and gifts that deepen the relationship with God."<sup>211</sup> It is a spiritual task that first demands a recognition of one's sinful state, second that solicits an act of repentance, and third that openly accepts God's grace; all necessary actions for salvation to be grounded. The struggle to grow in purity continues as it demands to be holy in everything just as the One who calls on us is holy. (1 Pt:1:13) God, however, did not leave his children alone with the struggle to holiness: "All Christian life, all holiness, is being by grace what Jesus is by nature";<sup>212</sup> that is as his Father was there when Christ was on the Cross so is Christ with us in our difficult moments. In practical terms, this means for the participants "to configure themselves to Christ and to do all things in Christ."<sup>213</sup> A concept and purpose cherished with joy by Saint Paul and lived to his dying days; a perfect example of what discipleship entails.

Purification and enlightenment are significant concepts for RCIA participants: for one they imply a washing but not of the natural kind, but rather of the spiritual kind, that is a washing of the soul whereby it is cleansed of the past and oriented to a future "in Christ". For another, these concepts invite to sanctification through knowledge of the words of Jesus and of his deeds which, together, are the only

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<sup>210</sup> Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 9

<sup>211</sup> Thomas H. Morris, *The RCIA: Transforming the Church*, revised ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 171.

<sup>212</sup> Dom Columba Marmion, quoted from Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 12.

<sup>213</sup> Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 59.

way to the house of his Father where he awaits each and everyone of us. Getting to know Christ is embracing the mystery of his passion and of his resurrection; it is developing a relationship by which a spirit of communion is enhanced so as to become "one" with him as he is "one" with the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Purification and enlightenment mean one more thing, that is to be pure and enlightened is to be at the service of others.

#### 4. A Misunderstanding of the Faith Formation Process

The concept of providing service to others has, for a Christian, its origin in biblical accounts. This is not to say that the idea of being of service did not figure earlier in history but it is admitting that the coming of Jesus contributed to highlight its worthiness: it is not only about responding to a necessity but about forgetting oneself for the benefit of others. In answer to the ambitions of James and John who desired recognition, Jesus tells the disciples that "it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all." (Mk 10:43-44)

With Jesus, what is relevant for a person's spiritual wellbeing is to be unpretentious: it is accomplishing one's tasks with humility and abnegation, always keeping in mind the interests of others first and foremost. The thought process of Jesus on the question reached a capstone with his teaching on the conditions of discipleship: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." (Lk 9:23-24) With so few words, he laid out the whole

plan of his life, a plan for others to follow in order to achieve perfection; it is the ultimate sacrifice that calls for setting aside all possessions, all relations, and devoting one's life entirely to the works of Christ, even to death. This is not to say, however, that he expects everyone to leave behind family and careers and adopt his way of life, but he does expect everyone to live in the spirit of his words and deeds, and to "make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Mt 28:19-20) The least that a disciple can do is to abide by the principles he carefully laid out through his living habits and to testify to the Good News.

A testimony to the Good News can take various forms and one of these is the formation of adults in the Christian faith. In a letter to the adults of Corinth, Saint Paul recognizes the rationale for such an enterprise and at the same time contributes to its definition: "Through the evidence of this service, you are glorifying God for your obedient confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution to them and to all the others". (2 Cor 9:13) Faith formation is a ministry that brings value to the lives of those to whom it is directed and concurrently rewards those who speak of God's love. In today's religious environment, Adult Faith Formation can be understood as a ministry that responds to the faith inquiries of searching adults in their particular locations. A principle aspect of faith formation is catechesis, an important contributor to the RCIA process.

Teaching catechism, at first sight, appears to be a simple task. Many parishioners believe, for instance, that it is matter of volunteering one or two hours a week and providing instructions on the Catholic faith. However, for the few living the experience, teaching about religion is more demanding than what meets the eye. As

they teach, they soon realize that it is not sufficient to read the different lessons of the program and to explain summarily a few concepts here and there while waiting for the clock to ring. On the contrary, catechesis "is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way".<sup>214</sup> Teaching catechesis is about witnessing to a new way of life whereby the formation provided [includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life, it is a "complete Christian initiation," which promotes an authentic following of Christ, focused on his person; it implies education in knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith.]<sup>215</sup> Teaching catechesis, then, is not a simple task: it demands that a catechist be focused on the teachings of Christ, on his way of life, and on all that is relevant to his mission; in other words on "the Truth that He is."<sup>216</sup>

In the story of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), Jesus contributes largely to the understanding of an effective catechesis. While two disciples were "conversing" about the events that took place earlier in Jerusalem, Jesus joined them on their walk back to their village. As they were walking, the disciples became so amazed by Jesus' interpretation of "what referred to him in all the scriptures" that they invited him to stay. At table, Jesus "took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them." At these words, the disciples finally "recognized him, but he vanished from their sight." Realizing what had happened, they concluded, "Were not our hearts burning [within

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<sup>214</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae," #18. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_16101979\\_catechesi-tradendae.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html) (accessed June 12, 2017).

<sup>215</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 1998), #67, 60. The "complete Christian initiation" is a reference from *Catechesi Tradendae*, #21.

<sup>216</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #6.

us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?". A careful reading of the text divulges two central lessons: first, a serious catechesis must touch the minds of the learners and second, it must be done in such a way as to "burn" their hearts. The text highlights that it is not sufficient to pass on the mere content of a message; on the contrary, its delivery must be carried out as to arouse feelings into the hearts and minds of the listeners, that is it must be done with the confidence and authority of Jesus. Additionally, as the Risen Christ shared a privileged moment with the disciples, the "definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy",<sup>217</sup> with Christ's divine person. In this story, Jesus is not only a story teller; he personifies what a true catechetical facilitator should be.

By what and how he taught, Jesus sought to inform, form, and transform. The scriptural information that he passed on to the disciples of Emmaus was of crucial importance for their understanding of who "he is". Likewise today, a true catechesis must inform "in all of the ways in which the heart and meaning of the Christian message and the Church's tradition are presented in a manner that is meaningful in this time and place."<sup>218</sup> Unless the information is relevant to the learners in their present situations, it will have little intended bearing on their daily lives.

Jesus also sought to form the disciples: his success is measured by the immediate reaction of the disciples of Emmaus, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us". The disciples easily made the connection between his "interpretation" of the Scripture and the "breaking of the bread" such that they knew who Jesus was. An appropriate manner of catechesis will form "in all the ways that

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<sup>217</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, #80, 71.

<sup>218</sup> Jane Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 15.

people are shaped into the way of life of the believers."<sup>219</sup> Catechesis is meant to form, to shape lives in view of the Kingdom, but within the context of the community, just as the disciples from Emmaus were moved within the life of their community.

Finally, according to Jane E. Regan, to be true to its mission catechesis must transform. In the Emmaus story, the words Jesus spoke and the action that followed "at table" were enough to effect a spiritual change in the "hearts" of the disciples; in effect, their state of minds rapidly evolve from being "downcast" to setting out "at once and return(ing) to Jerusalem", that is from disbelieving to believing. The transformative power of catechesis rests on the opportunity it affords "learners to reflect on the source and reasons for belief" and on providing "a context for learners to make the connection between the tradition and their lives".<sup>220</sup> That is to say, unless catechesis involves the learners in the process of making meaning in their lives and of stimulating feelings in their hearts, it will be barely useful. The end result will be no more than the formation of parishioners assisting the celebration of the Eucharist on major Christian holidays. However, an authentic catechesis, one that engages the whole person, will bring about a "total interior renewal which the Gospel calls *metanoia*; it is a radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart."<sup>221</sup>

A creative catechesis will be recognizable by its harvest, that is a faith that is living, explicit, and fruitful. A catechesis should first aim at stimulating a living faith. Growth over time is the principal characteristic of this faith: "it learns from experience, it adapts to changing conditions while maintaining its essential identity; it goes through

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<sup>219</sup> Regan, 15.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>221</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," #6, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul-vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul-vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html) (accessed June 10, 2017).



seasons, some apparently dormant, others fruitful".<sup>222</sup> Aided by the Holy Spirit, the learner expands continuous efforts at strengthening his or her apprenticeship to the ways of Christ, the model of perfection.

Second, an innovative catechesis will favor an explicit faith. In a parallel movement with an ever increasing living faith, the learner looks at deepening a personal relationship with Christ, but also with the Father, and the Holy Spirit who has taken over the mission of the Son. The learner, transitioning from a listening mode to one of engagement, enters "into dialogue with the gospel message as professed by the teaching of the Church and lived by the people of God."<sup>223</sup> It is an awakening to a new community with its social, sacramental, liturgical, and evangelical activities; it is an invitation to surrender to the demands of the faith.

Third, a right catechesis will promote a fruitful faith. This is a catechesis that has taken roots and is emerging as a sound counterbalance to a society in distress. It is already a maturing faith, albeit in minimal ways, "open to the action and power of God's Spirit and cannot remain idle or unproductive."<sup>224</sup> This faith realizes its responsibility toward its welcoming community and to society at large. It recognizes the aim of social justice and is open to compassion. It is present but not yet an agent of change. This faith is being evangelized to become evangelizing. It is the purpose of catechesis to nurture the gift of faith and to lead it, one session at a time, to its fulfillment.

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<sup>222</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1999), #50, 16.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, #57, 18.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, #60, 19.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* mentions that the fundamental tasks of catechesis are "helping to know, to celebrate and to contemplate the mystery of Christ".<sup>225</sup> This affirmation stresses in essence that Christ must be the focus of catechesis: "everything else is taught with reference to Him - and it is Christ alone who teaches - anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips."<sup>226</sup> It naturally follows that whoever teaches catechesis ought to be a person of intense faith and with the humility of admitting, following the example of Christ, that "My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me." (Jn 7:16) The ideal catechist should stand tall in the knowledge of Christ and be ready to testify that he or she has "indeed been taken possession of by Christ [Jesus]. . . . forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead". (Phil 3:12-13) Accordingly, a catechetical facilitator who lives the faith and teaches it passionately is no longer an ordinary person but one whose words and actions are "never separate from His life and His very being."<sup>227</sup> Because of its close relationship to the person of Christ, a catechetical facilitator is not performing an everyday trade, rather, his or her function has risen to the level of vocation.

It is not difficult to realize that being a catechetical facilitator is not the same as being an accountant, an engineer, or a lawyer. There are similarities between these occupations: for example, they all render a service to others. There are, however, noteworthy characteristics that differentiate a secular profession from a vocation. A profession, for instance, will stress public accountability whereas a vocation relies on an exterior calling, separate from his or her being. A profession, for another, is of the

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<sup>225</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, #85, 74.

<sup>226</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #6.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, #9

public domain whereas a vocation has both public and private attributes. And, finally, a profession respects a "leadership based on expertise" and will adapt "one's response to individual circumstances." A vocation, on the other hand, relies predominantly on a "bureaucratic organization" and is subjected to a "centralized leadership and fixed procedures."<sup>228</sup>

Above all else, what distinguishes a vocation from a profession is its "spiritual, transcendent dimension."<sup>229</sup> First, it is a ministry which arises "ultimately from the call of God to love in ways that reflect what being a disciple of Jesus demands of us."<sup>230</sup> It is basically a call to servant leadership whereby the other has always priority over the self. Second, it is about utilizing the natural gifts received from God; not all parishioners have the gift of catechizing or the charisma of expressing their living faith, but those who are beneficiary of those abilities have the duty to come forward and participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church, acting as it were "as a living, pliant instrument of the Holy Spirit".<sup>231</sup> Third, a vocation is not about who I am, it is about God's people. In the words of Parker Palmer, it is "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."<sup>232</sup> It is where the seeds of salvation are planted, where conversion becomes noticeable. Fourth, and lastly, catechizing is a vocation impregnated with "Gospel vitality and in a language suited to people and circumstances."<sup>233</sup> Catechizing is not done in a vacuum; it needs to respect "the religious and spiritual situation of those being evangelized. Respect for their tempo

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<sup>228</sup> Richard M. Gula, *Just Ministry* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010), 23.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>231</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #72.

<sup>232</sup> Quoted from Gula, 16.

<sup>233</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi", #54.

and pace; no one has the right to force them excessively. Respect for their conscience and convictions, which are not to be treated in a harsh manner."<sup>234</sup> It becomes somewhat clearer now that a profession is mainly focused on the self whereas a vocation is outward looking to the other; a profession is the result of studies in a specific field of interest, a vocation is the result of a calling and has its roots in baptism.

The calling to serve has its foundation in Christ who willingly accepted to do the will of his Father so that humanity could have life in abundance. In turn, the people who believe and are "baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood . . . Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them."<sup>235</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses what this means in practical terms: "The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, king, and prophet."<sup>236</sup>

The "priestly" function is explained by Paul J. Philibert who first quotes St. Paul: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." ( 1 Cor 10:17) And then adds: "In the Eucharist, we give ourselves to the Body of Christ and join our sacrifices to the one effective sacrifice that is Christ's. .

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, #79.

<sup>235</sup> Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II, Vol 1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, "Lumen Gentium" (Newport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), #10, 360-361.

<sup>236</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd. ed. (Washington , DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994), #1546, 386.

. . . We . . . link our own inner self-sacrifice to Christ's. . . . our own blood, sweat, and tears made one with the Blood of Christ."<sup>237</sup>

The servants who labor in the spirit of Christ, first exercise their "kingly" charism in their personal struggle over evil in imitation of Christ who overcame the powers of death. Second, they are called to offer with Christ their sacrifice at the service of evangelization, of charity, of social justice in an effort to transform the world.

The "prophetic" element of a servant is accomplished when it "becomes a sign of a new life as a member of Christ's body in the world."<sup>238</sup> Transformed in his or her being by Christ's offer to the Father, the servant endeavors to reform the wrongs of the world with faith, with words, and with actions.

The ministerial vocation is a demanding undertaking: it expects an offer of temporal and spiritual sacrifices in unity with Christ's self-sacrifice, it insists on spiritual and corporal works, and it requires the witnessing of one's faith in all things in the world. Such should be the life of a servant, of a disciple of Christ. Such a servant, however, should possess certain qualities; otherwise his or her efforts may not deliver the expected results.

A reading of the catechetical material above quickly brings to the realization that there are two attributes a catechist should possess above all, that is faith and love. It is not necessary for this faith to move mountains, but it is preferred that it be active. By this, it is meant that it should have the potential to grow, that is to be open to the heart of Christ which continuously reveals itself to a searching soul. Typically, this

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<sup>237</sup> Paul J. Philibert, *The Priesthood of the Faithful: Key to a Living Church* (Collegeville, MN: Order of Saint Benedict, 2005), 118-119.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

faith is from within but turned toward the spiritual good of others. The second attribute is love, one that sees to the improvement of the self in order to be better prepared to serve others. It is one that looks to self enrichment by means of spiritual activities in order to inspire those it touches. This love is never satisfied, always wanting to give.

Other than faith and love, there is not one set of additional qualities that a catechetical facilitator should possess that is better over another: different authors have different views. Nick Wagner, for instance, insists on the following qualities: first on the list is "faith". Then, we find "catholic" in the sense of one "who loves being catholic" followed by "scriptural", meaning a person who knows the pivotal stories of the Bible. We can add to that list, "traditional", not in the sense of conservative but in the sense of knowing and living the tradition. Finally, an aspiring catechetical facilitator is a "curious" person: he or she is not the answer to everything, but is willing to learn "more about Jesus all the time, just as the catechumens are."<sup>239</sup>

The booklet *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* also mentions "faith" as the first quality of a catechetical facilitator. The second quality is "knowledge of the faith" followed with "teaching ability" in order "to communicate this knowledge effectively to adults". Finally, a catechetical facilitator must be a "person of prayer". And then it mentions a litany of qualities: "a love for people, a passion for catechesis, effective interpersonal and community-building skills, respect for different adult learning styles, the ability to communicate and explore the Gospel . . . and the flexibility to adapt to

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<sup>239</sup> Nick Wagner, *The Way Of Faith: A Field Guide For The RCIA Process* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008), 90.

ever-changing circumstances."<sup>240</sup> Undoubtedly, these qualities echo an ideal to attain and reflect in a just measure the seriousness of the enterprise.

There is another dimension to the conversation on qualities that is less task oriented and more personal, that is the character of the catechetical facilitator. Richard M. Gula speaks of four inner realities that define a moral identity: intention, emotions, imagination, and virtues. The reality of "intention" works from the premise that "What we do stays with us to become part of who we are."<sup>241</sup> In time, behavioral patterns develop and form a "core moral identity" such that a life style may become apparent and could provide hints about a person's state of mind. The next inner reality is "emotions", which give "a window on the world that is not always apparent to reason. . . . because emotions bring us into a closer bond with what we value than conceptual knowledge does."<sup>242</sup> What seems to be hidden is often revealed by a person's emotions which can easily betray or display the true nature of that person. The "imagination" is the third inner reality and is interrelated with emotions in that emotions drive our personality whereas the imagination offers a cinematic vision. The imagination develops our character and defines our moral life as a consequence of the "language, images, and role models offered to us by the company we keep and the communities we live in."<sup>243</sup> Lastly, the inner reality of "virtues", which are "stable dispositions that enable us to be (or not) all that we can be and to realize the best kind of life we ought

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<sup>240</sup> *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, #151, 48.

<sup>241</sup> Gula, 49.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

to live."<sup>244</sup> It is a matter of becoming what we continuously do,<sup>245</sup> and our doings can become a give-away of our true self.

Other than charity and justice, Gula mentions two other virtues that deserve special attention: prudence and humility. Prudence, because it "brings goodness to life by putting the virtues into practice in the right way, at the right time, and for the right reason."<sup>246</sup> It acts in a manner of a Chief Officer who, facing a problem, evaluates all the options on the table to obtain a clear vision of possible solutions and, having exercise prudence by weighting the pros and cons of each option, determines the proper response and takes immediate action. Humility, probably one of the most difficult virtue to acquire in this self-centered world, is simply recognizing one's limits and acting accordingly. It does not look for favors; it does not reach for places of honor; and it does not boast about one's doings. Rather, strong in self-esteem, humility does what needs to be done with holiness and courage. With prudence, humility forms a partnership that is almost invincible; together, they provide a catechetical facilitator with an armor against assailants that will last a lifetime.

Finding a catechetical facilitator who possesses all of the desired qualifications is not a simple task; it is a challenge and for that reason judicious efforts must be expanded to find the best possible candidates. Catechetical facilitators are typically chosen among members of the community and as such bring with them a wide variety of work experiences, social situations, and educational backgrounds. For that reason, a need for a formation program is not only desirable but a condition for continued success.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 93.



The *General Directory for Catechesis* mentions a number of criteria to consider relevant to a formation program for catechetical facilitators. Among these, the first criteria has notable value: it states: "it is a question of forming catechists for the need to evangelize in the present historical context, with its values, challenges and disappointments."<sup>247</sup> The criteria also complements the universal understanding that catechetical facilitators must possess "a deep faith, a Christian and ecclesial identity; as well as a great social sensitivity."<sup>248</sup>

To satisfy the just mentioned requirements, *The Directory* offers three dimensions of formation: being, knowing, and savoir-faire. In summary, the formation of the "being" refers to identity and integrity, and thus "seeks to develop the lay ecclesial minister's human qualities and character, fostering a healthy and well-balanced personality, for the sake of both personal growth and ministerial service."<sup>249</sup> The "knowing" dimension advocates for a transition from "what do I know" to "what I should know" in matters of Scripture and Tradition, embodied in the Roman Catholic Church and situated in the milieu where the learners are formed. Finally, "savoir-faire" calls for an adaptation, that is moving from "how I function in my world" to "how I should function in their world", the world of the learners. It implies cultivating "the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that directly pertain to effective functioning in the ministry setting and that also pertain to pastoral administration that supports direct ministry."<sup>250</sup> Although the three dimensions are defined separately, it is opportune to mention that in real life situations they easily intertwine such that informed

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<sup>247</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, #237, 222.

<sup>248</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, #237, 222.

<sup>249</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers In The Vineyard Of The Lord* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), 36.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

catechetical facilitators should have the mental flexibility to focus on the dimension best suited for the particulars of the moment.

##### 5. A Liturgy of the Word Misunderstood

A Liturgy of the Word typically addresses what the Scripture contains: it is God speaking the truth of salvation as it affects the faithful in their everyday lives. The passages read during the liturgy reveal a caring God who is preoccupied with the spiritual wellness of his children; the words written in familiar language are inspired by the Holy Spirit and are destined to be "useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness." (2 Tim 3:16) The words preached or taught express the very thought of God and invite to holiness, "For I, the Lord, am your God; and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy." (Lv 11:44) The written words and the spoken words ultimately bring the readers and listeners to the understanding that it is the "Word of God" that is at play.

The meaning of the term "Word" in a Christian context often needs to be explained during discussions on faith related issues. The catechumens and candidates soon realize that it is not a reference to a simple noun or verb: their intuition possibly informs them that it is related to the familiar expression "my word is gold", but its Christian significance seems to remain a mystery. In Christian literature, or in other applications, words spoken say something about a person's mental disposition and reveal in some ways parts of his or her inner being. The writers of the Scripture seem to have been aware of this phenomenon and worked hard at exploring their powerful

potential; for instance, the "Word of God" in the minds of biblical writers is replete with meaningful revelations.

The expression "Word of God" can have different meanings depending on context. For instance, in *The Book of Deuteronomy* the author attempts to arouse the conscience of the Israelites by enjoining them to be faithful to the Lord: they are on the verge of crossing the Jordan to the promised land and a strong warning is necessary. The writer reminds them of the days in the desert without food and how God came to their rescue by providing a food from heaven, unknown to them and their fathers. God's generous gift was accomplished to show "that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord." (Dt 8:3) This gift from God was a sign given to touch the hearts of his people: while food from heaven sustains physical life, the word of God upholds a spiritual life. The significance of this anecdote is such that Jesus made use of the same verses in response to the devil's temptation: "If you are the Son of God command that these stones become loaves of bread." (Mt 4:4) Jesus had been fasting for forty days and was very hungry; yet, he preferred the words of God to the loaves of bread. A striking reminder that a corporal life will come to pass but not a spiritual life.

The words of God, the source of everlasting life, also invite trust. King Solomon, having offered a prayer of petition to the Lord, raised his hands to heaven and says: "Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, just as he promised. Not a single word has gone unfulfilled of the entire generous promise he made through his servant Moses." (1 Kgs 8:56) Every word spoken by God is of gold, every word is trustworthy; it is of his very nature which is Truth. Nearly one thousand

years later, a worried Jesus regarding the fate of the Apostles addresses a petition to his Father "I gave them your word . . . I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. . . . Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth." (Jn 17:14-15, 17) According to Raymond Brown, "in Johannine theology Jesus is both the word and the truth (Jn 16:6) so that consecration in a truth that is the word of God is simply an aspect of belonging to Jesus."<sup>251</sup> Jesus had previously cleansed the disciples with his own word (Jn 15:3) for their mission to the world; knowing his fate was near, he was now surrendering their lives to the care of his Father. Likewise, if the word of truth revealed by God is accepted by readers and hearers, they will wholly belong to Christ and belonging to Christ is belonging to God.

Another aspect of the "Word of God" is its everlasting power: "Your word, Lord, stands forever; it is firm as the heavens. Through all generations your truth endures; fixed to stand firm like the earth." (Ps 119:89-90) The writer of *The First Letter of Peter* considers the same theme but opposes its lasting effect against a withering nature: "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flowers of the field; the grass withers, and the flower wilts; but the word of the Lord remains forever." (1Pt 1:24-25) By abiding to the Word of God a human being is reborn again and promised eternal life. St. Peter understood this verity all too well: when many disciples were leaving because of their lack of faith Jesus asked the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" And St. Peter answered: "Master, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." (Jn 6:67-69) St. Peter clearly understood that Jesus is not only a "Master" or a

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<sup>251</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 765.

"Rabbi", but is "of God". The words that Jesus speaks are from God and are the source of lasting life. If one believes, nothing else is wanted.

The Scripture attests vividly that God's word is food to the soul, trustworthy, and the source of eternal life. His words are not spoken in vain; they are spoken to touch and transform all human beings. Entrusted with that goal, teachers of adult faith formation should have God's teachings in their hearts: they should recognize that they have God's words in their mouths (Jer 1:10) for everyone to hear. *The Letter of James* admits as much when it says that all good things come from the "Father of lights" and thus raises the stakes for a teacher when it states, "He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (Jas 1:18) The teacher, then, reborn by the "Word of God" will utter wisdom and speak what is right (Ps 37:30), that is the truth of God.

It was previously mentioned that a catechetical facilitator must have a knowledge of the Scripture as a qualification for teaching various aspects of the faith. A catechesis on the "Word of God", however, demands not only a knowledge but a sensitivity to the Scripture: a familiarity required by the Third Period of the RCIA if one is to provide "a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior" (#139). The Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* agrees, "catechesis does not consist merely in the teaching of doctrine"<sup>252</sup> but should seek "to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery."<sup>253</sup> This type of catechesis is not one that can be rendered easily by someone who has a faint knowledge of Christ's mission; rather, it insists on someone able to

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<sup>252</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #33.

<sup>253</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #5.

"draw upon the biblical narrative to provide believers with an interpretive framework within which to understand their lives in the light of God's continuing presence and action in the world."<sup>254</sup> In this sense, the preferred catechetical facilitator should have the ability to transition from instructing on scriptural passages to listening "to the scriptures in their liturgical setting and in their life-setting, with the knowledge of what they have meant to tradition"<sup>255</sup> in order to be faithful to the substance of the texts; it is no longer a simple task of teaching but a task that approximates preaching.

When the RCIA text speaks of enlightenment, it insinuates a vibrant reading of the Scripture whereby it "takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfillment."<sup>256</sup> In this section of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* refers to homilies, but it is difficult to deny the rapprochement between an homily and a catechesis of "enlightenment". Catechesis is no longer a matter of informing but of transforming: the task at hand "is not only concerned with what the text meant, but also with what it means now for those who hear it: What are we to do with what the text says?"<sup>257</sup> The participants have the right to know the answer to that question but also have the expectation of being told the truth of the biblical texts. Otherwise, they risk living a lie and this would be very damaging to the mission of Christ. A biblical text, then, should be read attentively and its contents divulge with fidelity in view of the aspirations of the participants.

A reading of a text should be mindful of its original intent, which typically resides in an oral tradition. In time, however, the content of a life story may have

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<sup>254</sup> Gula, 220.

<sup>255</sup> David N. Power, *"The Word of God": Liturgy's Use of Scripture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 14.

<sup>256</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #48.

<sup>257</sup> Gula, 221.

changed such that when it was written down a few decades later its subject matter may have lost some of its originality and thus resulted in different accounts. A case in mind is the story on *The Death of Jesus*: one Jesus, one death but four different narratives. The differences lie not in the substance of the account but in the details. These details, however are so diverse that they could affect, for instance, an interpretation of the role of the women at the foot of the Cross. Mark (15:40-41) and Matthew (27:55-56) do not name Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and say little about the role of the women except that they are present, but at a distance. Luke (23:49) does not even mention their names and places them at a distance from the Cross. John, however, mentions specifically the Mother of Jesus and gives her a definite role, that of mother of the disciple whom he loved (19:25-27). Since Mark, Matthew, and Luke do not name Mary at all, what should a catechist think of John's anecdote? Discard it totally? Give it a literal understanding? Or confer symbolically on Mary the role of mother of Christians as suggested by Moloney: "The passage affirms the maternal role of the Mother of Jesus in the new family of Jesus established at the cross."<sup>258</sup> Moloney's interpretation is certainly valid but is it faithful to the oral tradition from which the story originated? There is no way of knowing with certainty. A catechetical facilitator has the option of referring to other commentaries on the subject, which will offer appropriate suggestions based on critical, historical, and literary analyses. Ultimately, however, he or she should adopt the official position of the Church.

Another situation arises when the meaning of an original text transitions from its social setting to a later communal environment and, as a result, undergoes a significant change in its original meaning. In *The Book of Exodus*, the Israelites are

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<sup>258</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 504.

told to sacrifice lambs and mark the lintels and doorposts with the blood of the lambs to protect their first-borns against death. (12:21-23) The behest from God was memorialized in a ritual called The Passover to celebrate the "very day that I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt." (v. 17) The ritual meal celebrates the departure from Egypt and an escape from slavery orchestrated by God, but the literal meaning of the reading is about salvation from death. The anecdote was appropriated by the Early Church and its meaning reconfigured, symbolically, as freedom from the persecutions of the Romans and, after the era of Roman oppression, as liberation from the claws of sin in a world calling for order.<sup>259</sup> In the context of a suffering Latin America, the original meaning resurfaced and adapted in consideration of the Passion of Christ: "In hearing the story of the Paschal Lamb, struggling communities may find promise in the redeeming power of the Lamb that shall save them from slavery and from death, and in the strength of its flesh that gives them provision for the journey of this exodus."<sup>260</sup> In this sense, the Exodus story of chapter 12 is more about liberation than it is about sacrifice, more about redemption than it is about satisfaction for sin.<sup>261</sup> There is again an obligation on the part of a catechetical facilitator to remain truthful to the original meaning of a text while at the same time be willing to recognize modern-world variations due to current social settings.

While attending to a biblical text within the confines of current life situations is desirable and appropriate to do so, it does not mean that an informed catechetical facilitator has the latitude to draw out whatever interpretation he or she deems necessary to achieve a particular result. Such an approach is more of the domain of an

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<sup>259</sup> Power, 38.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, 43.



opinion than it is one of interpretation. A text deserves fidelity; any deviations from its original meaning should be done with mindful and religious honesty. David Power mentions two criteria by which the interpretation of a text can be evaluated for justness: critical evaluation and ethical assessment.

First, critical evaluation "refers to the need to go back to a scientific exegesis of a text, with special attention to how it came to be and to its literary form, so as to see interpretations in their relation to this."<sup>262</sup> This analytical method, although fallible, has the merit of being rational and exacting, and therefore has the capacity of producing the best possible outcomes in that time and place. The story of *The Testing of Abraham* (Gen 22:1-18) can serve to illustrate how critical evaluation works. It appears, if read literally, that the story is about God testing Abraham's fidelity. Another interpretation may affirm that the story is God's way of informing Abraham that the practice of killing first-borns, a known practice in some religions of the times, is immoral. A third interpretation will convince that the story is pure fiction, that it serves to demonstrate that the covenant with God demands faithfulness on various matters in addition to what is contained in the Law. This last reading, according to David Power, appears to be pertinent. In practical terms, he says, "People are asked, not in an abstract way but concretely along the path of life, to yield personal, family, cultural, ethnic, and national priorities to the service of God's kingdom."<sup>263</sup> Power's interpretation is the result of an historical-critical analysis of the text itself and of its setting in that part of the world at that time. Additionally, a literary critique of the written words in an ancient language possibly reveals what the author of Exodus was attentively saying to a community

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<sup>262</sup> Power, 47.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 55.

searching for answers to fundamental preoccupations. This last interpretation, however, is not set in concrete: it is the result of a text that has a life and as such may yield a different explanation from further exegesis.

A second criterion helpful in setting a boundary for a proper understanding of a biblical text is ethical validation. This process, according to David Power, "estimates how the meaning of a text comes alive in a Christian community by looking to the ethical orientation of life with which it is associated."<sup>264</sup> A text is written with a purpose in mind and if the subsequent reading of the text is done outside accepted parameters relevant to the message of Christ there is reason to doubt its truthfulness. The story of the *Woman with an Hemorrhage* comes to mind (Mk 5:25-34): this woman was not only in severe pain because of a persistent bodily affliction but was also judged unclean by her community and therefore excluded. An analysis of the text that would limit itself to the legal issues of her situation would probably miss the central theme all together, even if it would draw into the analysis whether it was appropriate for her to touch Jesus or not. Rather, the focus of a catechetical facilitator should be on her truthful confession, her expressed faith, or on Jesus' compassionate response. It could also be on attitudes or feelings that a person or a society expresses vis-à-vis people with disabilities or rejected by their milieus. An ethical validation offers the opportunity of analyzing a text such that its interpretation resonates with the words and actions of Christ.

A biblical text is typically analyzed for the purpose of identifying its true meaning at the time of its writing and, because of its enduring sacred worth, what it implies today for believers in Christ. Although written by an author for a given

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<sup>264</sup> Power, 48.

community with a specific message it has, however, a life of its own, possibly not anticipated by the author, but willed by the Holy Spirit for usage and analysis by future generations. In today's social and religious environments, it is the same Spirit who sponsors the same text and inspires its usage as a guide for human beings in their struggles to remain faithful to the Son and for others to discover the love of the Father. A biblical text, whatever its origin, relates a timeless story still valid today; readers and hearers deserve to know its truth, past and present, and its implications for their daily living.

In a world where common sense should prevail, it should normally be expected that an attention to the community should follow an attention to the text. A biblical text, after all, is written to communicate an impactful story to a troubled community; it is the task of an interpreter to unmask the essence of that story and to make it known to interested parties. The role of the preacher or catechetical facilitator is to assume the uncovered message and to take it, perhaps in different ways, to his or her listeners. The way for a catechetical facilitator to deliver the message to his or her audience is "to make people more aware of their most basic experiences, to help them to judge in the light of the Gospel the questions and needs that spring from them, as well as to educate them in a new way of life."<sup>265</sup> It is a task that attempts to connect the message to the experiences of the listeners; otherwise it will have little bearing on their journey to the Kingdom.

A catechetical facilitator who is mentally honest and purpose driven will attempt to learn who are his or her listeners for his or her teaching to be effective. It is an effort in discovering their age groups, their social and cultural experiences, their

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<sup>265</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, #152, 147 .

educational and economic backgrounds, and their family situations and work circumstances. Knowing who they are is half the battle, remains the task of identifying their faith-related and spiritual yearnings. The purpose is to identify the situation of each listener to better respond to his or her needs. The text will then be read and adapted as much as possible to answer the preoccupations of each listener. Such an approach can be affective in small-group gatherings but difficult in large-group encounters.

Attending to larger groups is a tricky affair: "the very nature of the diversity of cultures, ages, and lifestyles in a parish makes it virtually impossible . . . to (catechize) effectively to everyone."<sup>266</sup> Undoubtedly, the meaning of the message even if adapted to suit the needs of the audience will not reach all listeners the same way; some of them may not be touched at all. This outcome, however, should not detract the catechetical facilitator from his or her greater purpose, that of speaking the truth. It is a moral responsibility that befalls on them on account of their ministry of the Word.

## 6. Conclusion

The two key words defining the Third Period are purification and enlightenment. The meaning of these words, often misunderstood in the context of the RCIA, has been clarified to ensure a better understanding of what they entail with respect to a faith formation process which has in mind the spiritual wellbeing of the participants and the proclamation of the Word of God. With this understanding at the forefront, it is now appropriate to turn our attention to appreciating the truths that each

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<sup>266</sup> Gula, 224. Gula wrote this sentence with preachers in mind but it is also applicable for catechetical facilitators having to interpret a text.

of the gospel readings under our purview contain in order to be better equipped for their diffusion to RCIA participants.

## Chapter 5

### An Analysis of Gospel Readings Relevant to the Study of the Third Period

#### 1. Introduction

The focus of Chapter Four was on examining the theologies of purification and of enlightenment to appreciate better their import relevant to the aim of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. Of secondary importance was Chapter Four's efforts at defining the meaning of a Liturgy of the Word as it pertains to the spiritualization of the heart and to the illumination of the mind within the framework of the Scrutinies, which are part and parcel of the Third Period. This chapter, then, attempts to accentuate the meanings of the three Gospel readings under study to render a Liturgy of the Word efficacious and in line with the intentions of the Third Period. This is accomplished by first exploring the origin of the inclusion of the Johannine pericopes as part of the Scrutinies. Second, their meanings are extracted to enhance their contribution to the transformation process of the RCIA participants. Third and lastly, the theology of the evangelist who wrote the Fourth Gospel is researched to value the meanings of the three readings under study.

#### 2. The Origin of the Choice of the Gospel Readings within the Scrutinies

When the author wrote *The Gospel according to John* (henceforth referred to as John or the evangelist), his community was experiencing challenges around the theme of faith: some members had already left the community while others were questioning its foundation in Jesus. Amidst christological issues, the evangelist stood firm: the Gospel

"was written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this believe you may have life in his name." (20:31). Three of John's stories, *The Samaritan Woman* (4:4-42), *The Man Born Blind* (9:1-41), and *The Raising of Lazarus* (11:1-44)<sup>267</sup> serve well his very purpose: the woman at Jacob's well, the blind man in Jerusalem, and some of the Jews present at Lazarus' tomb all came "to believe" in Jesus and received "life" in his name.

Although there is not clear evidence that these three Johannine pericopes were used in the early centuries during a Christian initiation process, we can assume that they may have been used during certain rituals of pre-baptismal preparation. Antoine Chavasse, following an analysis of various sources including the *Depositio Martyrium* of 354, the *Würzburg Capitulary* (ca. 700), and the *Gelasian Sacramentary* (ca. 750), confirmed that by the time of the papacy of Leo the Great (440-461) the three stories under study were read on the Sundays of the third, fourth, and fifth week of the Roman Lenten season to coincide with the three scrutiny masses already in use.<sup>268</sup> This practice, however, did not last long: the *Würzburg Evangelary* of year 645 indicates that the Johannine pericopes were no longer read on Sundays. Rather, *The Samaritan Woman* was read on the Friday of the third week of Lent, *The Raising of Lazarus* on the Wednesday of the fourth week, and *The Man Born Blind* on the Friday of the same week.<sup>269</sup> These readings, it seems, were "transferred from the Sundays to which they originally belonged to the ferias where they now appear"<sup>270</sup> no later than 590 or 593 according to an eight

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<sup>267</sup> Henceforth referred to as "Johannine pericopes".

<sup>268</sup> Johnson, *From three weeks to Forty Days*, 186-188.

<sup>269</sup> Turner, *Scrutinies Scrutinized*, 71.

<sup>270</sup> Maertens, *History and Function*, 52.

century document, the *Comes of Murbach*.<sup>271</sup> These documents attest to the inclusion of the three referenced stories of John within a Lenten season, possibly as early as the fourth century, during which Scrutinies were carried out. However, no information is provided on the reasons why these specific stories were chosen to be part of the then Scrutinies; an attempt at elucidating the mystery did not occur until the twentieth century.

Thierry Maertens questioned the flagrant omission and proposed a reasonable explanation. Maertens argues that the three readings, by themselves, do not provide a clue as to their choice for the Scrutinies but, when considered with their accompanying Old Testament readings, a rational surfaces.<sup>272</sup> For instance, the "living water" of Christ in the Samaritan woman story (4:10) is coupled with the living water of the rock struck with the staff of Moses in Nm 20:1-13. Similarly, Jesus' command to the blind man to "Go wash in the pool of Siloam" (9:7) is coupled with God's command in response to Israel's sinfulness: "Wash yourself clean" in Isaiah 9:16-19. Finally, the raising of Lazarus in (11:43) is coupled with the raising of the widow's son in 1Kgs 17-24. Maertens concludes that these readings, taken together, are "designed to place the Gospel story in the framework of salvation history."<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, in line with their increasing standing in the eyes of the Church, these three compelling stories of John made their way to "the texts of the communion antiphons, still in place today, which reveal to the baptized the essential dimensions of the Eucharist".<sup>274</sup> The many themes these stories accentuate, such as the welling up of water to eternal life (4:14), the faith of the blind

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<sup>271</sup> Dominic Edward Serra, "The Scrutinies of the Elect in the Church of Rome," (M.A. thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1978), 40.

<sup>272</sup> An approximate date is not provided. The author, however, mentions that the coupled readings go "far back" in the liturgical formula. Maertens, *History and Function*, 52.

<sup>273</sup> Maertens, *History and Function*, 52.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, 52.



man (9:37), and belief in the Messiah (11:27) have endured for centuries and are still favored by the Church in response to a world in dire need of hope. It is not surprising, then, that their spiritual value was recognized early in the history of the Church and thus given a place of honor.

Although the Johannine pericopes obtained prominence in time, their placement within the Scrutinies of the Early Church was not to last: they were soon relegated to ordinary ferias with the gradual downturn of the catechumenate in the fifth and sixth centuries. The Scrutinies themselves lost their appeal: by the twelve century, the Roman Pontifical "offers no evidence of exorcisms or scrutinies during the preceding weeks" of Easter.<sup>275</sup> The Roman Ritual of 1614, however, does hint of a scrutiny but its emphasis is on exorcisms: bonded elements of a ritual for adult baptism which lasted until the 1960's.<sup>276</sup> A rite of initiation for adults was finally restored in 1972, including most of the elements of the Early Church Scrutinies. At the same time, the three Johannine pericopes were moved back to the Sunday celebrations of the Scrutinies, and, as it happened earlier in the history of the Church, no specific reasons were given as to why they were retained.

Today's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, however, provides a possible clue for the inclusion of the Johannine pericopes in a formation period meant to purify the minds and hearts of the elect and to enlighten them with a deeper knowledge of Christ.<sup>277</sup> The clue points in the direction of the meanings of the three Johannine pericopes, which are in harmony with the purpose of the Third Period. First, the Samaritan woman is purified with the living water of Christ (4:15) and enlightened by his revealing words: "I am he" (4:25). Second, the blind man is purified in the Pool of Siloam (9:7) and

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<sup>275</sup> Turner, *Scrutinies Scrutinized*, 72.

<sup>276</sup> Turner, *Scrutinies Scrutinized*, 72-73.

<sup>277</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #139, 77.

enlightened by Jesus' assertion: "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he." (9:37) Finally, in the story of Lazarus, Martha shows a sign of unbelief (11:20) but is somewhat purified with the words of Jesus, "I am the resurrection and the life" to which Martha answers, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah," (11:25, 27). Keeping in mind that the evangelist wrote his Gospel with an eye on belief, an objective that resonates well with the purpose of the Third Period, it is not surprising to find the Johannine pericopes within the Restored Catechumenate of 1972.

Furthermore, it seems that each one of those three Johannine stories has its proper audience. The Samaritan woman, for instance, could be perceived as a representative of community members who have little faith or who have lost their faith, all they need to believe is to "hear" about Jesus' prophetic ability (4:19, 39). The blind man story could have been written for members about to leave a faith community: for them hearing is not sufficient, they also need an extraordinary occurrence (9:7) performed by someone "from God" (9:33) to consolidate their understanding that Jesus is the Son of God. The Lazarus story offers a greater challenge in that many groups are represented: Martha could represent members who sway between unbelieving and believing (11:23-24, 27, 39); the disciples could represent those who still have doubts (11:14); and the Jews who are there to comfort both sisters could represent unbelievers (11:45). Ultimately, the whole community is represented in the crowd (11:42) which is placed there to witness an existential manifestation that highlights the "glory of God" (11:40) so "that they may believe that you sent me." (11:42). It is presumed that at that moment Martha, Mary, and the disciples fortified their faith and that some Jews "began to believe in him." (11:45) Likewise, it is not difficult to find in today's religious environment similar expressions of

faith, even among RCIA participants whose faith may vary from partial belief to a firm willingness to commit to a life in Christ; a challenge recognized by the Church in the Seventies, as did earlier the Church of our Fathers, and for which they provided a somewhat identical remedy: an initiation process for adults into the Roman Catholic Church, including the persuasive and perennial Johannine pericopes.

### 3. The Intended Meanings of the Three Gospel Readings Under Study

#### a) An Introduction to *The Gospel according to John*

The stories of The Samaritan Woman, The Man Born Blind, and of The Raising of Lazarus in The Gospel according to John are very human and compelling. They are human in that they address real situations within a community suffering from theological ambiguities concerning its Christian existence and compelling in that they highlight a major characteristic of the Gospel, that Jesus is the Son of God, the source of life (20:31). To understand adequately the profound meanings of these stories it is important first to appreciate the historical context of the Gospel itself.

The development of the Fourth Gospel occurred over time and involved more than one contributor. In that development, the evangelist would have edited previous material about the life and teachings of Jesus in answer to new challenges affecting the community until a final edition was completed by a redactor<sup>278</sup>. The writing process spanned many years if not decades: the scholarly opinions converge between an earliest date of 90 A.D. and a plausible latest date of 110 A.D. In agreement with Brown, Schneiders believes that the writing down of the story was done by an "evangelist" who

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<sup>278</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, XXXIV - XXXVI.

was possibly a second-generation Christian.<sup>279</sup> His work, in time, was redacted "to smooth out some of the most glaring theological and pastoral discrepancies between the Fourth Gospel and . . . the emerging and increasingly early Christian community".<sup>280</sup> On the question of "author", Moloney, independent of Schneiders and Brown's analyses, concludes that "It is impossible to give a certain answer one way or the other" but concedes [there is always the chance that the apostle John may have been in some way "author" of the Gospel we traditionally call "of John."]<sup>281</sup>

Irrespective of the "author", what is apparent is that the Johannine literature emerged from a community inspired by the "spirit" of the Beloved Disciple, that is a community that "preached and developed his reminiscences even further, according to the needs of the community to which they administered."<sup>282</sup> In mind and in heart, the community became "one" with the "spirit" of the Beloved Disciple, living in communion as prescribed by Christ. The "evangelist" himself lived and wrote with the same heart and "spirit" and, additionally, was imbued with a profound theological mindset and a singular spirituality unequaled among the Gospel writers; a spirituality which is "essentially mystical and contemplative, giving rise to a theology that is very little concerned with institution and very much concerned with union and life."<sup>283</sup> From his readings, we can

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<sup>279</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, New and Expanded Edition (New York, N.Y.: Crossroad Publishing, 2003), 40. In a separate section of her book, *Schneiders proposes that "of all the characters in the Gospel, the most likely candidate for the evangelist's textual alter ego is the Samaritan woman of chapter 4." In support of her proposition, she maintains that this woman is the only figure in the Gospel of John who is truly depicted as having an apostolic function during Jesus' earthly existence. Additionally, she knows both Jewish and Samaritan laws and theology; she receives the first "I am" revelation of Jesus, and understands that Jesus is the expected messianic prophet.* 251-252.

<sup>280</sup> Schneiders, 40.

<sup>281</sup> Moloney, 7-8.

<sup>282</sup> Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York, NY: Double Day, 2003), 196.

<sup>283</sup> Schneiders, 47.

detect an evangelist who lived profoundly his encounter with Christ such that "his natural desire to see, just as his desire to love, was concentrated henceforth upon Him alone. . . . (and hence) had to make known life "in spirit and truth" (4:23)."<sup>284</sup> Furthermore, his dramatic genius and his unquestionable love for Jesus and his community allowed for the construction of the three stories under study, which are written with assurance to bring readers and listeners to believe in Christ.

As to its place of composition, Moloney believes the Fourth Gospel had to be "written in a place where Judaism, early Christianity, the complex religions of the Hellenistic and Greek world . . . rubbed shoulders - often painfully."<sup>285</sup> He concedes that the best location where these ingredients mesh perfectly is the site of Ephesus. Other locations have been proposed such as Alexandria, Antioch, and Northern Transjordan but none of these, according to Brown, come close to the general acceptance of Ephesus as the most likely place of composition.<sup>286</sup>

The complex nature of John's community, its real people in real situations, provided the raw material behind the Fourth Gospel's theological and spiritual reflections. Schneiders offers a condensed but pointed summary of the community's challenges: "The animosity of the community toward "the Jews," the anti-Jerusalem/temple polemic contrasted with the positive attitude toward Galileans and Samaritans, the continual contrasting of Jesus and his teaching with Moses and Judaism, the utter rejection of "the world," the careful positioning of Jesus in relation to John the baptizer, the Samaritan cast to the Gospel's theology, the rivalry between Simon Peter and "the Twelve," on the one

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<sup>284</sup> Paul-Marie de la Croix, *The Biblical Spirituality of St. John*, trans. John Clark (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alpha House, 1966), 26, 29.

<sup>285</sup> Moloney, 5.

<sup>286</sup> Brown, *Introduction*, 202-206.

hand, and the Beloved Disciple and "the disciples," on the other, and the universalist soteriology are all probable reflective of the actual life of the Johannine community prior to, during, and after the writing of the Gospel."<sup>287</sup> For Dumm, simply stated, the theological problems arising from within the community can be summed up in its failure to understand "Christ". Therefore, the evangelist wrote in "an attempt to warn against a superficial Christianity, that knows all the right theological words and performs all the right ritual actions but which has not discovered the rich personal and mystical union with God in Christ for which these words and actions exist and toward which they point."<sup>288</sup> All in all, this was a community in pain: John wrote to give it a sense of belonging, of belonging to Christ.

This sense of belonging to Christ is not for John an abstract objective but rather a prospect offered then and now to all receptive readers or listeners: his reasoning is the result of his own lived experience of the ways of Jesus which became for him a matter that transcended all natural possibilities. Inviting people to believe became for John the ultimate purpose of his Gospel; his determination at convincing his community of the authenticity of his demonstration is clearly seen in the analysis of the three pericopes under study which follow.

b) The Samaritan Woman, (Jn 4:4-42)

The story of The Samaritan Woman stands out among all the narratives of the Gospels in that the evangelist shows Jesus having a private and theological discourse with a woman, which amounted to a public display that Jews typically avoided. Furthermore, this woman was despised for two reasons: first, by Jews for being a

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<sup>287</sup> Schneiders, 46-47.

<sup>288</sup> Demetrius R. Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), XX.

Samaritan and second, by her community for her seemingly questionable reputation. In this instance, the teaching of Jesus in the mind of the evangelist<sup>289</sup> takes on a particular purpose, that of establishing "full equality in the community between Samaritan Christians and Jewish Christians."<sup>290</sup>

Historical Context: During the first century, the Jews considered themselves part of a pure race, straight descendants of the line of Abraham whereas the Samaritans were of mixed blood, composed of traditional Jews of the North left behind after the Babylonian invasion and of colonists brought in by conquerors of the land. Adding to an already complex situation, the Samaritans adhered to the writings of the Pentateuch and expected a "Prophet-like-Moses" who would "settle legal questions"<sup>291</sup> whereas the Jews accepted both the Pentateuch and the Prophetical books and expected a prophet of the line of David who would rule as a king. Moreover, the Samaritans used to worship on nearby Mount Gerizim where their "tradition locates Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and Jacob's vision"<sup>292</sup> whereas the Jews honored Yahweh on Mount Moriah where tradition said Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac. Thus, the historical and religious differences created a divide between the two nations, which perdured to the turn of the century when presumably members of both societies were gathered in Ephesus under the same Christian banner.

The evangelist who wrote the Gospel according to John, however, was not indifferent to the social, ideological, and theological concerns of the Jews and Samaritans

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<sup>289</sup> For the evangelist to have written such a powerful Gospel and a deeply challenging story on the woman from Samaria, he [had to "know" Christ "in the Spirit" . . . And it is of this interior, experimental, intimate, and contemplative knowledge concerning Christ that John (the evangelist) gives an account in his Gospel.] Paul-Marie de la Croix, 49.

<sup>290</sup> Schneiders, 135.

<sup>291</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 171.

<sup>292</sup> Moloney, 132.

of his community, which eventually spilled over to their views of Jesus and what he represented as the Christ. With this preoccupation in mind, he wrote with the purpose of resolving these issues by insisting on "a reaffirmation of Jewish legitimacy as bearer of the covenantal faith and a surprising recognition of the essential validity of the Samaritan faith tradition despite the very real failures in fidelity of these historical successors of ancient Israel."<sup>293</sup> In his attempt to fill the theological rift between the Samaritans and the Jews, John was also satisfying a greater purpose, that of "assuring the universal character of God's plan of salvation."<sup>294</sup>

The story of The Samaritan Woman presents itself as an independent unit: its plot is self-sufficient and separate from other anecdotes in the Gospel. As a result, the question of its authorship raises legitimate doubts in relation to the Gospel as a whole. Macgregor and Morton, using an approach quite different from other scholars, looked at the story utilizing a statistical analysis method and concluded that the length of the pericope and stylistic evidence point to an author other than the author of the Gospel.<sup>295</sup> Brown is not convinced of their findings and suggests rather, that the method used by Macgregor and Morton alludes to a theory of multiple sources. The Samaritan story, he proposes, was possibly part of an oral tradition in the mind of an "author", accounted for in Stage 1 of his theory of composition. The oral tradition would have then been molded with other parts of the Gospel in Stage 2 before being written down in a first edition, in Stage 3. The person who received the traditional material and the first editor would be the

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<sup>293</sup> Schneiders, 135.

<sup>294</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 176.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, XXVIII and XXIX.



same person, the person referred to as the "evangelist" and the main source of the Gospel.<sup>296</sup>

Schneiders agrees with the concept of multiple sources but submits that the evangelist "may be" a woman and that woman is none other than the Samaritan woman; the same woman who would have written the Gospel as a whole. It could be argued that Schneiders' supposition is strongly supported by Jesus' affection for Mary Magdala and for the sisters Martha and Mary, by his defense of a woman caught in adultery, and by the presence of women near the cross where none of the disciples were present except the one "whom he loved". (19:26) Apart from Schneiders' suggestion, all the authors surveyed agree that whoever wrote the Gospel, also wrote the story of The Samaritan Woman.

Literary context: Commentators agree that the story of The Samaritan Woman stands alone, is complete, and is significant. The story is of itself important, but its significance within the Gospel is highlighted when considered within the Book of Signs in which the wondrous deeds of Jesus are described to bring its readers to believe in the Word. The story of the woman contributes to that purpose by revealing that Jesus is "living water" and by presenting testimonies in support of Jesus' true identity.

Strategically, the Samaritan story follows a development in the faith which starts at Cana where Jesus' disciples begin to believe (2:11) and continues with some Jews experiencing an authentic faith and being baptized (3:22). Up to this point, the progression to faith limits itself to Jews, but now the evangelist opens the door to

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<sup>296</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, XXXIV and XXXV.

outsiders. With this story, he craftily includes the Samaritans into his community and gives them equal status with other Christians.<sup>297</sup>

The evangelist utilizes a discourse form to accentuate the meaning of The Samaritan Woman story, that is the evolving faith of a woman who comes to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Within the same discourse, the evangelist interjects two dialogues: one with the Samaritan woman and another with the disciples. The first dialogue brings to faith whereas the second situates Jesus' mission in the will of God. The dialogue with the woman includes two distinct themes, that of living water that wells up to eternal life (v. 14) and that of worshipping the "Father in Spirit and truth" (v. 23). The dialogue with the disciples, on the other hand, is contained between two paragraphs, one describing the witness of the woman and the other explaining that many began to believe in Jesus because of his word (v. 41). In between, Jesus outlines another theme, that of continuing his work in accord with his Father's will (vv. 34-38). Although the themes are in line with John's mindset many scholars believe, because of the structure of the conversation and the unlikely scenario, that this story about a "Samaritan" woman is not an historical document; they prefer to characterize the story as "spiritual" on account of Jesus' love for his Father and his constant desire to abide by his will.

Furthermore, in this biblical account there are a number of statements that seem to be out of place: for instance, it is said that Jesus decided to "pass through Samaria" (v. 4) when Jews would normally bypass the territory because they "use nothing in common with Samaritans" (v. 9). According to Moloney, this is the author's way of saying that

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<sup>297</sup> Following the lead of Raymond Brown, Schneiders understands the Samaritan woman to be a "representative figure". She is a "symbolic character" like, for instance, the Beloved Disciple, the mother of Jesus, the man born blind who, nameless as they might be, enhance "their power to represent collectivities without losing their particularities." 137. As such, the Samaritan woman is not only a symbol for John's community, but also of the world outside Judea.

"He must move into the world beyond Israel".<sup>298</sup> Another sentence that demands clarification is the following: "His disciples had gone into town to buy food." (v. 8) Why would they leave Jesus alone? Surely, out of the Twelve, one disciple could have stayed with him. Finally, the "woman left her water jar" (v. 28) by the well, which amounts to an unlikely possibility in Jesus' time. In these examples, it seems the evangelist is using extraordinary circumstances to make the point that Jesus will go beyond normal expectations to do his Father's will.

On the other hand, the evangelist mentions terms not seen or heard before in the Gospels such as "Jacob's well" (v. 6) which is not even mentioned in the Old Testament,<sup>299</sup> the "gift from God" (v. 10) which "denotes the salvation of God in an inclusive sense",<sup>300</sup> "living water" (vv. 10-11) that will quench all thirst forever, "true worshipers" (v. 23), and "God is Spirit" (v. 24). Finally, the story depicts a progressive conversion in a synthesized manner: the woman first sees in Jesus a Jew, then a "Sir", moves on to recognize in him a "prophet", and ultimately acknowledges him as the "Messiah". In the two days that Jesus stays in Samaria, a large number of villagers are converted and recognize in Jesus the "Savior of the world" (v. 42); their messianic expectations are realized in Jesus, the "Christ". During the same time frame, the Samaritan woman becomes the first Johannine missionary and Jesus' conversation with his disciples anticipates their approaching task of evangelization. However, before arriving at the climax of the story, John puts forward a number of ministerial and theological concepts.

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<sup>298</sup> Moloney, 116.

<sup>299</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 169.

<sup>300</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary - John*, Vol. 36, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 60.

Synthesizing the meaning of the text: The writing of *The Samaritan Woman* story was probably occasioned by differences in beliefs in regard to theological issues between two principal factions in the Johannine community: Samaritans with Mosaic affinities and traditional Jews with Davidic expectations. The evangelist, confronted with this dilemma, included the unique story of the Samaritan woman into his Gospel in order to dissipate any misconceptions about the true nature of Jesus and to bring about unity within a divided community. Therefore, the evangelist brings to the realization that Jesus is the Christ by carefully discussing three principal themes, that of living water, worship, and mission. To enhance his presentation, he introduces the concepts of gift of God, prophet, Messiah, and of Savior, all in an effort to bring his community "to believe", to understand that Jesus is the key to eternal life.

The "living water" offered by Jesus is not of the physical kind, of the same elements as of the waters in Jacob's well from which the Samaritan woman came to draw water; rather, his "water" is spiritual in nature. On the surface, the term "living water" seems symbolic but in actuality it is a sign that expresses a way of being, that of an existence centered on Jesus who is Life. In the Old Testament, God is identified with "living waters" in a similar way (Jer 2:13, 17:18), but in reference to Jesus it also conveys a promise: the "living water" of Jesus is from a flowing spring that shoots up to eternal life, a spring that will never run out. His water is the source of life that leads to salvation, a life-long process mediated by the Holy Spirit.

With Jesus, water takes the form of a life-giving revelation to all men and women:<sup>301</sup> it is the Good News proclaimed by the Son of God. At first, the woman does

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<sup>301</sup> Moloney expands on this understanding of "living water": it refers, he says, to the "life giving revelation of the heavenly, which only Jesus makes known." Thus, Jesus becomes the revealer who "offers

not understand: she is hoping for a miraculous water that will satisfy her physical thirst, not realizing that the "living water" of Jesus will quench her anxieties, free her from oppressions, and provide hope in an afterlife. In an effective manner, Jesus is contrasting her diminished life with a life filled with joy and hope, a new life under his care. This living water, she will not find by herself, it does not exist by itself: it is a free gift from God, the gift of his Son to humanity which surpasses all gifts including the gift of the well from their esteemed ancestor, Jacob.

Jesus' words are beginning to have an effect on the woman's faith: her understanding of Jesus is evolving. At first, she recognizes in Jesus, a Jew, an antagonist, but soon realizes that he means no harm and hence shows respect by calling him, Sir. Once Jesus tells the woman about her marital situation, she quickly admits that he is a prophet, but not necessarily of the type of Moses. By now, her interest is growing and her faith is increasing. Not wanting to remain on her thirst, she initiates a theological dialogue on worship.

The woman senses that Jesus is a prophet but reaches for a confirmation by exacting from her interlocutor the proper place of worship, on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem? Her immediate concern is not on how to worship but on where to worship; a matter which betrays a lack of understanding of God's preference. Jesus quickly assesses the situation, dismisses immediately the issue of place, and switches the focus on the substance of worshipping: what is of importance is to understand whom to worship and how to honor the divine. Hence, true worship starts by ignoring Jewish and Samaritan

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the possibility of eternal life to those who are born again of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5)." It follows that the still waters of Jacob's well are not only "surpassed by the gift of Jesus, but this gift will be for all who would choose to take from it." 117-118.

rituals and believing in Jesus whose mission is to reveal the way to the Father.<sup>302</sup> It follows that worship is due to the Father who should be revered in Spirit and Truth (v. 23); in Spirit because he orients the worshipper to the Father such that he becomes the focus of one's life and in Truth not as demanded by the Law, but in virtue and righteousness. This worship eliminates the temples of Mount Gerizim and of Jerusalem to make room for the new temple which is "the body of the risen Lord. . . . And the new worship will be profoundly trinitarian, since it will be offered to the Father, in union with the Son and at the prompting of the Spirit."<sup>303</sup>

Possibly mystified, the woman speaks of a Messiah to come who will disclose "everything". Jesus seizes the occasion to confirm his true identity: "I am he" (v. 26), the one who proclaims the Father.<sup>304</sup> Jesus' self-revelation is absolute: he is the Messiah who transcends all the prophets. On the arrival of the disciples, the woman departs quickly to proclaim that Jesus could be "the Christ". At this juncture, she has heard the convincing words of Jesus and experienced the proof of his status but still demonstrates an element of doubt. Nevertheless, her proclamation to the townspeople demonstrates a true missionary spirit.

The food the disciples brought with them from the village is of little interest to Jesus. This food gives little satisfaction whereas the food he prefers is from his Father who sent him to accomplish a mission. His life is forever oriented toward the Father and in doing his will, his work is already bearing fruits and will soon be ready for harvest.

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<sup>302</sup> Moloney explains: in essence, "Jesus is revealing himself and the way to the Father to a non-Jewish world. . . . true worship is the orientation of oneself toward the Father in such a way that God becomes the imperative of one's life." 128.

<sup>303</sup> Dumm, 109.

<sup>304</sup> When Jesus mentions that he is "I AM", "he is not affirming simply that he exists but that he is present and wishes to help. . . . the extension into our world of this power of God to love and save." Dumm, 134.

This harvest, however, is not for human consumption, but for the Father to reap the labor of his love for humanity, to rejoice in his work of salvation. The disciples are invited to participate in the harvesting and to continue the mission already started by John the Baptist and perfected by Christ.<sup>305</sup> There is little time to waste since the harvest is almost ripe and plentiful; the disciples need to realize the nature of their calling and trust in the Father.

In the meantime, the words of the Samaritan woman led many villagers to begin to believe, which impelled them to come to Jesus. Jesus stayed with them two days and many more began to believe, not on her account, but because of his words. They soon reached a state of complete belief and recognized in Jesus the Savior of the world.

In a caring way, Jesus revealed his true identity as "the Messiah" to the lowest of the lowest: a non-Jewish woman who is an outcast of her society. Jesus accepts her for who she really is, that is a human being in need of compassion and mercy. She listens to his message of hope and gladly opens her heart to his love. Little by little his words sink in; little by little she comes to believe. Ultimately, her faith emerges and defeats her sinfulness: her conversion is complete. In her eyes, Jesus is no longer a Jew, an outsider, but the Savior<sup>306</sup> who has come to tell her and the world, "everything".

The woman at the well came to believe because of Jesus' convincing arguments, which reflected the Truth that he is, the reality of his divine being. By his self-revelation,

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<sup>305</sup> The missionary work of the disciples, however, will not "begin until the hour of Jesus' crucifixion/exaltation." Perkins, 957.

<sup>306</sup> This understanding of Jesus as Messiah and Savior is visible throughout the Gospels, including in John where the word *sōtēr* affirms Jesus' saving role: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world be saved through him." (3:17) In affirming that Jesus is Savior, the Samaritans are thus recognizing that Jesus is more than a Mosaic-like-prophet: he is the Anointed sent by God in response to their hopes.

Jesus situates himself at the center of all human lives, from where spring up believing and hoping. In the story that follows, John augments on his argumentation on the reality of Jesus as the Savior of the world (v. 42) with a miracle that brings a blind man to conclude that Jesus is the Son of Man (9:35-38). A reader or listener cannot escape the truth: Jesus is certainly more than a "man", more than a "prophet": he is "from God".

c) The Man Born Blind, (Jn 9:1-41)

The story of *The Man Born Blind* runs in parallel with *The Samaritan Woman* episode in that Jesus makes the subject of his attention two unknown persons, two outcasts from society who are in dire need of liberation. In the first instance, the discourse involves Jesus and a woman who suffers rejection because of her sinful behavior whereas in the second situation Jesus approaches a blind man who is dismissed on account of his blindness. Both of them, the Samaritan woman who hears a voice of hope in Jesus and the blind man who sees his power, transition from a disability to a spiritual awakening in Christ. Their miracles are a sign of Christ's power over sin and darkness. In the story of the blind man that follows, his darkness is overtaken by the "light" of Christ.

Historical context: The composition of *The Man Born Blind* story shows an author possessing a keen sense of drama and a concise writing style: what he wrote in few words could easily be a synopsis for a book. The base material for the story possibly originated in an oral tradition<sup>307</sup> and later formatted into the Fourth Gospel by a second source, called the evangelist. It is also likely that the original material was used for

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<sup>307</sup> Schneiders agrees that vv. 1-7 regarding the healing itself are possibly from an oral tradition but considers that the consequences of the healing narrated in vv. 8 - 41 are hardly part of that tradition. These consequences, she mentions, "concern events that are scarcely plausible within the lifetime of the pre-Easter Jesus, especially the interrogation/trial of the man's parents and the man himself for something which is hardly a crime, being healed of blindness." 151.



preaching to which information was subsequently added. For example, vv. 3b-5 seem to be an addition by the evangelist "to make the symbolism of Jesus as light clear and point to the approach of the hour when the light will depart."<sup>308</sup> Some interpreters also see v. 38 as an addition "based on some manuscript evidence that only here in the Fourth Gospel does *proskynein* ("to worship") appear, and that *ephē* (v. 39a: "said") is rare (elsewhere only at 1:23)."<sup>309</sup> Regardless of these observations, the story remains authentic and delivers its message convincingly.

The story's authenticity is, to some extent, corroborated by similar episodes in the Synoptic Gospels, with the difference that the blind man in John is disabled from birth whereas the blinds in Matthew, Mark, and Luke seem to suffer from a blindness other than congenital. Furthermore, we are informed by the evangelist that the man's blindness is not the result of sin; rather "it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him." (v. 3) Another key difference lies in the sending of the blind man to wash in the Pool of Siloam, an unique detail in John that deserves attention: the word "Siloam" in itself does not mean ["the sent one" (*ho hermēneuetai apestalmenos*), although consonants of the verb "to send" (Hebrew: *šālah*) are in the name.]<sup>310</sup> Popular interpretation, however, was quick to link "Siloam" with "sent one", possibly for various religious reasons. In John, however, "Sent" is "virtually a proper name for Jesus" and its use in this context refers not on the healing in itself ["but on the man's being "plunged into" Jesus, the Sent one."]<sup>311</sup> It can be concluded then, that the different features of the man born blind story demonstrate that "John is certainly not dependent on any single

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<sup>308</sup> Perkins, 967.

<sup>309</sup> Moloney, 299. Moloney, however, disputes this proposition from "some scholars" and concludes that it is unwarranted.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid, 297.

<sup>311</sup> Schneiders, 151.

Synoptic account, nor is there any convincing evidence that John is dependent on any combination of details from the various Synoptic scenes."<sup>312</sup> The evangelist's preoccupation is not so much on the healing as it appears in the Synoptics, but on eliciting a "profession of faith in Jesus as the Christ and embarking on the path of discipleship."<sup>313</sup>

In writing this story, the evangelist had a definite audience in mind: the Jews. This category of persons, however, points to two subgroups: the Pharisees and other Jews. The Pharisees of this story express a doubtful attitude toward the works of Jesus and betray a negativity toward his person. These are the Jews who, according to Perkins, "had taken measures to expel those who believed in Jesus from the synagogues (9:22-23)".<sup>314</sup> Furthermore, the evangelist renames the Pharisees of v. 13 to "the Jews" in v. 18, possibly to place on their shoulders additional liability. Moloney explains: these are the Jews in the Gospel "who have taken up a theological and christological position that rejects Jesus and the claims made for him by his followers. . . . The expression could be applied to anyone of any age and any nation who has decided, once and for all, that Jesus

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<sup>312</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 378.

<sup>313</sup> Schneiders, 151.

<sup>314</sup> A case in mind is that of the parents of the blind man. His parents' fear of expulsion reflects accurately the troubling situation facing the Christian Jews of the Johannine community, but this fear of the Jewish leadership was not prevalent in Jesus' time. Brown explains: "It is quite possible that during (Jesus' ministry), Jesus and his disciples met opposition in the synagogues and were handled roughly in the heat of debate (Lk 4:28-29). But it is almost unbelievable that during Jesus' lifetime a formal excommunication was leveled against those who followed him." Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 380. In time, however, the Jewish hostility against Christian Jews increased (Acts 4:18, 5:40, 8:1, 18:12-13, 21:27, and so on), so that by the time the evangelist wrote his Gospel, excommunication was a fait-accompli: "for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be expelled from the synagogue." (Jn 9:22) For Beasley-Murray, paraphrasing J. L. Martyn, "expulsion from the synagogues was the result of a formal decision of an authoritative Jewish body; that is likely to have been the one taken by the Pharisees at Jamnia, during their reformulation of Judaism under the leadership of Rabban Gamaliel." Beasley-Murray, 153. The Council of Jamnia is believed to have been held at the end of the First Century.

of Nazareth is not the Messiah, but a sinner whose origins are unknown (9:24-29)."<sup>315</sup> In the subgroup of "other Jews", we find first, the blind man himself: he is ["everychristian" in John's community who came in the world incapable of seeing the reign of God but who, by being plunged into the live-giving waters of the Sent One, is enlightened and enlivened.]<sup>316</sup> Second, the neighbors who are part of the "other Jews" represent people who, either out of curiosity or sincerity, are looking for answers to their existential questions. Finally, the parents "are the crypto-Christians in the Johannine community who know who Jesus is but are afraid to confess it."<sup>317</sup> The evangelist thus plainly exposes the socio-religious complexity of his community and the challenges inherent to its development in the light of Christ.

Literary context: Since the story of the blind man is complete in itself, it could have been introduced anywhere in the Book of Signs. The evangelist, however, inserted the story in Chapter 9 seemingly because he wanted to maintain a theological continuity in his narrative: it follows a long discourse in Chapter 8 on the person of Jesus and his relation to Abraham in which Jesus tries to convince the Jews that he speaks the truth. Instead, the Jews appear ready to charge him with sin, which brings Jesus to conclude that they are not interested in his words and therefore do not belong to God. It could be argued that in the episode of the blind man, Chapter 9, Jesus tries again to make the Jews realize that he is the "I Am" referred to in the previous chapter. This time, however, he doubles his attempt with a miracle, but the Jews, preferring darkness, remain in their sin.

Furthermore, the previous Chapters 7 and 8 contain two references that suggest that the story of the blind man is well suited for Chapter 9. For instance, in Chapter 8

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<sup>315</sup> Moloney, 11.

<sup>316</sup> Schneiders, 157.

<sup>317</sup> Schneiders, 158.

Jesus makes it clear to the Pharisees that he is "the light of the world" and that whoever follows him "will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (8:12) Moreover, there is also a direct association between the waters of Siloam (the Sent One), and the living waters offered by Jesus in 7:37-38. These two significant mentions serve well as a prelude to the story of *The Man Born Blind*.

It is also possible that the evangelist wanted the story of the blind man to serve as an introduction to the concept of the good shepherd in Chapter 10: the blind man hears the voice of Jesus, his shepherd (9:7), and believes (9:38) whereas the Jews who witness the works of the shepherd (9:3), but ignore his voice (9:24, 28), remain in their sin (9:41) and thus do not belong to the fold of the shepherd (10:20). Shortly after, at the Feast of the Dedication (10:22-39), the Jews asked Jesus, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus replied, "I told you and you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify to me. But you do not believe, because you are not among my sheep." (10:24-26) Jesus' reply is in continuity with the work he performed in Chapter 9 and in harmony with his viewpoint in the story of *The Good Shepherd*. Jesus' position vis-à-vis the Jews was highlighted in the story of the blind man, emphasized in the episode of the good shepherd, and accentuated at the Feast of the Dedication. In the story of *The Raising of Lazarus* which follows the Feast of the Dedication, Jesus again tries to convince the Jews who came to comfort Martha and Mary (11:19) that he is the source of life. This time, he was partly successful and some Jews came to believe (11:45) when they witnessed the "glory of God" (11:40). In raising Lazarus to life, Jesus reveals himself as "the resurrection and the life" just as he reveals himself as the "light of the world" in Chapter

9.<sup>318</sup> The purpose of the movement from Chapter 9 to Chapter 11 is to convince the Jews that he is the One sent by God for their salvation.

Synthesizing the meaning of the text: The evangelist<sup>319</sup> brilliantly summarizes the blind man's defense in a few but striking words, "If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." (v. 33) The blind man's conviction is remarkable coming from someone who, a few hours earlier, was despised by society for his sinfulness, rejected because of his disability, and forgotten because of his assumed ignorance. His telling words, as expected, should have been on the lips of the Pharisees who knew the writings of the prophets and the Law of Moses. Their sustained denial of the truth is set in opposition to the blind man's willingness to accept a simple reality, that this "man called Jesus" can be no other than the Son of God. The Pharisees, obstinately, rejected the blind man's proof of Jesus' true identity and fell back on their indefensible position. The simile trial of the blind man<sup>320</sup> who represents everyday Christians<sup>321</sup> in John's community highlights the spiritual struggle between the light of faith and the darkness of arrogance, between the desire to "see" and the refusal to "live". This story, as

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<sup>318</sup> Schneiders, 152.

<sup>319</sup> The evangelist starts his story with a casual observation, "As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth." (v. 1) There is nothing unusual about the sentence except for its implication for Jesus, that "work" has to be done. It was also important for the evangelist to specify that the man was blind from birth: it anticipated a challenge from the Pharisees who, otherwise, would have concluded that he was healed by a magician.

<sup>320</sup> The person on trial is not really the blind man but Jesus who has demonstrated superhuman powers. Furthermore, the focus of the interrogations is not on the transgression of the Sabbath per se, but on the identity of Jesus. The Jews are really looking for answers to such questions as how did the "man called Jesus" perform the assumed miracle and whom is he really? The blind man himself and the Sabbath are of secondary importance to the development of the story as a whole.

<sup>321</sup> These are Christians who have an open heart and a searching mind, looking for the truth. Cyril of Alexandria interprets the healing of the blind man "as a type of the calling of the Gentiles." In this sense, the miracle can be viewed as symbolical, for "It shows that as no intreaty has been made by the multitude of the Gentiles, for they were all in error, God, being indeed in His nature good, of His own will has come forward to shew mercy unto them. For how at all or in what way could the vast number of Greeks and of Gentiles beseech God for mercy, having their mind darkened by gross ignorance, so as to be in no wise able to see the Illuminator?" Book 6, 18.

in the case of the Samaritan woman, is about conversion: a marginalized human being, a blind man with little hope, is enlightened by the power of Jesus and through knowledge gained reflectively comes to the belief that the man who gave him sight is truly the Son of Man, from God.

The expression "light of the world" implies a new beginning for humanity, symbolized in the blind man's gain of sight who now lives in the light<sup>322</sup> whereas before he was existing in darkness and therefore dead to society. This light, however, is not new: it has a pre-existence of its own, it is the light of Christ, which "being very God . . . fills and tends not only the heavens and what is beyond the firmament, but also the world which we inhabit. . . . it overrules the universe, being absent from nothing that exists, neither having abandoned anything, but present everywhere in all thing".<sup>323</sup> The existence of the cosmos and its evolution depend on this "light" which took flesh to draw all human beings to itself. The livelihood of the souls rests on its rays such that whoever responds in faith to its illumination will "see" and believe,<sup>324</sup> whereas those who, out of

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<sup>322</sup> When writing about the "light", it is possible that the evangelist had in mind a passage from Isaiah: "I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." (49:6) It is a theme that the evangelist developed from the Prologue and later highlighted: "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (8:12) As in Isaiah, the theme has universal applications; in Chapter 9, however, it is directed at one blind man in a concrete situation in which darkness is overcome by the light of Jesus. A reader in John's community will quickly understand that Jesus is speaking to all those who are suffering from spiritual blindness, but are willing to "hear" his voice and then trust in his word. It is an invitation to "move from the darkness of a self-centered life to the light of loving concern and compassion. . . . an ever closer union with God." Dumm, 132.

<sup>323</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Book 6, 17.

<sup>324</sup> The "seen him" in John (v. 37) is "the real purpose of the gift of sight: it enables the man to see and believe in Jesus." Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 375. Both terms, "seen" and "speaking", are characteristics of the Gospel's christology. Moloney elaborates: "It is impossible for anyone to *see* God or come to the knowledge of God (cf. 1:18; 5:37), but Jesus reveals what he has *seen* (cf. 1:34; 3:11, 22; 8:38). He *speaks* what he has seen with the Father (cf. 6:46; 8:38). Those who believe in Jesus will *see* (1:50-51), while those who *refuse to see* are condemned (cf. 3:36; 5:37-38; 6:36)." Moloney, 295-296. Italics are those of the author. The blind man's trust in Jesus is vocalized in a resounding "I do believe, Lord," (v. 38); he finally believes that "the Son is One and only One, both before His conjunction with flesh, and when He came with flesh; and by flesh we denote man in his integrity, I mean as consisting of soul and body." Cyril of Alexandria, Book 6, 56. The blind man's trust in Jesus becomes his way of

pride and disregard, blocks its energy will remain in darkness. The Pharisees of the story are among those who have walked away from the “torch of the Spirit” and because of “their own unbelief they drew the affliction upon themselves. . . . (which) caused the coming of the Illuminator to be unto them a coming *for judgement*. For since they believe not, they are condemned.”<sup>325</sup> The choice between “seeing” and “not seeing” is personal; the former leads to eternal life, the latter implies self-condemnation and death.

It is worth noting that during the blind man’s interrogations Jesus is physically absent; he willingly tabled the main components of the discussions to follow by his words and deed (vv. 1-7), then walked away only to reappear for judgment at the end of the story. In the meantime, the blind man appears to be on his own, but not really since the Spirit is guiding his every move: his deepening knowledge of Jesus intensifies with every discussion. At first, in a conversation with the neighbors, the person who opened his eyes is simply the “man called Jesus”; his answer implies a passerby without much notoriety. While responding to questions posed by the Pharisees in the first interrogation, the blind man confesses that the “man called Jesus” cannot be other than a “prophet”.<sup>326</sup> During the second interrogation, his knowledge of Jesus grows significantly: if the Jews do not know where this “man” is from, he knows that the one who opened his eyes must be “from God”. The Jews refuse to see the truth laid out before their eyes and throw him out.

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breaking out "of this doomed material world into the spiritual world of ultimate liberation and fulfillment." Dumm, 133.

<sup>325</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Book 6, 59.

<sup>326</sup> In this context, the word prophet does not have the same messianic inference as in the story of the Samaritan woman (4:19); rather here "all that may be meant is that the man believes that Jesus has divine power." Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 373. In a sense, he sees something "godly" in Jesus. To the blind man's credit, the contrasting of "prophet" with his use of "man" earlier indicates an increase in faith, as little as it might be. Seen another way, his conversion is progressing as his interrogations intensify.

Finally, in the presence of Jesus, the blind man "sees" the "Son of Man"<sup>327</sup> and reacts with a resounding "I do believe". His faith has matured logically and theologically, transitioning from a physical healing, to a spiritual awakening, to embracing a personal relationship with the "man called Jesus", the Son of Man, from God.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, remained on their position of partiality and temerity. There was, however, a sign of hope for some Pharisees who, during the first interrogation, raised the possibility that the "man called Jesus" might be on the side of God. Their invitation to faith was soon set aside and their willingness to change evaporated; they quickly joined the other Pharisees to become, "the Jews", a designation for the persecutors of John's community "who think that by persecuting Jesus' disciples they are giving worship (or glory) to God."<sup>328</sup> In the final interrogation, the Jews, more obstinate than ever expressed the view that God did not speak with Jesus as he did with Moses and therefore "this man is a sinner" (v. 24). Ultimately, they acknowledge that they "see" when in fact they are not seeing; their denial is their condemnation: "Had they been prepared to admit their need for light they would have no guilt, but because they

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<sup>327</sup> In Johannine thought, the term Son of Man is used to refer to the role of Jesus in "making God known in the human story. His presence among us as the Son of Man is critical, revealing God and bringing judgment, but the consummation of his revealing role is yet to come." Moloney, 295. With regard to the difference in John between the Son of Man and the Son of God titles, Brown expresses Moloney's thought in this way: ["Son of God" is used by John to describe Jesus' relationship with the Father before, during, and after his incarnation, while "Son of Man" is limited to the earthly career of Jesus (and perhaps, one might add, to his relationship to human beings).] Brown, *Introduction*, 257. He, however, does not see such a sharp distinction between Son of God and Son of Man: he argues that in John the names "Jesus of Nazareth" and "Son of Man" are not used to speak of Logos and Son of God. However, they preexist (3:13) and postexist (6:62) insofar as they are "identified with "the Son (of God)" and the Logos. Brown, *Introduction*, 257-258. Thus, in Chapter 9, the Son of Man title does not seem to be a clear reference to the Logos nor to the "Son of God"; the blind man is only interested in knowing who is the "man called Jesus". He is told that he is the "Son of Man", the earthly Jesus, the Sent One from God (9:4). The title "Son of Man" in this situation seems to be "John's way of reminding us that titles, like rituals, can be useful at times but that they are only meant to lead us to something deeper, which is a personal, mystical union with God." Dumm, 145.

<sup>328</sup> Schneiders, 158.



claim all knowledge (v. 41: *blepomen*) there is no room for the revelation of the light that comes through Jesus. Thus they fall under Judgment.”<sup>329</sup>

In this story, the ignorance of the blind man is confronted with the knowledge of the Jews. The blind man, before the miracle, is left to himself, ignored by everyone. From his nothingness, he lives in hope of a better life, willing to pledge allegiance to a benefactor. From above, a ray of light falls upon him and his ignorance is transformed into belief. No longer dependent, but uncertain of the identity of his wonder-worker, he is determined to plead his cause. The “man called Jesus” is no longer there but it is as if he were: Jesus would normally be on trial to defend his actions but this time he delegates this responsibility to the blind man. Unbeknown to the blind man, Jesus is somehow present and shows his trust in his transition to faith, in his movement to become a disciple. The Jews, on the other hand, informed by the ways of Moses, strengthened by the Law, and influenced by the prophets possessed the required knowledge to recognize the difference between a charlatan and a man from God. But the Jews “set aside just judgement and were only bent on gratifying their prejudice; forgetting God, Who says: *The priest’s lips shall guard judgement and they shall seek the law at his mouth.*”<sup>330</sup> The Jews sensed that Jesus was from God just as Nicodemus knew that Jesus was a teacher from God (3:2). While Nicodemus walked away in silence, afraid of the implications, the Jews stubbornly turned their heads the other way, refusing to acknowledge the truth.

The spirituality that emerges from this story rests on a complete surrender to the ways of Christ. Paul-Marie de la Croix suggests there is a word in John's writings that expresses more than any other the "marvelous richness of the life of faith", and that is

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<sup>329</sup> Moloney, 302.

<sup>330</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Book 6, 41. The italics are those of the author.

"knowledge":<sup>331</sup> the man born blind is first brought to "see", then to "know",<sup>332</sup> which led to the transcendent "I do believe". The poor man's life transitions from a miserable existence to a life in Christ, which is nothing less than a promise of eternal life. His conversion is not only symbolic but real; it is the result of daily activities involving a real person challenged by existential issues. It is as if the blind man's "mysterious, spiritual side of life has suddenly been illuminated in a way that provides a clear vision of all that is essential in human life. . . . the luminous reality of a mystical understanding that is more real than any rational comprehension. . . . Thus, fear and anxiety gradually give way to joyful anticipation."<sup>333</sup> The blind man, in his surrender to Christ, is anticipating an eternal life made possible by the "light".

The story of the blind man evokes another aspect of a life in Christ, that of being purified in water. The Early Church was quick to see a baptismal lesson in the miracle of the blind man, in his conversion "from darkness to life and from spiritual blindness to illumination by Christ in baptism."<sup>334</sup> Four reasons justify the claim: first, the evangelist associates Siloam with Jesus, "the Sent One". Second, the healing itself occurred at the washing in the pool, which "illustrates the healing power of water." Third, the fact that

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<sup>331</sup> Paul-Marie de la Croix, 24. Dumm explains in his own words: knowing for the evangelist "is far more than having an intellectual grasp of the truth of some statement or equation. It is that rich biblical concept of knowing that involves a profound acceptance that engages the whole person." 136.

<sup>332</sup> The "*we know*" of the Jews (v. 29) highlights their belief in their ancestral tradition which ascertains that God spoke to Moses and gave them the Law. They are, therefore, disciples of Moses and legal guardian of the Law; in that capacity they could accuse of blasphemy anyone expressing a contrary opinion to the Law. What the Jews are in effect disclosing is their unwillingness to accept anything from the blind man, even if evident. By contrast, the "*we know*" of the man born blind (v. 31) speaks of the ultimate truth, that "God does not listen to sinners," His conviction relies on a simple human fact: no one can open the eyes of a blind person unless he is "from God". Moloney proposes that [Herein lie the roots of the failure of "the Jews" to accept Jesus. They are locked into adhesion to the former gift of God that came through Moses, and they reject the perfection of God's gift that comes through Jesus Christ (cf. 1:17-18) because they will not accept that he is "from God."] Moloney, 294-295. Once again, the Jews are appealing to the past to escape the truth of the present.

<sup>333</sup> Dumm, 130-131.

<sup>334</sup> Beasley-Murray, 162.

the man was "born" blind gives credence to the evangelist's portrayal of the healing. And fourth, the evangelist as well gives support to the claim when has the blind man say, "it is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind." (v. 32) Augustine agrees and, possibly echoing earlier notions, attests to its reality but from a different point of departure: "This blind man stands for the human race . . . if the blindness is infidelity, then the illumination is faith. . . . He washes his eyes in that pool which is interpreted 'one who has been sent': he was baptized in Christ."<sup>335</sup>

Fast forward to today, Brown offers some support for a baptismal claim: "Since the man's physical blindness is so obviously contrasted with the sin of spiritual blindness (v. 39) we may well suspect that the evangelist is playing on the idea that the man was born in sin (vv. 2, 34) - sin that can be removed only by washing in the waters of the spring or pool that flows from Jesus himself."<sup>336</sup> He concludes that on the basis of "some internal, contextual indication. . . . corroborated by the external criterion of good attestation . . . in chap. 9, the evidence (supporting the claim) may be strong enough to be reasonably probative."<sup>337</sup>

The blind man's dire condition has evolved from a physical disability to a spiritual enlightenment. Both his physical and spiritual cures are complete and decisive: the joy of experiencing Christ offers him the already vision of eternal things to come. At this juncture, John elevates his discourse and presents the ultimate price for believing, that of witnessing the glory of God. John was not satisfied with just presenting Jesus as the "Messiah", or the Son of Man as from God; he also wanted to persuade his followers that

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<sup>335</sup> Augustine, quoted in Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 381.

<sup>336</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 381.

<sup>337</sup> Brown, *New Testament Essays*, 66.

he is "life" and, hence, he has authority over death. These are the purposes of the story of *The Raising of Lazarus* which follows.

d) The Raising of Lazarus, (Jn 11:1-45)

The reaction of "the Jews" at the Feast of the Dedication disappoints Jesus: he has informed them of his true identity and performed many great deeds, but their challenging words suggest they have not understood his mission. They asked: "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." (10:24) Jesus attempts to convince them that the works he does are those of his Father's and, should they choose not to believe in him, to believe in the works themselves, "so that you may realize [and understand] that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (10:38) Jesus is well aware of his successes and of his failures; he knows he has worked hard for a long time, but realizes that now is the hour for something astonishing to happen: a sign must be given, a sign above all signs that will provoke a lasting faith in the hearts of his friends and disciples, and of many Jews. This ultimate sign is the raising of Lazarus, accomplished "for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (11:4)

Historical context: The placement of the chapter on The Raising of Lazarus at the end of the Book of Signs intimates that the evangelist wants the story to serve as the climax of all signs and consequently produce an immediate and lasting impact on his readers/listeners. For that reason, he takes great care in blending narratives and discourses as to construct a whole story: every part serves a specific purpose such that removing one part alters the meaning of the story. Nevertheless, the story seems to have undergone over time three levels of composition: a "simple catechetical resuscitation story" that highlights "Jesus' messianic identity and the general resurrection" was composed first,

followed with a "signs source redaction", which emphasizes "the Christian teaching on the fate of the deceased before the parousia", and ultimately completed with an "evangelist's redaction", which incorporates his theology and ties "the narrative into the chapters that precede and follow."<sup>338</sup> Although conceding that different levels of composition can be observed, Schneiders maintains that they cannot be from different authors: "virtually every verse of the Lazarus story is so marked by Johannine style characteristics and theological concerns"<sup>339</sup> that the story must be from the same witness.

Brown agrees that the whole story is possibly from the same author, but observes that two verses are out of place. For instance, v. 2, which depicts Mary as the "one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil" refers to a scene which has not yet taken place. And, v. 5, which reads "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." was probably inserted later "to assure the reader that Jesus' failure to go to Lazarus (as indicated in the following verse) does not reflect indifference."<sup>340</sup> It should be noted that even if these two minimal additions are removed, the story as a whole retains its integrity. It appears, however, that many critics are not of that opinion: Wilkens and Bultmann, among others, argue that the Martha account is a later addition because its theology is more developed than in other gospel incidents.<sup>341</sup> It seems that Brown, at some point, shared the conviction that Martha was added but was preceded by the annexation of Mary's account.<sup>342</sup> Whatever the case, it appears that Martha deserved a larger role on the assumption that in Luke 10:38-42 she is the one busy serving while Mary is sitting near

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<sup>338</sup> Schneiders, 171, who is referencing Gérard Rochais, *Les récits de résurrection des morts dans le nouveau Testament*.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

<sup>340</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 423.

<sup>341</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 433.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid*, 433.

Jesus. In John, however, Martha seems to lose some relevance: she "went out to meet him" while "Mary sat at home" (v. 20) but "when Mary hears that the teacher has come, she hastens out and falls at his feet."<sup>343</sup> Mary's actions seem to acknowledge that she is closer to Jesus. There is obviously some cross-referencing between John and Luke, but not enough to provide a clear picture of the individual roles of Martha and Mary in the life of Jesus.

On the question of historicity, Wilkens proposes that the primitive form of the Lazarus story excluded "all the sentences of a Johannine character"; in so doing what is left is a story about Jesus as the Lord over death. The Lazarus personage was added later to become the "central point of interest in the narrative, not the two sisters" with the purpose of manifesting the glory of God and that of the Son. A further revision took place, which included the dialogues with the disciples and Martha to accentuate the meaning of the sign to come, thus [the Evangelist sets the "Christ-word" alongside the "Christ-deed"]<sup>344</sup> Although Wilkens' proposal makes a certain sense logically it does not mean that it has merit over other proposals: when all is said and done all proposals are interpretations based on analyses performed by exegetes with different perspectives. This conclusion, however, begs another important topic: is the Lazarus story fictional?

A number of exegetes have examined the question without coming to a consensus: in spite of their valuable efforts to uncover the truth, the historicity of the Lazarus character and of his resuscitation remains a mystery. In an attempt to clarify the situation, Henneberry summarized the scholarly opinions under three headings: for one, the raising of Lazarus is an historical event; for another, the episode is a conflation of

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<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, 433. The italics are those of the author.

<sup>344</sup> Beasley-Murray, 185, who is referencing W. Wilkens.

relevant material in the Synoptics including the story of the rich man (Lk 16:19-31), the Martha and Mary account (Lk 10:38-42), the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:21-43), and the raising of the widow's son (Lk 7:11-17). And, finally, "there is a common story behind the Lazarus narrative and the other New Testament stories of raising from the dead."<sup>345</sup> Rochais offers a different perspective: having investigated the Lazarus story against related anecdotes involving Elijah (1 Kgs 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kgs 4:18-37; 13:21) concludes that "the historical Jesus probably did not raise anyone from the dead during his lifetime." He explains that the stories of the New Testament "arose in the early Church communities as a way of teaching that Jesus not only preached the coming reign of God, but in his own person, through his resurrection from the dead, inaugurated that reign."<sup>346</sup> In Schneiders' opinion, the historical argument is misconceived: what is of significance is the meaning of the stories. Relevant to the events in the raising of Lazarus and what is of importance "is the evangelist's way of dealing with the question confronting the Johannine community: How is the death of believers to be understood and faced? The answer to that question is derived from Jesus' own resurrection and its efficacy in the experience of the believers."<sup>347</sup>

Schneiders' last comment summarizes what is of value behind a story: it is not whether a story is historical or complete, or that it suffers from additions; what is of significance is the meaning behind the events and what the characters personify. It follows that for a text to have any theological value, its analysis must reflect the spirit of the writer of the story and be true to the tradition associated with the text.

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<sup>345</sup> Schneiders, 173, referencing Brian H. Henneberry, *The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44): An Evaluation of the Hypothesis That a Written Tradition Lies Behind the Narrative*.

<sup>346</sup> Schneiders, 173-174, referencing Rochais, *Les Récits*.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

Literary context: It is well recognized that the Lazarus episode is a remarkable piece of literature,<sup>348</sup> holding tightly together by its apparent purpose of manifesting the Glory of God and, by association, that of the Son. Jesus' assertion that "This illness is not to end in death" (v. 4) sets the tone for the clash between life and death, only for life to be celebrated and death to be defeated. The paradox is that the death-to-life raising of Lazarus signals the life-to-death decision that Jesus must die (vv. 49-50): the illness of Lazarus triggers the glorification of the Father and of the Son, now and at the Passover. (v. 55) But the real story is not the illness of Lazarus, but the evangelist's affirmation that his readers will see the glory of Jesus, "the glory as of the Father's only Son" (1:14).

The first Israelite to profess his faith in Jesus is Nathaniel who, confounded by Jesus' knowledge of his undisclosed whereabouts, declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." (1:49) His unconditional belief, however, was not immediately shared by Jesus' closest allies. The disciples' faith in Jesus, for instance, remained timid throughout his ministry, oscillating between misunderstanding, "Could someone have brought him something to eat?" (4:33), unbelieving, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." (11:12), and believing: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (6:68) Furthermore, the ordinary Jews who came in contact with Jesus did not fare much better: while a few displayed a true faith like the royal official and his household (4:53) others refused to believe all-together, "He is

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<sup>348</sup> Brown would not disagree with the statement nor object with the conclusion that the whole episode was written by the same author, except possibly for verses two and three. He disagrees, however, with the contention that its author is the evangelist who wrote the Fourth Gospel; rather, he sees in Chapters 11 and 12 the work of a redactor who introduced these two chapters after Chapter 10 at a later date in the development of the Gospel. He argues that the evangelist possibly ended Jesus' ministry with vv. 40-42 of Chapter 10 and continued with Chapter 13, in preparation for the Feast of the Passover. *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, XXXVII and 414. The exact reasons for the insertion of Chapters 11 and 12 are not known but from literary and theological perspectives their integration into the narrative of the Fourth Gospel at that place makes reasonable sense.



possessed and out of his mind: why listen to him?" (10:20) Lastly, the evangelist refers often to a category of Jews, the Pharisees (9:13, 18) who never recognized Jesus as someone "from God", preferring enslavement to the Law; hence, their efforts at wanting to kill him (5:18), at refusing "to come to (him) to have life" (5:40), at refusing the "words of God" (8:47), and at remaining in their sin because they did not "see" (9:41). By the end of Chapter 10, it is clear that many in Jesus' entourage did not believe at all or displayed a partial belief. The evangelist, possibly sensing that his efforts at convincing his readers of Jesus' identity were not producing the expected results, introduced a last sign, above all signs, that is the raising of Lazarus with its persuasive elements for his readers to finally "[come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God". (20:31)

In the Lazarus story, the characters of Martha and Mary represent different strata of John's community: Martha seems to be the spokesperson of the disciples<sup>349</sup> and by extension the followers of Jesus who still display an inadequate belief. Mary's role, on the other hand, is to introduce within the episode "the Jews" who still have hostile feelings toward Jesus.<sup>350</sup> It follows that the purpose of the story is to demonstrate that "Human death, though real, is not victorious because, though caused at one level by natural and human factors, it finally serves the purpose of God, which is to bring all believers into union with God in Jesus."<sup>351</sup>

The story also serves the purpose of introducing two important themes: for one, the illness of Lazarus, which brings about natural death, will lead "to the decision that Jesus must die (vv. 49-50)";<sup>352</sup> a decision called for by Caiaphas on the testimony of

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<sup>349</sup> Schneiders, 178.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

<sup>352</sup> Moloney, 322.

some of the Jews who were mourning with Mary. For another, the story ushers in Mary who will anoint Jesus' feet (12:3) in anticipation of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem (12:12-19) and, symbolically, of his burial. The logical sequence of events announces that "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (12:23) The story of Lazarus thus brings to an end the ministry of Jesus while manifesting the glory of God so that the glory of the Son can be observed throughout the nations.

Synthesizing the meaning of the text: In the Fourth Gospel, the reflection of the evangelist is centered on the theme of "belief"; his focus has evolved into a personal passion that exposes his irreversible love of Christ. This love, this belief in Christ, is the same belief that he communicates to his readers, that "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was with God. . . . What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;" (1:1, 3). The affirmation possibly served as the stepping stone for the evangelist's purpose, that of picturing Christ as the center-piece of Gods' plan of salvation and hence, as the driving force of its development. Christ's role is to reveal the glory of God so that the world will come to believe and have life. The first sign of Christ's glory and that of his Father was observed at Cana, at a wedding. Other signs were soon to follow for the world to believe in Christ and in the Father who sent him. Many "began to believe" (2:11), but it seems that a final sign was needed to incite more people to believe; this sign is the raising of Lazarus.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> It should be noted that this [last sign of Jesus has much in common with the first: "What Jesus did at Cana . . . (revealing) his glory and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). The two aspects of the miracle are brought together in 11:40 where Martha is told that belief in Jesus will lead her to see the glory of God.] *Brown, The Gospel According to John I-XII, 432. The italics are those of the author. Although the story is called The Raising of Lazarus, its purpose is not to highlight the "raising" itself, but to emphasize the necessity of "believing in Christ".*

The declaration of Jesus that he is "the resurrection and the life" triggers a question that calls for an answer: "Do you believe this?" and without hesitation Martha simply says "Yes, Lord." (vv. 26-27). Her answer, although timid according to some commentators, amounts to a confession of faith that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. With the raising of Lazarus, the evangelist attempts, one more time, to convince his readers that there are no other ways of sharing in the glory of God except by acknowledging that Jesus is from above, the Sent One of God.<sup>354</sup> The story is an outright invitation to partake in his life, to live in communion with his Father: "everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." (v. 26) This declaration of Jesus is more than wishful thinking, it is the promise made to Martha that whoever believes in his "resurrection" (v. 25) will inherit eternal life. The resurrection of Jesus did not happen in a void, it happened in a tomb for everyone to witness and believe, starting with Mary of Magdala (20:18). Martha will live a similar experience at her brother's cave and will come to a perfect faith, but before she does, the evangelist brings her and those in her proximity to witness an extraordinary event.

From the outset, the evangelist speaks of death. This death, a natural consequence, points to a final end from which there is no escape. It is a death without hope to which all human beings are subjected. However, it does not have to be that way for someone with an open mind. We learn, for instance, that death in the New Testament takes on a

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<sup>354</sup> *This is an appropriate place to remember that in this story, it is the raising of Lazarus that becomes the pretext for Jesus' death, whereas for the Synoptic writers Jesus is condemned because of his ministry, which stood in contradiction to the ways and beliefs of the Synagogue leadership. The miracle of the raising, which celebrates life, is for the glorification of Jesus, not for his own gratification. Thus, Jesus' affirmation that "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through him." (v. 4) "finds its ultimate meaning in the glorifying of God through the death and the resurrection of Jesus and the glorifying of the Son through God's exalting him to his right hand. This glorifying action of God in Christ is the means whereby the revelation in vv. 25-26 becomes actualized - the basis of hope for all the world." Beasley-Murray, 187-188.*

different meaning: it is often referred to as "sleep". Jairus' daughter, for example, is said to be asleep (Mk 5:39), a sleep which is revoked by the action of Jesus that offers a new life. This sleep, this death, for a follower of Jesus, points to a higher reality: it is the sign of a temporary state, a human condition abrogated by the resurrection of Christ. Thus, death is no longer destructive; it opens the door to a better tomorrow. In accord with this doctrine, Martha thinks of her brother's death as transitional, knowing that he will rise "on the last day." (v. 24) But, at this moment, Jesus has a point to make: Lazarus' death will serve to reveal God's glory and of the Son's (v. 4), so that those present may believe (v. 15), and hence, have eternal life (v. 25). The evangelist's message cannot be more vibrant and explicit: natural death is defeated by the resurrection of Christ<sup>355</sup> such that physical death for a believer becomes eternal life.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> The "I am" of Jesus of v. 25 "I am the resurrection and the life" is a direct response to Martha's confession of faith of v. 24: "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." The word ["Resurrection" (anastasis) appears only here and in the reference to future resurrection in v. 5:29. With the exception of 20:9, the corresponding vb. anistēmi is limited to phrases that refer to the "last days" (5:29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54). Thus, the expression "resurrection and life" links together a traditional word with the Johannine epithet for Jesus, "life".] Perkins, 970. Beasley-Murray explains further: [The eschatological rule of God for which Martha hopes, with all its blessings for humankind, is vested in Jesus. The greatest gift of God's saving sovereignty is precisely life eternal under that sovereignty and entry upon it through resurrection. The power to initiate it resides in Jesus ("the resurrection") and to grant it in its fullness ("the life").] Beasley-Murray, 190. The italics are those of the author. In effect, Jesus corrects a Jewish understanding of the final resurrection of the dead, whereby the souls of the deceased descend to a dark underground place while waiting for an undetermined resurrection.

<sup>356</sup> The meaning of "whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live" (v. 25a) is clear and well understood: physical death will not destroy a believer's faith, that is, the faith of a believer, even if he or she dies, will lead to eternal life. The second verse "and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (v. 25b) is more of a challenge: some exegetes see in "who lives and believes in me" a physical life informed by faith whereas others speak of a believer imbued with a spiritual life. It seems that both interpretations are likely and do not take away anything from the conclusion that both lead to eternal life, as stated in v. 25. Moloney summarizes: "People die physically (11:25b), but faith in Jesus ensures a life that transcends death. Thus Jesus insists that faith in him produces a spiritual life both now and hereafter." Moloney, 338.

In defeating death,<sup>357</sup> Jesus glorifies God; similarly, the truth of his words and the authority of his deeds honor the Father. As God is glorified by the sayings and actions of the Son, the Son finds his glorification in his obedience to the will of the Father. Thus, God is glorified by his relationship with the Son and vice versa; a relationship of love which causes Jesus' mission of inspiring all humans to believe. Hence, the resurrection of Lazarus manifests Jesus' oneness with his Father and points to the ultimate reason for his coming among his people, that of his own resurrection for everyone to have life, whereby he will take his rightful place by his Father's side: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (12:23) The ultimate truth is that Jesus must die for humanity to live, and to live presupposes believing that Jesus is from above, from his Father.

In her first remark to Jesus, Martha says: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (v. 21) These words seem to suggest an inadequate belief in Jesus: she submits that he could have done something for her brother while conceding that it is too late for him to intervene. She appears frustrated at Jesus' failure to act and, realizing that nothing can be done, turns her attention to the future, on the last day when her brother will rise (v. 23). Obviously, Martha does not understand that Jesus, a family friend, is the gift of life who has the power to interfere. More telling, she does not realize the absolute potential "of the one who is coming into the world" (v. 27), of Christ who is already by her side. She gives the impression that Jesus is no more than a wonder-worker, able of great things but not fully empowered to transcend death. Martha's perception of Jesus' abilities transpires at the cave as well: her caution that "there will be a stench" (v. 39) is a sign of her persistent partial belief. We are finally told that some Jews began to

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<sup>357</sup> Lazarus is this person who "simply represents all of us as we come to Jesus to seek healing and life." Dumm, 153.

believe because of the miracle (v. 45). It is reasonable to think that the disciples, Martha, and Mary also came to full belief in response to Jesus' prayer to his Father and the subsequent rising of Lazarus.

When Martha replied with an emphatic "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe" to Jesus' self-revelation that he is "the resurrection and the life" (vv. 27, 25), it seems again that she does not fully understand Jesus' words; what he is effectively telling Martha is that her expectation for last day will be realized today. In this context, "I am the resurrection" basically means that a believer, though he or she dies, will conquer death and receive the reward of eternal life, a life gained by the sacrifice of Jesus and awarded by the Spirit. The concept of "life" is explained by Jesus' oneness with the Father who has given his Son authority over the creation: "All things came to be through him, . . . What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race" (1:3). Wherefore, he or she who believes in Jesus has a share in the Kingdom and will never die spiritually. By his self-revelation, Jesus highlights his dynamic force over the world, which is meant to assure God's children that physical life has a purpose, that is to experience daily activities in a spirit oriented toward God and ultimately, accepting death as the passage to a communion with the Father, Son, and the Spirit. Martha misinterpreted Jesus' mission in the world; a second chance will be given to her at the raising of her brother.

Mary is identified as Martha's sister, but contrary to her sibling, she does not appear to be in need of a miracle to recognize in Jesus, the Christ. Her falling at the feet of Jesus indicates a confidence in his abilities to rule over the creation. Furthermore, her welcoming words, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 32)

confirm, in this context, a total trust in his power to overcome death. Of the two sisters, Mary is the one displaying a true faith and showing the willingness to accept Jesus as "the resurrection". In a sense, Martha is controlled by the events surrounding her and is limited in her capacity to see the "light" shining on her. By contrast, Mary, although overwhelmed by her brother's death, is overtaken by Jesus' presence and falls to his feet in prayer. Both sisters witness the same events but react differently: Martha appears more human in her approach to Jesus whereas Mary's behavior suggests a person capable of mystical union.

Mary is found weeping for the loss of her dear brother; her weeping is the result of grief not of despair. The Jews, who have come to mourn with the sisters, likewise break out in tears out of sympathy. Jesus, witnessing the display of emotions, weeps as well. Jesus' weeping, however, is not out of anger at Mary for her normal reaction or out of displeasure at the Jews' probable unbelief. Besides, he did not cry at Martha's partial display of unbelief nor at the disciples' misunderstanding of the events. Jesus' weeping is the result of a form of indignation at humanity's subjection at the hands of evil forces that cause illnesses, sorrows, and deaths. At the face of death, Jesus realizes that his hour has come and must act quickly to instill complete belief in the hearts of those present at the cave. But now, he must pray.

Jesus' prayer is, first, one of thanksgiving to his Father for being present by his side and one of appreciation for listening to his heart. (vv. 41-42a) The first part of the prayer<sup>358</sup> shows that the Son has extreme confidence in his Father and that the Father, in

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<sup>358</sup> The prayer contrasts the total belief of Jesus in his Father and Martha's imperfect belief in Jesus: "Jesus' prayer is expressed in terms of a relationship between himself as the Son and Sent One of the Father (vv. 41b-42). This complements the *egō eimi* statement of v. 25 but transcends Martha's belief in Jesus as Messiah, Son of David, Son of God, the one who is to come, of v. 27." Moloney, 342. The italics

return, trusts that his Son will always abide by his will. The Father and the Son share in a relationship that ignores all boundaries: their union is so intimate that they are one. They now want to share that oneness with humanity, which is in danger of falling into abysm. This oneness, however, comes at a price, that of believing in the works of the Son. In the second part of the prayer, Jesus invites his Father to action, "that they may believe that you sent me." (v. 42) He knows his Father will oblige and he rejoices at the thought that many will come to believe. The gift of life that comes from the Father through Jesus will give physical life to Lazarus and spiritual life to his followers. Thus, "they" will know who sent him, believe in his power, and become one with the Father if "they" so desire. The glory of God will be applauded and the Son will be exalted when he takes his place at the right hand of the Father.

With a loud noise Jesus cries out and Lazarus arises from the dead. Jesus' oneness with the Father is made evident in their capacity to rule over death and the Father's gift of physical life to Lazarus becomes hope for the many. Many of the Jews present began to believe in the saving action of the Father while a few remained in darkness and went to the Pharisees telling them "what Jesus had done." (v. 46) Some of the Jews who believed came from Jerusalem and went back testifying to Jesus' glory (12:17-18). On his coming to Jerusalem, a crowd gathered and cried out: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, [even] the king of Israel." (12:13)

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are those of the author. In his prayer, Jesus "emerges from non-vocal to vocal prayer here in order to show that the power he needs for his ministry - and here specifically for the raising of Lazarus - depends on the gift from God. It is through that prayer and communion and constant obedience to his Father's will that he is the channel of the Father's saving action." Beasley-Murray, 194. Jesus is, all in one, the Son who always obey his Father and the Sent One of the Father for the salvation of humankind.



With the story of *The Raising of Lazarus* the evangelist defines for his community two basic but consequential concepts: believing in Jesus is to live whereas not believing is to die. The former concept admits that the "resurrection" offers hope for a distressed humanity while the latter denies the reality of "life" after life. John's description of the events at the cave, which is done with sensible realism, demonstrates Jesus' authority over death for his community to realize that "life" indeed continues after death: the decision is up to its members to accept the "Truth that Jesus is" or to reject this truth and suffer a death that has no tomorrow. But the evangelist's demonstration is not yet complete: at this juncture, he increases the tempo of his stories. We are told that the Passover is near (11:55) which leads to the anointing in Bethany (12:1). On the next day, he depicts Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, where he receives a kingly welcome (12:13). Now that "the whole world has gone after him" (12:19), it is time for Jesus to announce that "when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." (12:32) The stage is set for experiencing *The Book of Glory*.

e) Conclusion to the Section on the Meanings of the Three Gospel Readings Under Study

A detailed analysis of the Johannine pericopes seems to show an evangelist who is not just satisfied with enunciating a few concepts with respect to the person of Jesus: additionally, he feels the obligation of demonstrating by means of credible stories the faithfulness of his thought process to ascertain their assimilation. Thus, he writes *The Samaritan Woman* and *The Man Born Blind* stories with characters having no faith in Jesus and *The Raising Of Lazarus* with personages expressing doubts about Jesus' divine nature for the purpose of convincing them ultimately that Jesus is the Christ.

Furthermore, he elaborates a crescendo effect from one story to the other: the Samaritan woman comes to believe that Jesus is the Messiah from "hearing" his words, the blind man comes to believe that Jesus is the Son of Man from "seeing" the truth that he reveals, and the disciples, Martha, and some Jews come to fully believe at the "raising" of Lazarus. The evangelist is in effect creating a faith momentum from "hearing", to "seeing", to the "raising" to progressively demonstrate that Jesus is, undeniably, the Son of God. It is as if he is thinking that "hearing" will in fact convince some members of his community but not all, that "seeing" will convince some others, and that the "raising" will finally convince the most incredulous ones.

The evangelist then closes *The Book of Signs* with *The Entry Into Jerusalem* (12:12-19) to bring to a close Jesus' ministry: now that he has revealed Jesus and his Father for who they are, he turns his attention to re-affirming their glory, but this time before "the whole world" (12.19). With Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, the evangelist certifies the glorious moment at the cave and provides a foretaste of the expressed glory of both the Father and of the Son that will be witnessed at the "resurrection".

In *Jerusalem*, John's portrays Jesus as the King who has come in fulfillment of the prophecies. But it is not so with the crowds which perceive in Jesus a liberator sent to rule over them: what they see is a king on the basis of his last sign at Bethany, a visible proof that he is more than a wonder-worker. In effect, the crowd does not understand the true nature of Jesus, but in time some Jews will recognize in Jesus the promised Messiah, the King sent by the Father to draw to himself the outcasts and oppressed of the world. Jesus will be the type of King who will lay down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:14-15), who

will be glorified definitely at the tomb so that all "may come to believe . . . and that through this belief (they) may have life in his name." (20:31)

#### 4. John's Theological Frame to the Gospel Readings

In the last paragraph of *The Book of Signs* Jesus recapitulates the purpose of the mission ordained by the Father: "I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness. . . . I did not speak of my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and speak." (12:46, 49) With these words John lays out succinctly but brilliantly the theological stance at the heart of his Gospel: Jesus is the Word of God, the Christ.

When John refers to Jesus Christ as the "Word", his intention is to identify a person, both human and divine, capable at the same time of ministering to men and women and to comport himself as One with God. This person is God's mediator and messenger who is sent from above to reveal heavenly things. For John, this is the Son of God, the source of life freely offered to all human beings; a spiritual life lived in hope for one who believes that will well up into an eternal life.

In John's theology, both Word and Light are synonymous: the Word of God is Jesus who is Light. His Light gives meaning to human souls and brings human minds to understand the truth that he is, the all-revealing "I Am". The livelihood of the souls rests on the rays of his light such that whoever responds in faith to its illumination will "see" and move from the darkness of individualistic living to a greater rapport with the Father. The nature of the Light is so overwhelming that the forces of darkness will never overcome its beneficial effects.

The flesh willingly taken by the Son is for humanity to witness his glory in his words and signs which call all believers to a relationship with his Father. The Son's presence among humans is a free manifestation of God, a presence passing naturally and essentially from the Father to the Son; it is God's overflowing gift which embodies the truth of their intimate communion. The ultimate truth revealed by the Son is the Father's all-encompassing love for humanity, for his creation.

In John's mind, God's gift of his Son is, in essence, an invitation to partake in their divine nature; a process of conversion which the evangelist's followers are persuaded to undertake now. If they truly "receive" Christ's message and "believe" in him they will be empowered to "become children of God", that is by divine benevolence and not by right. In Johannine theology, [One does not have to wait for an end-time to become a child of God. . . . In the Fourth Gospel these gifts are anticipated. They are available to the believer now, and are thus "realized".]<sup>359</sup> It is also important to note that "in Johannine thought those who believe and those begotten by God are equivalent."<sup>360</sup>

As can be deduced from the above comments, the evangelist's theology is particularly Christocentric in that it focuses on the activities of Jesus, the Christ. This realization is materialized in "Jesus' self-giving through his witness to himself and to God and the receptivity through believing and reciprocal self-giving of the disciples."<sup>361</sup> This reciprocal self-giving is especially made visible in Jesus' interaction with the main characters of the Johannine pericopes. In the story of the woman from Samaria, for instance, the self-giving/receiving climax occurs when the woman admits that Jesus

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<sup>359</sup> Moloney, 38.

<sup>360</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 11.

<sup>361</sup> Schneiders, 49.

might be the Messiah (4:29) and in the man born blind account when he recognizes that Jesus is the Son of Man (9:38).

Jesus, the Son of Man, is the Word of God who has taken flesh to do his Father's will: in the story of the raising of Lazarus his words and works reflect an intimate relationship with the Father that betrays an absolute trust of the Son for his Father (11:42). Although they share in the same oneness, the Son retains his identity and recognizes his purpose: he is the "resurrection and the life" so that whoever believes in him will never die (11:25-26). Ironically, Jesus must die so that God's children can live. For the evangelist, Jesus' death "is the supreme manifestation, the final and definitive revelation of who he is and what God desires for humanity."<sup>362</sup> Thus, Jesus, the Christ, is the source of all goodness and the final destination where all those who believe meet.

Furthermore, in the same three texts that were analyzed, the only place where the word "Spirit" is used is in the story of The Samaritan Woman: "true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and true; . . . God is Spirit" (4:23). An understanding of the evangelist's pneumatology based on that verse would not be very telling except that God belongs to a realm other than humanity. Brown explains further, "it means that God is Spirit toward men because He gives the Spirit (14:16) which begets them anew."<sup>363</sup> Thus, the Spirit allows men to elevate themselves above what they are and worship the Father appropriately. The evangelist does not have an elaborate theology of the Spirit, but does recognize his existence and his purpose: first and foremost, the Spirit will "give the

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<sup>362</sup> Schneiders, 57.

<sup>363</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 172.

disciples an interior and abiding conviction of the reality of Jesus' presence within them",<sup>364</sup> a real presence that is felt today in every believer.

The concept of Church is not present in the Johannine pericopes nor in the Fourth Gospel: ecclesial terms such as "people of God", "Christian community", and "body of Christ" are non-existent. It appears that, for the evangelist, acceptance into the community of Christ begins with an individual faith, e.g. the woman from Samaria (4:29) and flourishes in time into a community, e.g. the villagers who come to Jesus and begin to believe (4:40-41). Brown explains: "The foundation of community is the response of individuals to Jesus as the revealer of God and the unique way to God, but those individuals form a unity."<sup>365</sup> Apart from the Samaritan woman illustration, only two other examples come to mind that may suggest a hint of ecclesiology in The Gospel according to John. The first one is from the account of The Good Shepherd (10:1-18) in which Jesus declares: "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me," (10:14). The second example is found in the anecdote of The Vine and the Branches (15:1-17); of particular interest is the following verse: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing." (15:5) These examples are symbolic at best; nevertheless, they reveal an evangelist who, in spite of his silence on the subject, is not adverse to the idea of "Church". The evangelist, knowing firsthand the predicaments of his ecclesial community, preferred decidedly to emphasize a relationship with Jesus, who represent life and a promise of a better tomorrow.

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<sup>364</sup> Schneiders, 59.

<sup>365</sup> Brown, *Introduction*, 226.

Contrary to the evangelist's restrained position on ecclesiology, his view on eschatology is much more transparent; already, in the Prologue, he informs his readers that salvation (1:12) is from above (1:2) and is made perceivable by the presence of the Word with God from the beginning (1:2). And the Word (1:1), who is the source of life (1:4) took flesh (1:14) "so that those who do not see might see," (9:39). His preoccupation with salvation becomes evident in the story of The Raising of Lazarus, more specifically in 11:24-26: to Martha who had just said to Jesus that her brother will rise on the last days, Jesus replies 'I am the resurrection and the life; . . . and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' Jesus' answer can be interpreted to mean that the "life" he offers starts now and will never die for one who believes in him. Whereas the evangelist has in mind a final eschatology in 6:40, "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him [on] the last day", here in 11:24-26 the concept of resurrection and life, joined together, is one of realized eschatology.<sup>366</sup> For the evangelist, then, the process of salvation begins now for one who believes and continues to the last days, while at the same time the promise of eternal life becomes a reality.

On the issue of the sacraments, again the evangelist seems to take a position from silence. In John, there are no allusions to the baptism of Jesus as in Mark 1:9-11, nor a command to baptize as in Matthew 28:19. Rather, the evangelist limits himself to a mention of baptism by the Baptist and to an acknowledgement of Jesus' future baptismal activities (1:33). There is, however, baptismal symbolism in the story of The Samaritan Woman in which Jesus equates "living water" with "eternal life" in 4:14, and again in the association of "Siloam" with the "sent one", who commands the blind man to "Go and

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<sup>366</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 434.

wash in the Pool of Siloam" (9:7). The sacrament of the Eucharist does not fare much better; for example, there are no accounts of The Last Supper as in Luke's narrative (22:14-20). At best, the evangelist associates the flesh and blood of Jesus in The Bread of Life Discourse with "life", particularly in 6:56-57. The only other sacrament that may deserve a mention is the sacrament of matrimony of which a vague allusion may be inferred from The Wedding in Cana (2:1-11). Thus, the institution of sacraments is not a main concern for the evangelist, who much preferred to highlight the works of the Word in relation to his Father. Brown concludes that the evangelist "is interested in sacramentality only in so far as it leads to the reality of Jesus. . . . Rather, the evangelist's interest was centered on martyrria: he wished to emphasize contact through witness with Jesus, and this main purpose did not call for any sacramental stress."<sup>367</sup> The evangelist had in view the challenges disrupting the faith of his community and these challenges demanded a different approach: the theological issues affecting his Church were christological in nature, hence his insistent efforts at demonstrating that Jesus is the Christ, so that its members would come to believe and "have life in his name." (Jn 20:31)

##### 5. Conclusion to the Chapter

This chapter sought first to demonstrate the legitimacy of the inclusion of the three Johannine pericopes in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. A look at early practices of the Church and at aspirations of early Church bishops in matters of pre-baptismal preparation were enough to justify the inclusion of the Johannine pericopes within the Scrutinies of the Revised Catechumenate. Second, the chapter highlighted the meanings of the three Johannine pericopes in order to enhance a Liturgy of the Word for

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<sup>367</sup> Brown, *New Testament Essays*, 53. The italics are those of the author.



the immediate benefit of the participants. This was accomplished by a detailed analysis of the three Gospel readings in question supported by a review of commentaries from distinguished exegetes. Third and lastly, the main characteristics of the theology underlining the Gospel according to John were exposed to better appreciate the meanings of the Johannine pericopes under review. Again, this was done by referring to the exegetes who contributed their savoir faire for their better understanding

## Chapter 6

### Formulating a Revised Praxis

The revised praxis touches three areas of concern. The first area of concern is addressed in Part I and has for subject relevant chapters of the *Gospel according to John*. Part II is preoccupied with the second area of concern, which has for matter of interest the celebration of rites associated with the Third Period. Lastly, an outline of a proposed program of initiation, specific to the Third Period, is provided in Part III.

#### Part I: A Study of Relevant Chapters from the Gospel According to John.

##### 1. Introduction

A retrospection into the history of Christian initiation has revealed its intended nature: it is from the will of God but took shape through the works of Jesus who first accepted to be baptized and then proceeded to proclaim the Good News. These last two elements are at the core of a rite of initiation, which developed over time to become a formalized undertaking by the time *The Apostolic Tradition* was written in ca. 215. Although Baptism and proclaiming the Gospel were universally recognized norms, their applications varied from one region to another. Likewise with norms such as exorcisms, the laying of hands, the presentations of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer, which were added in time to the baptismal process as each region viewed the development of a rite of initiation from a different setting. The three readings from the *Gospel according to John*, that is *The Samaritan Woman*, *The Man Born Blind*, and *The Raising of Lazarus* became initiation norms themselves somewhat early in the life of the Church. These norms and others were finally meshed into a common purpose with the *Ordo Initiationis Christianae*

*Adultorum* promulgated in 1972 by the Congregation for Divine Worship. The intention of the Holy See was for these norms to be applied universally across all continents. However, in spite of the vision of the Holy See and its concerted efforts, parishes, regions, and countries are still selective in their practice of conferring the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

The three Gospel readings mentioned above were likely a part of a prebaptismal preparation as early as the later years of Hippolytus' life (ca. 170-235). It seems fairly certain that by the time of Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397) these readings were already associated with the Scrutinies; a few years later, it is ascertained that under Pope Leo the Great, (ca. 440 to 461) they are in effect part of the Scrutinies. These readings became a norm for baptismal preparation in many regions of the expanding Church, mainly because of their intrinsic and far-reaching theological and spiritual values. Their capacity for inspiring change is still a powerful element to consider when speaking of conversion within the framework of the story of salvation.

The concept of conversion is at the center of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment and, not surprisingly, the three highlighted readings from John highly contribute to the conversion process of a participant by means of an interior transformation. The readings participate in the goal of the Third Period in three specific and normalized ways. First, they provide a deeper knowledge of Jesus who is not only human but also the Son of God. Second, they bring about a purification of one's total being: a change from a sinful existence to a life in Christ through his living waters, from a total darkness to the Light that is always present, and from doubting to believing that Jesus is the source of life eternal. Third and finally, the readings with their forgiving

messages and their promise of hope enlighten the mind such that there is no turning back: from now on only God suffices. A deeper knowledge of Christ, a purification of the heart, and an enlightenment of the mind are the existential norms for a Third Period program meant to realize a lasting spiritual makeover.

An exploration of the Scripture, Tradition, and of relevant sources both past and present has revealed a right understanding of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and has underlined expectations for its proper implementation. The universal will for its success is authentic and the task of making the Rite an achievement rests on the shoulders of each parish across the globe. At San Pedro, the will to arrive at a favorable outcome is noticeable but the task of executing a suitable program of religious education for adults desiring an initiation into the Church remains modest. At this point, we must turn to the task of proposing a revised praxis for San Pedro, in particular with respect to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. Richard Osmer qualifies this fourth and last task as "pragmatic", that of formulating "strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable."<sup>368</sup>

Since this thesis-project is concerned first with the substance of the three readings selected from the *Gospel according to John* and mentioned earlier, we turn to the business of accentuating the core messages that each one of these stories convey for the benefit of catechetical facilitators trusted with the responsibility of proclaiming the truths they contain. This exercise is carried out in an attempt to normalize their teachings and minimize any deviations from their inherent intents.

Before directing our attention to this task, however, it is important and relevant to highlight their author's theological framework summarized in the *Prologue*. This exercise

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<sup>368</sup> Osmer, 176.

is necessary to better understand and appreciate the theological and spiritual nuances of the Gospel readings under review.

## 2. The Essence of the Meaning of the *Prologue* (Jn 1:1-18)

When reading the *Prologue* a person quickly comes to the realization that this is not an ordinary piece of literature: its profound lessons, inspired by God, are unique and telling and thus deserving of special consideration.

The *Prologue* offers a confluence of information such that only an able catechetical facilitator, possessing the right mindset, is equipped to pay attention to its myriad of possible interpretations and then offer his or her audience a proper perspective on the author's intentions. For instance, a catechetical facilitator will need to explain how the *Prologue* can be viewed as a confession of faith, expressed in the form of an authentic hymn outlining artfully the author's theology and spirituality. The *Prologue* can also be visualized and taught as an introduction to the Christocentric themes that will be developed later in the Gospel or as a synthesis of the evangelist's understanding of the person of Jesus, both as incarnate flesh and Word of God. In the author's mind, Jesus is the Word of God, the source of Life, the incarnate Son of God, and the Truth given to humanity, all at once; these themes need to be interpreted and expounded judiciously by a catechetical facilitator amid a justification for the role of John the Baptist.

The Word of God: A teacher of religion could limit his or her discussion on the "Word" of God by specifying that the term refers to the person of Jesus, the Son of God, without further definition. The explanation would be faithful to the text but would not tell the whole story: it jumps to a conclusion without giving much thought to the complex

ideas that the "Word" represents in history. For instance, in the Semitic world of the Old Testament, the Hebrew term *dābār* for "word" suggests authority and trust without a reference to a "person". Apart from this, in the Hellenistic culture "word" is the translation for *logos*, the original term used in the New Testament, and is liken to a demiurge, a supernatural being, but nevertheless dependent on a higher being. The closest definition of "word" that approximates the evangelist's meaning of Word is found in the Wisdom literature where Wisdom is depicted as having a resemblance of a personality but is nonetheless created.

The New Testament attests that the "word" of God is food to the soul and trustworthy. It also implies that the "word of God" is the source of eternal life in line with St. Peter's confession that Jesus has "the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68) In the *Prologue*, the "Word" acquires its full meaning: it is personified in Jesus, the Son sent by the Father for the salvation of humanity. Jesus becomes the messenger enabled to reveal his function among "his own", to expose the love of the Father for his children, and to announce the advocacy of the Spirit who will stand with every human being. Furthermore, Jesus, the Word, is armed with the power to overcome all that is evil and in so doing to establish a new order: a communion of believers participating in the building-up of his Church. The members of this communion, because of Jesus' sacrifice and his ever-present Spirit, already have if they believe a share in the life of the Trinity. And this is possible because the Son is always with God and is God: they are One from always such that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit although differentiated by their activities share the same nature.

There is no longer any confusion: Jesus, the Word, is the manifested mind and will of the Father, and on account of their consubstantiality whatever the Father will the

Son does and whatever the Son does the Father does. The Son who is the Word, the Father, and the Spirit are of the same substance: they are the unambiguous "I Am", who is everything in time, space, and dimension. The *Prologue's* focus is on the Word and God and their interaction, on the Word who became flesh in Jesus so that the world could come to believe; this objective becomes quite visible throughout the narratives that follow.

The Word is life: Sorting out the true sense of life in v. 4 can be a baffling endeavor; to extract its significance, a catechetical facilitator will need to ponder every word of the verse. In the preceding verse, the Word is presented by the writer as the originator of the universe, both of its material constituents and of its inhabitants. He then declares that life came to be through him without specifying whether he is referring to physical life or spiritual life. His thought process becomes more obscure with the next assertion: "this life was the light of the human race". To which life is the writer alluding to? The pronoun "this" seems to suggest that he is referring to either the physical life or the spiritual life of the creatures inhabiting the earth. When reading further, it becomes obvious that both of these possibilities are not in harmony with the total narrative. The next verse, however, provides the answer.

The "light that shines in the darkness", which is overshadowing the creation, is the light of the Word, Christ; the only authority who can overcome by his very nature the dark forces operating in the universe. It becomes clear then that the life which is "the light of the human race" is the life of the Word, the eternal life to which all human beings are invited.

At this point in the *Prologue*, the evangelist does not expand on the details of what life represents for the human race, but an informed catechetical facilitator will remember Jesus' clarification given to Martha in the story of *The Raising of Lazarus*. To Martha who was still expressing some doubts about his ascendancy, Jesus squarely tells her that he is "the resurrection and the life" and that whoever believes in him, even if he dies physically, will live eternally (Jn 11:25). Furthermore, the eternal life that Jesus promises is realized now if a person truly believes that he is the Word of God. His promise is not about expectation, but rather an actual grace that is efficacious starting now.

The Word came to what was his own: If we accept the proposition that the *Prologue* first appeared as an hymn years earlier, the reference to "his own" would suggest that its original writer had human kind in mind. However, when the evangelist took up the hymn to annex it to the body of his Gospel he was referring to Israel, particularly Jerusalem where the activities of Jesus caused the Jewish leadership to plan for his arrest and his death. These are the Jews, on the one hand, who have refused to "know him", to accept his revelation.

There are Jews, on the other hand, who have acknowledged Jesus' authenticity and authority; to these, Jesus has given them the reward of becoming "children of God", not by right but by grace: a free gift for their act of believing in his words and deeds. This gift from God is no less than an invitation, conferred now, to participate in the divine nature of the Son and of the Father. It would be appropriate, at this point, for a catechetical facilitator to remind the RCIA participants that we were once created in the



image and likeness of God and that if we accept God's invitation, we are given the opportunity to recover "the pristine beauty of our nature."<sup>369</sup>

The eschatology of the evangelist cannot be any more transparent: the Word who was with God took flesh and came among his own people so that all human beings may believe. By believing, his glory is acknowledged, that is "the glory as of the Father's only Son". Furthermore, since his glory is an historical event, a reality that continues to be celebrated, those believers who accept its historicity and recognize its continued influence in their lives already partake in the life of the Word, a Life without a beginning and an end.

The Word is "grace and truth": John the Baptist testified about Jesus but his mission was not of his own doing, rather the truth that he preached was from God who sent him to bear witness. By all accounts he was not an ordinary man: already in the womb of his mother it was announced that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:15). In addition, as the writer of *The Gospel according to Luke* mentioned, the hand of the Lord was with him from birth (Lk 1:66). John the Baptist was a special envoy from God, sent to cry out Jesus' true nature; he was not the light but the one who would come after him would be the "light of the human race".

A prophet of the genre of Isaiah, John the Baptist knew about the Law but it was not his main preoccupation; that concern would be Jesus' who was sent to fulfill the Law, he, who is "grace and truth", the fullness of the gift from God that is truth.<sup>370</sup> While the Law of Moses was serving its purpose by providing guidelines for the Israelites, the Word who is the Father's only Son came to complete the Law, that is to reveal the truth

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<sup>369</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Book 1, 104.

<sup>370</sup> Moloney, 39.

about himself and the Father so that humanity would have a road map to eternal life. The Son's incarnation and passion are the manifestation of God's supreme gift, the ultimate truth, because they express God's unconditional and enduring love for his children.<sup>371</sup>

The *Prologue* is effectively a preview of what is to come in the *Gospel according to John*: it portrays Jesus, both divine and human, as the One whom to believe for a share in his eternal life. The narratives under review are designed to evidence Jesus' true identity and so cause readers and listeners to believe. Now that the *Prologue* is better understood, we can turn to the three Gospel readings under review to highlight their contributions to the topic of belief.

### 3. Proclaiming the Messages of the Gospel Readings Associated with the Scrutinies

#### a) Introduction

It is instructive to realize how the Fourth Gospel can be so different from the three preceding New Testament accounts. Although the subject of each account is the same, i.e. Jesus, the aspiration of each Gospel is quite unique: each is written for a distinctive audience with its own theological and spiritual preoccupations. The Fourth Gospel, however, distances itself from the first three by its ultimate purpose, that of emphasizing Jesus' divinity against an accentuation of Jesus' human side. In the *Gospel according to John*, the presentation of Jesus is generally elevated from a vision of Jesus as Son of Man to Jesus as Son of God, from recognizing in him a "teacher" to being the "Word" of God. In parallel and differently, the Period of Purification and Enlightenment is called to elevate the discussions from an appreciation of the tenets of the faith to a spiritualization

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<sup>371</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 14. And Dunn, 168.

of the participants: it is to be a time when the mission of transforming the hearts of the RCIA participants must be given preference over the task of informing their minds

The change of emphasis recommended by the Bishops is to ascertain that the catechesis communicated during the Third Period will seek "to arrive at man's innermost being".<sup>372</sup> At this point in the program, a catechetical facilitator should encourage a conversation on Jesus that evolves from his person as "prophet" to one that augments his being as "Messiah", that speaks less about his role as "Master" and more on the concept of "glory", and that reflects on his identity as "Son of God" while attenuating his portrayal as "miracle-worker". To be clear, it is not a matter of making abstraction of the life and message of Jesus, on the contrary the giving of instructions is still necessary but it needs to be deepened, that is at this time the focus should be on how he, the Christ, can affect one's life and on one's response to his offer of love. Catechesis during the Third Period is meant to become a mode of conversation on what Pope John Paul II calls "the living mystery of God",<sup>373</sup> which is the person of Christ at the "centre of salvation history".<sup>374</sup>

The official text of the Rite insists on a "deeper knowledge of Christ",<sup>375</sup> which means that the role of a catechetical facilitator during the Third Period is not one of only conversing about the words of a biblical anecdote but of attending to its deeper signification, that is to the Truth and the Life that Jesus is (Jn 14:6). Hippolytus may have had this special knowledge of Christ in mind when he specified that only believers are to receive it; this knowledge was so secretive that it had to be passed on privately by the

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<sup>372</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #52.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, #7.

<sup>374</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 93, #98.

<sup>375</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #139, 77.

bishop after their baptisms.<sup>376</sup> This "deeper knowledge" is to be part of an evangelization that is not limiting itself to the teaching of a doctrine but is to be concerned about touching the natural lives of the participants "to which it gives a new meaning".<sup>377</sup> Taught this way, the evangelization of a catechetical facilitator can only result in the purification and enlightenment of the minds and hearts of the participants.

The three Johannine pericopes associated with the Scrutinies contribute to the "deeper knowledge" required for achieving a greater understanding of Christ and his Church by providing substance which the participants can use in conjunction with a "serious examination of their lives and true repentance" in order to progress in their self-knowledge.<sup>378</sup> This enhanced knowledge and self-examination, together with the Scrutinies which "are rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose", they form a powerful instrument of conversion. By means of the readings and the celebrations of rites relevant to the process of conversion, the participants are thus invited to align their lives on the ways of Christ who is the Mediator to the Father; from that vantage position the participants will finally observe the glory of the Son and of the Father, that same glory that Martha and Mary witnessed in the depth of their souls at the raising of their brother. At this stage of the process, the catechetical facilitator transmits to the participants an ever increasing experience of the love of God, which comes alive amidst humanity through his Son, the Word who is eternal Light.

b) The Essence of the Meaning of *The Samaritan Woman* (Jn 4:1-42)

The underlying meaning of *The Samaritan Woman* story is consistent with the theological perspective permeating *The Gospel according to John*: it is about receiving

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<sup>376</sup> Hippolytus, "Apostolic Tradition", #21. Cuming, 22.

<sup>377</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi", #47.

<sup>378</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #142, 78.

the words of Jesus, acknowledging his deeds, and believing that he is the Christ, the Son of God. The difference lies in the presentation: in this case, the evangelist reaches out to the edge of humanity and brings into full view a woman caught between her dismissal by Jerusalem Jews on account of her worship on Mount Gerizim and her oppression by townspeople because of her dubious reputation. She comes to Jacob's well for water at midday, unnoticed, not suspecting that the "living water" offered by Jesus will change her life forever. Two dialogues actually take place within the story, one with the woman who will come to believe and another with the disciples that situates Jesus' broader mission in the will of God.

Jesus is living water: At the well and unknown to her, the woman, a sinner, is blessed first and foremost with a "gift of God". This seemingly undeserved gift is the very presence of Jesus by her side, a gift that surpasses Jacob's gift of the well to his people: Jesus' presence will transform permanently the ways of the woman whereas Jacob's well will only satisfy temporarily her physical thirst. Had she asked Jesus for water, he would have given her "living water", a water that would never dry up, a water that would flow from his heart and would become in her "a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (4:14) Not understanding Jesus' allusion, the woman thinks that Jesus is offering some sort of magical water that would quench her thirst permanently. The water that he was presenting, however, is of another sort: it has the power of eradicating sinfulness and the feelings of abasement that were affecting her whole being.

The "living water" named by Jesus is a sign pointing to a greater reality, that he is the source of life through which salvation is made possible. Expressed another way, his words reveal the Truth that he is: to Pilate who was asking if he is a king, he answered,

"You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (Jn 18:37) This is exactly what the woman is doing, she listens to his voice and comes to the truth that he is the "Messiah". Thus, Jesus is the revelation of heavenly things, that is of the Father, of the Spirit, and of himself, and by his revelation he offers the possibility of eternal life to the woman, to humanity, but more specifically to those who are born and purified with water and spirit. (Jn 3:5) This last condition allows for a return to understanding Jesus' baptism and its implication for the Samaritan woman.

Jesus did not need to be baptized but accepted because he wished "not to be cleansed, but to cleanse the waters, that, being purified by the flesh of Christ that knew no sin, they might have the virtue of baptism".<sup>379</sup> The waters of the Jordan were purified with the flesh of Jesus, by the action of his baptism; henceforth, the waters of baptism united with the action of God will cast aside the past of a sinner and make room for a new life in Christ. The "living water" of Jesus tendered to the woman amounts, in a way, to an invitation to baptism: if she accepts she will be cleansed with pure water and blessed with the Spirit of Jesus. As the story unfolds, the woman at the well sets aside her sinful past and, purified, embraces a life under the care of Christ. In essence, she has been sprinkled with the words of Jesus which are "living water", cleansed from all impurities, and thus has received from God a new heart and a new spirit (Ez 36:25-27). All that Jesus asks of the woman is that she believes that he is "living water", the Revealer, and by believing that he is the Son of the Father she will be raised on the last day (Jn 6:40).

The place of true worship: Jesus, sensing that the woman at the well is perplexed about his identity, exposes her marital situation to advance the conversation. Bewildered

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<sup>379</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Q. 39.

and unsure, she declares that he is a prophet: her recognition that Jesus is now above a simple Jew indicates that she is uncovering his identity progressively. Possibly as a way of convincing herself that he is surely a prophet, she challenges Jesus: should we worship on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem? Jesus' answer is swift and precise: the Father who is Spirit is not to be worshipped on a mountain but in "Spirit and truth".

True worship is not to take place on the mountain where her ancestors once worshipped nor on Mount Zion where the first Temple was built, but in a new way: the worship of the old days is to be replaced with the new worship commanded by the Sent One of God and guided by the Spirit. The new norm of worship is to believe in Jesus, the Christ, who has replaced the Jewish ceremonials with the new covenant established at the Last Supper. Spiritually speaking, "true worship is the orientation of oneself toward the Father in such a way that God becomes the imperative of one's life."<sup>380</sup> Thus, worshipping becomes a question of substance, of understanding whom and how to worship: it is due to the Father, in Spirit because he orients the worshipper such that he or she becomes the focus of one's life, and in Truth not as demanded by the Law, but in virtue and righteousness. The place of worship becomes accidental, what is of importance is the manner by which the woman at the well should honor the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The mission: At this point of the conversation, the woman is overwhelmed: she knows Jesus is more than a prophet, but is still uncertain as to his true nature. Jesus, sensing again her hesitation, declares outright that he is the Anointed, "the one who is speaking with you". Jesus' self-revelation is absolute: he is the Messiah who transcends all the prophets. On the arrival of the disciples, the woman departs quickly to proclaim

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<sup>380</sup> Moloney, 128.

that Jesus could be "the Messiah". At this juncture, she has heard the convincing words of Jesus and has experienced the proof of his status but still demonstrates an element of doubt. Nevertheless, her haste into town and her proclamation to the townspeople demonstrate a true missionary spirit; she has in fact become an ambassador of Jesus. Because of "her words" many villagers began to believe and in time they testified that Jesus is "truly the Savior of the world." We can only surmise that if the townspeople came to fully believe, the woman at the well also came to have complete faith.

Likewise, the disciples are called to the mission of the Father. Whereas the main preoccupation of the disciples is ordinary food, the food sought by Jesus is the will of the Father. The mission entrusted to him by the Father has priority over all else. Jesus' life is forever oriented to planting seeds of faith: the mission is already bearing fruits and its fruits will soon be ready for harvest. The disciples are invited to participate in the harvesting and to continue the mission already started by John the Baptist and perfected by Christ. There is little time to waste since the harvest is almost ripe and plentiful; the disciples need to realize the nature of their calling, trust in the Father, and participate in the mission.

In summary form, the story of *The Samaritan Woman* is about trusting in the words of Jesus. If one "hears" his words, trusts the "truth" they reveal, and come to believe, eternal life will be his or her reward. The "living water" offered by Jesus is his words, his revelation of heavenly things, his way to the Father. Jesus is of necessity the mediator, the Messiah, the source of life; anyone who believes in his Sonship will worship the Father in accord with the "new covenant" and participate in the building up of the Church.



c) The Essence of the Meaning of *The Man Born Blind* (Jn 9:1-41)

The stories of *The Samaritan Woman* and of *The Man Born Blind* share a common theme, that of conversion. The woman at the well and the blind man live in darkness: the former is blinded by her sinful life and the latter by his congenital sin; the difference in their sinful state lies in the fact that the blindness of the woman is of her own making whereas the blind man's blindness is from birth. Both live at the edge of society, rejected by their peers. Forgotten, they are in need of a singular intervention that will allow for their reinsertion into their respective communities. The woman had her day when Jesus appeared out of nowhere and offered the gift of "living water", which signaled the beginning of an interior transformation that resulted in the removal of her spiritual blindness and replaced it with a faith worthy of a new missionary. On the other hand, the blind man is waiting anxiously to be freed from the physical blindness that has plagued his whole being and curtailed his social standing.

Light opposed to darkness: The man born blind had little hope for a normal life until Jesus passed by. His blindness was not of his own making nor was it caused by his parents' sinfulness; it was so because Jesus was called upon to reveal the works of God. This work, this time was to demonstrate the glory of the Father by giving sight to an undisputable blind man so that many would come to believe. Jesus made a mixture of clay and saliva, rubbed the blind man's eyes with it, and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam; the darkness was removed instantly, a miracle that allowed the Light to reach his eyes.

First questioned by his neighbors, the blind man can only admit that it is the "man called Jesus" that gave him his sight. His answer betrays more than a recognition, it

discloses a yearning for the truth: a foundation for a genuine faith is taking form. At this moment, the blind man perceives a Light but cannot uncover its true nature. Seemingly frustrated at the blind man's ignorance, the neighbors take him to the Pharisees for resolution. Realizing that the blind man gained his sight on the Sabbath, a punishable offence according to the Mosaic Law, the Pharisees openly declare that the "man called Jesus" cannot be "from God" and refuse to see in him something less than a sinner. Unsure of the antecedents of his benefactor, the blind man knows that he is not a sinner and concludes that he must be "a prophet." The lines are drawn: the Pharisees refuse to see an intervention from God whereas the blind man elevates his understanding of Jesus and sees in him a representative of God. His mind, searching for the truth, lets the Light penetrate his heart where it is getting brighter by the minute.

In interviewing the blind man's parents, the Pharisees realize that his blindness was real and undisputable: the man who opened his eyes now becomes a threat to their religious standing. They called the blind man for a second time and accused him of being a disciple of the man Jesus while professing their loyalty to Moses, who is from God. In response, the illiterate blind man gives the Pharisees, the guardians of the Mosaic Law, a profound theological lesson: since God does not listen to sinners but only to those who are devout and do his will, the "man called Jesus" must be "from God". The Pharisees, refusing to accept the logic and truth of his simple but fitting argument, rebuked him sternly and threw him out. Their action is a denial of the plain and profound truth in front of their eyes, a denial of the Light that is tendered to them, out of mercy from God, through the humble and open minded blind man. On the other hand, the blind man's faith

is increasing rapidly: the Light that has been shining on him is now at the heart of his very being.

Jesus reappears in the life of the blind man and asks him if he believes in the "Son of Man". Still in doubt but wanting to know who he is, he answers: "Who is he, that I may believe in him?" On finding out that Jesus is he, he worships him. The Light who is before the blind man has led him to see Jesus' true nature; his darkness has dissipated and now he can truly see the Truth for himself: his conversion is complete. To the contrary, the Pharisees refused to see the Light that was offered to them on many occasions, each time setting it aside preferring to remain in darkness, and so their sin remained within them.

Jesus' mercy provided the blind man with a physical healing whereas his Light afforded the blind man a spiritual healing, that is a transformation from begging as an outcast to becoming a follower of the "man called Jesus" who is "from God". A question, however, remains: what is the meaning of "Light"?

The story of *The Man Born Blind* illustrates that the Word, Jesus, has authority over the creation, that he alone oversees the welfare of the children entrusted to him by the Father. As mentioned in the *Prologue*, the mission of the Word, the "true light", is to offer his life in order to overcome the darkness which permeates the creation; his role as source of life is to point to heavenly things. Expressed another way, the Light is the revelation mediated through the Word whereby humanity is given the knowledge to appreciate the gift of God, which is none other than the person of Jesus, his Son, so that each human being may come to believe. In practical terms, the Light of Jesus is justice to the man or woman who suffers from a wrong; the Light is hope to the man or woman

who has none; the Light is knowledge to the man or woman who is religiously illiterate; the Light is faith to the man or woman repudiated by his peers and the Law; and the Light is life to the man or woman who now believes in Jesus.

The sin of the blind man: The man at the gate of the Temple is blind: according to an understanding of the days it was believed that the man's blindness was caused either by a sin committed by his parents or by the man himself while in the womb of his mother. Jesus dismisses both understandings and informs the disciples that the man's blindness will permit God's work to be made visible. With this sketch, the evangelist is effectively saying that man and woman are not in sin congenitally, that this sinful condition is not an effect of an earlier cause. Furthermore, the supposed sin of the blind man is of little interest to the evangelist who prefers to draw attention to the sinfulness of the Pharisees who refuse to acknowledge the truth about Jesus and to the "sin" of Jesus, according to the Mosaic Law, for having opened the eyes of the blind man on a Sabbath. The evangelist skillfully explains that Jesus is not in "sin" otherwise he would not have been able to open the eyes of the blind man whereas the sin of the Pharisees remains since they refuse to concede that Jesus is "from God". It seems that "sin" for the evangelist is a "sin" caused by an act of unbelief; it is the sin of not believing. Hence, his constant efforts at trying to bring his readers to believe that Jesus, is the Christ, the Son of God.

Son of Man, Son of God: In this episode, Jesus declares to the blind man that the man who spoke with him, whom he saw, is he, the Son of Man. In mentioning the title Son of Man, it seems that the evangelist is alluding to a physical person, to the "man called Jesus". However, by allowing the blind man to reflect on what happened to his

eyes, to know that a sinner cannot do what the "man called Jesus" did, and to appreciate that no human being has the power to give sight to a blind person, the evangelist has the blind man realize that the man to whom he is speaking now is certainly more than a man, more than a prophet, that he is "from God". In this story, the evangelist does use the epithet Son of Man, but in associating the "man called Jesus" with the term "from God" he is actually referring to the Son of God. It is a characteristic of *The Gospel according to John* that the title Son of Man refers to Jesus' humanity in his relationship to other human beings whereas Son of God brings to full view Jesus' everlasting relationship with his Father. Thus, in this story the "man called Jesus" is Son of Man by his association with the blind man but Son of God by his association with his Father.

The blind man and baptism: The particulars of the blind man's healing suggest that a baptism has taken place. First, the fact that Jesus smeared the blind man's eyes with clay, second, that the blind man is sent to a pool for purification, and third, that the pool itself is called Siloam which can be translated as the "Sent One", all contribute to the visualization of a baptism. Typically, a traditional baptism involves blessed water and the pronouncement of the Trinitarian formula, none of which has actually taken place in this story. But the events surrounding the blind man's miracle happened in a different era, involving different circumstances. The man born blind is blessed by an action of Jesus, the Christ, and is directed to go wash in the pool by the "Sent One", by Christ, in waters that have purifying capabilities. This man, an unbeliever, under the influence of the Light comes to understand that Jesus is the Son of God and hereby confesses his belief; the miraculous gaining of his sight compounded with his acquired faith in Christ have all the ingredients of a baptism, although not traditional by today's standards. Augustine also

sees a real baptism: the blind man represents the human race . . . and if his blindness is the result of infidelity, his illumination is the result of faith . . . he then washes in the pool as directed by the "Sent One" . . . he has been baptized in Christ.<sup>381</sup>

d) The Essence of the Meaning of *The Raising of Lazarus* (Jn 11:1-44)

It is worth remembering that in the two previous stories, *The Samaritan Woman* and *The Man Born Blind*, the evangelist's point of departure is fixed on two sinful and marginalized persons with no expressed faith. However, through an orchestrated intervention of Jesus, the evangelist brings them from a state of no belief to one of total belief. The story of *The Raising of Lazarus* offers a different scenario: his target are persons of faith but are yet to be wholly settled in their beliefs. Except for Mary, Martha and the disciples are in need of a convincing sign to secure their faith.

From the beginning: There is a striking parallel between the stories of the woman at the well, the man blind from birth, and the raising of Jesus' friend, Lazarus. At the beginning of each story, the evangelist tells his readers that Jesus has a purpose in mind: in the first story, the evangelist implies that Jesus must do the will of his Father, in the second story that he must do the works of God, and in the last story that he must see to the glory of God. In effect, the evangelist portrays a Jesus who is decisively attached to his Father: all he says and does is by and for the Father. This bond with the Father suggests a deep intimate relationship that reaches its climax at the Cross, when the Son accept the sacrifice willed by his Father. Their intimacy is of such intensity, that Jesus and the Father are One; and their oneness exposes a compassionate love that extends to all human beings, not in the same measure but by participation.

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<sup>381</sup> Augustine, from Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, 381.

That you may believe: The evangelist did not write to boast about his knowledge of Jesus: he wrote for his community to better understand the person of Jesus. In the story of Lazarus, the evangelist implies that it is human to have doubts, that it is normal to question the truth of Jesus' Sonship. To make his case, he points to the disciples who have been with their teacher for quite some time and who, in spite of his inspiring words and wondrous deeds, are still not sure about Jesus' true identity (v. 15). Furthermore, the evangelist mentions Martha by name who is skeptical of Jesus' divine power and authority in spite of their close friendship. Consequently, the evangelist relates a real life story whereby the disciples and Martha finally see in Jesus "the glory of God"; his message is clear, if the disciples and Martha have come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then truly all readers or listeners should also believe.

Our friend Lazarus is asleep: At the time of the writing of the *Gospel according to John*, Christians should have known that death had been supplanted from the moment of the resurrection, that an afterlife is now a reality obtained at the cost of Jesus' life. It seems, however, that some expressed doubts about this center-piece of Jesus' teachings such that the evangelist felt compelled to warn outright his readers: if you do not come to believe you will die and be buried, and nothing will rescue you from permanent destruction. However, if you truly believe, although dead, you will live and witness forever the glory of the Father and of the Son. In the mind of the evangelist there is no reservation: in truth, Jesus is the "resurrection and the life", (v. 25).

Martha's faith: Martha's faith reflects possibly the faith of many Christians in John's community; she could represent followers who acknowledge Jesus as a special person, maybe from God, but are uncertain about some aspects of his divinity. Martha

knows that her brother will rise on the last days, but not now. She is oscillating between partly believing by admitting that Jesus cannot raise her brother now (vv. 21-24) and believing by confessing she has come to believe (v. 27). Even after this confession, she hesitates when Jesus commands to take the stone away: she warns there will be a stench. Her answer suggests that it is too late for Jesus to do anything; her doubt about the true nature of her friend persists. Martha will finally believe when her brother comes out of the cave. By making Martha an exemplar, the evangelist is advising some members of the community not to be distressed if they entertain doubts about Jesus' true identity; he understands their predicament but submits nevertheless that they need to accept reality for what it is, that what he is revealing about Jesus is true and therefore there is no other alternative but to believe.

Resurrection and life: Jesus had just informed Martha that her brother will rise. Thinking of a reference to a future event, Martha confirms what Jesus said but added that he will rise "in the resurrection on the last days". Jesus, however, was not alluding to a future occurrence but to the present: "I am the resurrection and the life". His mention of "I am the resurrection" informs Martha that he has the authority to raise Lazarus now and his assertion "I am . . . life" confirms that he is the source of life, on earth and in heaven. In other words, Jesus is effectively telling Martha that no one can be resurrected except by him and that no one can have eternal life except through him. The evangelist spells out his conviction: if someone believes in Jesus and dies, he or she will have live in abundance alongside the Son and the Father. The evangelist knows his community well and strives to assure its members that they will not die in vain if they believe; he intimates that his affirmation is not based on wishful thinking or on some fantasy, but that



it is the upshot of a solemn promise made by Jesus himself. He then takes his reasoning one step further by superimposing a new concept: anyone who lives by his or her faith will never die, that is if someone is faithful to God in his daily living, he or she is already living in communion with the Son and the Father. The evangelist makes known that Jesus' promise is already being realized, that the reign of God is already here, available to all believers.

Mary's faith: Contrary to Martha's faith, Mary's appears more genuine: for one she falls at Jesus' feet in a spontaneous manner, as if to worship him in a similar fashion as did the man born blind. For another, she is convinced that if Jesus had been there he would have saved her brother from death. Jesus does not question Mary further: he has known her for some time and is satisfied with her reaction. It is time to move on. However, when he prays to the Father and refers to the crowd, Mary is obviously included in that crowd. By her inclusion the evangelist is probably providing Mary with a reward for her unwavering faith in Jesus: although her faith is irreproachable, the witnessing of the rise of her brother will allow this believer to see the glory of the Son and of the Father. Mary's reward may be a living example of what Jesus' meant by his earlier statement: "and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die". Mary's true faith allows her to experience, to realize here and now, the promise of eternal life made by Jesus.

Jesus' prayer: Jesus prays not because he requires his Father's permission to raise Lazarus: since he and the Father are One, he knows his Father will always answer his prayers. He prays not for himself, not for Lazarus, but for the crowd. The crowd is on his mind: he knows that he could have raised Lazarus privately but he wants this last sign to

be proof positive that he is the Son of Man, the Son of God. This prayer is to ask his Father to allow the crowd to see their glory and in so doing that they may believe. The evangelist has a similar purpose in mind, that by this sign the timid believers of his community may finally see in Jesus, not an everyday miracle worker, not a promising prophet, but the Word sent by the Father, the Light for all of his children to behold and thus have eternal life.

*The Raising of Lazarus* is the last sign performed by Jesus. It has the distinctive feature of accomplishing a feat that no human being can perform unless he is "from God". This sign, in particular, occurred to bring the "crowd" to believe by witnessing the glory of the Father, and as a consequence, of the Son. This observed glory by a few points to a moment in Jesus' life when it will be proclaimed by "the whole world" (Jn 12:19). The evangelist takes his "readers" from the reality that Jesus came "in the name of the Lord" to his acceptance by a "crowd" as the "King of Israel" (Jn 12:13). Thus, Jesus' glory is recognized and celebrated by the "world".

e) Conclusion to the Three Gospel Readings Under Review

Unbelief is an unbridled sin within the evangelist's community: recognizing this *état-de-fait* he decides to confront the dire situation. He thus sets out to write a Gospel that will demonstrate that Jesus is for real, that he is the promised Savior (4:42). He first outlines his theology in a *Prologue* and then advocates for Jesus' uniqueness. With this last purpose in mind, the evangelist presents the stories of *The Samaritan Woman* and *The Man Born Blind* as a defense of Jesus' true nature: these two individuals whose existence at the edge of humanity cannot be more telling will ultimately embrace the truth about Jesus. Spiritually, they are deprived, existing in a dark place where there is no

hope, where tomorrow is just as unbearable as today. Yet, the evangelist succeeds, through the intervention of Jesus, to make the woman at the well and the blind man believe. In the story of *The Raising of Lazarus*, the disciples and Martha are in a better place: they know Jesus well but they still express some doubts. Again, the evangelist succeeds in convincing them that Jesus is the "resurrection and the life". The point made is that if the evangelist is able to bring the woman at the well, the blind man, the disciples, and Martha to believe, then the doubting members of his community should also believe. Given the meaning of the stories, they do not have any excuses for not believing. The evangelist goes one step further: he shows that the whole world has gone after Jesus (12:19). This is the story of *The Entry Into Jerusalem*, which meaning follows to better appreciate the theological perspective of the evangelist.

#### 4. The Essence of the Meaning of *The Entry Into Jerusalem* (Jn12:12-19)

The witnesses to the glory of Jesus at the raising of Lazarus have experienced the same extraordinary miracle, but their reactions signal different interpretations. The disciples of Jesus and his friends of Bethany realized that he is the Anointed of God whereas the Jews who were present either began to believe or misread the sign and, consequently, misinformed inquirers.

The great crowd: On hearing that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem a great number of Jews went out to welcome him. These Jews are to be differentiated from the Pharisees who are constantly harassing Jesus and disrupting his mission; they are, rather, well intentioned but misguided. These welcoming Jews are made up of two groups: one group was possibly instructed by Jews present at the cave and was either misinformed or it

came to the wrong conclusion about Jesus' mission, while a second group was comprised of Jews visiting Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and it had heard of Jesus through various sources. Notwithstanding, they all welcome Jesus thinking he could be the Messiah, the king of Israel, who has come to rescue them from oppression. Jesus, who was glorified earlier as the Son of God is now glorified by Jerusalem as a great warrior of the type of David.

Jesus, the Son of God: Jesus read the minds of his pressing supporters and, not wanting to provide them with a false pretext, found an ass and sat on it to their cries of "Hosanna". His choice of animal and his manner of mounting were meant to dispel all ambiguities about his "kingship" and the type of warrior he embodies. Jesus' actions were meant to show that he has come as a trusting servant of God, that his "kingship" is to be a minister to the spiritual needs of mankind, and that he is a warrior but not of the type of David but of Moses who has freed his own from tyranny. In arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus was not ready for this type of welcome, for this type of glory; rather, his purpose was to display a type of behavior that would inform the Jewish population of his relationship with his Father and of their love for all human beings. He wanted people to know that he has arrived for the ultimate moment when his Kingship will be visible from all corners of the earth.

The disciples misunderstood: The disciples did not understand at first all the excitement and commotion; after all they had just witnessed the unpretentious but decisive glorification of their Teacher. The unpredictable reception in Jerusalem strongly contrasted with what the disciples knew of Jesus, the humble carpenter born of commonplace parents: their long time friend would not have paraded through the narrow

streets of Jerusalem while its citizens would lay down palm branches crying out "Hosanna". The Jesus they knew would not have accepted this type of glory. After Jesus' resurrection, however, they remembered what was written in the Scripture: "Fear no more, O daughter Zion; see, your king comes, seated upon an ass's colt". The disciples finally realized that Zachariah's prophesy is alluding to a Savior-King who will be "meek", that is one who will be peaceful and compassionate; certainly not of the type acclaimed a few days earlier. They understood, therefore, that the prophesy of Zachariah's is fulfilled in Jesus, the Sent One of God.

So the Pharisees: Jesus' reputation has reached within the walls of Jerusalem and, as a result, the Pharisees observe their lack of advantage over Jesus. Their only solution is to proceed with their plan that "one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish." (Jn 11:50) Thus, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (Jn 12:23)

##### 5. Conclusion to the Gospel Readings

A catechetical facilitator teaching about the above readings should come to the realization that he or she must focus on two principal ideas. First, he or she will quickly recognize that the evangelist centered his thought on the person of Jesus, given his writings a Christocentric envelope. As a consequence, when a catechetical facilitator interprets *The Gospel according to John* he or she must constantly teach with Christ in mind, disclosing the Truth that he is, teaching as if he were teaching. Second, an informed catechetical facilitator should also come to the conclusion that John's writings are about conversion, about convincing each reader or listener that Jesus is the Word, the

Son of God. These readers and listeners are called to reflect on their faith, that is to hear anew the living words of Jesus, to see his galvanizing deeds, and to visualize his glory, and thus recognize in him the way, now realizable, to eternal life. Teaching in this manner is not a small task, but it is the only option that a catechetical facilitator has at his or her disposal in the mission of building up the Church.

Furthermore, a catechetical facilitator, to succeed in his or mission, must be a person empowered with a proven trust in the Holy Spirit, with a clear vision of God's plan of salvation, and with a sincere preoccupation for those under his or her care. Given that his or her fundamental purpose "is to present Christ and everything in relation to him"<sup>382</sup>, a catechetical facilitator will also be a person equipped with a wisdom capable of picking "from the field of theological research those points that can provide light for (his or her) own reflection and (his or her) teaching".<sup>383</sup>

There are still two more qualities that a catechetical facilitator must possess if he or she wants to do justice to *The Gospel according to John*, and that is prudence and humility: prudence because it directs the mind and heart to act wisely and to respond sensibly to challenges; humility, because it recognizes one's limits and animates the mind and heart to act and react accordingly.<sup>384</sup> So equipped, an informed catechetical facilitator will recognize that he or she teaches to the extent that he or she is Christ's spokesperson and consequently will allow Christ to teach with his or her lips.<sup>385</sup> As Christ's commissioned representative, a catechetical facilitator is now ready to engage the

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<sup>382</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 93, #98.

<sup>383</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #61.

<sup>384</sup> Gula, 93.

<sup>385</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Catechesi Tradendae", #6.

evocative stories of the evangelist who wrote the *Gospel according to John*, and in particular the three profoundly inspiring stories read during the Scrutinies.

## Part II: Celebrating the Rites of the Third Period as Intended by the USCCB

### 1. Introduction

Catechetical facilitators need to remember that the dispensation of knowledge on various tenets of the faith and the provision of commentaries on Scripture readings are important means for deepening the faith of RCIA participants, but are not in themselves sufficient for the attainment of a lasting conversion. The realization of a flourishing faith demands, in addition, the incorporation of rites into the initiation process such that the hearts of the participants will be graced to a greater extent with the presence of Christ. Thus, having their minds filled with an appreciation of the Good News and their hearts turned permanently toward God, the participants will now be equipped with an apostolic ardor for the building up of the Church.

It is worth mentioning that Jesus set the basis for an inseparable message-rite link by investing the Apostles with the responsibility of teaching about the Kingdom and of initiating their followers with the rite of Baptism. From the beginning, the teaching-baptism combination served as the foundation for an initiation process into the Church; a process which the Fathers of the Church, following the example of Jesus who taught and performed various rites, would eventually enrich by adding a number of rites, such as exorcisms, the laying of hands, and the presentations of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer. These interspersed rites had the dual purpose of purifying the hearts of the

participants and of engraving into their minds the essentials of the faith; together, the minor rites prepared spiritually each participant for the final rite of Baptism.

An understanding of the message-rite link suggests that the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is not just a program of incorporation into the Church but a sacramental process whereby "the Spirit empowers the believer to proclaim the gift received: liberation and redemption in and through the person of Jesus, the Christ."<sup>386</sup> It follows that catechetical facilitators and Directors of Religious Education would do well to remember that what matters ultimately is the spiritual transformation of the participants, which implies a Christian formation made up of knowledge and of the celebration of certain rites.

We have seen in Chapter 2 that current participants appreciated their experience of the RCIA at San Pedro and considered its contribution as an awakening to a new religious reality while past participants witnessed a positive change in their daily living, all favorable inputs that justify the preservation and perpetuation of the Rite. Furthermore, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as it is structured and presented at San Pedro led the participants to transform their ordinary faith into a better relationship with God; we can thus assume that the celebrated rites in conjunction with a deepening knowledge of the faith contributed to their enhanced spirituality. However, as mentioned by both current and past participants, improvements still can be made: in this regard certain rites as celebrated deserve particular attention in order to consolidate the resolve of the participants to the ways of Christ.

Furthermore, interviews conducted with a number of Directors of Religious Education or their representatives across the Diocese of Venice in Florida has shown that

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<sup>386</sup> Morris, 10.



not all the rites contained in the RCIA-Study Edition are celebrated as intended. As at San Pedro, improvements can be made. It follows that parishes need to understand the purpose of the RCIA and adopt fully the prescriptions of the Bishops if they want their initiation process to deliver the benefits hoped for by the Church Fathers and the current leadership at the Vatican.

What follows is a synthesis of what each rite has to offer and a rationale for its inclusion into the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in an effort to encourage Directors of Religious Education or their agents to include or celebrate fully each ordained rite in their process of initiation of adults.

## 2. The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

The Rite of Acceptance is meant to underline the progress made during the Period of the Precatechumenate, which has for purpose to satisfy the inquisitive minds of inquirers in matters related to the development of an initial faith. By its position in the conversion journey of inquirers, the Rite of Acceptance signals the beginning of a new expectation, that of bearing witness to a faith in Christ. The transition to this reality demands that inquirers openly express their will to become followers of Christ and in return the Church actualizes their desires by welcoming them into its faith community. In so doing, the inquirers officially make their entrance into the Church and as a consequence are attributed the meaningful epithet "Christian". This significant step allows the now catechumens to participate with the community in the celebration of the Word of God and, after which, to be dismissed for further discussions on the Sunday

readings. In essence, by this rite, the catechumens manifest their intention of concretizing their initial conversion and of entering into a mature relationship with God.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults emphasizes the utmost importance of the Rite of Acceptance by making of it a community event whereby inquirers are assured of the support of the Church they long to join in their quest for salvation. The USCCB, following the lead of the Congregation of Divine Worship, prescribe the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance for the spiritual benefit of inquirers, which is partly achieved with the dispensation of intensified instructions given out during the Period of the Catechumenate. Although popular today, this rite is not a novelty: it is possible that its inspiration came from theologians like Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-253) who was the first to speak of an examination of souls and of a demonstration of a virtuous life as a step toward a welcoming into the Church.<sup>387</sup> By the time of Augustine (ca. 354-430) the rite had taken a definite form: the inquirers had to express openly their faith to the Church, which in turn performed a rite of entrance including signation to indicate their kinship to Christ and the giving of salt as a sign of hospitality and welcome.<sup>388</sup>

Before the advent of a Rite of Acceptance, the story of the Samaritan Woman seems to envisage the likelihood of such a rite: the celebrant being Jesus himself. The townspeople of Sychar had been informed by the woman at the well about Jesus' truthful and significant insights; accordingly they subsequently decided to invite him to stay with them a few days. In Jesus' decision to stay, an observer may visualize an "acceptance by Jesus of the townspeople" who have demonstrated an initial faith on account of the woman at the well and are now longing for additional instructions. The transition to a

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<sup>387</sup> Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, 33.

<sup>388</sup> Dujarier, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 36-37.

higher form of catechesis is at the hands of Jesus who has "accepted" the townspeople wherever they were in their faith journey; from this moment on, he provides them with an opportunity for a profound relationship with himself. It seems that the "acceptance" of Jesus lays down the foundation, at least in spirit, for a future Rite of Acceptance.

The purpose of the rite itself , with its practice in the Early Church and the prescription of the United States Bishops, should be enough to convince any Director of Religious Education of the *bien-fondé* of the Rite of Acceptance; denying the celebration of the rite is counter-productive to a conversion process meant to be enriched spiritually with liturgical activities.

### 3. The Rite of Election or of Enrollment of Names

With further instructions provided during the Period of the Catechumenate, the catechumens have strengthened their faith and are now ready to demonstrate their determination to adhere to the ways of Christ. The testimonies of eyewitnesses affirm their acceptance of the teachings of the Apostles such that the Church decides at this time "on their advancement toward the sacraments of initiation".<sup>389</sup> The state of mind of the catechumens has been transformed intellectually and spiritually to the point that they are now prepared to express personally their outright intention to be incorporated into the Body of Christ. The liturgical step that allows for the transition from an acknowledged believer (Period of the Catechumenate) to one presenting himself or herself for spiritual betterment (Period of Purification and Enlightenment) is called the Rite of Election.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #119, 63.

<sup>390</sup> Preceding the Rite of Election, certain parishes choose to celebrate an optional rite, called the Rite of Sending whereby the catechumens are sent forth to the diocesan cathedral where they will be "elected" by the presiding bishop. In places where this rite is celebrated, the names of the catechumens

The significance of this rite is dependent on four separate but unifying elements. First, following the example of the early Church, the rite is celebrated solemnly by a bishop to signify the Church's preoccupation with the occupational, mental, and spiritual location of the catechumens. It is the Church in the name of God which discerns the appropriate motives of the catechumens; accordingly, it befalls the bishop to carry out "the act of admitting them as elect"<sup>391</sup> within the larger diocesan faith community. Second, the catechumens accept God's call by enrolling their names with the bishop; it is their way of expressing their commitment to the Roman Catholic faith. Third, the rite is to be celebrated at the beginning of Lent when all Christians are called to repentance, penance, and almsgiving in view of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. The catechumens, understanding the spirit of self-effacement of the members of the Church during this period of sacrifice, join their community in a retreat-like setting with the same spirit in thankful recognition for the Paschal Mystery. Lastly, the rite inaugurates the consequential Period of Purification and Enlightenment whereby catechumens are submitted to a deeper knowledge of the faith and to a spirituality worthy of a disciple of Christ.

The Rite of Election finds a justification as early as the Patristic era: Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) does not speak of a Rite of Election per se but insinuates a choosing of some sort when he writes that those who believe in what has been taught and live accordingly "are brought by us" to the waters of baptism.<sup>392</sup> Likewise, Hippolytus (ca. 170-235) mentions that those who are ready for baptism "are chosen" and, unlike Justin

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are inscribed on a parchment-like paper which is given to the bishop at the Rite of Election. The significance of this rite lies in the fact that the faith community to which the catechumens belong by reason of the Rite of Acceptance now stands with them on their way to their election.

<sup>391</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #123, 64.

<sup>392</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology", #61. Barnard, 66.

Martyr who remains silent on what followed, insists on a further examination, the application of exorcisms, and the laying of hands.<sup>393</sup> It is not until much later (ca. 381-384) that we find in the writings of Egeria an account of a rite of enrollment of names, which she witnessed while visiting Cyril, the bishop of Jerusalem. She recalls that those who were ready for baptism gave their names to a presbyter on the day before Lent began. On the next day, those who were ready were called one by one and examined by the bishop. If they were found pure, their names were written down by the bishop himself.<sup>394</sup> These sketches and a similar one from the writings of Ambrose (ca. 339-397) probably came to the fore when the Congregation for Divine Worship restored and enhanced the ancient catechumenate in 1972.

The story of *The Man Born Blind* is of the same fabric and may have inspired the Congregation in its work to revive an older tradition; in the story a blind man is "chosen" by Jesus so that the works of God will be made visible. (Jn 9:3) At the beginning, the blind man is unknowing of the person of Jesus but has been "elected" just the same to demonstrate that his benefactor is the Son of God; it may be that he was chosen because of his heart's capacity to see and accept the truth. From that moment on, the blind man is infused with a deep knowledge of Jesus: he quickly comes to the realization that Jesus is not only 'a man' but 'a man from God'. He is in fact undergoing a period of spiritual purification. Thrown out of the Synagogue, a disciple without a Master, he wants to know more about Jesus, to "inscribe his name", but Jesus is nowhere to be found. Knowing his

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<sup>393</sup> Hippolytus, "Apostolic Tradition", #20, Cuming, 17.

<sup>394</sup> Egeria, "Diary of a Pilgrimage," G. E. Gingras, trans. in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. by J. Quasten, W. J. Burghardt, T. C. Lawler (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1970), 122.

predicament, Jesus finds him and instills in his soul the knowledge above all knowledge that he is the Son of Man. The blind man's answer "I do believe" acknowledges his previous desire to experience Jesus as who he is and confirms his anterior and subconscious wish to be inscribed, symbolically, in the Book of Christ.

The Rite of Election is of dire consequence for catechumens: it signifies a passage into a period when a transformation of the self, similar to the enlightenment of the blind man, implies that an initial conversion will mature in the realization that "I, too, believe". This rite is not an option: it is of the essence of a journey "in Christ" to the Father.

#### 4. The Scrutinies

It is tempting to view the Scrutinies as no more than a Rite of Acceptance or a Rite of Election. Such an understanding, however, exposes an ignorance of the real purpose of each one of these three rites. It is worthwhile remembering that each rite has its own rationale that justifies its insertion into the process of conversion. For instance, the Rite of Acceptance signifies an 'initial admission' of the inquirers into the community of the faithful and that the Rite of Election reveals a participation by God in the election process of the catechumens for a complete admission into the Church. The Scrutinies, however, belong to an higher order: they are not so-to-speak a step or a transition toward something but a sum of activities having for purpose the mental and spiritual wellbeing of the elect. These activities include prayers, acts of exorcisms, and the laying of hands, in an effort to free the elect of all that is evil.

Directors of Religious Education and catechetical facilitators should remember that once appropriate instructions have been given and that the Rite of Election is a *fait*

*accompli*, it is time to enrich their programs in order to embrace a spirituality of the person whereby the elect are given the opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with God. It is therefore time for programs that will promote the cleansing of minds and the purification of hearts of things destructive in a human being and to enlighten the same minds and hearts with a deeper knowledge of the mission of Christ. Furthermore, the wisdom of the Church recognizes that this dual purpose, of purifying and of enlightening, cannot be attained unless Scrutinies are interjected into the transformation process.

By inserting the Scrutinies within "the Third Period", the Church realizes that knowledge of the faith alone is not a guarantor of an authentic conversion. It is true that knowledge enlightens the mind and the heart and that interior examinations are wanted to purify the whole being, but it must be conceded that Scrutinies when solemnized will enhance the conversion process by delivering the elect from the powers of sin and of Satan and by giving them strength in Christ.<sup>395</sup> In other words, normal means of betterment are necessary for transformation, but for a genuine and lasting conversion spiritual activities are crucial and indispensable.

The Church did not come up with the idea of celebrating Scrutinies out of nowhere: it has decided, realizing their potential benefits by interpreting liturgical acts of the early Church, to incorporate within a renewed catechumenate the many elements of a traditional initiation process for adults. On the one hand, the contents of today's Scrutinies seem to have been inspired, in part, by Justin Martyr who instructed those to be baptized "to pray and ask God with fasting for the remission of their past sins".<sup>396</sup> The laying of hands, practiced during the rite of baptism, may have come from Tertullian (ca.

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<sup>395</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #141, 78.

<sup>396</sup> Justin Martyr, "First Apology", #61. Barnard, 66.

150-220).<sup>397</sup> The larger part of the Scrutinies, however, may have been influenced by a work of Hippolytus, the *Apostolic Tradition*, in which specific prescriptions are made, including the need for moral and occupational questionings, for praying often, for the laying of hands on catechumens while they are exorcised, and for signing their foreheads, ears, and noses.<sup>398</sup> These mentioned elements of an initiation process have intrinsic and spiritual value which recent Church authorities quickly recognized and adapted for their own purposes.

The number of Scrutinies, on the other hand, was possibly governed by three pericopes of the *Gospel according to John*, namely *The Samaritan Woman*, *The Man Born Blind*, and *The Raising of Lazarus*. It seems that these readings were made part of a catechumenal preparation as early as the fourth century.<sup>399</sup> Later, during the papacy of Leo the Great (ca. 440-460), they are found to be read at the Scrutinies of three consecutive Sundays during the Roman Lenten season.<sup>400</sup> It is possible that the Church in its effort to reconstruct a meaningful catechumenate was partly influenced by those liturgical events of the past.

The three Scrutinies of today are a reflection of the past and, appropriately, share a similar purpose, that of supplementing instructions with means of personal contacts with God through prayers, self-examinations, penance, and the cleansing of oneself of all that is evil. The Lenten Season is a time of spiritual renewal; it is only fitting that the Scrutinies be celebrated properly during the same period. Directors of Religious

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<sup>397</sup> Tertullian, "On Baptism," #8.

<sup>398</sup> Hippolytus, "Apostolic Tradition", #15 to 20, Cuming, 15-18.

<sup>399</sup> Thierry Maertens, "History and Function of the Three Great Pericopes . . . ", 52.

<sup>400</sup> Johnson, *From three weeks to Forty Days*, 186-188.



Education and catechetical facilitators should take notice and plan germane activities for the Lenten Season.

##### 5. The Presentations

The presentations of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer may be the two most misunderstood rites of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This statement derives its plausibility from the bishops' decision to recommend their celebrations during the weeks following the first and third Scrutinies, and from a mention in the RCIA - Study Edition that the Creed and the Lord's Prayer may be presented, because of local conditions, by anticipation, before the beginning of the Third Period. These decisions give the impression that these rites are not as important as the rites celebrated on Sundays when the community is gathered to celebrate the Eucharist and thus provide a rationale for agents of catechetical formation to change at will how, if at all, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer will be presented.

There is ample evidence that parishes react differently to the recommendations of the bishops: while some parishes will present only the Creed others will celebrate neither the Creed nor the Lord's Prayer. Other parishes will celebrate them after the Scrutinies. There are also indications that some parishes hand out a parchment of the Creed at a convenient time without further discussions. Of the two presentations, the Lord's Prayer suffers the most from neglect: it is simply not celebrated nor discussed in many parishes. These *laissez-faire* practices are not acceptable, they are not in the spirit of what the Church intends. Agents of formation need to remember that there is a justification for the

inclusion of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer in the rite of initiation of adults: the first reason concerns "tradition" while the second has to do with their "intrinsic significance".

First, from the premise that Church and Tradition are interlocked, although different phenomena, comes the understanding that an elect cannot become a member of the Church without adhering to its Tradition. Irenaeus summarizes their intimate association: "this precious deposit (Tradition), enclosed within such an excellent vase (Church), is ceaselessly rejuvenated, and in turn rejuvenates the very vase which contains it."<sup>401</sup> It follows that to pay less attention to the Creed or Lord's Prayer, or both, which are essential parts of a rich Tradition, is hampering an elect's awareness of the concept "Church". Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386) realized this harmful situation and insisted that the catechumens subject to memory the Creed and then recite it back before being admitted to the sacrament of Baptism.<sup>402</sup> As for the Lord's Prayer, a sermon of Augustine stipulates that an elect would have to memorize it and recite it back on the morning of Holy Saturday before being baptized.<sup>403</sup> The practices of reciting the Creed in Jerusalem and the Lord's Prayer in Hippo suggest that both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are essential aspects of the Christian faith, integral components of Tradition and Church; it follows that agents of the initiation process for adults would do well to present and discuss both the Creed and the Lord's prayer in honor of the Church Fathers who accorded these acts of faith a crucial role in their baptismal preparations.

Second, the Creed and the Lord's prayer contain a wealth of information that helps any reader or listener to better understand the Roman Catholic faith. For the elect, however, they are not just informational in nature: they are expressions of a profound

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<sup>401</sup> Irenaeus quoted from Dujarier, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 137.

<sup>402</sup> Egeria, "Diary of a Pilgrimage", 123-124.

<sup>403</sup> Dujarier, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 140-141.

faith, integral parts of a rich Tradition. For one, the Creed is a profession of faith that "recalls the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race" and for another, the Lord's Prayer fills the elect "with a deeper realization of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father."<sup>404</sup> Their presentations are not meant to be just ceremonial rites but rather an invitation to experience the faith as lived by Christians in the primitive Church. Furthermore, when celebrated with the community, they fortify a communion between those "chosen by God" for baptism and those who are already united in the "body of Christ".

The Lord's Prayer, which was taught by Jesus for his disciples to pray to his Father and the Creed, which evolved from the days of the Apostles, are two fundamental prayers meant to build on a relationship with Christ and his Father. Missing on this opportunity is like depriving some elect of essential ingredients on their journey of conversion; henceforth, it will be hard for them to bring their conversion to its fullness without a better understanding of what the Creed offers for appreciating God' plan of salvation and of how the Lord's Prayer unites with the Father.

## 6. Celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation

The sacraments of initiation signal the completion of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment and mark the beginning of a new birth; the elect, having been prepared judiciously for the next step are now ready for God's supreme gift of adoption made possible through their inclusion into the Body of Christ. The candidates, on the other hand, have completed periods of catechesis and await earnestly the full gift of the Holy Spirit. The calculated efforts of both the elect and candidates are finally bearing

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<sup>404</sup> RCIA - Study Edition, #147, 79.

fruits: now fully initiated into the Church of Jesus Christ, they will finally participate with the faith community in the commemoration of the sacrifice on the Cross by which Christ offers himself for the faithful and, at the same time, the laity offer the sacrifice in thanksgiving, atonement, and petition. At that very moment, both Christ and the laity are on the Altar, resulting in a clear manifestation of the Body of Christ.

The significance of the three Sacraments of Initiation is reason enough for agents of the RCIA to take seriously the mission of preparing effectively both the catechumens and the candidates for that one moment when their planning and forming should culminate rightly in the memorial of the Paschal Mystery. The dispensing of instructions and of deeper knowledge, and the allowance for personal reflections are certainly necessary for the formation of a person into a child of God, but given the ultimate purpose of the process of initiation, it is just as important to explain fully to the participants the meanings of each of the Sacraments of Initiation. The temptation to teach about them during the precatechumenate and the catechumenate appears just and reasonable, but it must be recognized that the best time to maximize their impact on the participants is during the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. Understanding the Sacraments of Initiation, together with a deeper knowledge of Christ, and activities leading to a purification of the heart and mind, will have the most positive effects on the spiritual transformation of the participants when done in full view of the Easter Vigil.

## 7. Conclusion to the Celebrations of Certain Rites

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults has long passed the tests of desirability and reasonableness; it has become an indispensable tool for the initiation process by

reason of its contents and of its purpose, that of initiating converts to the ways and life of Christ. It takes its inspiration in the roots planted by Christ at the Great Commissioning: an initiation root that grew deeper and deeper to finally touch the hearts of Early Church Fathers who, in turn, designed animated programs of initiation for their communities. Many elements of their programs became norms for centuries to come, even up to recently, when the restored catechumenate became a reality.

The restored catechumenate has its beginning in Christ who had the vision of a baptismal initiation that would stand for something, that would mean something to potential followers. Today's catechumenate is meant to do just that, that of bringing inquirers and candidates to the belief that Jesus is the Anointed from God; a belief that becomes the impulse that leads to baptism.

The plan of initiation inaugurated in the Early Church to bring "those chosen by God" to the baptismal font incorporated consequential norms. These norms such as the inscription of names, the concept of election, the three Gospel episodes read during the Scrutinies, the practice of exorcisms, the laying of hands, the presentations, were judged by recent Vatican scholars to be of essential value in today's environment, as they did originally, for a successful process of initiation. These same norms are now incorporated into a Catechumenate designed to be carried out fully; by cutting short one norm or dismissing another, agents of the Catechumenate are not true to its intent or to the will of the Church Fathers who were inspired by the Holy Spirit in their efforts of formulating an initiation process *à la hauteur* of the Sacrament of Baptism. It is now the responsibility of the agents of initiation processes for adults to live according to the norms set in the Rite

of Christian Initiation of Adults, which norms were recently adopted and enhanced from Early Church practices, otherwise an agent is not doing his or her due diligence.

### Part III: Outlining a Program of Initiation for the Third Period

#### 1. Introduction

The research done for this thesis-project has uncovered lacunae in the celebration of certain rites recommended by the USCCB in preparation for the sacraments of initiation of adults in the Diocese of Venice, Florida. Furthermore, past and current participants of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults at San Pedro have suggested recommendations for the improvement of this Rite. The proposed outline that follows considers these and the bishops' recommendations in the light of what the Tradition discloses in this regard.

#### 2. A Proposed Outline

##### † Ash Wednesday

Explain what Lent signifies

Review what the Period of Purification and Enlightenment involves

Explain what the forthcoming Rites of Sending and of Election imply

Arrange for the reception of Ashes by the participants

##### † First Sunday of Lent

Arrange for the celebration of the Rite of Sending

Arrange for the celebration of the Rite of Election

After the dismissal, discuss the readings of the day

Allow for a reflection on what the readings signify in regard to "the Third Period"

Note: It is good practice to follow this discussion with a lunch with the participants, godparents, and agents of the RCIA before making their way to the diocesan cathedral for the Rite of Election. It is a matter of manifesting support and solidarity to the participants

- \* First Week of Lent
  - Present and discuss the Sacrament of Baptism
  - Show a short video on the sacrament
  - Arrange for a personal reflection on the subject

† Second Sunday of Lent

- After the dismissal, discuss the readings of the day
- Allow for a short reflection on the Gospel reading, which is normally  
The Transfiguration of Jesus

- \* Second Week of Lent

- Define "Scrutinies"
- Explain briefly what will happen the following Sunday during the "First Scrutiny" and what it means
- Explain briefly what will happen the following Sunday during the "Presentation of the Creed" and discuss the articles of the Nicene Creed
- Highlight the story of "The Samaritan Woman"
- If time allows, show a short video on the subject of "The Samaritan Woman"

† Third Sunday of Lent

- Celebrate the First Scrutiny in its entirety
- Celebrate the Presentation of the Creed
- After the dismissal: Lead a discussion on the meaning of "The Samaritan Woman"
- Allow for a short reflection on "What is the story telling me?"

- \* Third Week of Lent

- Explain briefly the "Second Scrutiny" and what it means
- Highlight the story of "The Man Born Blind"
- Show a short video on the subject of "The Man Born Blind"
- If time allows, show a short video on the subject of "conversion"

† Fourth Sunday of Lent

- Celebrate the Second Scrutiny in its entirety
- After the dismissal: Lead a discussion on the meaning of "The Man Born Blind"
- Allow for a short reflection on "What is the story telling me?"

- \* Fourth Week of Lent

- Explain briefly the "Third Scrutiny" and what it means
- Explain briefly what will happen the following Sunday at the "Presentation of the Lord's Prayer" and discuss the articles of the Lord's Prayer
- Highlight the story of "The Raising of Lazarus"
- If time allows, show a short video on the subject of "The Raising of Lazarus"

† Fifth Sunday of Lent

Celebrate the Third Scrutiny in its entirety

Celebrate the Presentation of the Lord's Prayer

After the dismissal: Lead a discussion on the meaning of "The Raising of Lazarus"

Allow for a short reflection on "What is the story telling me?"

\* Fifth Week of Lent

Present and discuss the Sacrament of Confirmation

Present and discuss the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Show a short video on the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Allow time for an examination of conscience

† Palm Sunday

After the dismissal: Lead a discussion on the meaning of the "Lord's Passion"

Allow for a short reflection on "What does it mean to me?"

\* Holy Week

Present and discuss the Eucharist

Discuss the concept of Real Presence

Show a short video on this subject

Explain the concept of Triduum

Arrange for the participants to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation

\* Holy Thursday

Encourage the elect and candidates to take part in the Mass of the Lord's Supper and solicit their participation in the Washing of Feet

\* Good Friday

Encourage the elect and candidates to take part in a Stations of the Cross celebration

\* Holy Saturday

In the morning, arrange for the Rite of Ephphetha to be celebrated

At the same time, arrange for a practice for the celebration of the Rites of Initiation

† Easter Vigil

Arrange for the participants and their godparents to be on time for The Blessing of the Fire, the Preparation of the Candle, and the procession that will follow

Celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation

Notes:

1. It is a good practice to have a light snack/meal after the Easter Vigil rites to celebrate the participants' newly acquired standing into the Church.



2. Praying before and after each dismissal and each weekly session is a good practice. It shows the participants how to pray and also encourages them to pray more often. Furthermore, it is a matter of preaching by example.

### 3. Conclusion to the Proposed Outline

It is unimaginable to have a program for the Third Period that will ensure a "perfect" conversion process. The principal handicap is time: six weeks to satisfy the recommendations set forth in the RCIA-Study Edition for a period designed to purify and enlighten the participants is a tall order. And, engaging simultaneously the individual needs of the elect and of the candidates, and responding to the wishes of the parish leadership while teaching with the Spirit of Christ is a formidable task. Nonetheless, it befalls on the DRE's to prepare the best program possible within the constraints of their respective parishes and on the catechetical facilitators to be prepared to deliver on expectations as if Christ was teaching. Not living to these responsibilities is not an option; elect, candidates, and the Church deserve, at all times, the best from all parties involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

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