

Augustine and the Catechumenate

William Harmless, SJ

Augustine and the Catechumenate

Revised Edition

Foreword by
Allan Fitzgerald, OSA

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In memory of my mother, Mary L. Harmless,
and my father, Roy Harmless.

*Sit ergo in pace cum uiro . . .
cui seruiuit fructum tibi offerens cum tolerantia,
ut eum quoque lucraretur tibi.
Et inspira domine meus, deus meus, inspira
seruis tuis, fratribus meis, filiis tuis, dominis meis,
quibus et corde et uoce et litteris serui. . . .
Meminerint cum affectu pio parentum meorum
in hac luce transitoria.*

May she rest in peace, together with her husband. . . .
In serving him she patiently brought forth fruit for you,
so as to win him for you in the end.
Inspire, my Lord, my God, inspire
your servants who are my brothers and sisters,
your sons and daughters who are my masters,
whom I now serve with heart and voice and pen. . . .
Let them remember with loving devotion
those who were my parents in this transitory light.

Confessiones 9.13.37

Contents

List of Charts	x
List of Abbreviations	xi
Foreword	
<i>by Allan Fitzgerald</i>	xvii
Preface to the Revised Edition	xxi
INTRODUCTION	
To Return to the Sources	1
What the RCIA Says	3
What the RCIA Implies	10
What the RCIA Does Not Say	16
The Investigation	20
CHAPTER ONE	
The Fourth-Century Catechumenate	35
Third-Century Inheritances: North Africa	37
The Catechumenate: Trends in the Greek East	57
Lent: Trends in the Greek East	70
Mystagogy: Trends in the Greek East	79
CHAPTER TWO	
Augustine and the Catechumenate in Milan	88
Augustine the Catechumen	91
Augustine the Petitioner	109
Augustine the Neophyte	117
Lessons from the Threshold	125
CHAPTER THREE	
Evangelization: Unrolling the Scroll	131
The Candidate: Milieu, Motives, and Types	135
The Catechesis: Principles	148
(1) The Classical Background	149
(2) The Narrative: Making the Case for Christianity	152
(3) Exhortation and End Time	157

The Catechist: Cultivating Delight	160
The Catechesis: Examples	164
The Message and the Messenger	175

CHAPTER FOUR

Catechumenate: Breaking Open the Bread of the Word	181
Feeding the Hungry: The Liturgy of the Word	186
Noisy Improvisations: The Sermon and Its Hearers	190
(1) Written Text and Oral Performance	191
(2) Audience Response	195
(3) The <i>Disciplina Arcani</i>	197
A Seasoned Rhetoric: The Method	200
Scripture and Its Riddles: The Core Curriculum	208
<i>Conversi ad Dominum</i> : The Dismissal	222
Excursus: The Delay of Baptism?	225

CHAPTER FIVE

Catechumenate: The Eagle and the Staircase	235
Two Sessions: December 406	239
Tractate on John 1	240
Exposition of Psalm 121	246
Melodic Themes	250
(1) The Paradox of Christ	251
(2) The Church as Body of Christ	256
(3) Baptism and the Donatists	260
(4) A Spirituality for Exiles	265
Turning to the Catechumens	271
Tractate 3	271
Tractate 4	273
Tractate 10	275
Tractate 11	276
Tractate 12	279
Theater of the Word	280

CHAPTER SIX

Lent: Time in the Womb	291
The Cross-Weave of Faith and Works	292

Boot Camp: The Lenten Discipline	299
Emancipation Proclamation: The Scrutiny	309
A Pact among Pearl Merchants: The Creed	322
Two Wings of Prayer: The Our Father	336
Lent and the Midwife's Art	345

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mystagogy: Baking Bread, Fermenting Wine	352
Lamps and Hearts Ablaze: The Rites of the Easter Vigil	354
The Great Swap: Easter Morning	369
Be What You See, Receive What You Are: The Eucharist	372
Hunting Down Death: Easter Week	381
Chirpings to Fledglings Leaving the Nest: The Octave	388
Mystagogy Tuned to the Key of the End Time	395

CHAPTER EIGHT

Peroration	404
The Spoken Word: Rhetoric	406
Catechesis as a Performing Art	407
The Well-Tempered Word	408
The Art of Persuasion	412
The Dark Side	416
The Visible Word: Liturgy	418
The Sermon as Catechesis	420
The Pedagogy of Silence	421
The Shape of Mystagogy	423
Catechesis as Liturgical Theology	426
The Written Word: The Scriptures	427
The Bread of the Word	428
Breaking Open the Bread of the Word	429
The Musicality of the Word	432
The Word-Made-Flesh: Christ	435
The Melody of Christ	435
Christ and Conversion	438

Select Bibliography	443
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Index	462
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Charts

1. The Rites and Structure of the RCIA 31
2. The Catecheses of Ambrose of Milan 129
3. Augustine's Opening Catechesis
and the Classical Juridical Oration 180
4. Sermons (and Letters) Addressed to Catechumens 229
5. Other References to Catechumens and the Catechumenate 233
6. The Sequence on the Psalms and John: Texts and Order 284
7. The Sequence on the Psalms and John: Topics 286
8. The Sequence on the Psalms and John: Intertwining
Themes 289
9. Sermons to *Competentes* 348
10. Other References to the Training of *Competentes* 349
11. Creeds found in Augustine's Sermons 351
12. Sermons for the Easter Vigil 398
13. The Rites of Initiation: Comparison of the North African Rite
with Others 399
14. Sermons Mentioning Neophytes 401
15. Augustine's "Breaking Bread" Image of Initiation 403

Abbreviations

WORKS OF AUGUSTINE

The complete listing of abbreviations and the titles for the works of Augustine can be found in Cornelius Mayer, ed., *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 3 (Basle: Schwabe, 2010), XI–XXV, and in Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), xxv–xlii. Those used in this book are as follows:

<i>Acad.</i>	<i>Contra Academicos / De Academicis</i> [Against the Academics]
<i>agon.</i>	<i>De agone christiano</i> [On the Christian Struggle]
<i>an. et or.</i>	<i>De anima et eius origine</i> [On the Soul and Its Origin]
<i>an. quant.</i>	<i>De animae quantitate</i> [On the Greatness of the Soul]
<i>bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo</i> [On Baptism]
<i>beata u.</i>	<i>De beata uita</i> [On the Happy Life]
<i>b. coniug.</i>	<i>De bono coniugali</i> [On the Good of Marriage]
<i>c. ep. Pel.</i>	<i>Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum</i> [Against Two Letters of the Pelagians]
<i>c. Faust.</i>	<i>Contra Faustum Manicheum</i> [Against Faustus the Manichee]
<i>c. Iul.</i>	<i>Contra Iulianum</i> [Against Julian]
<i>c. Iul. imp.</i>	<i>Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum</i> [Unfinished Work Against Julian]
<i>c. litt. Pet.</i>	<i>Contra litteras Petiliani</i> [Against the Letters of Petilian]
<i>cat. rud.</i>	<i>De catechizandis rudibus</i> [On Catechizing Beginners]
<i>ciu. Dei</i>	<i>De ciuitate Dei</i> [The City of God]
<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i> [Confessions]

<i>cons. eu.</i>	<i>De consensu euangelistarum [On the Agreement among the Evangelists]</i>
<i>corrept.</i>	<i>De correptione et gratia [On Admonition and Grace]</i>
<i>Cres.</i>	<i>Contra Cresconium grammaticum partis Donati [Against Cresconius, a Donatist Grammarian]</i>
<i>cura mort.</i>	<i>De cura pro mortuis gerenda [On the Care of the Dead]</i>
<i>diuin. daem.</i>	<i>De diuinatione daemonum [On the Divination of Demons]</i>
<i>doctr. chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana [On Christian Teaching]</i>
<i>Dulc. qu.</i>	<i>De octo Dulciti quaestionibus [Eight Questions of Dulcitus]</i>
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos [Expositions of the Psalms]</i>
<i>ench.</i>	<i>Enchiridion / De fide spe et caritate [Enchiridion / On Faith, Hope, and Love]</i>
<i>ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae [Letters]</i>
<i>ep. Io. tr.</i>	<i>In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus [Tractates on the First Letter of John]</i>
<i>f. et op.</i>	<i>De fide et operibus [On Faith and Works]</i>
<i>f. et symb.</i>	<i>De fide et symbolo [On Faith and the Creed]</i>
<i>Gn. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram [On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis]</i>
<i>gr. et pecc. or.</i>	<i>De gratia Christi et de peccato originali [On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin]</i>
<i>Io. eu. tr.</i>	<i>In Iohannis euangelium tractatus [Tractates on the Gospel of John]</i>
<i>lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio [On Free Choice]</i>
<i>mag.</i>	<i>De magistro [On the Teacher]</i>
<i>mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum [On the Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life]</i>
<i>nupt. et conc.</i>	<i>De nuptiis et concupiscentia [On Marriage and Concupiscence]</i>

<i>ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i> [On Order]
<i>pecc. mer.</i>	<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo paruulorum</i> [On Merits and the Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism]
<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i> [Revisions]
<i>s. dom. m.</i>	<i>De sermone Domini in monte</i> [On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount]
<i>Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i> [On the Trinity]
<i>uera rel.</i>	<i>De uera religione</i> [On True Religion]
<i>uirg.</i>	<i>De sancta uirginitate</i> [On Holy Virginity]
<i>util. cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credendi</i> [On the Usefulness of Believing]
<i>util. ieiun.</i>	<i>De utilitate ieiunii</i> [On the Usefulness of Fasting]

COLLECTIONS OF AUGUSTINE'S SERMONS

Finding one's way around the corpus of Augustine's sermons is not easy. A core collection of 396 of Augustine's "sermons to the people" (*Sermones ad populum*) was assembled by the Benedictines of St. Maur in their classic seventeenth-century edition of Augustine's complete works and was reprinted in *Patrologia Latina*, vols. 38 and 39. Researchers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries discovered more than 170 additional sermons (some complete, some fragments); these were collected and published in *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, ed. Germain Morin, vol. 1 (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930–1931). In older studies one sees sermons from this miscellany cited under the name either of the scholar who discovered them (e.g., Denis, Lambot, Morin) or of the library where they were found (e.g., Guelferbytanus). Pierre-Patrick Verbraken, in his *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin* (Steenburgis: in abbatia S. Petri, 1976), renumbered these nineteenth- and twentieth-century discoveries and integrated them into the Maurists' numbering system by adding a letter to the number: thus Sermo Guelferbytanus 7 is now listed as s. 229A. Verbraken's numbering system has now become the standard, and as further discoveries have been made (e.g., by François

Dolbeau in 1990, Isabella Schiller in 2008), these too have been numbered according to Verbraken's system. For a complete listing of Augustine's sermons according to both numbering systems, see Edmund Hill, ed. and trans., *Sermons, Works of Saint Augustine III/1* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 138–63; Éric Rebillard, "Sermons," *Augustine Through the Ages*, 774–89; and Cornelius Mayer, *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 3 (2010), XVI–XXV. To aid researchers references to the sermons are listed with both the older and the newer numbering systems. The abbreviations of these sermons are as follows:

- s. *Sermones ad populum* [*Sermons to the People*], ed. Benedictines of St. Maur
- s. *Casin.* *Sermones in bibliotheca Casinensi editi*
- s. *Caillau* *Sermones*, ed. A. B. Caillau et B. Saint-Yves
- s. *Denis* *Sermones*, ed. Michel Denis
- s. *Dolbeau* *Sermones*, ed. François Dolbeau
- s. *Erfurt* *Sermones Erfordenses Bibliothecae Amplonianae*, eds. Isabella Schiller, Dorothea Weber, and Clemens Weidmann
- s. *Étaix* *Sermones*, ed. Raymond Étaix
- s. *Frangip.* *Sermones*, ed. Ottavio F. Frangipane
- s. *Guelf.* *Sermones ex collectione Guelferbytana*, ed. Germain Morin
- s. *Lambot* *Sermones*, ed. Cyrille Lambot
- s. *Mai* *Sermones*, ed. Angelo Mai
- s. *Morin* *Sermones*, ed. Germain Morin
- s. *Wilm.* *Sermones*, ed. André Wilmart

SERIES, TRANSLATIONS, AND REFERENCE WORKS

- ACW Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Newman Press / Paulist Press)
- ANF Ante-Nicene Fathers (1887; reprint Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995)

- AOW *Augustine in His Own Words*, ed. and trans. William Harmless (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010)
- ATA *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999)
- Aug-Lex *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer, 4 vols. (Basle: Schwabe, 1986–)
- BA Bibliothèque Augustinienne (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer / Institut d'Études Augustiniennes)
- CCL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnholt: Brepols)
- CEASA Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes)
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna: Tempsky)
- DACL *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed. Fernand Cabrol, Henri Leclercq (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–1953).
- ECF The Early Church Fathers, ed. Carol Harrison (New York: Routledge, 1997–)
- FOTC The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press)
- Geerlings Wilhelm Geerlings, ed. and trans., *Possidius: Vita Augustini*, Augustinus Opera–Werke (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005)
- MA *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, ed. Germain Morin, 2 vols. (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930–1931)
- NPNF Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (1887; reprint Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995)
- O'Donnell James J. O'Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- OECS Oxford Early Christian Studies, ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993–)

OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press)
PG	Patrologia Graeca, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris)
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris)
RB	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i> (Namur, Belgium : Abbaye de Maredsous, 1890–)
RCIA	<i>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i> , rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988)
SC	Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf)
SCA	Studies in Christian Antiquity
SEC	Studies in Early Christianity, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993).
<i>Vingt-six</i>	<i>Augustin d' Hippone: Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique, Retrouvé à Mayence</i> , ed. François Dolbeau, CEASA 147 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996)
WEC	<i>Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources</i> , trans. Lawrence J. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009)
WS	Woodbrooke Studies
WSA	<i>The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century</i> , ed. John Rotelle and Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990–)

Foreword

Not long before the untimely death this year of Bill Harmless, he had submitted the final page proofs of this book—a revision of the 1995 edition. Keeping the best of the first edition, he also filled this revision with fascinating changes and useful new material. It thus displays the avid dedication to research and the lively communication that characterized the scholar-teacher we came to appreciate and love. In the following remarks about the scholarship and publication of this restless and creative Jesuit priest, I offer a snapshot of his contribution to the many kinds of readers whose imaginations and interests he wanted to inspire, hopeful that they would, in their turn, reach for something more.

A good place to begin is with Bill's recent article, the result of an oral presentation at *Reconsiderations IV: "A Love Supreme: Augustine's 'Jazz' of Theology."*¹ Notice, he said, how our medieval-inspired framework for theology "can block us from hearing the Scripture-centered musicality of Augustine's performances and block us from recognizing Augustine as he saw himself, namely, as a performer . . . of God's Word." Bill thus joined his love for jazz and his appreciation of Augustine's improvisational style in an invitation to hear—not just read—Augustine's "dizzying off-the-cuff and on-the-spot improvisations." In the process he highlighted the easily overlooked facet of the oral quality of Augustine's thinking: always rhetorically engaging, constantly adapting to the listeners,

I want to thank Prof. Michael Cameron (University of Portland), Prof. Jonathan Yates (Villanova University), and Prof. John O'Keefe (University of Creighton) for their help in writing these words.

¹ *Augustinian Studies* 43, no. 1/2 (2012): 149–77. *Reconsiderations IV* was held at Villanova University, September 13–15, 2012, on the theme of Augustine: Ancient Inspiration, Modern Muse.

ever trying to delight with his rhetoric. Linking Augustine's improvisation to the sounds of modern jazz allowed Bill, yet again, to teach Augustine in a mesmerizing way and to help us learn how to be captivated by the rhythm in Augustine's thinking and speaking.

Bill's active historical imagination made the past come alive on a page. But so much of the energy in his own thinking and writing seemed to flow from his conversations with others: with his Jesuit brothers, with his colleagues on university campuses, with fellow scholars in early Christian studies, and, perhaps in a special way, with the students he taught. His book *Augustine in His Own Words*² is an anthology of well-chosen texts from Augustine's writings, accompanied by thoughtful introductions, perceptive footnotes, and useful bibliographical entries. The thoughtful choice of texts, often translated anew by Bill, provides a good way to begin to know Augustine or to meet him again in new and surprising ways. It is also an example—as is his book *Mystics*³—of the importance of pedagogy for him, with pertinent suggestions for further reading and astute comments on existing scholarship. His attention to the kind of detail that benefits others can also be seen in the masterful set of online of theological bibliographies.⁴

In the years since the publication of the first edition of this book, Bill's scholarship did, of course, extend to other Augustinian topics⁵ and beyond.⁶ The widening of his perspective allowed him

² *Augustine in His Own Words*, ed. William Harmless (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

³ *Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴ See http://moses.creighton.edu/harmless/bibliographies_for_theology.

⁵ "Christ the Pediatrician: Infant Baptism and Christological Imagery in the Pelagian Controversy," *Augustinian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1997): 7–34; "The Voice and the Word: Augustine's Catechumenate in Light of the Dolbeau Sermons," *Augustinian Studies* 35, no. 1 (2004): 17–42.

⁶ For example, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus," *Theological Studies* 62, no. 3 (2001): 498–529; *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); "Mystic as Experienced Exegete: Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Tolle Lege: Essays on Augustine and Medieval Philosophy in Honor of Roland J. Teske, S.J.*, ed. Richard Taylor (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011), 277–301.

to return to *Augustine and the Catechumenate* with fresh eyes and new enthusiasm for the ways historical research is useful, not only for students in the classroom, but also and especially for those engaged in ministry. As he says in his preface, he wanted to bring this revised edition “up to date from top to bottom, to better reflect the state of current scholarship on Augustine, on liturgical studies, and on the catechumenate, both ancient and modern.”⁷

This study of the ancient catechumenate in the first edition was already helpful to many of those who were working for the initiation of new Christians because it provided a way to see the practical pastoral reality of their work from the point of view of another culture in another time. This revision has benefitted not only from many reviewers’ comments about that first edition but also from more than twenty years of Bill’s teaching, preaching, discussing, and celebrating the sacraments of initiation. His perception of what happened in North Africa, therefore, was sharpened by reflection and meditation on the experience of Christian communities today—one more striking example of how present practice enriches historical research and investigation of the past in turn enlivens and improves practice.

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The Augustinian Institute

⁷See the preface to the revised edition.

Preface to the Revised Edition

Around 426 CE, in the dusk of a long literary career, Augustine went back and reread everything he had published. His rereading inspired him to compose a small treatise titled *Retractationes*. The title, often but inexactly translated as “Retractions,” is better rendered in English as “Reconsiderations” or “Revisions.” In it Augustine gives brief, brisk reviews of each of his works, listing them in order of publication and citing what occasioned their writing. Along the way he quibbles with this or that passage, sometimes correcting what now seemed a misstatement, at other times defending or amplifying what he had written decades earlier. “I wanted to write this,” he says, “in order to put it into the hands of the people from whom I cannot ask back what I have already published and needs correction.”¹

Augustine had to wait forty years before he had the chance to revise his earliest publications. I feel fortunate not to have had to wait quite so long. It was twenty years ago when Liturgical Press published the first edition of this book, and I am grateful to have the privilege of going back and placing my own reconsiderations and revisions not into an appendix but into the text itself. In this new edition there are changes on nearly every page. Certain concerns that seemed urgent in the early 1990s seem less so now, and so various bits here and there have been excised. I have also spent the last twenty years teaching Augustine and much else. That has alerted me to the ways I sometimes presumed things I should not have. It has also taught me to say certain things better, more crisply, with less jargon. So one will find the occasional new paragraph or new anecdote or newly sharpened sentence. In my many and various tinkering I have tried not to alter too much the

¹ *retr.* prol. 3 (CCL 57:6); trans. Boniface Ramsey, *Revisions*, WSA I/2 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2010), 22.

flavor of the original or turn this into a completely new book. But I wanted this new edition to be up to date from top to bottom, to better reflect the state of current scholarship on Augustine, on liturgical studies, and on the catechumenate, both ancient and modern.

In the last twenty years Augustinian scholarship has witnessed a wide array of new discoveries, new resources, and new perspectives. Among the new discoveries, the most significant has been François Dolbeau's unearthing of twenty-six new sermons. These were collected and published in 1996 and were accompanied by Dolbeau's astute and learned commentaries.² Among those sermons is one in which Augustine speaks at length about the death of a catechumen; other sermons offer a variety of new angles of vision on this or that element of Augustine's catechumenate.³ I treat these new discoveries at various points, especially the end of chapter 4.

As for new resources, critical editions of Augustine's *Letters* and *Expositions of the Psalms* are now nearing completion. Of more immediate importance to most students of Augustine, there is now a vast new library of translations. When I worked on the first edition of this book I drew on (and often tinkered with) an uneven hodgepodge of translations. Also, at that time the majority of Augustine's sermons were not yet available in English, and so many of the translations in the previous edition were my own first efforts to render Augustine's intricate and musical Latin into English. Just as I was wrapping up my writing, Edmund Hill's comprehensive translation of Augustine's sermons was beginning to appear in a new series, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (WSA). This fine series, some forty volumes and counting, makes the bulk of Augustine's works available in lucid translations based on the best Latin editions. In preparing this revision I have changed out many of the older translations and inserted those from

² François Dolbeau, ed., *Augustin d'Hippone: Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique, Retrouvé à Mayence*, CEASA 147 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996).

³ See William Harmless, "The Voice and the Word: Augustine's Catechumenate in Light of the Dolbeau Sermons," *Augustinian Studies* 35 (2004): 17–42.

the WSA series or from my own 2010 anthology, *Augustine in His Own Words*.⁴ Also in the last twenty years there have appeared two landmark reference works devoted to Augustine: the multivolume *Augustinus-Lexikon*, whose publication is ongoing, and the one-volume *Augustine Through the Ages*, edited by Allan Fitzgerald, which appeared in 1999.⁵ These not only offer fine summaries of texts and themes but have standardized many essentials, including the Latin (and English) titles and the abbreviations of Augustine's works. The notes to this new edition now reflect those standards. As for new perspectives on Augustine—well, there are simply too many to begin to list here. I have threaded the most urgent of these here and there into the text itself and included many others in the notes to provide readers resources to which they may wish to turn next.

The last twenty years have also seen advances in liturgical studies of the patristic era. Among new discoveries, the most important has been a negative one. Through most of the twentieth century, liturgical scholars accepted the accuracy of attributing a church order titled *The Apostolic Tradition* to the early third-century Roman presbyter Hippolytus and presumed that the document reflected, to some degree, liturgical practices and customs of early third-century Rome. That attribution and that dating have been undermined by the philological, liturgical, and historical analyses of Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson, and Edward Phillips.⁶ They raised questions especially about its chapters on the catechumenate and baptism. In my previous edition I had followed that earlier scholarly consensus and had opened my background chapter on the ancient catechumenate with a discussion of *The Apostolic Tradition*. Because of this recent scholarship it seemed simplest to excise those pages and refocus how I situate the legacy of the

⁴William Harmless, ed., *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

⁵Cornelius Mayer, ed. *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 4 vols. (Basle: Schwabe, 1986–); Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁶Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, eds., *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

third-century catechumenate. That section now deals solely with North African sources that directly affected Augustine, namely, the writings of Tertullian (now treated in more detail) and of Cyprian (newly added).

As for new resources in liturgical studies, none has proved more helpful than Everett Ferguson's encyclopedic *Baptism in the Early Church*, published in 2009, which examines every important figure and every important baptismal document from the patristic era, collating the best current scholarship with an eye to liturgy, theology, and archaeology.⁷ When I began my research I had at hand no such reliable compendium and struggled to situate Augustine's catechumenate and the rites of his church within the wider landscape. The survey histories then at my disposal were rather dated, limited in scope, and insufficiently sensitive to contexts (social, literary, theological). While I had been able to mine certain well-crafted studies on this or that text or author, it was hard to see the forest for the trees. In this revision I have been repeatedly aided by Ferguson's encyclopedic survey as well as by a wide array of other recent more specialized liturgical studies.

From the beginning, this book has had a dual readership. One major group has been scholars interested in Augustine or in the liturgy of the patristic era. Their reviews, comments, and criticisms have proved invaluable. Augustine once remarked: "What I desire for all my works . . . is not merely a kind reader but also a frank critic."⁸ I have deeply valued both my frank critics and my kind readers. Among that scholarly readership, many appreciated the difficulty of gathering, ordering, and breathing life into what was a vast mass of data. I had sought to communicate the rich-hued textures and the robust humanity of Augustine's everyday world and the poignant vibrancy of his preaching, and I was pleased that those qualities came across and received such a good critical reception. Several reviewers expressed puzzlement at the way I situated this investigation in terms of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II and

⁷ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁸ *trin.* 3, *prol.* 2 (CCL 50:128); author's trans.

contemporary catechesis. They found the idea of drawing inspiration from Augustine and Christian antiquity for contemporary renewal somewhat curious; several noted the risk of anachronism but judged (happily) that I avoided it. One appreciative reviewer worried that scholarly readers interested in Augustine might not get beyond the introduction and encouraged such readers to skip the opening pages and plunge directly into the chapters on Augustine and his world. For readers with such interests, let me second that suggestion and encourage them to follow their instincts and read what interests them.

But such uneasiness raises a helpful question: Why do we write our histories? Why expend long years and great effort first acquiring the knowledge and skills required to write history and then plunge into the rigors of research, gathering the documentation in all its messiness, struggling to make sense of the multiple voices and the all-too-human biases they speak from? We who are professional historians mostly do this as a matter of course and, often enough, do not articulate to our colleagues, perhaps even to ourselves, why we set off on these long, often costly ventures. We historians are professional rememberers. We explore communities' collective memories, alert to gaps in the historical record and the varied agendas of the texts (as well as the historians who interpret them) that make the hard task of telling the truth harder. At the same time we work from a core conviction that such remembering does, in the long run, offer the present something of value. It is urgent, I believe, to articulate why we do what we do. In this new edition I have tried to do so somewhat more cogently. What had been chapter 1 in the original edition is now pared down and recast as an Introduction, mostly because it is stylistically different from the chapters that follow; it sets out the rationale for the investigation rather than serving as part of that investigation. That recast introduction now speaks more explicitly of this project in terms of a *ressourcement*, a "return to the sources." I grew up just as the reforms of Vatican II (liturgical and much else) were filtering out and stirring up all manner of new things. As I have gotten older I better appreciate how bold and how brilliant were that generation of scholars who laid the groundwork for Vatican II: Yves Congar,

Marie-Dominique Chenu, Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Josef Jungmann—to name but a few. Their efforts have been criticized, sometimes sharply, as have been the efforts of those who sought to make their scholarly work a practical pastoral reality in churches across the globe. I share that generation's profound conviction that remembering well helps keep the Christian church Christian.

Without the study of history, we risk communal amnesia. Remembering, in this instance, the catechumenate and the rites of initiation means remembering about matters very close to the heart of being Christian. The call to conversion, to *metanoia*, appears among the opening words of the Christian gospel. And baptism, which celebrates such conversion, is the doorway into the Christian assembly. Water and chrism are the double door that allow one to stand and break bread among those gathered in memory, in *anamnesis*, of Jesus' dying and rising. If we do not remember the history of these things well, then our doorway stands neglected, even unhinged. This book is thus an exercise, albeit a limited one, in ecclesial memory care. It explores a single episode, though an important one, within a much broader history of Christian catechesis—a history that, I should add, has yet to be written.

One other large segment of readers has been church leaders—clergy, religious educators, pastoral ministers—who work in churches across the globe and who, among their many duties, work to initiate new Christians. They routinely seek resources to better equip themselves for the mysterious and often baffling task of guiding people through conversion and into communion. Many of these readers have kindly reviewed what I have written or have written to me directly and spoken of the way this plunge into remembering Augustine and his generation has proved helpful in their day-to-day work. Twenty years on, the catechumenate is now more of a routine fixture both in Catholic parishes and in mainline Protestant churches. My hope is that this new edition may serve as a better, richer resource for those who do the work of initiation on a routine basis.

Alongside all this there has been, in the last twenty years, the rise of a new traditionalism. In commending the study of Augustine and others of his era I have no traditionalist agenda. Respect for tradition is not traditionalism. Drinking deeply of the Christian tradition

tends to unmask the fixities of a traditionalism more concerned to repeat past formulae than to understand them, more interested in control than in the search for truth, more anxious to keep the world at arm's length than to embrace it in all its vibrancy and its brokenness. While I believe it urgent to study the past with meticulous care, I have no interest in antiquarianism, whether liturgical or catechetical or ecclesial. What I treasure is wisdom. I seek it out wherever and whenever I can. Studying the history of Christianity offers the possibility of remembering people who possessed some measure of it, some insight into the depths of the human heart, its mysteries, its compassion, and its brutalities. I believe that Augustine and others of his generation had a measure of wisdom about the task of teaching Christianity. They also had a measure of blindness and hard-heartedness. Their efforts, both the good and the bad, are worth savoring. One of Augustine's deepest insights was that we human beings possess a dark, mysterious propensity for selfishness, for self-absorption, for evil. He called it original sin. But he celebrated its undoing by God's grace, by God's uncanny knack to break through our sin-encrustedness and crack us open and restore in us a primordial insight and compassion and will to do the good. He was convinced that conversion is possible and that teaching has a role to play in conversion. We remember not just to remember, as though memory were an end in itself. We remember in the hope of recovering shards of wisdom, and by their compass better orienting our own bearings in the mystery of this journey.

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I would also like to thank Catholic University of America Press for letting me draw on the translations from my book *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2010). The Augustinian Heritage Institute has kindly granted permission to use the translations from its series, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*.

The Bible that Augustine cited was the so-called *Vetus Latina*. The Old Testament of the early Latin Bible(s) had been translated not from the Hebrew, as one finds in modern Bibles, but from the Greek Septuagint. So Augustine's biblical citations do not always match modern versions. The translations here, whether mine or others, reflect the Bible Augustine know.

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I must thank a number of people for their guidance and encouragement on this project: first, Martin Elsner, SJ, and the people of St. Joseph's Parish in Houston who gave such support and brought such enthusiasm to the task of implementing the RCIA. I am particularly grateful to those who served on my dissertation committee: Thomas H. Groome, who directed my doctoral work and whose reflections on religious education have done so much to shape my own educational praxis; Rev. Robert P. Imbelli, whose insights on Christology alerted me to the melodic core of Augustine's catechesis; Michael S. Schiro, who guided my study of curriculum and educational philosophy; and especially Brian E. Daley, SJ, who introduced me to patristic studies and whose insight, imagination, and sympathy did so much to bring Augustine and his era alive. I must also thank my Jesuit brothers and my parents, family, and friends who were so supportive through the years of research and writing, especially Paul Deutsch, SJ; Joseph Fortier, SJ; David Borbridge, SJ; Randall Rainey; Mel Halbert; Maureen O'Brien; Almeda Colby; and Ann Harmless. Finally, I must acknowledge my profound debt to Raymond Fitzgerald, SJ, who each week read through my scribblings, checked my translations, and acted as an astute discussion partner through it all.

To Return to the Sources

One hardly expects radicalism from Rome. But in 1972 the Vatican promulgated the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (*Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*, usually referred to as “RCIA”). In so doing it reversed more than a thousand years of initiatory practice and attitude.¹ As Ralph Keifer once put it, “under the aegis of an ecumenical council, with the approval of the Roman see, and over the signature of the Roman pontiff, the primary rites of initiation . . . have been turned upside down and inside out, heralding a cry to begin a reform and renewal of the most radical sort.”² The

¹*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, rev. ed., International Commission on English in the Liturgy [ICEL] (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988). The original Latin *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum* was published in 1972; an interim English translation was approved in 1974. After it had been in use for more than a decade, the Catholic bishops of the United States approved a revision and mandated it for implementation in 1988. For commentaries see *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, Murphy Center for Liturgical Reflection (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976); Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (New York: Pueblo, 1978); Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 375–409; James F. Puglisi, SA, “Rite(s) of Baptism in the Catholic Church: A Theological-Pastoral Commentary,” 29–54 in *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, ed. Thomas F. Best (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).

²Ralph Keifer, “Christian Initiation: The State of the Question,” 138–51 in *Made Not Born*, at 138. The proximate impetus for the revision of the rites of Christian initiation came from the legislation of Vatican II, notably *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 64–66; *Lumen Gentium* 14; *Ad gentes* 13–14; *Christus Dominus* 14. On Vatican II as event see John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); on its liturgical reform see

contours of the RCIA are certainly revolutionary, and its vision of Christian conversion is breathtaking. But its official promulgation marked no more than a fragile first step. The visionary hopes and high ideals embedded within the Rite have, in the decades since its promulgation, too often been watered down or simply ignored. If the RCIA is to work the renewal it heralds, it will have to be far more profoundly implemented and integrated into the ordinary routine of parish life. Its implementation has proved a challenge on various fronts. First, it is a lengthy, complex document, one that requires careful study and prudent interpretation. Second, its vision of Christian initiation remains at odds with many of the Catholic Church's inherited liturgical, pastoral, and catechetical habits. Some of those habits have proved so deeply ingrained as to resist any recasting. Finally, the RCIA, like any blueprint, sketches some matters in only the barest outline. This is especially the case with its vision of catechesis. If the Rite is to enter into the depths and fiber of the church's everyday life, its catechetical principles will have to become second nature and its catechetical gaps filled in by a robust and deeply considered pedagogy. It is precisely the RCIA's catechetical sketchiness and often lackluster implementation over the last few decades that has prompted this investigation.

In this introduction I begin by surveying two matters: first, what the RCIA legislates and, second, what it implies. These set out the Rite's vocabulary and dynamics and give some sense of the high stakes involved in its implementation. In the third section I mark out the Rite's catechetical gaps and silences. In the final section I set out a proposal for addressing these: that we embark on a process of *ressourcement*, a "return to the sources," and begin to map out and harvest the catechetical wisdom of the early church as an aid and a challenge to contemporary catechesis. This book will seek—in a limited, focused way—to do just that, doing so via a single in-depth case study. In this investigation I seek to reconstruct what we know of the catechumenate of one of the most influential of the early church fathers, Augustine of Hippo (354–430).

Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Colleville, MN: Liturgical Press [A Pueblo Book], 2012).

My focus will be on Augustine the teacher, to reconstruct what we can of his day-to-day teaching of candidates for baptism and what his reflections on such teaching were.

WHAT THE RCIA SAYS

The RCIA describes the initiation of adults as “a spiritual journey,” one that, throughout its length and breadth, “bear[s] a markedly paschal character.”³ To plot out this journey, the Consilium, the committee of experts charged by Pope Paul VI to oversee the reform of Catholic liturgy after Vatican II, turned for guidance to ancient “maps”: patristic church orders, sermons, sacramentaries.⁴ This turn to Christian antiquity was sparked not by some romantic yearning for the archaic. Those working on the Consilium believed that they found in these ancient Christian documents a forgotten wisdom—a theological vision, a psychological sensitivity, a pastoral realism—a wisdom that, despite its antiquity, spoke to contemporary needs. Balthasar Fischer, who chaired the baptism study group within the Consilium, noted what motivated the turn to antiquity: “It was not our intention to keep ancient texts merely because they were old or for nostalgic reasons, but because these texts, while they linked us with the past, still answered contemporary needs. The ancient texts treated Christian initiation as what it really is, a *process*, and [they] related that process to human nature.”⁵ Drawing on these ancient texts, the Consilium resurrected a complex ensemble of rites, stages, and practices that had once

³ RCIA §§5 and 8.

⁴ On committee structure, drafts, and processes that gave rise to the RCIA, see Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948–1975*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), esp. 584–97. Bugnini’s account is indispensable since he worked for over a decade as the Consilium’s secretary and had spent decades at the forefront of the entire liturgical reform. The larger Consilium was made up of various more specialized “study groups.” Study Group 22, chaired by Balthasar Fischer, was the primary one responsible for the RCIA.

⁵ Quoted in Walter Ciesak, “RCIA: Looking Back—an Interview with Fr. Balthasar Fischer,” *Modern Liturgy* 11 (June–August, 1984): 7. See also Balthasar Fischer, “The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Rediscovery and

guided the early church. It began by dividing the journey of Christian initiation into four “periods”: (1) evangelization, (2) catechuminate, (3) purification/enlightenment, and (4) mystagogy. It then punctuated the transition between these periods with three rites of passage, or “steps”: (a) acceptance into the order of catechumens, (b) election, and (c) sacraments of initiation.⁶ (For a summary of these periods and rites, see chart 1.)

The first period, evangelization, is to be a time for hearing the Gospel of “the living God” and of “Jesus Christ whom he has sent for the salvation of all.” Newcomers should taste some initial conversion, one powerful enough to cause them “to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God’s love.” Upon this initial conversion, newcomers are welcomed at the first of the public rites, the Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. This rite serves as an occasion for mutual commitment: “candidates . . . declare their intention to the Church and the Church in turn . . . embraces the catechumens as its own with a mother’s love and concern.”⁷ Candidates are signed with the cross, first on the forehead, then on the ears, eyes, lips, heart, shoulders, hands, and feet. The presider then invites them “to share with us at the table of God’s word.”⁸ After the sermon but before the liturgy of the Eucharist, the candidates—now referred to as “catechumens”—are prayed for, then dismissed with a blessing.⁹ This initial rite “marks their reception and first consecration by the Church.” These new

New Beginnings,” *Worship* 64 (1990): 98–106, citing pivotal historical episodes and broader principles that shaped the Consilium’s work.

⁶ RCIA §6 refers to these rites of passage as “steps” or “gateways” through which candidates pass to “ascend to the next level.”

⁷ RCIA §§36–37, 41, 47. This echoes *Lumen Gentium* 14.

⁸ RCIA §60. Only the signing on the forehead is required; the others are optional (§§55–56). The signing on the forehead was the patristic practice; the multiple signations were a Gallican addition.

⁹ The Rite stresses that the “catechumens are normally dismissed” before the eucharistic liturgy itself; however, it does make such a dismissal optional, but only for “serious reasons”: RCIA §§67, 75.3.

catechumens are henceforth to be regarded as “Christians,” as “part of the household of Christ.”¹⁰

This rite is the gateway into the second period, the catechumenate. The catechumenate is to be a time for more than mere schooling in Christian doctrine; it is to be, as Vatican II speaks of it, an apprenticeship in Christian living.¹¹ It is an intricate venture accomplished not in a few hurried sessions but more leisurely, over a span “long enough—several years if necessary—for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong.”¹² Catechumens continue to attend the Sunday liturgy of the Word, just as they did in the early church. Week after week the same pattern is kept: readings, sermon, prayer, blessing, dismissal. Along the way catechumens are to receive “suitable catechesis . . . gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year.”¹³ This catechesis should do more than instruct in dogmas and precepts. It should instill in the catechumens a “profound sense of the mystery of salvation.”¹⁴ It should not only instruct them in ways of prayer but also give them some experience of these. Finally, it should focus on the practical and the moral “to implant in their hearts . . . the morality characteristic of the New Testament, the forgiving of injuries and insults, a sense of sin and repentance, the duties Christians must carry out in the world.”¹⁵ Such catechesis should take place at least some of the time within a liturgical setting.¹⁶

¹⁰ RCIA §§41, 47. This phraseology is from Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 11.4, and is quoted in Vatican II’s *Ad gentes* 14.

¹¹ Vatican II, *Ad gentes* 14: “The catechumenate . . . is not merely an exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, but a period of formation in the entire christian life.”

¹² RCIA §76.

¹³ RCIA §75.1.

¹⁴ RCIA §75.1.

¹⁵ RCIA §82.

¹⁶ The 1988 American edition suggests that “celebrations of the word may . . . be held *in connection with* catechetical or instructional meetings of the catechumens, so that these will occur in a context of prayer” (§81–89; emphasis added). It also suggests an outline: (i) an opening song, (ii) readings and responsorial psalms, (iii) homily, and (iv) concluding rites (an exorcism,

All this clearly moves against the grain of inherited practices. No longer can catechists content themselves with presenting theological summaries lifted from official catechisms. No longer is it sufficient to win mere assent to propositions. Rather, the goal and measure of catechesis is not only changed minds but also changed hearts and changed lives. Catechumens are to give public witness to a “progressive change of outlook and conduct,” and that progress should be “manifest by means of its social consequences.”¹⁷ Catechumens should begin to embody a vigorous love of neighbor, a virtue honed and won at the cost of self-renunciation. Catechumens are expected to begin to mirror the church’s life, and since the church’s life is apostolic, that of the catechumens should be so as well. To strengthen their resolve they receive a complex of blessings, exorcisms, and anointings. This whole journey of faith depends both on the grace of God and on local circumstance (needs of catechumens, character of the local assembly, availability of ministers). For this reason “nothing . . . can be settled a priori.”¹⁸

Throughout this period, sponsors play a pivotal role. They are, as in the early church, to apprentice catechumens into the everyday rhythms and demands of Christian living. Sponsors are to show catechumens “how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain [them] in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide [their] progress in the baptismal life.” Because of this close relationship, sponsors “stand as witnesses to the candidates’ moral character, faith, and intention.”¹⁹ Sponsors thus play a dual role: on the one hand they are witnesses *to* the catechumens, testifying as much by deed as by word how one incarnates gospel imperatives; on the other hand they are witnesses *for* the catechumens, testifying on the catechumens’ behalf before the liturgical assembly.

a blessing, or an anointing). This mirrors the presumption of the ancient texts: that liturgy is the normal context for catechesis.

¹⁷ RCIA §75.2.

¹⁸ RCIA §76.

¹⁹ RCIA §§9–11.

The third period, that of purification and enlightenment, coincides with Lent. It begins with the Rite of Election, presided over by the local bishop and celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. The assembly first seeks out public testimony from sponsors and catechists, much as it did in the early church. The catechumens are then enrolled for baptism, their names inscribed in the Book of the Elect. During the weeks that follow, candidates (now referred to as “the elect”) go through a “more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction”; they are to purify mind and heart and do penance.²⁰ On the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent special readings are assigned; these invite them to grapple with classic images from John’s Gospel: Christ the living water (John 4), Christ the light of the world (John 9), and Christ the resurrection and the life (John 11).²¹ On these same Sundays, after the homily, candidates undergo the great exorcisms known as “scrutinies.”²² These rites are to inspire self-searching and repentance, 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.”²³ Also during the weeks just before Easter the elect receive—as they did in the early church—the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, those “ancient

²⁰ RCIA §139.

²¹ RCIA §143. These rites draw on the *missae pro scrutiniis* preserved in the Gelasian Sacramentary. See Antoine Chavasse, “La structure du Carême et les lectures des messes quadragesimales dans la liturgie romaine,” *La Maison-Dieu* 31 (1952): 76–120; idem, “Temps de préparation à la Pâque, d’après quelques livres liturgiques romains,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 37 (1950): 125–45. For a summary see Maxwell E. Johnson, “From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent,” *Studia Liturgica* 20 (1990): 185–200, reprinted in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 118–36.

²² Balthasar Fischer, “Baptismal Exorcism in the Catholic Baptismal Rites after Vatican II,” *Studia Liturgica* 10 (1974): 48–55, at 53, notes the exorcisms in the RCIA are no longer “imprecatory” but “deprecatory”; “we no longer speak to the Devil (considered as being present); we speak with God about the Devil (still considered as personal).”

²³ RCIA §§141, 143.

texts that have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church's faith and prayer."²⁴ Finally, on Holy Saturday the elect withdraw to a quiet place to pray, fast, and reflect. Two rites may be held at this time: the Recitation of the Creed, in which the elect formally recite the symbol of faith they have been given, and the Ephphetha, an exorcism of ear and mouth meant to impress "on the elect their need of grace in order that they may hear the word of God and profess it for their salvation."²⁵

That night, at the Easter Vigil, the most sacred liturgy of the year, the church celebrates the climax of this long journey with the rites of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. The choice of the Vigil is critical. As Aidan Kavanagh once noted:

The insistence on the Easter Vigil as the normal setting for Christian initiation is neither ecclesiastical nostalgia nor doctrinal wistfulness. There is simply no other time of the year, and certainly no other liturgical context, that serves as so rich a setting for sacramental initiation and its meaning. Not only are the initiates dying and rising in Christ as the Church commemorates his passage from death to life long ago. More importantly the initiates are entering into his corporate real presence which is the Church. . . . Only the Easter Vigil yields up an ecclesiology worthy of baptism.²⁶

The RCIA insists that the sacraments be celebrated as they were originally, as a unified, integral succession of rites. No longer is baptism to be separated from confirmation, whether by days or by years; it is to take place immediately afterward.²⁷ For this to occur,

²⁴ RCIA §147. The Rite specifies that the Presentation of the Creed takes place during the third week of Lent (i.e., following the first scrutiny); the Presentation of the Lord's Prayer takes place during the fifth week of Lent (i.e., following the third scrutiny). Alternatively they may be anticipated during the period of the Catechumenate; see RCIA §§79, 104-5, 147.

²⁵ RCIA §§193-99. The presentation of the Lord's Prayer may also take place at this time (§189).

²⁶ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 134-35.

²⁷ RCIA §§215, 217: "In accord with the ancient practice followed in the Roman liturgy, adults are *not to be baptized without receiving confirmation im-*

the RCIA includes a history-altering provision: the priest who confers baptism is the one who also confers confirmation.²⁸ This moves against a centuries-long Latin tradition of reserving the conferring of confirmation to bishops. The RCIA also sets out immersion as the preferred form of baptism.²⁹ No longer should baptism be a few dribbles of water on the forehead. It is again to resemble what it is: a bath, a plunge into enough water that one can taste and feel water's death-dealing and life-giving power.

The fourth and final period, that of mystagogy, begins after Easter and extends until Pentecost. The newly baptized (now called "neophytes") receive a genre of catechesis widely used in the early church but still largely unknown in the present one: mystagogy, that is, a "teaching of the mysteries." These explore the rites of initiation—the gestures, the symbols, the words—in terms of their biblical resonances and their import for Christian life. During the liturgies of the Easter season neophytes may sit in a special section of the church.³⁰ This silently but powerfully highlights their new status and marks them as people deserving the assembly's special

mediately afterward, unless some serious reason stands in the way. The conjunction of the two celebrations signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the Son and the Holy Spirit come with the Father to those who are baptized. . . . Finally in the celebration of the eucharist, as they take part for the first time and with full right, the newly baptized reach the culminating point in their Christian initiation" (emphasis added). For an analysis, see Aidan Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform* (New York: Pueblo, 1988), 85–86.

²⁸ RCIA §14. Balthasar Fischer, "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Rediscovery and New Beginnings," 103, notes how much resistance the Consilium faced on this, that it "succeeded—but not without considerable psychological difficulties expressed by the bishops—in safeguarding the classic sequence of the sacraments of initiation." Fischer once noted: "If I am proud of anything, I am proud of having convinced the bishops that they should give permission to the priest to confirm" ("Interview with Balthasar Fischer," *Chicago Catechumenate* 6, no. 2 [Dec. 1983], 11).

²⁹ RCIA §26. While the RCIA does allow for pouring water over the head as a possible option, it lists immersion first. See Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 138.

³⁰ RCIA §248.

care. Pentecost marks the neophytes' completion of their long pilgrimage. The Rite adds that "on the anniversary of their baptism the neophytes should be brought together in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences, and to renew their commitment."³¹

WHAT THE RCIA IMPLIES

The RCIA is more than a collection of rites and rubrics. It is, more deeply, a fundamental reenvisioning of the mission and character of Christian community. In resurrecting ancient and long-forgotten rituals, practices, and stages it seeks to retrieve an ancient and quite radical vision of the church, one that places conversion at the very heart of Christian experience. It reshapes community roles, radically redefines the contours of catechesis, and sees baptism as the taproot and catalyst for lifelong transformation. Let us pause here for a moment to savor and probe some of these implications.

First, the RCIA reverses a centuries-old habit: privatizing Christian initiation. No longer is the formation of converts a few hasty months of private instruction in doctrine. No longer is conversion a private matter, worked out in hushed anonymity between convert and parish priest. No longer is baptism to be a quiet affair, a small gathering of family and friends held any Saturday afternoon. Instead, initiation once more assumes the honor, the centrality, and the symbolic amplitude it enjoyed in the early church. Converting individuals now assume center stage in the assembly's worship. Before the entire assembly their motives are examined and their commitments made public. Before it they are lavished with blessings, healed with exorcisms, strengthened with anointings. Week after week they are solemnly dismissed in a vivid—even threatening—gesture meant to catechize faithful and catechumen alike on the high dignity of baptism. Through it all "their faith, progress, and prognosis in communal faith-living are the concerns of the

³¹ RCIA §250. The RCIA, by conceiving mystagogy as a fifty-day period between Easter and Pentecost, differs from most early Christian churches in which mystagogy lasted a single week.

entire local church met for solemn public worship.”³² This public witness assumes its richest expression at the Vigil. This means, as Keifer has noted, that “the celebration of the paschal mystery finds its axis and concrete manifestation in the baptism, confirmation, and eucharist of newly baptized adults. . . . The revelation of Christ’s saving, healing, and redeeming power in our midst is the making of Christians. . . . [This marks] a breathtaking departure from the recent past.”³³

Second, the RCIA insists that ministry, both lay and ordained, be vibrant, that it permeate the very sinews of the church. It presumes that within every assembly there are enough master Christians to apprentice catechumens in the intricate art of gospel-living. As Kavanagh has cogently put it: “One learns how to fast, pray, repent, celebrate, and serve the good of one’s neighbors less by being lectured on these matters than by close association with people who do these things with regular ease and flair.”³⁴ Restoring the catechumenate calls for the renewal and recasting of the traditional ministries of priests, deacons, catechists, and sponsors. But the Rite insists that the ministry of initiation is not the preserve of an elite, ordained or otherwise, but is the responsibility of all the baptized, that the whole assembly acts as evangelist, catechist, sponsor, deacon, priest. In the long run this may give fresh substance to the phrase “priesthood of all believers” and help us savor that “*laos* is a priestly name for a priestly person.”³⁵ Ultimately the RCIA calls the church to see and to be what it is: the people of God sent on a world-shaking and world-transforming mission—evangelizing, witnessing, teaching, serving, healing, dying to self, and rising to new life.

Third, the RCIA resurrects the long-forgotten order of catechumens. This means that we need to adjust our conceptions about

³² Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 128.

³³ Keifer, “Christian Initiation: The State of the Question,” *Made Not Born*, 139.

³⁴ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 131.

³⁵ Aidan Kavanagh, “Unfinished and Unbegun Revisited: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” *Worship* 53 (1979): 327–40, at 336; reprinted in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, 259–73, at 269.

what constitutes membership and begin to take seriously the Rite's—and Vatican II's—words about catechumens as “already part of the household of Christ.” It also implies something about the role of catechumens in the ecology of the church's life. When the local assembly witnesses catechumens feasting at the table of God's word it should find itself called to examine how the Scriptures nourish its own heart and mind. When it witnesses catechumens spending years hungering for the Eucharist it should find itself called to examine how that Eucharist sustains its own graced life. When it witnesses catechumens feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the dying, it should find itself called to ponder the depth of its own apostolic vocation. Catechumens are not simply recipients of the church's ministry. They too are ministers, agents of its transformation.

Fourth, the RCIA restores the sacraments of initiation to their earlier order and ritual proximity. No longer is baptism to be separated from confirmation by weeks or even years, as happened in the medieval church.³⁶ This restoration of the practice of the Latin church of the early centuries seeks to reverse what Nathan Mitchell has called the “dissolution of Christian initiation,” a “ritual breakdown” that “resonates throughout Christian faith, catechesis, theology, and praxis.”³⁷ This reform is much more than ritual fine-tuning or archaeological restoration. It is an attempt, as Mark Searle once noted, to present “a powerful symbolic re-description of what it means to be Christian”: “That a Christian is one who is identified with the dead and exalted Christ by the power of the Spirit” and who is united with his Body by that common fellowship, meal, and sacrifice we call Eucharist.³⁸

³⁶ On this medieval breakdown see Nathan Mitchell, “Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation,” 50–82 in *Made, Not Born*, which draws on the classic study of J. G. Davies, “The Disintegration of the Christian Initiation Rite,” *Theology* 50 (1947): 407–12. See also J. D. C. Fisher's study, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (London: SPCK, 1965). For an overview see Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 245–67.

³⁷ Mitchell, “Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation,” 50.

³⁸ Mark Searle, “Issues in Christian Initiation: Uses and Abuses of the RCIA,” *Living Light* 22 (1986): 199–214, at 200.

This shift toward a reintegrated celebration may gradually reconfigure the deeper contours of Christian self-understanding. For Catholic Christians, sacraments are essential to the grammar of faith. This grammar, like that of any language, works beneath the surface, mediating meanings, establishing canons of intelligibility, structuring what is expressible and what is not. Because of this grammatical shift within the sacraments of initiation we may again savor confirmation's baptismal moorings and probe its messianic and pneumatological themes. Because of this we may again come to appreciate the way confirmation is a Spirit-filled rite of passage that leads one *from* the Spirit-imbued waters of baptism and *to* the Spirit-endowed table of Eucharist. Because of this we may begin to recognize Eucharist—rather than confirmation—as the apex of Christian initiation, as *the* sacrament of Christian maturity.³⁹ In altering our symbols—particularly ones as important as how one becomes and remains Christian—we may find our way to a new corporate sense of identity and purpose.

Fifth, the RCIA implies that adult baptism should once more serve as the *norm* for Christian initiation.⁴⁰ This does not mean abandonment of infant baptism, nor does it mean that infant baptism will cease to be the most common way people enter the ranks of the faithful. To raise such concerns is to misunderstand what a norm is and how it functions. As Kavanagh has noted, “A norm has nothing to do with the number of times a thing is done, but it has everything to do with the standard to which a thing is done.”⁴¹ Norms, whether those of the church or of civil society, set standards of judgment. They help us decipher what is normal, what is abnormal but *permissible*, and what is abnormal and *impermissible*. What does this mean for baptism? Once we begin to experience the Rite as our norm we may again come to recognize the weighty demands and spacious contours of Christian initiation: that initiation,

³⁹ Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 177. On this see Nathan Mitchell, *Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation*, Forum Essay 2 (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994).

⁴⁰ On this see Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 102–25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

in the richest sense, should happen in stages and with a panoply of rites; that it demands faith and conversion; that it involves community and apostolic commitment; that it is accomplished slowly, if need be, over a period of years; that it is best celebrated at the Easter Vigil; that its sacramental expression includes not just bathing but also anointing and feasting. Set against such a norm, infant baptism will seem more like a “piano reduction” when compared to the Rite’s full “symphonic orchestration.” In infant baptism the melodies may all be there, but scarcely with their full-voiced sonorities.⁴²

Sixth, the RCIA sets out a rich, multifaceted vision of conversion.⁴³ It insists that authentic conversion demands more than some sudden born-again experience or shift in institutional allegiance; it requires transformation of the whole person. It envisions human life as a journey of ongoing conversion that begins long before the person approaches the local church and continues long after the person enters its ranks. It presumes that the conversion experience has its seasons, and that at pivotal moments that experience requires ritual expression. It envisages conversion as the forging of a sacred pact between God and convert and is clear that in this covenant-making the initiative is always God’s. The RCIA insists that conversion is Christ-centered and expresses that centeredness in rite after rite, initially by the signing of the cross on catechumens’ foreheads, later by a water-bath that marks their

⁴²Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 109–14, is especially critical of *quampri-mum* infant baptism and regards certain cases of infant baptism as a “benign abnormality” (in cases of emergencies or of especially faithful parents), but he considers much current practice as “pastoral malfeasance” and “theological obsession.” Mark Searle, “The RCIA and Infant Baptism,” *Worship* 56 (1982): 327–32, sharply criticizes Kavanagh’s perspectives, arguing that baptism possesses meanings beyond the Pauline death-resurrection motif and that infant baptism better highlights themes such as adoption, divinization, and indwelling. See also Paul F. X. Covino, “The Postconciliar Infant Baptism Debate in the American Catholic Church,” *Worship* 56 (1982): 240–60, reprinted in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, 327–49.

⁴³On this see Robert Duggan, “Conversion in the *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 96 (1982): 57–83, 209–32; 97 (1983): 141–223.

“sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ,” and finally by the Eucharist that signs their incorporation into Christ.⁴⁴ The RCIA insists that conversion, far from being an individual matter, is an event of the church as a whole. Ultimately, it conceives of conversion as the genesis of the church itself.⁴⁵

Finally, the RCIA sets out a formidable agenda for religious educators. Balthasar Fischer stated that he and the other members of the Study Group explicitly intended “to do away with [the] school mentality, that cerebral way of entering the Church.”⁴⁶ They were concerned that catechists recognize that “the catechumenate is not a school, but an initiation: the school has some students who learn a lesson; initiation has some disciples who discover a life.”⁴⁷ The Rite presumes that catechists can speak with equal fluency the plural languages of catechesis: certainly that of instruction, but also of evangelization and apprenticeship, of spiritual direction and mystagogy. It demands not only that they be capable of handing on the church’s rich, pluriform traditions; it insists that they propose a practicable ethics, that they catalyze interior explorations, guide prayer, and discern spirits, that they nurture apostolic action and embody a virtue worth imitating. It asks that catechists not only be fluent in an array of catechetical languages but also be attuned to a process more circular than linear: not so much “a graduated program” but rather a “series of explorations that radiate outward from the gospels into every area of personal, ecclesial, and social living, flowing back again into the meditative reading of the scriptures, the practice of prayer, and the elicitation of commitments.”⁴⁸ It presumes that catechists will be experts in the fine art of “conversion therapy”—to use Kavanagh’s often quoted and much misunderstood coinage. Kavanagh does not mean

⁴⁴ RCIA §§55, 64; 66; 8; 233; 217.

⁴⁵ Duggan, “Conversion in the OICA,” 211.

⁴⁶ Fischer, quoted in “An Interview with Balthasar Fischer,” *Chicago Catechumenate* 6 (1983): 7

⁴⁷ André Aubry, quoted in Thomas Ivory, “The Restoration of the Catechumenate as a Norm for Catechesis,” *Living Light* 20 (1976): 225–35, at 230.

⁴⁸ Searle, “Issues in Christian Initiation,” 202.

therapy in the psychological sense; he means a catechesis capable of nurturing people through the trauma of God's iconoclastic grace, of protecting them "from the Church's insensitivity to the crisis," and of bringing both church and convert into a sustained relationship called "communion."⁴⁹ All this presumes high standards and considerable expertise. The problem is this: The RCIA, since it is a ritual document, offers few resources for such a formidable agenda. This may account for the often workmanlike implementation to date. It also names the impetus that has inspired this study.

WHAT THE RCIA DOES NOT SAY

In the early 1980s, as the RCIA was just beginning to be implemented around the United States, I was assigned to work in a small Hispanic parish in Houston, Texas. Careful study of the Rite had alerted me to its potential, but as we began implementing it in the parish we soon discovered its catechetical gaps and silences. While individual rites were often new or unfamiliar, enacting them was fairly straightforward since the Rite spelled out matters in good detail (though, of course, their actual performance required planning, reflection, and a healthy measure of creativity). By contrast, the RCIA's perspectives on catechesis, while provocative and innovative, remained sketchy. As we discovered, the Rite offered little help on four catechetical issues critical to its implementation:

1. *Curriculum*: The RCIA is largely silent about curriculum. It specifies that each period has its own curricular goal (that is, evangelization, apprenticeship, repentance, immersion into mystery). But it offers few specifics. Yet educators who implement the Rite have to ask: What specifically are we to teach? What specific experiences should catechumens have of God and of community? What do they need to know, to feel, to taste, to do? What stories, what beliefs, what practices? What order should these things be given in? And in what depth?

2. *Teaching Styles*: The RCIA is also silent about how one teaches these things. Yet educators must ask: How might specific beliefs,

⁴⁹Kavanagh, "Introduction: Christian Initiation: Tactics and Strategy," 1-6 in *Made, Not Born*, at 4.

moral precepts, and virtues be best taught or nurtured? What methods best respect the dignity, call, and needs of catechumens? How specifically should catechists—in partnership with pastors, sponsors, and assembly—apprentice catechumens in the Christian life? Does one lecture? If so, how much? What about discussions? Small groups? Pairing of candidates and sponsors? Should candidates be encouraged to speak about their own experiences, whether of conversion or prayer or manner of life, or about their personal reflections on the Scriptures or moral issues? If so, how much and when? Should one require candidates to do service? If so, how much? How should teachers help them reflect on such experiences? Does each period, in accord with its specific character, demand different teaching methods, dynamics, and venues?

3. *Conversion*: The RCIA, as we saw, sets out a multifaceted vision of conversion, yet educators must worry about how this is to be fostered and discerned in the concrete. How, in practical terms, does such conversion manifest itself in the candidate? What evidence should one look for? In terms of catechesis: how should the curriculum and teaching styles converge so as to aid and nurture the intricate conversion the Rite calls for? It speaks of the community of the faithful “joining the catechumens . . . [in] renewing their own conversion.”⁵⁰ Implied in this is a recognition that the church too is in need of conversion. The problem is this: catechumens confront a church, both locally and worldwide, in need of reform. As a catechist, one has to ask: How does one bring the energy, insights, and charisms of the catechumens to challenge both the local community and the larger church? How does one avoid using the Rite simply as an instrument for socialization, for maintaining the status quo? How does one give catechumens a realistic sense of both the wisdom and the weaknesses of the church and at the same time honor their idealism and encourage them to help reform our communities?

4. *Faith and Culture*: The RCIA is a document for the universal church, but new members are initiated into quite specific local

⁵⁰ RCIA §4.

communities rooted in quite specific cultures. The Houston church I worked in was shaped both by its Hispanic cultural traditions and by its American setting. This bicultural character, in turn, shaped its social life, its liturgical habits, its popular pieties. Thus we had to discern: What is the interplay of the faith of the larger church and its local embodiment? To what extent does one pass on traditions of local popular piety? Which of these are helpful and nurturing and which are inessential? The people of the parish were, in the main, quite poor. They routinely faced prejudice and suffered deeply from prevailing economic and political structures. Thus it became critical to ask: How does one help catechumens make an option for the poor? How does one help them develop a faith-tempered critical stance to the dominant American culture?

The RCIA is what it calls itself: a rite. But the catechetical is woven into the very fabric of this rite.⁵¹ Addressing such catechetical gaps and silences is not an option. And if pastors and catechists rely on an ill-conceived or ineptly enacted catechesis, they risk undermining the Rite's power and subverting its pastoral vision.

In the decades since its promulgation, educators have worked to concretize the RCIA's sketchy ideals and fill in its catechetical gaps and silences.⁵² The first impulse in many parishes was—and

⁵¹ Aidan Kavanagh, "Critical Issues in the Growth of the RCIA in North America," *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation* 10 (1988): 10–21, at 10–11: "The RCIA must not be perceived to be a program or, as one often hears, a process. It is what it says it is: a rite. . . . [It] must be perceived and dealt with as such. And good liturgy does not proceed from our confusing it with educational programs or therapeutic processes." True, but certain conundrums in the implementation have been due to its catechetical sketchiness.

⁵² The US Catholic bishops have sought, in broad terms, to fill in elements by setting forth essential themes and pedagogical guidelines; see United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), which says that "the baptismal catechumenate is the source of inspiration for *all* catechesis" (p. 115). For a study of the implementation of the catechumenate at the parish level, see the five case studies examined by David Yamane and Sarah MacMillen, with Kelly Culver, *Real Stories of Christian Initiation: Lessons for and from the RCIA* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006).

still often is—to rely on a catechism to define the curriculum. Often this has been coupled with a lecture approach. In such catechumenates the theological content may be erudite and unequivocally orthodox, but the dynamic remains that of the old convert class: doctrinal in focus and cognitivist in conception of faith. Other parishes draw on a catechism for their outline of topics but couple this with various group-centered and experience-centered methods. Both approaches honor the RCIA’s call for a catechesis “complete in its coverage” but ignore its very next phrase: that catechesis be “accommodated to the liturgical year.”⁵³ But there is a deeper problem: both, often unconsciously, transmute the RCIA into a classroom enterprise where one learns lots about Christianity rather than an entry into a graced mystery whereby one slowly finds one’s way to becoming Christian.

Still other parishes have sought to honor the RCIA’s call to accommodate catechesis to the rhythms of the liturgical year by centering their gatherings around the church’s cycle of readings.⁵⁴ This has some advantages. It ensures that candidates directly grapple with the Scriptures and that those catechumens who have only a scant familiarity with its narratives and teachings acquire a basic biblical literacy. More deeply, this approach ensures that the word of God remains central. Catechumens are formed by and in that word. In the long run this provides converting individuals with a language to begin to root and orient and articulate the contours and rhythms of their conversion. This method, however, risks losing touch with the wider Christian tradition. We who are Catholic Christians do not tend to leap from the Bible to the present as

⁵³ RCIA §75.1.

⁵⁴ The North American Forum on the Catechumenate promoted this lectionary-based approach for many years; see, for example, Karen M. Hinman Powell and Joseph P. Sinwell, eds., *Breaking Open the Word of God: Resources for Using the Lectionary for Catechesis in the RCIA* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986–1988). It did so not only in publications but also in the workshops it offered in dioceses across the United States. I should note that the Forum officially closed its national office on June 28, 2013. Other experiments in contemporary approaches to RCIA catechesis can be found by surveying pastoral publications, especially *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation*.

though there had been no Christians in the centuries in between. We understand ourselves as inheritors of a vast, rich, and sacred tradition. We presume that the many, many generations of Christians who came before us possessed a profound, grace-filled wisdom and that they therefore have profound things to say to those of us alive now, whether their speaking be via the medium of established doctrine or theological reflection, of public liturgy or popular piety, of mystical spirituality or moral teaching. That tradition certainly includes vital, faith-defining official teachings but it also includes much, much more: saints worth imitating; artwork and music and literature worth exploring; prayer forms worth embracing; a moral vision that aspires to, indeed, requires us to seek to reshape and heal a broken world. Does such a liturgical-readings pedagogy honor such tradition? Do candidates come to meet their ancestors in faith? Do they become conversant in, at home with, and committed to the very tradition to which they are committing their lives?

THE INVESTIGATION

While educators have been experimenting with various pedagogies in hopes of both guiding catechumens to communion and respecting the RCIA's lofty vision, no less striking is what they have *not* been doing: turning to patristic authors for guidance. That may, on first hearing, sound rather odd. Yet turning to patristic authors is precisely what the liturgists who created the Rite did, and it is precisely what contemporary commentators on the Rite do. These liturgists and these commentators have argued that *if we want to interpret the RCIA accurately, then we need to understand the patristic sources that gave rise to it*. In this study I want to take the perspective of these liturgists and these commentators one step further and apply it to the RCIA's catechetical dimension. I will argue that *if the church has found itself renewed by the wisdom and richness of these ancient rituals and their underlying pastoral vision, then the church might find itself similarly renewed by our gleaning the best from ancient styles of and perspectives on catechesis*.

What I am proposing here—and calling for—is a sustained and in-depth exercise in *ressourcement*, that is, a “return to the sources.”

The term *ressourcement*, first coined by the French poet Charles Péguy (1873–1914), was popularized by the great Dominican theologian and architect of Vatican II, Yves Congar (1904–1995).⁵⁵ Congar, together with two other leading theologians of Vatican II, Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) and Jean Daniélou (1905–1974), championed *ressourcement* as a theological principle for the renewal of the church. All three focused their considerable scholarly energies especially on patristic sources to address an array of issues: liturgy, biblical interpretation, the nature of the church, the emergence of the hierarchy and the theology of the laity, the formation of doctrine and the nature of tradition. Their work dovetailed with and gave a deepened theological rationale for the Liturgical Movement that had begun earlier, in the mid-nineteenth century, and had focused on renewing contemporary liturgy through researches into the liturgies of the patristic era.⁵⁶ That research into patristic sources conducted by scholars within the Liturgical Movement, such as Odo Casel (1886–1948) and Josef Jungmann (1889–1975), laid the groundwork for the extraordinary series of liturgical

⁵⁵ On this movement and its key figures see Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); on the terminology and its background see John W. O'Malley, "The Hermeneutic of Reform: A Historical Analysis," Essay Series: "On the 50th Anniversary of Vatican II" (Set I), *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 517–46. On Congar's contribution see Gabriel Flynn, "Ressourcement, Ecumenism, and Pneumatology: The Contribution of Yves Congar to *Nouvelle Théologie*," 219–35 in *Ressourcement*; Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Anthony Oelrich, *A Church Fully Engaged: Yves Congar's Vision of Ecclesial Authority* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).

⁵⁶ On the Liturgical Movement see Keith F. Pecklers, "Ressourcement and the Renewal of Catholic Liturgy: On Celebrating the New Rite," 318–32 in *Ressourcement*; André Haquin, "The Liturgical Movement and Catholic Ritual Revision," 696–720 in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America, 1926–1955* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).

reforms that flowed out from the council.⁵⁷ The RCIA itself is one such dramatic instance of this “return to the sources.” The starting point for any such *ressourcement* was and remains a meticulous and multifaceted research. As Vatican II’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* expressed it: “In order that sound tradition be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress, a careful investigation—theological, historical, and pastoral—should always, first of all, be made into each section of the liturgy which is to be revised.”⁵⁸

Ressourcement is an exercise in deep remembering. Consider someone with amnesia. Without memory, a person does not know who he or she is. Memory gives us our bearings. It tells us who we are, where we are going, why we do what we do. This is true not only for individuals. It applies no less to nations, to ethnic groups, and, of course, to the church. If we do not take care of our communal memory as church we risk losing our very selves, forgetting who we are, where we are going, why we do what we do.⁵⁹ *Ressourcement* as scholarly exercise does not offer easy or immediate solutions to current problems. Its power is deeper and more subtle. It puts us in touch with the depths of the tradition, what Jaroslav Pelikan has called “the living faith of the dead.” Pelikan has argued—rightly, I believe—that to nurture the living faith of the living we need “to include the dead within the circle . . . of our conversation.”⁶⁰ *Ressourcement* presumes that those who have gone

⁵⁷ On this see especially Bugnini, *Reform of the Liturgy*; Marini Piero, *A Challenging Reform: Realizing the Vision of the Liturgical Renewal, 1963–1975*, ed. John R. Page and Keith F. Pecklers (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007); Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium*; John F. Baldovin, “The Development of the Liturgy: Theological and Historical Roots of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,” *Worship* 87 (2013): 517–32.

⁵⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 23. See Kathleen Hughes, “Meticulous Scholarship at the Service of a Living Liturgy,” 21–32 in *Summit and Source: Commemorating Josef A. Jungmann, S.J.*, ed. Joanne M. Pierce and Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 41.

⁶⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 82.

before us have something to say to us; that there exists a continuity between their living faith and ours; that they possess a wisdom, albeit a wisdom with quite definite limits, but a wisdom nonetheless. Robert Taft, one of the finest liturgical scholars of the last century, addressed with characteristic aplomb those who questioned the pastoral relevance of exploring Christian history (in this case, liturgical history):

Amidst all the contemporary talk of “relevance” in matters liturgical it remains my first conviction that nothing is so relevant as knowledge, nothing so irrelevant as ignorance. . . . So in spite of the (to me) rather perplexing discomfort that many Americans seem to have with history, there can be no theology without it. . . . Christian liturgy is a given, an object, an already existing reality like English literature. One discovers what English literature is only by reading Chaucer and Shakespeare and Eliot and Shaw and the contemporaries. So too with liturgy. If we want to know what Christmas and Chrismation, Eucharist and Easter mean, we shall not get far . . . by asking ourselves what we *think* they mean. We must plunge into the enormous stream of liturgical and patristic evidence and wade through it piece by piece, age by age, ever alert to pick up shifts in the current as each generation reaches for its own understanding of what it is we are about.⁶¹

What Taft says here about the study of the history of liturgy is no less applicable to the study of the history of catechesis. For nearly two centuries liturgical scholars have plunged into that vast, deep stream of patristic evidence, examining it piece by piece, age by age, doing so with sensitivity and acuity of insight. There has been no comparable investigation of Christian catechesis.

The catechumenate as resurrected by the RCIA was, in its origins, a patristic creation, and the church fathers who shaped it were themselves gifted teachers and, on occasion, gifted theorists of teaching. Their example and their counsels may help us not only

⁶¹ Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1997), ix–x.

restore the rites of the catechumenate but also craft a pedagogy appropriate to the subtle and often mysterious task of Christian initiation. These authors worked in a period prior to what has been called the “deritualization of catechesis.” In that era catechesis and liturgy were not as they are now—separate endeavors, each with its own expertise, ideologies, and methods. The two intertwined, each influencing the other. Catechesis took place in a liturgical setting, its learnings prompted ritual expression, and each rite of passage led, in turn, to deeper, renewed catechetical explorations. Studies of the patristic catechumenate should sober us in healthy ways. For many the catechumenate is a novelty and, as one sometimes reads, a solution to all manner of ills within the church.⁶² It was never that for the ancients. The catechumenate was simply part and parcel of the church’s life. The church fathers knew well its power and its limits. They devoted great energy to its maintenance but they had no illusions about the mixed motives and flawed morals of the candidates their churches attracted.

If educators hope to act upon such a *ressourcement* of catechesis they will need a large library of scholarly literature that spells out in depth and detail the many and varied contours of patristic catechesis. The problem is that most existing scholarly literature on the ancient catechumenate gives, at best, scant attention to the concerns of educators. Most of this literature has been done by and for liturgists. Their contributions have been extraordinary, but their analyses tend, naturally enough, to focus on passages and perspectives relevant to liturgy. Few have approached the texts with an educator’s eye in a sustained, systematic way. As Charles Paliard once remarked, “In the literature on the catechumenate,

⁶²On the risks of romanticizing the liturgy of the fourth and fifth centuries, see Paul Bradshaw, “The Liturgical Use and Abuse of Patristics,” 134–45 in *Liturgy Reshaped*, ed. Kenneth Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1982). See the response by John F. Baldovin, “The Uses of Liturgical History,” *Worship* 82 (2008): 2–18, reprinted in his *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 158–73. I will return to this issue in the final chapter.

[catechesis] takes on the image of a 'poor relation.'"⁶³ This state of affairs is ironic since many of the remarkable fourth- and fifth-century documents that liturgists have been studying are transcripts of catecheses. Liturgical scholars use these *not* to study catechesis but rather to reconstruct from them the structure and contours of the ancient rites. Such study is certainly legitimate, but these ancient documents *also* need to be studied in terms of what they are: records of catechesis.

There is, as yet, no trustworthy history of the ancient catechumenate, nothing comparable to the histories we have on the ancient trinitarian debates or on the ancient eucharistic rites. The handful of existing surveys of ancient catechesis are far too brief and, in many cases, methodologically deficient.⁶⁴ Too often such surveys tout what "the Fathers said" or what "the Fathers did"—as though the different catechumenates were largely the same.⁶⁵ As Paul Bradshaw has noted, contemporary liturgical scholars stress the rich local diversity in the rites of Christian initiation and warn against the tendency of

⁶³ Charles Paliard, "The Place of Catechesis in the Catechumenate," in *Adult Baptism and the Catechumenate*, ed. Johannes Wagner, *Concilium* 22 (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 88.

⁶⁴ Often cited is Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, trans. Edward J. Hassl (New York: Sadlier, 1979); in the notes for chapters 1, 3, and 4, I note its flawed assumptions and arguments from silence. Other surveys include P. de Puniet, "Catechuménat," *DACL* 2:2579–2621; Lawrence D. Folkemer, "A Study of the Catechumenate," *Church History* 15 (1946): 286–307, reprinted in *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church*, SEC 11, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 244–65; Josef Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great*, trans. Francis A. Brunner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 74–86; Robert M. Grant, "Development of the Christian Catechumenate," 32–50 in *Made Not Born*.

⁶⁵ For example, Joseph Lecuyer, "Théologie de l'initiation chrétienne chez les Pères," *La Maison-Dieu* 58 (1959): 5–26; Maurice Jourion, "Catechèse et liturgie chez les Pères," *La Maison-Dieu* 140 (1979): 41–54. A contrast is the careful methodology used by Everett Ferguson's "Catechesis and Initiation," 229–68 in *The Origins of Christendom in the West*, ed. Alan Kreider (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001); he keeps clear the distinctive accent and style of each author he surveys.

an earlier generation of scholars to take evidence from diverse locales and harmonize it into a single picture.⁶⁶ Such harmonizing of patristic catechesis is no less misleading. Put simply, what may have been practiced in one region or in one era may have been absent in others. Such surveys gloss over the fact that surviving sources from the ancient catechumenate are often fragmentary, that we get more of a glimpse than a sustained portrait. Only a few studies have focused on a single locale and sought to reconstruct, with all deliberate caution, what its specific catechumenate looked like.⁶⁷ Only from a series of such studies can we hope eventually to have a general critical history of the ancient catechumenate.

Thus this investigation. It will be a case study, a sustained and in-depth exploration of a single ancient catechumenate, that of Augustine of Hippo. My primary focus will be on Augustine the catechist and preacher. While I take care to map out whatever one can unearth of the fifth-century North African liturgy, my concern is with Augustine's teaching, exploring what he did with his baptismal candidates, what he said to them, and what his reflections on the experience were. The approach will be to read the texts with an educator's eye, to chart the course and rhythms of his catechesis, to note what doctrines he thought urgent, what language he used, what feelings he roused, what actions he called for, how he envisioned conversion and how he nurtured it.

Chapter 1 provides the background, surveying inherited structures and broad trends within the fourth-century catechumenate. This will enable us to better situate and name Augustine's unique approach to things. Chapter 2 focuses on Augustine's own experience as a catechumen within the catechumenate in Milan. This will

⁶⁶ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 144–46.

⁶⁷ For example, Thomas M. Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1967); also Craig Alan Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), who took his cues from the first edition of *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (see his comments on pp. xvii–xviii).

give important clues about Augustine's habits as a teacher of catechumens, the ways that he, like most of us, drew guidance from personal experience and, to some extent, taught others as he had been taught. The next chapters parallel, in a rough way, the four periods of the RCIA. I say "in a rough way" because the periods and rites of Augustine's catechumenate, while similar in some ways to those of the RCIA, do not match it precisely. Chapter 3 examines Augustine's approach to evangelization, particularly as he sets it out in his treatise *On Catechizing Beginners* (*De catechizandis rudibus*). Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the catechumenate period. In the fourth century, ordinary catechumens (as opposed to advanced ones) did not receive special instructions; they simply attended Sunday and weekday liturgies of the Word. This meant that their catechetical instruction came from whatever they could glean from ordinary sermons. Chapter 4 will therefore survey Augustine's day-to-day habits as a preacher as well as his theories on the art of preaching. Chapter 5 examines Augustine's approach to curriculum by studying a four-month sequence of sermons on John's gospel and the Psalms he gave to both catechumens and faithful. Chapter 6 focuses on his Lenten sermons to his advanced catechumens (or "petitioners," as he called them). These include his sermons on the scrutiny, on the handing over of the Creed, and on the handing over of the Lord's Prayer. Chapter 7 examines Augustine's mystagogical sermons, especially those given on Easter Sunday morning, during which he instructed the newly baptized on the Eucharist, and those given eight days later when they took off their baptismal robes and once more mixed in with the larger assembly. In chapter 8, I try to set out ways that Augustine's catechetical practices and reflections may be of value for contemporary catechesis.

In this study I will read sources, as I noted, with *an educator's eye*. Education can mean many things, of course, and contemporary educational theories and categories have, to a large degree, been shaped by the realities of schools; as we have seen, the catechumenate is not schooling and involves much more than matters intellectual. Therefore let me spell out briefly the educational lenses that shape this investigation. I have chosen ones that both respect the unique dynamics of the catechumenate and grapple with matters

of urgent concern to educators. The four catechetical “gaps and silences” of the RCIA I cited earlier provide the headings:

1. *Curriculum*—that is, the “what” of catechesis: What *past* traditions (stories, beliefs, practices, prayers) of the Christian community did Augustine hand on? What *present* experiences of God and of community did he see as constitutive? Specifically, what topics did he touch upon? What order did he follow? In what depth did he treat them? How did he envision interaction between different elements of his curriculum, that is, between instruction, liturgy, and day-to-day apprenticeship in Christian living? My approach will be to reconstruct his working curriculum from the topics embedded in what survives of his day-to-day catechesis.

2. *Teaching Styles*—that is, the “how” of catechesis. Here again, Augustine’s varied approaches to teaching will have to be discerned from the surviving records we have of his practice. In analyzing these, key questions will be: How did he instruct? How did he gear his message to address both mind and heart? How did he try to educate the body (as a teacher of athletes would)?⁶⁸ How did he shape the symbolic imagination of his candidates (as a teacher of artists would)? How did he see the rites as educative? How did he interrelate rites and verbal instruction? In what settings did these take place?

3. *Conversion*—that is, the “why” of catechesis: Education is a teleological activity. Every act of education works, whether explicitly or implicitly, with distinct *ends* or *goals* in view and, as we saw, the goal of the catechuminate is conversion. Thus: How did Augustine see his curriculum and teaching styles converging so as to shape candidates’ conversion? How did he envision conversion? As a journey? as Christ-centered? as ecclesial? By what standards did he evaluate it? Was it his primary goal, or were there others? Did he socialize candidates into an ecclesial status quo or did he alert them to community weaknesses and sinfulness? If so, how?

⁶⁸Seeing the body as a focus of education is largely neglected in educational and catechetical discussions. Ancients, however, were quite conscious of it. See Henri Ir ne Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), esp. 116–32.

What social habits and attitudes did he expect candidates to manifest in their day-to-day lives?

4. *Faith and Culture*—that is, the “where” of catechesis: Educators necessarily deal with specific people in a specific cultural, economic, social, ethnic, and intellectual milieu. This implies the need to use the methods of social history in such a way as to respect the social roots and moorings of Augustine’s thought and practice. Thus it will be important to ask: How was his message shaped by his late fourth- / early fifth-century North African context? What economic, social, and ethnic realities did he address? How did religious movements and intellectual frameworks of that time shape his formulation? Did he envision any clash between his community’s faith and the broader Roman culture? If so, how did he address it? How did he deal with differences between the faith expression of his local community and those of other churches?

Concentrating on Augustine and his catechumenate has its advantages and its challenges. He is the only patristic author from whom we possess a sampling of documents for each of the four periods of Christian initiation. We also possess an array of more theoretical reflections in which he speaks directly to one or another aspect of his understanding of the catechumenate and of catechesis, and these theoretical works can be compared with his actual practice, for which there is a large surviving body of texts. Even by a conservative count we have at least twenty-nine sermons (as well as four letters) directed to catechumens, nineteen to elect, and thirty-five to neophytes (for a listing, see charts 4, 9, and 14). At least as important is that we can put all this into context with a precision virtually impossible with other ancient figures. Simply put, we know more about Augustine than about almost any other figure in the ancient world. Over the last century, scholars and archaeologists have uncovered extraordinarily detailed information about Augustine’s church in Hippo Regius and the surrounding region. We also possess remarkably precise information on the history of fourth-century North Africa, not only religious events and conflicts but also its varied economic realities, its complex social structures, and its regional cultures.

Despite this wealth of information, Augustine's catechumenate has received relatively little attention from liturgists.⁶⁹ Most studies of the ancient catechumenate and the ancient rites of initiation concentrate on Augustine's contemporaries—Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia—partly because the data from each of these authors is limited to a handful of relatively accessible and fairly brief documents. With Augustine there is almost too much data, and that data defies easy collection, scattered as it is amid some nine hundred (unevenly edited) sermons. There are, as well, many scattered references in Augustine's letters, polemical works, and theological treatises. We have a sprawling jigsaw puzzle of data, much of it fragmentary. Surviving sermons do not, for the most part, represent what Augustine actually did in any given year. One important exception is, as we will see in chapter 5, a four-month sequence of sermons. Surviving sermons come from all periods of his career. Some can be dated precisely, others cannot. But the material is sufficiently rich to provide a set of tableaux from Augustine's catechumenate. For the purposes of this investigation, that should suffice.

⁶⁹ The classic reconstruction of the initiation rites in Augustine's church is by Benedict Busch, "*De initiatione christiana secundum sanctum Augustinum*," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 52 (1938): 159–78; "*De modo quo sanctus Augustinus descripsit initiationem christianam*," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 52 (1938): 385–483. Others include Frederic Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 347–87, 453–67; Suzanne Poque, "Introduction," *Augustin d'Hippone: Sermons pour la Pâque*, SC 116 (Paris: Cerf, 1966; rev. ed., 2003); R. DeLatte, "S. Augustin et le baptême: Étude liturgico-historique du rituel baptismal des adultes chez saint Augustin," *Questions liturgiques* 56 (1975): 177–223, and 57 (1976): 41–55; Victor Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation chrétiennes du II^e au VI^e siècle: Esquisse historique et signification d'après leur principaux témoins* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1988), 381–99; Thomas M. Finn, "It Happened One Saturday Night: Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58 (1990): 589–616. Few scholarly surveys of the ancient catechumenate and rites of initiation have incorporated such studies into their accounts; most discuss Augustine almost solely in terms of his teachings on infant baptism and on original sin.

Chart 1

The Rites and Structure of the RCIA

Period / Rite	Length / Date	Goal	Catechesis / Symbols
First Period:			
<i>Evangelization</i>	Not specified	*Initial conversion	*Hearing the Gospel
<i>Name for Candidates:</i> Inquirers			
First Step:			
<i>Acceptance into Order of Catechumens</i>	Not specified	*Welcome	*Signed with cross *Liturgy of Word
		*Mutual commitment	*Receive Bible [*Renunciation of false worship] [*New name]
Second Period:			
<i>Catechumenate</i>	1–3 years	*Strengthen faith	*Morality of New Testament
		*Sense mystery of salvation	*Prayer experience
		*Change of outlook and conduct	*Dogmas, precepts
<i>Name for Candidates:</i> Catechumens			*Apprenticeship in Christian life by sponsors
<i>Rites during 2nd Period:</i>			
a. Blessings	Anytime during period	*Sign of God's love & church's care	
b. Exorcisms		*Need for God's help in struggle	
c. Anointings		*Strengthening faith, hold to it	
Second Step:			
<i>Election, enrollment of names</i>	First Sunday of Lent	*Approval of candidates for baptism	*Inquiry by bishop on candidates
			*Affirmation by godparents *Enroll names

Chart 1—Cont'd
The Rites and Structure of the RCIA

Period / Rite	Length / Date	Goal	Catechesis / Symbols
Third Period:			
<i>Purification / Illumination</i>	Lent	*Intense spiritual preparation *Purify mind and heart	*Do penance *Guide interior reflection more than instruct
<i>Name for Candidates: the Elect</i>			
<i>Rites during third period</i>			
a. Scrutinies	Third, Fourth, Fifth Sundays of Lent	*Inspire self-search *Uncover, heal the defective & sinful *Strengthen the good	*Christ the living water *Christ the light of the world *Christ the resurrection & life
b. Present Creed	Third Week of Lent	*Recall salvation history	*Hand over, instruct on heart of church's faith
c. Present Lord's Prayer	Fifth Week of Lent	*Fill with spirit of adoption	*Hand over, instruct on heart of church's prayer
d. Recite Creed	Holy Saturday	*Elect recite Creed	*Instruct on duty to proclaim Gospel
e. <i>Ephphatha</i>	Holy Saturday	*To hear & speak Word of God	*Touch ears and lips

Chart 1—Cont'd
The Rites and Structure of the RCIA

Period / Rite	Length / Date	Goal	Catechesis / Symbols
Third Step:			
<i>Sacraments of initiation:</i>	Easter Vigil	*Rebirth *Inaugurating life of baptized	*Vigil readings *Renunciation of sin /devil *Profession of faith
*Baptism			*Baptism: Triple immersion
*Confirmation			*Clothe with baptismal robe
*Eucharist			*Confirmation: Anointing, handlaying *First Eucharist
Fourth Period:			
<i>Mystagogy</i>	Easter to Pentecost	*Deepen grasp of paschal mystery *Experience welcome of faithful	*Celebrate Eucharist *Mystagogical catechesis *Do works of charity

The Fourth-Century Catechumenate

In the late fourth century the one whose conversion made headlines was not Augustine, but his friend Paulinus of Nola (ca. 352–431).¹ Born to spectacular wealth and vast lands in Spain, Aquitaine, and Italy, Paulinus was an aristocrat, a *vir clarissimus*. He served for a time as governor of the province of Campania and should have gone on to enjoy an illustrious political career among the senatorial elite of the Roman Empire. Suddenly, in 394, he renounced “the world”—career, rank, property. After ordination in Barcelona he retreated to Nola (not far from modern Naples), where he spent his days as its bishop. Paulinus was a gifted and erudite poet, one of the finest in the Christian world. He was also a man of letters—and letters in the most literal sense—for he carried on a far-flung correspondence with Christian notables around the empire. For over twenty-five years Augustine and Paulinus kept up a lively, intimate correspondence without ever meeting one another face to face.

Paulinus, like Augustine, was baptized in his thirties and came to savor and celebrate baptism’s life-transforming powers. He was once enlisted by another friend of his, Sulpicius Severus, to compose poetry to be inscribed on the walls of a lavish new baptistery, words that the newly baptized might ponder just as they stepped

¹On Paulinus’s career see Dennis Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Catherine Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 208–40.

out from the font. Paulinus complied and sent Severus these verses:

Here this fathering-forth soul-restoring font, imbued
by divine light, stirs up living water.
The Holy Spirit drops down from heaven into its currents
and marries its sacred waters to heaven's fountain-flow.
Its sea-swirl conceives God, and its nurturing waters
birth forth a holy progeny by seed eternal.
Awe-inspiring, this care of God. The sinner is flood-plunged,
then emerges from these very same waters uprighted.
So a person, in a good-fortuned going down and rising up,
dies to things earthly, is born to things unceasing.
Sin withers, life returns. The old Adam is buried
and the new Adam is born to kingdoms eternal.²

These verses, aswirl with verbs of dying and rising, capture in a nutshell how ancient Christians viewed the life-altering passage of baptism. Paulinus's words would not have been carved into stone but rather inlaid as mosaic, the letters spelled out in glittering bright-colored tesserae. Mosaic was the great art form of Augustine's and Paulinus's day.³

In this chapter I assemble a mosaic of a different sort, a "mosaic" of the early catechumenate. First, I set out fragments from the third century to illustrate some of what Augustine inherited. Here I focus on two of his North African predecessors, Tertullian and Cyprian, whose care of catechumens and whose sometimes hard-

²Paulinus of Nola, *ep.* 32.5 (CSEL 29:279–80); author's translation. On this episode, see Robin M. Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 209–10; G elle Herbert de la Portbarr -Viard, *Descriptions monumentales et discours sur l' dification chez Paulin de Nole: Le regard et la lumi re (epist. 32 et carm. 27 et 28)* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

³Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage*, Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology (Oxford: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1978); Aïcha Ben Abed, *Tunisian Mosaics: Treasures from Roman Africa* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2006).

line views on baptism proved uneasy inheritances, ones that Augustine at times felt it necessary to amend, even contradict. Then we will range about through an array of catechumenal texts from the fourth century, especially from the Greek East, to highlight broader patterns. These come from Augustine's contemporaries or near-contemporaries. Some illustrate points of commonality; others, points of contrast. With this mosaic as backdrop we will be in a better position to set Augustine's catechetical artistry in its proper frame.

THIRD-CENTURY INHERITANCES: NORTH AFRICA

The Platonist philosopher Celsus, a shrewd and caustic critic of the Christian movement, once quipped: "If all people wanted to be Christians, the Christians would no longer want them."⁴ Celsus's remark, for all its irony, had more than a grain of truth in it. One detects a rigorist, sectarian strain running through many catechumenal and baptismal documents from the third century.⁵

Few illustrate such rigorist attitudes more pungently than Tertullian (ca. 170–215), a North African writer active in the church of Carthage and one of the pioneers of Latin theology.⁶ His writings,

⁴Celsus, quoted by Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.9 (SC 136:28–30); trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 133.

⁵On North African Christianity in this period see Maureen A. Tilley, "North Africa," 381–96 in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *Origins to Constantine*, ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); François Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, trans. Edward Smither (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009). For an overview of the liturgy in the period prior to Constantine, see Maxwell E. Johnson, "The Apostolic Tradition," 32–75 in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶Jerome, in *De viribus illustribus* 53, gives a thumbnail biography repeated in many modern accounts: that Tertullian's father was proconsular centurion; that Tertullian himself had been a presbyter of the Carthaginian church; that "because of the envy and reproaches of the clerics of the Roman church, he had lapsed into Montanism" (trans. Thomas P. Halton, *St. Jerome: On Illustrious Men*, FOTC 100:74). Timothy Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary*

especially *On Baptism (De baptismo)*, the earliest surviving treatise on the sacrament, offer glimpses of the third-century catechumenate and the North African rite of baptism.⁷ They also display his passionate concern for catechumens, whom he defined as “recruits who have just recently begun to give ear to the flow of divine discourse and who, like puppies newly born, creep about uncertainly, with eyes as yet unopened.”⁸

Tertullian makes no mention of a rite of entry into the catechumenate or of the catechumenate’s exact length or possible stages. But he sets out in high relief what Timothy Barnes has called “the dominant motif of African Christianity: uncompromising rejection of an alien world.”⁹ This is evident in *On the Shows (De spectaculis)*, a work Tertullian addressed to catechumens and neophytes. He warned that they inhabit a demon-possessed world: “There is no place—whether streets or marketplace or baths or taverns or even our own homes—that is completely free of idols: Satan and his angels have filled the whole world.”¹⁰ Tertullian sought to convince readers to shun four locales and the popular entertainments they offered: horse races in the circus; gladiatorial combats and wild-animal hunts in the amphitheater; athletic competitions in the stadium; bawdy plays in the theater. The linchpin of his argument was that these were “pomps of the devil” and thus contrary to baptismal vows:

Study, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3–59, dismantles each of those claims and offers a reconstruction of Tertullian’s thought and career on the basis of his surviving works. See also David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian*, ECF (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁷ For the text, with commentary, see Ernest Evans, ed., *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964); R. F. Refoulé and Maurice Drouzy, eds., *Tertullien: Traité du baptême*, rev. ed., SC 35 (Paris: Cerf, 2002). For a translation see Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 119–32 (hereafter abbreviated “WEC”).

⁸ Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 6.1 (CCL 1:329); trans. William LeSaint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, ACW 28:24.

⁹ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 62.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 8.9 (CCL 1:235); trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, *Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works*, FOTC 40:69. He mentions catechumens and neophytes in 1.1 (CCL 1:227).

I shall now appeal to the prime and principal authority of our seal itself. When we step into the water and profess the Christian faith in the terms prescribed by its law, we bear public witness that we have renounced the devil and his pomps and his angels. . . . So, if it be proved true that the whole apparatus of these shows originates from idolatry, we will have reached a decision in advance that our profession of faith in baptism refers also to these entertainments, since they belong to the devil and his pomps and his angels because of the idolatry involved.¹¹

For Tertullian, renouncing Satan during the rite of baptism had wide implications for Christian living. In *The Crowns*, he used this same argument to condemn Christian soldiers who joined pagan confrères in wearing victory crowns and swearing oaths of allegiance.¹² In *The Apparel of Women*, he appealed to it to denounce women who used rouge or dyed their hair or wore gold jewelry or fashionable seashells.¹³ But his most far-reaching appeal appears in *On Idolatry*.¹⁴ Here he sets out a long list of professions forbidden to Christians, arguing that, because of baptismal vows, craftsmen could not sculpt or paint pagan figures; weavers, bronze workers, silversmiths, stonemasons, building contractors, and engravers could not work on temples, altars, or shrines, barring them from the most lucrative construction projects of the day. Nor could Christians be teachers. The school curriculum required teaching books that glorified pagan gods, and the school calendar revolved around pagan feasts. Nor could they serve in politics since as magistrates they would be required, either in person or by delegation, to

¹¹ Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 4.1 (CCL 1:231); trans. Arbesmann, FOTC 40: 56 (modified). On this theme, see Jan H. Waszink, "Pompa diaboli," *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1947): 13–41.

¹² Tertullian, *De corona* 13.7 (CCL 2:1062).

¹³ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 1.2.4 (CCL 1:345); also 2.5.1–3.

¹⁴ For this work, see Jan H. Waszink and J. C. M. Van Winden, *Tertullian: De idololatria: Critical Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1987). Barnes, *Tertullian*, 100, argues that "Tertullian is writing for recent converts," though the work does not explicitly reference either catechumens or neophytes.

help with sacrifices, raise taxes for maintenance of pagan temples, sponsor gladiatorial games, and order the torture and execution of criminals.¹⁵ Christian businessmen were scrupulously to avoid oaths—more or less impossible since business contracts contained an oath to the gods.¹⁶ This advice, if followed, meant Christians had to make a profound break from their everyday world. Not surprisingly, many complained: “I have nothing else to live by.”¹⁷ Tertullian was unsympathetic. Baptismal renunciation formed the bedrock of Christian morals—at least, his interpretation of them—and its exigencies had to be followed no matter the cost.

Once, in a rapid summary, Tertullian listed ascetical exercises expected of catechumens on the eve of their baptism: “Those preparing for baptism should invoke God through fervent prayers, fasting, genuflections, and vigils”; they also “prepare themselves by confessing all their past sins,” though such confession was not done “publicly.”¹⁸ This summary gives no outline of catechetical training, but we possess two catecheses that Tertullian directed to catechumens: *On Penitence* and *On Baptism*. He and others seem to have spoken to catechumens at community meals and other gatherings.¹⁹ In *On Penitence*, he complained about two pastoral problems Augustine later wrestled with: catechumens who delayed baptism because they feared the rigors of public penance should they commit sin on the far side of baptism; and catechumens who

¹⁵ Tertullian, *De idololatria* 3-17 (Waszink, *Tertullian*, 26–57).

¹⁶ Tertullian, *De idololatria* 23 (Waszink, *Tertullian*, 66–68). Waszink and van Winden, *Tertullian: De idololatria*, 285, note: “In business contracts of the day, there were oaths to pagan gods. While a Christian only had to sign the document, they—in Tertullian’s view—made the words of the document their own.”

¹⁷ Quoted by Tertullian, *De idololatria* 5 (Waszink, *Tertullian*, 28–29).

¹⁸ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 20 (SC 35:94); trans. WEC 1:131.

¹⁹ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 117, notes that in *Apologeticum* 39 (CCL 1:152–53) Tertullian mentions that at or after their common meal Christians were invited to read from Scripture or to speak. Barnes concludes that these and several other works (e.g., *De oratione*, *De patientia*) may have been delivered in these circumstances. These works retain marks of an oral address but also have a literary polish that indicates they were reworked before publication.

felt justified in maintaining a lower moral standard that they might “steal the intervening time and make of it an interlude for sinning rather than for learning not to sin.”²⁰ Tertullian denounced both types and encouraged catechumens in his audience to strive for rigor of life: “We are not baptized so that we may cease committing sin but because we have ceased, we are already clean of heart. This, surely, is the first baptism of the catechumen.”²¹ While Tertullian had deep respect for baptism’s powers, he did not regard the rite as magical. The water bath ratified what the catechumenate’s discipline had wrought. As he famously put it, “Christians are made not born (*fiunt non nascantur Christiani*).”²² And the catechumenate was precisely where Christians were made.

His other catechesis, *On Baptism*, has the earmarks of a final address directed to those soon to be baptized.²³ He opens with an intriguing claim: “As little fish who take our name from Jesus Christ, the great Fish (*ichthus*), we are born in water, and it is only by remaining in the water that we are saved.”²⁴ He then took up an issue that Augustine’s teacher, Ambrose, would also discuss: candidates disappointed by the “simplicity” of the Christian mysteries. Pagan shrines in that era used elaborate apparatus to create the impression of miraculous events: reflecting pools that caused strange light effects; fireworks to suggest a god’s departure;

²⁰ Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 6.9 (CCL 1:330); trans. LeSaint, ACW 28:24.

²¹ Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 6.17 (CCL 1:331); trans. LeSaint, ACW 28:26.

²² Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 18.4 (CCL 1:118), trans. Robert D. Sider, *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 38. Tertullian uses the similar expression “making Christians” in *De baptismo* 18. The aphorism echoes Seneca: “One is not born wise, but becomes wise” (*On Anger* 2.10.6).

²³ For an overview of Tertullian’s theology of baptism and the rite as he describes it, see Alistair Stewart-Sykes, “Manumission and Baptism in Tertullian’s Africa: A Search for the Origin of Confirmation,” *Studia Liturgica* 31 (2001): 129–49; Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 336–50. Tertullian, *De baptismo* 20 (SC 35:96) closes with appeal for prayer similar to John Chrysostom’s final instructions to candidates before their baptism (see *Baptismal Instruction* 11.30–31).

²⁴ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 1 (SC 35:65); trans. WEC 1:119 (modified).

mirrors that allowed initiates to see the god through a glass darkly; underground channels and piping that converted a stream of water into one of wine; doors equipped with spring mechanisms so that they appeared to open miraculously; statues that seemed to speak in an eerie, distant voice.²⁵ Christian rites had no such special effects. It is little wonder candidates might feel disappointed. Tertullian tried to head off the reaction: "Nothing so assails the human mind as the contrast between the apparent simplicity of divine work and the greatness of the effects promised. This is true. Everything happens with the greatest simplicity, without splendor, without extraordinary preparation. In short, without any cost a person goes down into the water and is washed while certain words are said. The person emerges from the water not much or not at all cleaner. This is why some do not believe that eternity is gained in this way."²⁶

Tertullian then embarked on a long panegyric on the high dignity of water. First, he surveyed its role in the Old Testament: the waters at creation that brought forth the first living creatures and became "the abode of the divine Spirit who preferred it to other elements"; the waters of the flood that was "the baptism of this world," while the dove of Noah "which is the Holy Spirit, flies towards the earth, that is, toward our body which comes out of the bath washed of its former sins"; the waters of the Red Sea signifying that "pagans are released from the world by means of water; they leave behind the devil, their old tyrant, crushed down under the water"; the figure of Moses sweetening a desert spring by throwing in a piece of wood ("this wood was Christ himself").²⁷ In lapidary fashion he then insisted, "where Christ is, there is water," and followed with a compendium of water episodes from the gospels:

Christ was baptized in water. And when he was invited to the wedding feast, water initiated the beginning of his power. Announcing

²⁵ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 135–36.

²⁶ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 2 (SC 35:65–66); trans. WEC 1:119.

²⁷ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 3-9 (SC 35:67–79); trans. WEC 1:120–24.

the word, he invites those who are thirsty to drink of his eternal water. Speaking of love, he declares that the cup of water given to one's neighbor is an act of love. It is next to a well that Christ regains his strength. He walks on water, taking delight in crossing over it; with water he washes the feet of his disciples. Witnesses in regard to baptism continue on to the Passion: . . . water flows forth when Christ's side is pierced by the soldier's lance.²⁸

Tertullian's comments here presuppose a high level of biblical literacy among his catechumens. Why else would he have felt at ease in using such rapid-fire and often oblique allusions?

Tertullian is the earliest writer to recommend Easter as the privileged day for celebrating baptism, arguing for its "greater solemnity . . . since the passion of the Lord into which we are baptized was accomplished" then.²⁹ This linking of Christ's passion with baptism echoes Paul's comments in Romans 6. In the fourth century this Pauline theology of baptism—that Christians are baptized into the death of Christ—would become the paradigm. But it was not that in the third century. In the Syriac East at this time the prime gospel archetype was not Jesus' passion but his baptism, and that archetype gave rise to a quite different interpretation of baptism: that the Holy Spirit anointed Christians into the prophetic power of the Messiah.³⁰ Tertullian's advocacy of Easter foreshadowed another trend. In the centuries to come, Easter became the favored day for the celebration of baptism in the Latin West. But elsewhere other days, such as Epiphany (which became associated with Jesus' baptism), would be no less significant. Tertullian himself acknowledged other suitable days. He spoke of Pentecost as a "propitious time for celebrating baptism," noting that "during these days the Risen Lord frequently showed himself to his disciples" and that "this was when the grace of the Holy Spirit was given to them and which allowed them to hope in the Lord's

²⁸ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 9 (SC 35:79); trans. WEC 1:124.

²⁹ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 19 (SC 35:93); author's translation.

³⁰ See Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

coming.” He then added: “Every day belongs to the Lord. Every hour, every time is suitable for baptism. Even though the ceremony might be different, grace is in no way affected.”³¹

In *On Baptism* (and elsewhere) Tertullian offers intriguing, if passing, comments on the North African rites of initiation. His remarks are not like accounts found in church orders of the era (e.g., *Didascalia*) or later mystagogical catecheses that permit scholars to reconstruct a step-by-step sequence of ancient rites. But his comments are precious because they are among our earliest glimpses into the rite. First, he says that there was a public renunciation of Satan: that at some point prior to baptism candidates “declare in the assembly, under the bishop’s imposed hand, that [they] renounce the devil, his pomps, and his angels.”³² Second, he gives the earliest mention of a blessing-prayer prayed over the baptismal waters: “The Spirit comes from heaven, hovers over the waters which it sanctifies with its presence, and the waters, thus sanctified, are in turn granted the power to sanctify.”³³ Third, he says that the words that accompanied baptismal immersion were “interrogations somewhat lengthier than the Lord prescribed in the Gospel.”³⁴ We today use an indicative formula (“I baptize you . . .”) and draw on the words of the risen Jesus from the end of

³¹ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 19 (SC 35:93–94); trans. WEC 1:131. On this see Paul F. Bradshaw, “‘*Diem baptismo sollemniorum*’: Initiation and Easter in Christian Antiquity,” 41–51 in *EYAOΓHMA: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S.J.*, Studia Anselmiana 110 (Rome: 1993), 41–51, repr. in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, 137–47; Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 75–86.

³² Tertullian, *De corona* 3.2 (CCL 2:1042): “*aliquanto prius in ecclesia sub antistitis manu.*” *Antistitis* (“presider”) ordinarily refers to the bishop. Stewart-Sykes, “Manumission,” 132–33, argues for reading the passage literally (“under the hand”) rather than more figuratively (“under the control”), noting that the bishop has his hand on the candidate, in a gesture of exorcism that parallels and complements the later episcopal Spirit-invoking hand-laying after baptism. There also seems to have been a second renunciation “when entering the water” (*De spectaculis* 4); see the discussion in Stewart-Sykes, “Manumission,” 130–31; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 340.

³³ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 4 (SC 35:69); trans. WEC 1:121.

³⁴ Tertullian, *De corona* 3.3 (CCL 2:1042); author’s translation.

Matthew's gospel, and those words accompany a triple dunking or pouring. In the later North African rite and elsewhere in the Latin West the words that accompanied immersion were not a single indicative sentence but a triple interrogation: "Do you believe in God the Father . . . ? in Jesus Christ . . . ? in the Holy Spirit . . . ?" and each question included added phrases from the local creed. So when Tertullian speaks here of "interrogations somewhat lengthier" than Jesus' words, that seems to be what he means. Fourth, Tertullian gives the earliest mention we have that baptism involved a *triple* immersion: "Christ commanded that his disciples baptize into the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . . and so it is with us that we are immersed not just once but three times, once at each individual name into each individual person" of the Trinity.³⁵ And it was, indeed, an immersion, not just a sprinkling. Tertullian regularly used the verb *baptizare* ("to baptize"), a Greek word transliterated into Latin; he also used descriptive Latin verbs more familiar to his listeners: *tingere* ("to dip, to dye") and *mergere* ("to immerse, to plunge"). For Tertullian baptism was a *lavacrum*, "a bath." It involved the whole body.³⁶

After the triple immersion, other rites followed. First, a person was "thoroughly anointed with blessed oil in conformity with ancient practice whereby a person was customarily raised to the priesthood by being anointed with oil from a horn. . . . The name 'Christ' has its origin here."³⁷ Later, Western theology would

³⁵ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 26 (CCL 2:1198); author's translation.

³⁶ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 341.

³⁷ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 7 (SC 35:76); trans. WEC 1:123. By contrast, in third-century Syria an anointing with chrism occurred *before* not *after* baptism and was interpreted as an incorporation into Christ's messianic and prophetic life. On this see Gabriele Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications," *Worship* 52 (1978): 24–45, repr. in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, 58–81, and summarized in Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 146–55, and Johnson, *Rites of Initiation*, 55–63. This *single* anointing differs from later Roman practice, which had a *double* anointing, the first by the presbyters, the second by the bishop, which was interpreted as the gift of the Spirit. In Tertullian (and later Cyprian) the gift of the Spirit is associated with the imposition of hands.

interpret such an anointing as the gift of the Holy Spirit, but Tertullian interpreted this chrismation in terms of its priestly and Christic implications. Second, Tertullian says that “hands were laid upon us with a blessing invoked, inviting the Holy Spirit to come.”³⁸ His comments on these postbaptismal rites of anointing and hand laying are the earliest Western mention of a rite that, centuries later, followed a separatist course, breaking off to become the independent sacrament of confirmation.³⁹ But as Tertullian indicates here, these rites were integral to baptism; they were all of a piece. Finally, he says that Eucharist followed immediately: “Having stepped forth from the font, we are given a taste of a mixture of milk and honey, and from that day for a whole week, we forego our daily bath. We also receive the sacrament of the Eucharist which the Lord entrusted to all at the hour for supper, at our early morning meetings, and then from the hand of none but the bishops.”⁴⁰ First Communion in Tertullian’s North Africa was thus an unusual one: the communicant partook not only of bread and wine, but before that was given a taste of honeyed milk. The newly baptized had entered a Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Tertullian closed his address to the soon-to-be-baptized catechumens with a dramatic final exhortation:

Therefore, blessed ones, God’s grace awaits you. You will ascend from the most holy bath of new birth. For the first time you will extend your hands with your brethren in the house of your mother.

³⁸ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 8 (SC 35:76); trans. WEC 1:123. Cf. Cyprian, *ep.* 73.9, who also interprets the imposition of hands as the gesture by which newly baptized “receive the Holy Spirit and are made perfect with the Lord’s seal.”

³⁹ These gestures, set against evidence of Syrian practice of a single chrismation prior to the water bath, have been much discussed in liturgical scholarship with regard to later Western practices of and interpretations of confirmation. See Gabriele Winkler, “Confirmation or Chrismation? A Study in Comparative Liturgy,” *Worship* 58 (1984): 2–17; Frank C. Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered: Rite and Meaning,” *Worship* 59 (1985): 345–70; both reprinted in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, 202–18 and 219–37.

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *De corona* 3.2 (CCL 2:1042); trans. Sider, 123.

You will ask the Father, ask the Lord for the abundance of his charisms as a special gift of divine grace. Ask and you will receive, he says. You have asked, and you have found. You have knocked, and it has been opened to you. I request only one more thing: that you remember in your prayers Tertullian the sinner.⁴¹

Tertullian's plea presumes what became a stock North African belief: that the newly baptized stepped out from the font charged with supernatural powers of healing and of intercession. In the dazzling purity of their sudden sinlessness their prayers would enjoy a hearing and answer from God in a way that few others enjoyed. Tertullian does not say exactly what words those newly baptized prayed, but if the later North African rite is any indication, the words were likely those of the Lord's Prayer.⁴²

The world of Tertullian was one in which Christians still risked persecution, imprisonment, even execution. A catechumen, if martyred before baptism, received, he argued, a baptism of blood "that paid off every debt of sin."⁴³ Fifty years later the risks of martyrdom were, if anything, heightened. In 248, Cyprian of Carthage was elected bishop and almost immediately was called on to guide his church through one of the most brutal and systematic

⁴¹ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 20 (SC 35:96); trans. WEC 1:132.

⁴² On this see William Harmless, "' . . . receive today how you are to call upon God' (s. 58.1): The Lord's Prayer and Augustine's Mystagogy," in *Seeing Through the Eyes of Faith: The Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, ed. Paul van Geest (Louvain: Peeters, 2014). We will examine this in chapter 6 in regard to the *traditio orationis* and again in chapter 7 in the reconstruction of the baptismal rite in Hippo. The earliest surviving treatises on the Lord's Prayer are those by Tertullian and Cyprian; neither makes explicit reference to a prebaptismal handing over of the Lord's Prayer or a baptismal usage. But it is possible that these treatises first originated as catecheses for catechumens; that, at least, is the judgment of Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Tertullian, Cyprian and Origen: On the Lord's Prayer* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 22–24. Augustine knew and drew on these treatises for his catecheses of *competentes*.

⁴³ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 50.15 (CCL 1:171); author's translation. In *Scorpice* 6.11 (CCL 2:1081) he speaks of martyrdom as a "second new birth" (trans. Dunn, *Tertullian*, ECF, 118).

persecutions early Christians ever faced, that of the emperor Decius.⁴⁴ Cyprian himself would be martyred in 258, and by Augustine's time he was celebrated as one of the heroes of the North African church. Cyprian's writings offer glimpses of the third-century catechumenate, but more important, his views on baptism would lay the groundwork for all later North African baptismal theologies, including Augustine's.

Cyprian, like Augustine, had been a mid-life convert. In *To Donatus (Ad Donatum)* he looked back on his former high-society lifestyle in dark terms:

I lay sprawled in the shadows of a lightless night, tossed about on high seas, indecisive, wandering about, ignorant of my life, estranged from truth and light. I used to reflect on my lifestyle and wondered how anyone could be born again and inspired to a new life simply through taking a bath in flowing water. . . . "How," I used to say, "is such conversion possible?" My reflections penetrated deeply, down to my soul's very roots.⁴⁵

He reflected on the exquisite pleasures of one who savored an upper-class Roman life. How, he asked himself, could one who grew up enjoying the finest gourmet foods and high-society dinners get used to eating simple basics? How could one who had worn the latest fashions in gold and imperial purple get used to commonplace garb? How could one who had grown accustomed to high political office return to the unacclaimed anonymity of ordinary citizenship? How could one who had been surrounded by a large entourage of clients get used to solitude? "All these applied to me," he noted, adding: "I was ensnarled in so many errors of my old way of life that I couldn't believe I could ever get rid of them." Around 246 he experienced a conversion and sought baptism; then

⁴⁴ On Cyprian's career and theology, see especially J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 3 (SC 291:80–82); author's translation.

With the help of life-restoring waters that washed me clean of the stains of my old way of life, a light poured down from on high upon my purged and purified heart, and I drank in the Spirit that came down from heaven, and I tasted a second birth that restored me to a new humanity, and I marveled that what I had once doubted became clear, what was once hidden came open, what was once in shadows came to light so that it became possible to live and do what I had thought impossible. . . . The Holy Spirit was now giving me life.⁴⁶

Just two years later Cyprian was elected Carthage's bishop. No doubt his political experience, leadership skills, and elite social contacts made him an attractive candidate. These proved critical in guiding the Carthaginian community when the Decian persecution erupted so violently. We only get brief glimpses of Cyprian's catechumenate, much as we get only brief glimpses of the rest of his church, most often in passing allusions to persons and events within letters occasioned by the often anguishing emergencies and bitter conflicts during and after the persecution of Decius. In these letters Cyprian speaks here and there of "*catecumini*" (which transliterates the Greek term) or "*audientes*" ("hearers," which translates the term into Latin).⁴⁷ Cyprian speaks of appointing "teachers" (*doctores*) and "readers" (*lectores*) charged with teaching catechumens.⁴⁸

What did they teach? An early treatise, *To Quirinus* (*Ad Quirinum*), gives us a good sense of what Cyprian thought urgent to teach beginners. It spells out not only the sort of content taught to

⁴⁶ Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 4 (SC 291:82–84); author's translation.

⁴⁷ Cyprian, in *ep.* 73.22.2 (CCL 3C:556–57) and *Ad Quirinum* 3.98 (CCL 3:78), uses *catecumenus*, while in *ep.* 18.2.2 (CCL 3B:101–2) and *ep.* 29.2 (CCL 3B:138) he uses *audientes*. A Roman letter to Cyprian uses *cathecuminus* (*ep.* 8.3.1, CCL 3B:42). On Cyprian's catechumenate see Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "Catechumenate and Contra-Culture: The Social Process of Catechumenate in Third-Century Africa and Its Development," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47 (2003): 289–306; Andy Alexis-Baker, "Ad Quirinum Book Three and Cyprian's Catechumenate," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17 (2009): 357–80.

⁴⁸ Cyprian, *ep.* 29.2 (CCL 3B:138), speaks of "readers for the teachers of catechumens (*lectores doctorum audientium*)"; *ep.* 73.3.2 (CCL 3C:532–33) also refers to "teachers" (*doctores*) for catechumens.

catechumens but also a method used to teach them.⁴⁹ This work is of interest since Augustine knew it well and commented on it on several occasions.⁵⁰ Cyprian speaks of it as “a compendium” of Scripture meant to “form the first lineaments of your faith” so that “being led away from the darkness of error and enlightened by God’s pure and shining light, we may keep to this way of life through the saving sacraments.”⁵¹ The treatise is divided into three “books.” Each contains “testimonies,” that is, an anthology of biblical verses arranged under a heading.⁵² Book 1 has twenty-four headings and portrays (in harsh terms) the Christian church as a replacement of ancient Israel;⁵³ book 2 has thirty headings that define the identity and meaning of Jesus; book 3 has one hundred twenty headings that contain an array of moral precepts and admonitions. Much of this may not be Cyprian’s own but rather represents an older compilation that Cyprian himself learned from, drew on, and recommended to others.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ On the *Ad Quirinum* see Ferguson, “Catechesis and Initiation,” 239–42; see also Antonio Quacquarelli, “Note retoriche sui *Testimonia* di Cipriano,” *Vetera Christianorum* 8 (1971): 181–209; Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 29–32; Alexis-Baker, “*Ad Quirinum* Book Three and Cyprian’s Catechumenate.” Kreider and Alexis-Baker read the work solely as a catechumenal document, while Ferguson, “Catechesis and Initiation,” 242, rightly notes that “Cyprian’s collection of scriptural *testimonia* may have served other purposes than catechesis.” Charles Bobertz, “An Analysis of *Vita Cypriani* 3.6–10 and the Attribution of *Ad Quirinum* to Cyprian of Carthage,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 112–28, at 127n35, points out that Cyprian himself mined it “as a source of citations in all of [his] treatises except *Ad Donatum*.”

⁵⁰ *c. ep. Pel.* 4.21, 4.25, 4.27 (CSEL 60:543, 552, 556); *corrept.* 7.12 (PL 44:923).

⁵¹ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* praef. (CCL 3:3); trans. Robert E. Wallis, ANF 5:507.

⁵² Thus the work’s other common title: *Testimonia*. See R. Weber, “Introduction,” *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera*, CCL 3, liii–lv.

⁵³ On this anti-Jewish polemic in North Africa see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), esp. 231–32; she traces the ugly legacy of the anti-Jewish “talking points” of book 1 of Cyprian’s *Ad Quirinum* and notes their use by Augustine’s Manichean opponent Faustus of Milevis.

⁵⁴ While the manuscript tradition and a wide consensus of scholars see Cyprian as the author, Bobertz has noted that the heading of 3.28 (“that for-

The headings of book 2 illustrate its Christ-centered curriculum: “That Christ is the first-born and himself the wisdom of God through whom all things were made” (2.1); “That Christ also is the Word of God” (2.3); “That Christ is God” (2.6); “That Christ as God should come as the illuminator and savior of humankind” (2.7); “That Christ is both God and human joined from out of both so that he may be the mediator between us and the Father” (2.10); “That in the passion and sign of the cross is all virtue and power” (2.21); “That he should rise again from the underworld on the third day” (2.24); “That he himself will come as a judge” (2.28); “That he himself will reign as a king forever” (2.29).⁵⁵ These headings are more than chapter titles. They mark signposts that map how Cyprian’s community understood the identity of Jesus. They also provided catechumens with lenses for reading the gospels. They of course resemble (and expand on) essentials from the creed (or “rule of faith,” as it was called in Cyprian’s time). No less important was that these headings were made to be memorized. And that precisely was Cyprian’s intention: “that a few things digested into a short space are both quickly read through and are frequently repeated.”⁵⁶ They were thus memory aids. Cyprian also intended them as springboards for fuller exposition by teachers.⁵⁷

givenness cannot be granted in the Church by one who has sinned against God”) contradicts Cyprian’s teaching from the earliest phase of the Decian persecution. One possibility is that Cyprian changed his mind in the wake of the persecution; Bobertz, however, concludes that the work, while known to and used by Cyprian and by his biographer Pontius, predates Cyprian himself, that “the rigorist notion of church discipline reflected in *Ad Quirinum* . . . was a vestige of the past.” I am inclined to agree in part that the substance of the work represents an older collection that Cyprian himself drew upon, but he appears to have authored the prefaces and commended their contents to Quirinus. Some admonitions echo an earlier era; 3.28 was made obsolete by Cyprian’s policies.

⁵⁵ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 2 capit. 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 21, 24, 26, 28, 29 (CCL 3:27–28); author’s translation.

⁵⁶ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3 praef. (CCL 3:73); trans. Wallis, ANF 5: 528.

⁵⁷ Cyprian makes this very point in another collection of *testimonia: Ad Fortunatum* praef. 3 (CCL 3:184), “a compendium” that “establishes by what I had proposed as the authority of divine teaching in such a way that I might not

In the preface to book 3, Cyprian speaks of the headings as “pertaining to the religious teaching of our school.”⁵⁸ These were “precepts” or moral dicta drawn from across the New Testament: that one practice love of neighbor (3.3); that one be humble (3.5); that one not swear (3.12) or curse (3.13); that one not judge others rashly (3.21); that one forgive wrongs done (3.22); that one never return evil for evil (3.23); that one visit the sick (3.109) and protect widows and orphans (3.113).⁵⁹ In anticipation of life’s inevitable tragedies, Cyprian insists that God’s providence is deeply mysterious, that one must not murmur against God (3.14) but treat tragedies and injustices as God’s purposeful testing (3.15). Many headings concern economics. The opening one, “On the benefit of good works and mercy,” gathers many pages of biblical texts on care of the poor, beginning with a text Augustine would regularly cite: “Share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless into your dwelling; if you see someone naked, clothe him” (Isa 58:7).⁶⁰ Other headings stress that laborers be paid promptly (3.81), that one not give loans at interest (3.48) or lust for money (3.61). These moral dicta were not simply headings to be memorized; they were lessons to be lived. One also finds echoes of Tertullian’s dark worldview: “That there is a strong conflict to be waged against the devil, and that therefore we ought to stand bravely, that we may be able to conquer” (3.117).⁶¹ Another heading encapsulates a core North African conviction: “That unless a person has been baptized and born again, he or she cannot attain the kingdom of God” (3.25).⁶² Other admonitions refer to the catechumenate’s goal: “That

appear to have sent you my own treatise so much, as to have suggested material for others to discourse on.”

⁵⁸ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3 praef. (CCL 3:73); author’s translation.

⁵⁹ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3 capit. (CCL 3:73–80). Deogratias, a deacon from Carthage, wrote Augustine around 403 and echoed this language in the way he speaks of teaching newcomers “the precepts.” See the discussion of this in chapter 3.

⁶⁰ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.1 (CCL 3:80–88).

⁶¹ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.117 (CCL 3:177); trans. Robert E. Wallis, ANF 5:556.

⁶² Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.25 (CCL 3:121); author’s translation. This cites John 3:5–6 and 6:53 as proof texts.

the catechumen ought to sin no more" (3.98); "That we must hurry to faith and the attainment" (3.97)—"attainment" (*consecutio*) being a traditional code word for "baptism."⁶³

Cyprian's legacy to Augustine—and to Western Christianity—was a cluster of theological ideas forged in the midst of and in the aftermath of the brutal, bloody Decian persecution. In the winter of 249 an imperial decree went out that all must pronounce a loyalty oath before an imperial commission, testifying that one has always been a worshiper of the gods who protected the empire, offering a libation and a few grains of incense and taking a taste of sacrificed meat. For Christians such an act was both idolatry and apostasy. Cyprian spoke of it in the darkest terms, as participating in demonic worship: "Could a servant of God stand there and speak and renounce Christ, whereas it was the world and the devil he had renounced before [at baptism]? . . . When he saw that altar of the devil, smoking and reeking with its foul stench, should he not have fled in terror?" Huge numbers of Christians lapsed. Cyprian complained that in Carthage "some did not even wait to be arrested before going up" to sacrifice; "they did not wait to be questioned before they denied their faith. Many were defeated before the battle was joined."⁶⁴ Some sought ways around sacrificing. Wealthy Christians bribed officials for certificates (*libelli*) that testified to their having sacrificed even though they had not done so; others sent their slaves to do so in their name, again avoiding actually sacrificing. In a letter to his presbyters Cyprian wrote: "We must face the fact and acknowledge that the raging devastation of this persecution . . . has ravaged the major part of our flock."⁶⁵ Both during and after the persecution many who had sacrificed (*sacrificati*) or bought certificates (*libellatici*) sought forgiveness. In North Africa there had been a longstanding tradition of a one-time

⁶³ Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.98, 97 (CCL 3:170, 169); author's translation.

⁶⁴ Cyprian, *De lapsis* 8 (Maurice Bévenot, ed., *De lapsis and De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*, OECT [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], 12); trans. Bévenot, *St. Cyprian: The Lapsed*, ACW 25:19.

⁶⁵ Cyprian, *ep.* 11.1.2 (CCL 3B:56–57); trans. G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of Cyprian of Carthage*, ACW 43:76.

forgiveness of major sins after baptism, requiring a lengthy public penance. But in this case, at least to the hard-liners, such apostasy seemed an unforgivable sin. Within months after the persecution's end in 251, Cyprian gathered bishops from around North Africa to meet in council and forged consensus around a core principle: bishops—and bishops alone—had the right to offer forgiveness even for such catastrophic sins as apostasy. They also hammered out legislation defining varying degrees of apostasy and spelling out requirements for readmitting people into communion. In reaction, hard-line splinter groups broke off, denying any forgiveness on the far side of baptism.

Out of this experience Cyprian, slowly and in careful conjunction with his fellow bishops, worked out a consensus on fundamental principles that shaped the North African theology of the church and of baptism. Central to being church was its unity; to break the unity of the church was unchristian. As Cyprian put it: "If a person does not hold fast to this oneness of the Church, does he imagine that he still holds the faith?"⁶⁶ He cited the letter to the Ephesians as his defining text: there is "one body and one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God" (Eph 4:4-6). The unity of the church was symbolized by the unity of the bishops, whom he understood as successors to the apostles. Thus hard-liners who broke with either Cyprian or his episcopal colleagues were no longer members of the church. Second, he famously insisted: "There is no salvation outside the Church (*salus extra ecclesiam non est*)."⁶⁷ He also famously compared the church to Noah's ark and asked rhetorically: "If there was escape for anyone who was outside the ark of Noah, then there is escape too for one who is found outside the Church."⁶⁸ This had consequences for anyone who joined assemblies led by the hard-liners as well as any baptized by them. Cyprian insisted: "You cannot have God for your Father if you do not have the Church for your mother."⁶⁹ This, another of Cyprian's

⁶⁶ Cyprian, *De unitate* 4 (OECT, 64); trans. Bénévot, ACW 25:47.

⁶⁷ Cyprian, *ep.* 73.21.2 (CCL 3C:555); trans. Clarke, ACW 47:66.

⁶⁸ Cyprian, *De unitate* 6 (OECT, 66); trans. Bénévot, ACW 25:49.

⁶⁹ Cyprian, *De unitate* 6 (OECT, 66); trans. Bénévot, ACW 25:48–49.

famous aphorisms, meant that if one had been baptized by someone other than the bishop or his delegated representative one was neither a member of the church nor could one be saved. The logic of such views could be taken to imply that catechumens who died as martyrs died unsaved, but Cyprian upheld the traditional view that catechumens received a baptism of blood:

Such catechumens do hold the faith and truth of the Church complete; they march forth from the camp of God to do battle with the devil possessed of a full and sincere knowledge of God the Father and of Christ and the Holy Spirit; . . . they are not in fact deprived of the sacrament of baptism inasmuch as they are baptized with the greatest and most glorious baptism of all, that of blood. It was of this that the Lord Himself said that . . . those baptized in their own blood and sanctified with a martyr's suffering are made perfect and obtain the grace which God has promised.⁷⁰

In the aftermath of the persecution the question arose about how to deal with people who had been baptized within one of the splinter groups, or "schismatics," and who now wanted to join the catholic, or "worldwide," church. In Rome its newly elected bishop Stephen treated those baptized by schismatics as penitents; after due penance, hands were laid on them, and they were welcomed into communion.⁷¹ Cyprian and his North African colleagues sharply disagreed. Such a person had been washed in a ceremony outside the church; such a baptism was no baptism at all, and any hand laying that followed it would have conveyed no gift of the Spirit. As Cyprian put it, "Can a man give what he doesn't have? How can a man who has himself lost the Holy Spirit perform actions of the Spirit? That is why those who come uninitiated to

⁷⁰ Cyprian, *ep.* 73.22.2 (CCL 3C:556–57); trans. Clarke, ACW 47:67.

⁷¹ On this controversy see J. Patout Burns, "Social Context in the Controversy between Cyprian and Stephen," *Studia Patristica* 24 (1991): 38–44; idem, "On Rebaptism: Social Organization in the Third Century Church," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 367–403; Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Heresy and Schism according to Cyprian of Carthage," *Journal of Theological Studies* 55 (2004): 551–76.

the Church are to be baptized and renewed."⁷² When schismatics came to Cyprian they therefore received both baptism and a Spirit-invoking hand laying. To Stephen in Rome that policy looked as though Cyprian and the North Africans were endorsing *re*-baptism. Cyprian replied sharply, speaking in the name of bishops who had gathered at a large North African council: "We ruled that there is but one baptism and that is established within the catholic Church; by this baptism we do not *rebaptize* but rather *baptize* all those who, coming as they do from spurious and unhallowed waters, need to be washed clean and sanctified in the genuine waters of salvation."⁷³ There were sharp exchanges in the letters that passed between Cyprian and Stephen, and Stephen may have broken off communion. Cyprian himself was soon after arrested and martyred in 258. His death would seal his heroic reputation, and his views would come to define North African policy. These views were ones Augustine would inherit and, in certain ways, amend, even reverse, but only with the greatest of care and difficulty.

The third-century catechumenate should neither be romanticized nor underestimated.⁷⁴ On the one hand its selectivity and rigor produced a spate of martyrs. On the other hand, for all its sectarian rigors and discipline it did not guarantee uniformly high standards or stalwart congregations. The clearest evidence is the widespread lapses that Cyprian spent his tenure coping with. On a more mundane, day-to-day level, there were always those less-than-zealous Christians who, according to Cyprian's contemporary Origen, came to church erratically, disturbed liturgies with noisy chit-chat, and spent their best energies not on faith but on making money.⁷⁵

⁷² Cyprian, *ep.* 70.2.3 (CCL 3C:509); trans. Clarke, ACW 47:47.

⁷³ Cyprian, *ep.* 73.1.2 (CCL 3C:530); trans. Clarke, ACW 47:54.

⁷⁴ E.g., Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries* (New York: Sadlier, 1979), 30, who claims this period represents the catechumenate "in its most authentic form" (see also pp. 107–11); Dujarier ignores the link between third-century initiatory polity and its sectarian views of church; he also ignores pastoral problems noted in the texts (e.g., hesitancy of candidates, apostasy, indifference within congregations).

⁷⁵ Origen, *In Exodum* 13.3 (SC 321:380–82), complains about those who come to church with "their mind and heart on business dealings" and "profit" and

THE CATECHUMENATE: TRENDS IN THE GREEK EAST

In the early fourth century, persecutions ended. Beginning in 311 the emperor Constantine (d. 337) granted Christianity formal status as a legitimate religion. Its official toleration set off reverberations across the empire that came to alter church life and, as a consequence, the catechumenate.⁷⁶ Shifts within either the larger culture or the church necessarily affect the contours and tone of the catechumenate, which of its nature sits at the fluid frontier of church and world. The fourth century saw various shifts, and these left their impression on the catechumenate.

First, Christians were no longer a vulnerable minority subjected to intermittent persecution. They now began to enjoy certain privileges. What Constantine did for Christianity was not without venerable precedent. Emperors before him had lavished benefactions on their favorite cults, and such patronage was considered good piety; that is, if a god rewards one with health, good fortune, or military success it is only fitting to express one's gratitude, conversion, and obeisance by acting as a patron for the god's cult.⁷⁷ Constantine shared this traditional view. He attributed his military victories to the God of the Christians and in gratitude offered the churches his patronage. He built spacious basilicas and richly adorned shrines in Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople; he bequeathed endowments of land; he offered grain allowances

"chatter so much, who disturb with their stories so much that they do not allow any silence" (trans. Ronald E. Heine, FOTC 71:738); cf. *In Genesim* 10.1-2. See Joseph Trigg, "Origen's Understanding of Baptism," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 959-65.

⁷⁶Constantine's conversion and its effects on Christianity continue to inspire a complex and contested scholarship. See Noel Lenski, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Raymond Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a survey of liturgical developments in this period see John F. Baldovin, "The Empire Baptized," 77-130 in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*.

⁷⁷Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100-400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 48-49.

and shelter to widows and orphans. He also accorded bishops privileges: they were granted immunity from burdensome civic and financial obligations; they received judicial powers that allowed them to hear local civil suits and preside over the manumission of slaves; for certain councils they used the imperial post for transportation (something traditionally reserved for imperial messengers and high state officials).⁷⁸ With these new powers came new expectations. Bishops found themselves called upon to serve as patrons for their communities and enmesh themselves in the intricate system of patronage that held together late Roman society.⁷⁹ This meant wielding powers and influence in matters both spiritual and secular: settling feuds, forwarding lawsuits, getting debts canceled, even lobbying for favors in the imperial court.

Second, the churches faced a surge of new converts. It is easy to point to famous cases of highly articulate, well-educated converts such as Augustine or Paulinus of Nola, but these offer a poor basis for making generalizations. They do little to account for an array of conversions that touched widely disparate ethnic groups, social classes, and geographic locales. The wide spread of conversions is difficult to account for since the historical record gives scant attention to the lives and feelings of the mass of ordinary people. Ramsay MacMullen and A. H. M. Jones have suggested various factors: the new tolerance allowed Christian evangelical campaigns to take place unchecked by government authorities; Constantine's embrace of Christianity helped publicize it and did much to make it at least socially acceptable; the benefits that Constantine lavished on the churches drew public attention to them and helped make them major public centers; the favors Constantine and his sons gave their coreligionists made it politic in certain circles (especially government and the military) to become Christian; pagan cults faced a slowly mounting body of legislation that curtailed their

⁷⁸ Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 44–53; Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 622–23, 667–69.

⁷⁹ Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

activities and depleted their state-supported revenues.⁸⁰ None of these guaranteed conversion, nor did fourth-century emperors force conversions as later medieval rulers would do. Paganism maintained robust strongholds both in the countryside and among the aristocracy.⁸¹ Christianity remained, in the main, an urban movement dominated by the lower and middle classes. Its progress was fitful and subject to enormous local variation.

Third, the fourth century witnessed much-contested public controversies over key points of doctrine. Such disputes had plagued local communities in the third century, but in the fourth they assumed a broader, more international character. There were frequent councils, both regional and empire-wide; those later named “ecumenical,” Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381, would in the long run become the most famous, but there were many other well-attended and well-publicized ones.⁸² Theological controversy was hardly confined to bishops or councils; it became part of the routine banter one heard in bazaars or bathhouses. As Gregory of Nyssa (d. 396) famously complained about his experience while in Constantinople: “If you ask someone for change, he will discuss with you whether the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you ask about the quality of bread, you will receive the answer that ‘the Father is greater, the Son is less.’ If you suggest that you require a

⁸⁰ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1:90–96; MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, esp. 49–67, 86–101.

⁸¹ A. H. M. Jones, “The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity,” 17–37 in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); Michele Renee Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁸² For a comprehensive survey see R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381 AD* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988); see also Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Hans Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine: The Theological Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

bath, you will be told that ‘there was nothing before the Son was created.’”⁸³ Fourth-century bishops and catechists devoted great care to teaching catechumens doctrinal essentials, especially the doctrine of the Trinity. That doctrine was central to the catechumenate since it defined who Christians said God is and it defined the faith that catechumens affirmed as they stood in the waist-deep waters of baptism. And, of course, the newly baptized were expected to defend their decision and faith not only to family but also among friends or in the often noisy banter of the marketplace.

Fourth, this century witnessed several generations of extraordinary Christian thinkers, all highly educated, many trained as rhetoricians. Many served as bishops of local churches and made the teaching of catechumens and neophytes a regular and central pastoral duty. Among the major fourth-century catechumenal documents are verbatim transcripts of their talks. The quality of catechesis was often extraordinary, a heady blend of biblical spirituality, doctrinal precision, and rhetorical flare. And they came to the task with a deep confidence in the power of words to shape conversion. As Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 389), among the most eloquent of these, once boldly put it to his catechumens: “Today I need to write *in* you and impress *upon* you what is needed for perfection. . . . Give me the tablets of your heart. I am Moses for you. . . . I write *in* you a new decalogue with the finger of God. I write *in* you a synopsis of salvation.”⁸⁴

Fifth, there was an uneasy shift away from a church of the few and the pure and toward a church of the many—a “mixed-up

⁸³Gregory of Nyssa, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus sancti* (PG 46:557). The slogans Gregory quotes echo the views of the anti-Nicene Eunomius of Cyzicus, who had been influential for a time in the imperial capital. His party’s views, eventually condemned, led to alternative baptismal practices and formulae. See Maurice F. Wiles, “Triple and Single Immersion: Baptism in the Arian Controversy,” *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997): 337–49.

⁸⁴Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40.45 (SC 358:302–4); author’s translation. See Susanna Elm, “Inscriptions and Conversions: Gregory of Nazianzus on Baptism (Or. 38–40),” 1–35 in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, ed. Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003).

body" (*corpus permixtum*), as Augustine called it. Memories of the old rigor persisted. The cult of the martyrs remained a potent and sometimes disruptive force. So too was the emerging monastic movement, with its athletic asceticism that retained rigorist strains and even took them to new heights. Then there were various protest movements such as those associated with Pelagius and his circle, who called for higher standards among the aristocracy where Christianity ever so slowly was becoming a politically correct stance. The orthodox churches, while decidedly counter-cultural, came to embrace the task of trying to create a Christian culture, with all the uneasy risks of such a venture.

These shifts in both the fourth-century church and the wider milieu combined to challenge and reshape the tone and temper of the inherited ritual structures, pedagogies, and moral expectations of the third century. When we today speak of a "Christianization of the Roman Empire" it is crucial to savor the catechumenate's role in this. The catechumenate was precisely the cutting edge where such Christianization took place, where it became personal, where it touched individuals' lives and those of their families and local communities. Its day-to-day workings were largely uncelebrated and underreported. Yet over the next century, year after year, within catechumenates of individual churches across the empire, person after person after person was instructed and formed in his or her Christian faith and lifestyle, tested, and brought to communion. In other words, much of the "Christianization of the Roman Empire" took place via the framework we call catechumenate. Bringing about change on an empire-wide scale was, of necessity, demanding and messy and uneven.

In the remainder of this chapter I will survey the three periods of initiation that emerge in the fourth century: a catechumenate phase, a final training prior to baptism often linked to the emergence of Lent, and a mystagogical formation in the days after Easter. I will draw my examples from the Greek East, since we will explore Ambrose's catechumenate in Milan in the next chapter and follow that with a detailed examination of Augustine's catechumenate in Hippo in the remaining chapters.

We have less information about the broad catechumenate period when compared with what we know of formation immediately prior to and following baptism. Length of the catechumenate varied. The Council of Elvira in 305 legislated that “those who come to the beginning of faith, if they are of good behavior, may be admitted to the grace of baptism after two years.”⁸⁵ The church order known as *The Apostolic Tradition* (whose legislation was long believed to describe third-century patterns but now seems more likely to reflect fourth-century ones) dictated a three-year catechumenate.⁸⁶ Its legislation is echoed in the later fourth-century Syrian *Apostolic Constitutions*: “The candidate will be instructed for a period of three years. Whoever is zealous and demonstrates eagerness during this time is to be received by you, for judgment depends not on time but on conduct. The catechist, even if a lay person and provided that he or she has experience with the word and is upright in conduct, is to teach, for ‘they shall all be taught by God’ (Jn 6:45).”⁸⁷ Many raised in Christian families were made

⁸⁵ Council of Elvira, *Canon 42*, trans. E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 3d ed. by Maxwell E. Johnson, Alcuin Club Collection 79 (London: SPCK, 2003), 154.

⁸⁶ *Apostolic Tradition* 17. For the text and a commentary, see Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, eds., *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002). For much of the twentieth century this document was believed to have been compiled by the third-century Roman presbyter Hippolytus. That dating and attribution have been seriously challenged; see Paul F. Bradshaw, “Redating the Apostolic Tradition: Some Preliminary Steps,” 3–17 in *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honor of Aidan Kavanagh, OSB*, ed. John F. Baldovin and Nathan Mitchell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); John F. Baldovin, “Hippolytus and the *Apostolic Tradition*: Recent Research and Commentary,” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 520–42.

⁸⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.32.16 (SC 336:238–40); trans. WEC 2:270 (modified). On this document see Joseph G. Mueller, “The Ancient Church Order Literature: Genre or Tradition?” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15 (2007): 337–80. The compiler had detectable anti-Nicene commitments; see T. A. Kopecek, “Neo-Arian Religion: The Evidence of the *Apostolic Constitutions*,” 153–80 in *Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments*, ed. Robert C. Gregg (1983; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006). For an overview of its baptismal theology see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 564–73.

catechumens as children but did not seek baptism until adulthood, and thus spent long years as catechumens.

As for formation, certain traditional patterns persisted.⁸⁸ Catechumens attended liturgies of the word, certainly on Sundays but other days as well.⁸⁹ At these, ordinary catechumens received their primary—and in all probability, their only—formal instruction. Fourth-century preachers used to turn to catechumens in their larger assemblies and address them directly when they dealt with biblical texts that had baptismal overtones. When John Chrysostom (d. 407) preached on the story of Nicodemus (John 3), he first pleaded with the baptized to lead “a life worthy of . . . the mysteries.” He then turned to the catechumens: “You who have not yet been deemed worthy of them, do everything so as to become worthy, that we may be one body, that we may be brothers and sisters.”⁹⁰ After the sermon, prayers would be offered for

⁸⁸ Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 94, makes the very odd claim that in the fourth century “the catechumenate, properly speaking, no longer existed.” By “catechumenate” he apparently means the sort described in the *Apostolic Tradition*, whose dating, authorship, and contents (as noted above) are much contested; the very legislation he so admires may date from the fourth, not the third century, and probably describes ideals rather than actual practices. Dujarier’s claim also flies in the face of basic facts: that fourth-century bishops certainly believed the catechumenate was very much in existence and that it required them to take considerable effort to deal with the catechumens who had joined their assemblies. In chapter 4 I will return to these issues in greater detail.

⁸⁹ Catechumens may also have attended liturgies of the hours. Egeria, a Spanish pilgrim who visited Jerusalem in the late fourth century, regularly mentions the presence of catechumens at prayer services of the Jerusalem churches she visited. Notable in *Itinerarium* 24.6-9 (SC 296:240-42) is her description of the formal dismissal of catechumens at Vespers.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, *In s. Johannis evangelium*, Homily 25.3 (PG 59:151); trans. Thomas A. Goggin, *Saint John Chrysostom: Commentary on Saint John*, FOTC 41:248. On his life, context, and works see J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom: Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom*, ECF (New York: Routledge, 2000); Jaclyn Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and His Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the catechumens. In Chrysostom's Antioch catechumens did not mingle with the baptized, but stood apart—"far from the sacred precincts," as he put it.⁹¹ At the deacon's call for prayer, catechumens knelt or prostrated themselves full-length on the floor. Then the deacon intoned a long and quite beautiful prayer, asking: "that [God] would open the ears of their hearts and instill into them the word of truth . . . that He would unveil to them the gospel of righteousness, that He would grant to them a godly mind, sound judgment, and virtuous manner of life . . . that He would count them worthy in due season of the regeneration of the font, of the remission of sins, of the clothing of incorruption, that He would bless their comings in and goings out, the whole course of their life."⁹² After the deacon's prayer and the faithful's Amen, catechumens rose, received a blessing, and were dismissed.⁹³ They were not permitted to witness the Eucharist itself.

While this traditional way of forming catechumens remained, the milieu had changed. In the third century catechumens were fewer. Worship in a community such as Tertullian's would have taken place in a modest-sized house-church. Catechumens' presence or absence at liturgies could be dutifully noted, and their progress and lifestyle scrutinized. In the fourth century the larger numbers of catechumens made supervision and pastoral care more difficult. Catechumens no longer enjoyed the support (and scrutiny) of an intimate, if embattled, community; they could now drift in and out more anonymously, one more face among crowds that now began filling the basilicas.

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, *In epistolam 2 ad Corinthios*, Homily 2.6 (PG 61:40); trans. Talbot Chambers, NPNF 12:282. See Thomas M. Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom*, SCA 15 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 35.

⁹² John Chrysostom, *In epistolam 2 ad Corinthios*, Homily 2.6-8, gives a line-by-line commentary on this prayer for the catechumens. Its reconstruction is from Talbot Chambers, NPNF 12:281-82 n11. A similar prayer is found in the fourth-century Syrian *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.6.

⁹³ Egeria reports a similar ritual pattern at the close of liturgies of the hours in Jerusalem. On these see Kavanagh, *Confirmation*, 12-14.

In fourth-century sources one comes across complaints about motives. One always has to weigh such complaints, where they come from, who is making them, whether they reflect widespread realities or local problems or simply voice the *bête noire* of a highly articulate complainer.⁹⁴ There were, it seems, a certain number of political opportunists. Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), a bishop and learned historian who moved among the very highest echelons of the Roman Empire, complained about “an unspeakable deceit on the part of those who slipped into the Church and adopted the false façade of the Christian name” to win political favors.⁹⁵ This complaint should not be overgeneralized—it reflects a report only about the most elite circles. Cyril, the bishop of Jerusalem (d. 387), complains that even some on the eve of baptism were there for less-than-exemplary motives: “Perhaps some man among you has come because he wants to win the approval of his girlfriend; the same can apply to women too. Perhaps a slave has wanted to please his master or someone has wanted to please a friend.”⁹⁶ While there were enough conversions of this type to merit such remarks, most converted, it seems, for sincerely religious motives.⁹⁷ The greater problem involved weaning people from deeply ingrained cultural habits that, according to a traditional and often old-fashioned Christian morality, seemed pagan: theater-going, attending public games, consulting astrologers, wearing charms. Some preachers, such as John Chrysostom, could portray catechumens in the most unflattering terms: “The catechumen is a sheep

⁹⁴Some scholars (Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 94ff.; Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 218–19) have taken complaints about politic conversions and suspect motives at face value.

⁹⁵Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini* 4.54 (SC 559:520); trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 174. The context is Eusebius’s defense of Constantine’s sincerity in being baptized. On Eusebius’s context and career see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*; Michael J. Hollerich, “Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius: Reassessing the First ‘Court Theologian,’” *Church History* 59 (1990): 309–25.

⁹⁶Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 5 (PG 33:541); trans. Edward Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, ECF (New York: Routledge, 2000), 81.

⁹⁷See Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 2:979–80.

without a seal; he is a deserted inn and a hostel without a door, which lies open to all without distinction; he is a lair for robbers, a refuge for wild beasts, a dwelling place for demons."⁹⁸

Another widely reported pastoral problem concerned catechumens who delayed advancing further.⁹⁹ Tertullian too had complained of hesitant catechumens and had in some cases even advised delay. In interpreting fourth-century complaints it is important to pay attention to who is complaining and why and when, as well as what deeper motives may have led to delays. An older (and still repeated) scholarly interpretation was that "the catechumenate was the customary status of the nominal Christian, the one who lacked the courage for baptism but was ashamed to be called a heathen."¹⁰⁰ This plays into a larger and still-common scholarly narrative that after Constantine the church supposedly "declined," that Christianization meant absorbing and adapting pagan practices and imagery.¹⁰¹ To interpret reports of delay we need to be alert to

⁹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 10.16 (= II.7, SC 366:192); trans. Paul W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions*, ACW 31:155. The numbering of Chrysostom's baptismal instructions varies from edition to edition; I have followed that used by Harkins.

⁹⁹ On reports of the delay of baptism and their interpretation see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 617–27; Éric Rebillard, "La figure du catéchumène et le problème du délai du baptême dans la pastorale d'Augustin," 285–92 in *Augustin Prédicateur (395–411): Actes du Colloque International de Chantilly (5–7 Sept, 1996)*, ed. Goulven Madec, CEASA 159 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1998). I will return to this issue in Augustine's church in chapter 4, especially in the "Excursus: Delay of Baptism?"

¹⁰⁰ Frederik van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London and New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 357.

¹⁰¹ On this older scholarly narrative see Daniel H. Williams, "Constantine, Nicaea, and the 'Fall' of the Church," 117–36 in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998). Paul Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 213–15, describes Christian liturgy after Constantine as in "decline": "many of the fourth-century liturgical developments were responses of a Church which had already passed its peak, was experiencing the beginnings of decline, and was trying to do something to stem the tide"; he then speaks of fourth-century catecheses and initiation rites "appropriating language, images, and ceremonies from

certain broader perspectives. First, the fourth-century norm was adult baptism. Infant baptism, first mentioned by Tertullian (who opposed it), was widely practiced but nearly always as *emergency* baptism; given the high infant mortality rate of the era, it may have been a fairly frequent practice (even if few of those baptized actually survived).¹⁰² It was common for those from Christian families to be baptized only in their twenties or early thirties. Basil of Caesarea, who came from a venerable and deeply pious Christian family, was baptized at the age of 26; his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, whose father was the local bishop, was baptized at 28; Ambrose of Milan was in his thirties.¹⁰³ In some cases “delay” may have been prompted less by people’s ill will and more by their response to Christianity’s ethical rigors. In the third century, as we saw, certain professions and business practices were forbidden, tainted by their “pagan” associations. Fourth-century churches maintained some of these standards and adjusted others. Such professionals might be accepted as catechumens but barred from baptism. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, reports that those in politics feared that they were “stained” by it; he advised that they leave politics altogether, that they “flee from the public forum . . . for what do you have to do with Caesar or what belongs to Caesar.”¹⁰⁴ According to A. H. M. Jones the source of the problem was the church itself: “had built up its code when it was a small exclusive society of the elect” and

pagan practice” (emphasis added). This judgment presupposes that third-century Christians had not drawn catechetical language and ritual gestures from local culture prior to this and that fourth-century Christians were uncritical absorbers of their cultural and intellectual world.

¹⁰² Tertullian, *De baptismo* 18 (SC 35:92–93). On the origins and rise of infant baptism see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 362–79, 627–33; on circumstances in North Africa see William Harmless, “Christ the Pediatrician: Augustine on the Diagnosis and Treatment of the Injured Vocation of the Child,” 127–53 in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). One notable but rare figure baptized as an infant was Augustine’s late opponent, Julian of Eclanum.

¹⁰³ David F. Wright, “At What Ages Were People Baptized in the Early Centuries?” *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997): 389–94.

¹⁰⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40.19 (SC 358:238); author’s translation.

thus “set its standards too high, and insisted too strongly that any major lapse entailed eternal damnation.”¹⁰⁵

One finds various exuberant rhetorical denunciations of the “delay” of baptism. John Chrysostom, a richly skilled and often exuberant rhetor, noted that the apostles Andrew and Peter “merely heard of Him who takes away the sin of the world and at once they ran to Him”; he then remarked: “Is it not, then, utter senselessness to defer accepting the gift? Let the catechumens listen to this—those who are putting off to their last breath their own salvation.”¹⁰⁶ In one sermon he entertained his baptismal candidates with a portrait of a catechumen who delayed baptism until his deathbed:

Even if the grace is the same for you and for those who are initiated on their deathbeds, neither the choice nor the preparations are the same. They receive baptism in their beds, but you receive it in the bosom of the common mother of us all, the Church; they receive baptism amidst laments and tears, but you are baptized with rejoicing and gladness; they are groaning, while you are giving thanks; their high fever leaves them in a stupor, while you are filled with an abundance of spiritual pleasure. . . . The dying man weeps and laments as he is baptized, his children stand about in tears, his wife mars her cheeks with her nails, his friends are downcast, his servants’ eyes well with tears, and the whole house gives the appearance of a gloomy winter’s day. . . . Then, in the midst of such tumult and confusion, the priest comes in, and his arrival is a greater source of fear than the fever itself and harder than death for the sick man’s relatives. When he enters, their despair is deeper than when the physician said he had given up all hope for the patient’s life. Thus, he who is an argument for eternal life is seen as a symbol of death.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 2:979; see his discussion on pp. 979–85.

¹⁰⁶ John Chrysostom, *In s. Johannis evangelium*, Homily 18.1 (PG 59:115); trans. Goggin, FOTC 33:175.

¹⁰⁷ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 9.5-8 (= I.3-4, SC 366:118–22); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:133–34. For an overview of “clinical” (i.e., deathbed) baptisms see Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism*, 27–30; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 618–26.

This portrait illustrates more about Chrysostom's skills in word-painting and his acerbic wit than it does about the health of the catechuminate. Of course, the most famous convert of the era, Constantine, was baptized on his deathbed. But once again, that tells us more about the dirty and often deadly business of imperial politics than about the state of the catechuminate.

Sermons on the "delay" of baptism were often occasioned by the liturgical year. Gregory of Nazianzus and his Cappadocian friends, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, used the feast of Epiphany (which commemorated not only Jesus' birth but his baptism as well) as a time for baptizing candidates. Sermons from these days served as prime opportunities for catechizing on the meaning of baptism. The Cappadocians also used these occasions as times to recruit other catechumens to begin the process of turning in their names for baptism.¹⁰⁸ In these sermons Gregory of Nazianzus denounces delays with an array of rhetorical strategies. He appeals to his catechumens' common sense: "How absurd it is to cling to accumulating wealth and yet be lackadaisical about caring for your health, to keeping your body clean as a top priority and yet put soul-cleansing into second place, to seek out freedom from slavery here below and not worry about freedom on high."¹⁰⁹ He tantalizes them by claiming that baptism would give them access to ineffable mysteries: "As long as you're a catechumen you stand in the outer

¹⁰⁸ Everett Ferguson, "Exhortations to Baptism in the Cappadocians," *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997): 121–29; idem, "Basil's Protreptic to Baptism," 70–83 in *Nova et Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton*, ed. John Petruccione (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40.13 (SC 358:224); author's translation. This sermon, *On Baptism*, is the third in a trilogy (preceded by *Oratio* 38: *On the Theophany* and *Oratio* 39: *On the Holy Lights*); the three were delivered in the days up to and including January 6, 381, soon after Gregory's installation as bishop of Constantinople. For a translation of *Orationes* 38 and 39 see Brian E. Daley, ed., *Gregory of Nazianzus*, ECF (New York: Routledge, 2006), 117–38; for *Oratio* 40 see Nonna Verna Harrison, ed., *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: Festal Orations* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008). For a detailed analysis see John McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 336–47.

court of prayer; you need to come in, to cross the hall and contemplate the holy, to enter into the Holy of Holies, to be in the presence of the Trinity."¹¹⁰ He plays on fears of hell and warns that death might come unexpectedly—through war, earthquakes, sudden illness, a political purge, choking on food, falling from a horse.¹¹¹ These sermons by Gregory and the other Cappadocians contain sparkling theology and rhetorical acumen, but the intent behind them was the same as an evangelical preacher's altar call: to bring people to the water.

LENT: TRENDS IN THE GREEK EAST

By 325, Lent (or "the forty days," as it was called) was emerging as part of the liturgical calendar, though its exact length and ordering differed from place to place.¹¹² It came to be used as a time for intensive formation of those getting ready for baptism. The contours and tenor of this formation can be gleaned from various collections of Lenten catecheses that have come down to us: the nineteen by Cyril of Jerusalem (delivered in the 350s),¹¹³ the fourteen by Theodore of Mopsuestia (delivered sometime between 392

¹¹⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40.16 (SC 358:230–32); author's translation.

¹¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40.14 (SC 358:226–28). Cf. Chrysostom, *In s. Johannis evangelium*, Homily 25.3 (PG 59:152).

¹¹² On the emergence of Lent and Holy Week see the classic study of Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2d ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 168–230; for recent perspectives see Bradshaw and Johnson, *Feasts, Fasts and Seasons*, 89–119. It has been traditional to point to Canon 5 of the Council of Nicaea as the earliest reference to a forty-day Lent, but its interpretation is complex. According to the festal letters of Athanasius (after 330), Lent in Alexandria lasted six weeks; according to Egeria (*Itinerarium* 27.1) Lent's forty-day fast in Jerusalem lasted eight weeks (i.e., not counting Saturday and Sunday), but her witness has been variously interpreted; other Jerusalem sources, such as the Armenian Lectionary, indicate six weeks.

¹¹³ For Cyril's Lenten sermons see PG 33:369–1060; for a translation of the *Procatechesis* and *Catecheses* 3–6, 10–14, and 18, see Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem*; an older but complete translation is by Leo McCauley, *The Works of St. Cyril of Jerusalem*, FOTC 61 and 64. For studies see John F. Baldovin, *Liturgy in Ancient Jerusalem*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 9 (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove, 1989); Alexis J. Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogue: The Authorship of the*

and 428),¹¹⁴ and the six by John Chrysostom (delivered in Antioch between 388 and 390).¹¹⁵ We also have a travelogue, the *Itinerarium*, from a Spanish pilgrim named Egeria who visited the Holy Land near the end of the fourth century and who describes liturgies and catecheses she witnessed in Jerusalem.¹¹⁶

These late fourth-century documents offer vivid accounts of the training and a window into the diversity of approaches. They also

Mystagogic Catecheses, Patristic Monograph Series 17 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

¹¹⁴Theodore's text is preserved solely in an ancient Syriac translation. For the text see Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devreesse, eds., *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste*, Studi e Testi 145 (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949); for an English translation see Alphonse Mingana, ed. and trans., *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed*, WS 5 (Cambridge: Heffer, 1932); idem, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, WS 6 (Cambridge: Heffer, 1933). I have followed the custom of English-speaking commentators in using the paragraph numbering of the Tonneau-Devreesse edition while using Mingana's translation. On Theodore's career and baptismal theology, see Frederick G. McLeod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, ECF (New York: Routledge, 2008); S. Gerber, *Theodor von Mopsuestia und das Nicänum. Studien zu den katechetischen Homilien* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Frederick G. McLeod, "The Christological Ramifications of Theodore of Mopsuestia's Understanding of Baptism and the Eucharist," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002): 37–75; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 519–32.

¹¹⁵For the texts of Chrysostom's Lenten sermons see Antoine Wenger, ed., *Jean Chrysostome: Huit catéchèses inédites*, SC 50 (Paris: Cerf, 1957); Auguste Piédagnel, ed., *Jean Chrysostome: Trois Catéchèses baptismales*, SC 366 (Paris: Cerf, 1990); for a translation see Harkins, ACW 31. For a study see Finn, *Liturgy of Baptism*; also Philippe de Roten, *Baptême et mystagogie: Enquête sur l'initiation chrétienne selon s. Jean Chrysostom*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 91 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2005); Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 533–63.

¹¹⁶For the text of Egeria's *Itinerarium* see Pierre Maraval, ed., *Égérie: Journal de voyage (Itinéraire)*, SC 296 (Paris: Cerf, 2002); for a translation with detailed commentary and charts see John Wilkinson, ed., *Egeria's Travels*, rev. ed. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1981). On the churches of Jerusalem and their liturgies see John F. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 228 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 45–104.

witness to a refining of vocabulary. Fourth-century authors began distinguishing advanced catechumens on the eve of baptism from ordinary ones. Greek authors referred to advanced catechumens as *photizomenoi* (“those being illuminated”); North African and other Western sources called them *competentes* (“petitioners”); Rome had the unique custom of calling them *electi* (“chosen ones”). Cyril of Jerusalem made much of the distinction when he addressed his new *photizomenoi* in an opening Lenten address, the *Procatechesis*:

Consider the honour 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.¹¹⁷

In Jerusalem, Lent began with a formal enrollment of names. The Jerusalem rite described by Egeria had an air of high solemnity. On the first day of Lent those who had turned in their names came with their sponsors to the main church, the Martyrium. There the bishop personally presided over the proceedings. Seated on the traditional *cathedra*, surrounded by a retinue of presbyters and deacons, he questioned the godparent and neighbors of each candidate: “Is this person leading a good life? Does he respect his parents? Is he a drunkard or a boaster?” If the candidate was accepted, the bishop would note down the person's name; if denied, the bishop “tells him that he is to amend his ways before he may come to the font.”¹¹⁸ Note the emphasis: questions pertained not to theological matters but to lifestyle, to the quality of the lived apprenticeship.

¹¹⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 6 (PG 33:344); trans. Yarnold, *Cyril*, ECF, 81. Cyril plays here on the root meaning of “catechesis,” namely, “echoing.” No longer does God's word “echo” from the outside, but reaches down so that it touches the person's depths. Also noted in *Catechesis* 1.4, 5.1.

¹¹⁸ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 45 (SC 296:306); trans. Wilkinson, 144.

Once enrolled, candidates embarked on a complex regimen that wove together three elements: (i) asceticism, (ii) instruction, and (iii) exorcism. The churches envisioned this as a sort of spiritual fitness program meant to touch mind, heart, body, and behavior. John Chrysostom once compared it to a training camp for wrestlers: “Let us learn during these days how we may gain the advantage over that wicked demon. . . . Let us learn, during this time of training, the grips he uses, the source of his wickedness, and how he can easily hurt us. Then, when the contest comes, we will not be caught unaware nor be frightened . . . because we have practiced among ourselves and have learned all his artifices.”¹¹⁹

(i) *Asceticism*. During Lent candidates took up a rigorous ascetical discipline. It included all-night vigils, fasting, abstaining from alcohol, sleeping on the ground, weeping for one’s sins, giving alms to the poor, even refraining from bathing.¹²⁰ Of these, almsgiving received the most catechetical attention. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, insisted that “another Lazarus is at your door” needing food and drink; that the sufferings of Christ are found in the masses of homeless; that candidates should “be a Zaccheus, yesterday a publican and today a person of generosity”; that if they find a debtor falling at their feet they should, unlike the hardhearted servant of Jesus’ parable, “rip up every contract, whether just or unjust.”¹²¹ John Chrysostom in his usual prophetic style denounced the rigid class strictures of his day and insisted that the newly enrolled give witness to the justice of the kingdom: “That you may wear a single ruby, countless poor are starved and crushed. What defense will you find against this charge? . . . You received gold, not to bind your body with, but to help and feed the poor.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 9.29 (PG 49:228); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:140–41.

¹²⁰ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 1.38 (SC 50:128); see also 12.7, 5.1–3.

¹²¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40.31 (SC 358:268–70); author’s translation.

¹²² John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 12.41 (PG 49:237); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:185.

(ii) *Instruction*. These sources testify to a sophisticated and structured process of instruction. It is difficult to be sure how different such pedagogy was from third-century approaches.¹²³ Some pedagogies may represent a continuation of earlier ways; others, a refinement and expansion; still others, new developments. The instructional approaches found in these Lenten catecheses are so complex and varied that I can do no more than highlight a few salient features. Egeria provides a vivid account of their setting, length, and audience as found in Jerusalem. She says that talks were held, appropriately enough, in the Martyrium, the traditional site of the crucifixion. They lasted three hours and were given daily in the morning.¹²⁴ The bishop spoke to *photizomenoi* from his *cathedra*. They sat closely around him while their sponsors stood nearby. Some of the faithful also attended, but ordinary catechumens were barred.¹²⁵ The talks Egeria heard were stirring addresses; she reports that they aroused loud shouts and applause.¹²⁶

The syllabus of these instructions varied considerably. Egeria reports that in Jerusalem the bishop spent the first five weeks surveying the entirety of Scripture, “expounding first its literal meaning and then explaining the spiritual meaning.” After this the candidates were formally handed the creed, one of those secrets that, like the rites of baptism and Eucharist, was hidden from ordinary catechumens. The bishop then spent the remaining two weeks explaining the creed as he did the Scriptures, “expounding first the literal and then the spiritual sense.” Formal instruction ended just before Holy Week. At this time each candidate recited the

¹²³ Older (but still cited) commentators interpreted these fourth-century documents in opposite ways. At one extreme is Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 109, who claims that this Lenten instruction was new, a way of squeezing the old three-year catechumenate into a few weeks; at the other is Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy*, 249, who claims that “the catechesis in Lent was what it had always been: a systematic introduction into the entire Christian doctrine, summed up in the *symbolum* [creed].” Neither interpretation has third-century materials sufficient to justify such broad claims.

¹²⁴ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 46.3 (SC 296:308).

¹²⁵ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 46.2 (SC 296:308).

¹²⁶ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 46.4 (SC 296:308–10).

creed back to the bishop; then the bishop offered a final sermon, noting that “the teaching about baptism itself is a deeper mystery, and you do not have the right to hear it while you remain catechumens. . . . You will hear it all during the eight days of Easter after you have been baptized.”¹²⁷

The surviving set of Cyril’s catecheses follows a rather different arrangement.¹²⁸ He used the tenets of the Jerusalem Creed as the overarching framework: *Catecheses* 1 to 3 treat the phrase “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins”; *Catechesis* 4 gives an overview of essential Christian beliefs; *Catecheses* 5 to 18 then take up the remaining phrases of the creed phrase by phrase. In the middle of *Catechesis* 5 he formally handed over the creed and at the end of *Catechesis* 18 he formally received it back. Cyril likened this systematic approach to good construction techniques:

Think of catechesis as if it were a house. If we don’t use clamps in the right order to hold the structure together and to prevent gaps appearing so that the building becomes unsound, even our earlier efforts will be wasted. We must smooth away irregularities if the building is to rise. In the same way we bring you, so to speak, stones of knowledge. . . . I shall have many things to say in order: first I must explain them point by point, and only later in their mutual connections. If you don’t join them together into a single whole, remembering what comes first and what second, I will have performed my task of building, but the structure you have will be unsound.¹²⁹

While creedal phrases charted the main lines of this catechetical edifice, biblical stories shaped its interior. In practice Cyril linked the creed and the Scriptures in a complex way. Often he used

¹²⁷ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 46.6 (SC 296:312); trans. Wilkinson, 145 (modified).

¹²⁸ On this see Baldovin, *Urban Character*, 90–93, who suggests precise datings of Cyril’s catecheses in light of the stational liturgies; see also Maxwell E. Johnson, “Reconciling Cyril and Egeria on the Catechetical Process in Fourth-Century Jerusalem,” 18–30 in *Essays in Early Eastern Initiation*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 8, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw (Nottingham: Grove, 1988).

¹²⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 11 (PG 33:352); trans. Yarnold, *Cyril*, ECF, 83.

the creed as a way of integrating and elucidating the Scriptures, sometimes as a searchlight to sweep rapidly across the biblical landscape, other times as a focused beam to illuminate a key biblical episode. This set up a complex dialectic. While the creed lit up the Scriptures, the Scriptures in turn demonstrated the truth of creedal claims. As Cyril said just before he recited the creed to his candidates:

So for now, listen to the Creed and memorize it word for word, and in due time you will be taught the proof from the holy Scriptures for each point it contains. For the articles of the Creed were . . . collected from the whole of Scripture to make up a single exposition of the faith. Just as the mustard-seed contains its many branches in a tiny grain, so too this Creed embraces in a few words all the religious knowledge contained in the Old and New Testaments.¹³⁰

Theodore of Mopsuestia also used the creed as a key element of his curricular outline (*Homilies* 1–10) but added expositions on the Lord’s Prayer (*Homily* 11) and on baptism (*Homilies* 12–14). (I will take up later why he explained the secret baptismal rite *before* Easter.) Theodore listed quite different reasons for focusing on the creed: first, “that you might learn what to believe, and in the name of whom you are baptized”; second, that the creed is “our part in the mysteries” (presumably he means that candidates needed to understand the three creedal questions that would be asked them during the baptismal rite itself); and third, that the words have so “much power hidden in them” and are so condensed that they need exposition to tease out their subtle and potent mysteries.¹³¹ Theodore was, at heart, a mystagogue, a “teacher of mysteries,” and felt that the creed gave one access to otherwise ineffable mysteries. He justified an exposition on the Lord’s Prayer by claiming that while the creed provided knowledge of mystery, the Lord’s Prayer contained

¹³⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 5.12 (PG 33:520–22); trans. Yarnold, *Cyril*, ECF, 114.

¹³¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homily* 12.1 (Tonneau, 342–45); trans. Mingana, WS 6:17.

“teaching of good works.”¹³² These, along with the “mysteries” of baptism and Eucharist, were “symbols” that initiated one in a way that joined the Christian present to the Christian future: “we might gradually approach our future hope . . . while cultivating a conduct that is in harmony with the new world.”¹³³ For Theodore, catechesis prepared one for eschatological living.

John Chrysostom’s prebaptismal instructions have no apparent overarching framework. He mentions other teachers, so it is possible that he left more systematic instruction to others.¹³⁴ His concern—always passionate—was moral formation. His talks may be hard to outline, but his admonitions were crisp and his directives were clear. He denounced some of the same vices Tertullian had condemned: oaths, public games, women’s makeup, tinkering with omens, charms, and incantations.¹³⁵ Like Tertullian he saw these as pomps of the devil. However, his moralism focused not on the baptismal renunciation as Tertullian’s had, but on the new life made possible by baptism: “Those who administer the affairs of state are clad in robes bearing the imperial images. . . . How much more should this be the case with you who are about to put on Christ himself!”¹³⁶

Noting frameworks and outlines gives one little taste for their actual in-the-moment dynamic. These talks were emotionally charged. Cyril in the *Procatechesis* greeted the new *photizomenoi* with great warmth: “Already, my dear candidates for enlightenment, the scent of blessedness has come upon you; already you

¹³²Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homily* 11.1 (Tonneau, 280–83); trans. Mingana, WS 6:1.

¹³³Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homily* 1.4 (Tonneau, 6–7); trans. Mingana, WS 5:20. See Johannes Quasten, “The Liturgical Mysticism of Theodore of Mopsuestia,” *Theological Studies* 15 (1954): 431–39.

¹³⁴John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 10.2 (= II.1, SC 366:166–68).

¹³⁵John Chrysostom denounces shows in *Baptismal Instruction* 1.43 and 12.52; women’s fashions in 1.34–38 and 12.42–47; superstitions in 1.39–40 and 12.53–60. Oaths remain his most passionately despised *bête noire*: e.g., 9.36–47; 10.18–29.

¹³⁶John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 1.45 (SC 50:131); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:41. See also 1.46, 2.11, 2.27, 11.7.

are gathering spiritual flowers to weave into heavenly crowns; already the perfume of the Holy Spirit has breathed upon you. You are already outside the outer hall of the palace; I pray that the king may lead you inside.”¹³⁷ Chrysostom opened one of his with a similar warmth (“How I have loved and longed for the throng of my new brethren!”) and paid court to his candidates as people of great dignity (“I will do what people do when a man is going to acquire ruling power”).¹³⁸ While these catecheses are called “instructions,” they are rarely abstract or didactic. They instruct more with down-to-earth proverbs, striking analogies, or terse biblical *exempla*. Teachers like Chrysostom drew on everyday scenes and imagery—from civil service, judicial proceedings, medical practice, business, crafts, sports, war, marriage, slavery—to give a vividness and poignancy to their message.

(iii) *Exorcism*. Egeria noted that in Jerusalem exorcisms were part of the daily Lenten routine.¹³⁹ Cyril, too, alluded to their frequency and in the *Procatechesis* explained their meaning: “Be earnest in submitting to the exorcisms. . . . Imagine an unworked lump of gold that is adulterated and combined with a variety of other substances, like bronze, tin, iron and lead. We are trying to get pure gold.”¹⁴⁰ John Chrysostom (who mentions these more routine cleansings) and Theodore both stressed a major exorcism that took place some time before the vigil.¹⁴¹ In Mopsuestia—and in Augustine’s Hippo, as we will see later—candidates stood barefoot on a sackcloth of goat’s hair (*cilicium*) with their heads veiled, their outer cloaks stripped off, and their arms outstretched. Then the exorcist approached and spoke “in a loud and prolonged voice,” denouncing Satan. To explain the rite’s meaning Theodore used a courtroom

¹³⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 1 (PG 33:332–33); trans. Yarnold, *Cyril*, ECF, 79.

¹³⁸ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 9.1 (= I.1, SC 366:112); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:131.

¹³⁹ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 46 (SC 296:306).

¹⁴⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 9 (PG 33:348–49); trans. Yarnold, *Cyril*, ECF, 82.

¹⁴¹ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 9.11 (=I.7, SC 366:124–26).

analogy: the candidate was the accused; the devil, the plaintiff; the exorcist, the defense lawyer. By his words the exorcist showed that the candidate was innocent, that he or she had suffered a form of cruel slavery, and that the devil “had forcibly and unjustly brought him under his rule.”¹⁴² John Chrysostom described the exorcists’ role in a different way: “as if they were preparing a house for a royal visit, they cleanse your minds by those awesome words.”¹⁴³

MYSTAGOGY: TRENDS IN THE GREEK EAST

By the late fourth century Easter had become the favored day for initiation in many locales, East and West. We saw glimpses earlier of the third-century North African rites of initiation; we will survey the rites in Milan in the next chapter and those in Hippo in chapter 7. Here let me sketch a single Eastern example, namely, the Jerusalem rite as it can be reconstructed from Cyril’s *Mystagogic Catecheses*.¹⁴⁴ I do so to keep us alert to the diversity, sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle, among the ancient rites themselves, as well as between them and their modern counterparts. (See chart 13).

¹⁴²Theodore, *Catechetical Homily* 12.22-23 (Tonneau, 358-59); trans. Mingana, WS 6:31. See Johannes Quasten, “Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Exorcism of the Cilicium,” *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (1942): 209-19.

¹⁴³John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 2.12 (SC 50:114-15); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:47-48. In 2.14 Chrysostom draws on an analogy from the way prisoners of war were treated.

¹⁴⁴For the text see Auguste Piédagnel, ed., *Cyrille de Jérusalem: Catéchèses mystagogiques*, SC 126bis (Paris: Cerf, 2004); for a translation see Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 70-97. There has been a longstanding dispute on the authorship of the five *Mystagogic Catecheses* attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem. Two recent studies summarize the debate, offer new perspectives, and come to opposite conclusions: Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogue*, offers a sustained argument for the traditional attribution to Cyril; Juliette Day, *The Baptismal Liturgy of Jerusalem: Fourth and Fifth Century Evidence from Palestine, Syria and Egypt* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2007), favors their present form coming from Cyril’s successor, John of Jerusalem. I find Doval’s arguments stronger and follow the traditional attribution. Both authors offer valuable reconstructions and detailed studies of the Jerusalem rite and comparison with rites elsewhere in the East.

In Jerusalem initiation took place during the Easter Vigil. The *photizomenoi* and the clergy gathered at a free-standing baptistery not far from the basilica of the Martyrium.¹⁴⁵ They first entered the outer chamber. There, candidates were instructed to turn to the west and renounce “Satan . . . and all your works . . . and all your pomp . . . and your worship,” addressing him “as though he stood there before you.”¹⁴⁶ Then they turned around, from west to east, and said: “I believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and in one baptism of repentance.”¹⁴⁷ They then moved into the inner chamber of the baptistery, stripped naked (the room was probably dark, and the sexes were separated), and were anointed from head to foot with “exorcized oil.”¹⁴⁸ They then were “led to the holy pool of divine baptism.” Standing there naked in the water, they were asked three questions, whether they believed in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and were immersed after each answer.¹⁴⁹ Cyril then says that “when you emerged from the pool of sacred waters you were anointed in a manner corresponding to Christ’s anointing”; the anointing was with perfumed oil (chrism) and the newly baptized were anointed on the forehead, ears, nostrils, and breast.¹⁵⁰ At some point they were clothed with a white garment.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ See Alexis Doval, “The Location and Structure of the Baptistery in the *Mystagogic Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem,” *Studia Patristica* 26 (1993): 1–13; Juliette Day, *Baptism in Early Byzantine Palestine 325–451*, Alcuin / GROW 43 (Cambridge: Grove, 1999), 18–24.

¹⁴⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 1.2, 4, 5, 6, 8 (SC 126bis:84–94); trans. Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 71–73.

¹⁴⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 1.9 (SC 126bis:98); trans. Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 74–75.

¹⁴⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 2.2–3 (SC 126bis:104–6).

¹⁴⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 2.4 (SC 126bis:100); *Catechesis* 17.14–15 (PG 33:985–88).

¹⁵⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 3.1, 4 (SC 126bis:120, 126); trans. Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 82. There is no mention here of any hand laying such as one finds in Western rites; for a discussion see Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem: Mystagogue*, 143–45.

¹⁵¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 4.8 (SC 126bis:124–44), does not specify *when* the candidates received their baptismal robes but refers to them via scriptural quotations and after the fact.

After the baptism and chrismation the bishop and the newly baptized processed from the baptistery to the circular chapel of the Anastasis, built over Jesus' empty tomb, and there sang a hymn.¹⁵² From there they processed back to the basilica, where the larger congregation had been keeping its all-night vigil. The newly baptized (referred to as neophytes, "newly enlightened ones") were now privileged to witness and participate in the Eucharist for the first time. The deacon opened by calling for a kiss of peace, welcoming the newcomers.¹⁵³ The Eucharistic Prayer followed. It began with the traditional dialogue: "Let us lift up our hearts. . . . We have lifted them up to the Lord. . . . Let us give thanks to the Lord. . . . It is right and just."¹⁵⁴ The bishop then offered a long prayer that included an invocation of the Holy Spirit "so that he may make the bread Christ's body and the wine Christ's blood, for clearly whatever the Holy Spirit touches is sanctified and transformed."¹⁵⁵ It continued with commendations for the living and for the dead and closed with a final "Amen." The congregation together recited the Lord's Prayer.¹⁵⁶ The bishop then invited the congregation to communion, saying, "Holy things for the holy."¹⁵⁷ As the congregation approached, the cantor chanted Psalm 33: "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord." One by one, the newly baptized received first the consecrated bread in their hands, cupping their right hand in their left, and receiving it with

¹⁵² Egeria, *Itinerarium* 38.1 (SC 296:290).

¹⁵³ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.3 (SC 126bis:148).

¹⁵⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.4-5 (SC 126bis:150-52); trans. Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 91.

¹⁵⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.7 (SC 126bis:154); trans. Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 92. There has been considerable debate over the absence of a Last Supper narrative within Cyril's eucharistic prayer. For a discussion see Emmanuel Cutrone, "Cyril's Catecheses and the Jerusalem Anaphora," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 44 (1978): 52-64; Edward J. Yarnold, "Anaphoras without Institution Narratives?" *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997): 395-410; Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, 150-61.

¹⁵⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.11-17 (SC 126bis:160-68).

¹⁵⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.19 (SC 126bis:168).

an “Amen.”¹⁵⁸ Then they received the cup (presumably from a deacon), first bowing, then with an “Amen” they drank from it.¹⁵⁹ The service closed with a final prayer.¹⁶⁰

Over the course of Easter Week the newly baptized came each day for a series of final catecheses, known as *mystagogia* (“teaching of the mysteries”), which used the rites as springboard.¹⁶¹ One finds two quite different traditions on the timing and the outline. Cyril of Jerusalem typifies one of these: that the “mysteries” of baptism, chrismation, and Eucharist can be explained only *after* initiation. He set out his rationale in his opening words to the newly baptized: “For some time now, true-born and dearly loved children of the Church, I have desired to speak to you about these spiritual and heavenly mysteries. But I knew well that seeing is more trustworthy than hearsay, and so I waited until this moment to find you more amenable to my words so that, drawing on your personal experience, I would be able to lead you into the brighter and more fragrant meadows of Paradise on earth.”¹⁶² Cyril believed that the discipline of secrecy (*disciplina arcani*) that had previously cloaked the sacraments simply enshrined a good pedagogical principle: that in matters of mystery, experience precedes explanation. Cyril trusted that being stripped naked, anointed from head to foot, dunked, then chrismated with pungent perfume was itself splendid catechesis. Only after initiates had drunk in and savored the rich elusive power of such symbols did instruction assume its proper place. Only then would the resonances of his theological

¹⁵⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.20-21 (SC 126bis:168-72).

¹⁵⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.22 (SC 126bis:172).

¹⁶⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 5.22 (SC 126bis:172), in his closing comments, instructs the neophytes to “wait for the prayer,” implying that some in Cyril’s church (as some today) departed right after communion.

¹⁶¹ The classic study is Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ambrose of Milan*, *Studies in Christian Antiquity* 17 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974).

¹⁶² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 1.1 (SC 126bis:82-84); author’s translation.

reflections have their proper poignancy. Cyril, therefore, delivered his five *Mystagogic Catecheses* during Easter week. Ambrose, Augustine's mentor, would follow this same approach.

John Chrysostom and Theodore worked from a different tradition. As they saw it, one explained the rites of baptism *just prior* to the Vigil. Augustine, as we will see, would follow this same pattern. Chrysostom once cited his reasons for "anticipating the event": first, "that you might be carried on by the wings of hope and enjoy the pleasure before you enjoyed the actual benefit"; and, second, that "you might . . . see the objects of bodily sight more clearly with the eyes of the spirit," since the rite's real dynamic was worked by God invisibly.¹⁶³ Chrysostom's two mystagogical instructions on baptism were delivered prior to initiation (probably on Holy Thursday); we also have six other addresses by him given to neophytes during Easter Week. Theodore, likewise, explained the rites of baptism *prior* to initiation and for reasons similar to Chrysostom's. Baptism in his view served as the "representation of unseen and unspeakable things through signs and emblems"; one must learn "the reason for all of them" that one might "receive the things that take place with great love."¹⁶⁴ While he spoke about the baptismal rite in advance, Theodore maintained strict silence about the Eucharist itself until after Easter.¹⁶⁵ Thus his three catecheses on baptism were given prior to Easter, while his two catecheses on Eucharist were given during Easter Week.

Egeria's account of mystagogy offers fascinating details about the setting and audience in Jerusalem. She noted that in the days between Easter and its octave the neophytes, together with any of the faithful, came to hear "the mysteries," but ordinary catechumens

¹⁶³ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 2.28 (SC 50:149); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:53–54.

¹⁶⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homily* 12.1-2 (Tonneau, 324–25); trans. Mingana, WS 6:17.

¹⁶⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homily* 14.29, 15.1 (Tonneau, 460–61). Chrysostom did not maintain such reserve, but his remarks on the Eucharist during Lent were meant to tantalize rather than explain: e.g., *Baptismal Instruction* 2.27 and 10.2.

were barred from entering. Whereas Lenten instructions had been given in the church on Golgotha, the mystagogical ones were given in the Anastasis, the Church of the Resurrection. She noted the great enthusiasm these received: “The applause is so loud that it can be heard outside the church. Indeed the way he expounds the mysteries and interprets them cannot fail to move his hearers.”¹⁶⁶

A rich affective tone pervades all these mystagogical addresses, much as it did the Lenten ones, but the tonal register is brighter. Chrysostom opened one sermon by comparing the neophytes’ robes to bright stars: “Blessed be God! Behold there are stars here on earth too, and they shine forth more brilliantly than those in heaven!”¹⁶⁷ In another talk he modulated from joy to awe: “See how many children this spiritual mother has brought forth suddenly and in a single night! . . . Spiritual child-bearing is such that it needs neither time nor a period of months.”¹⁶⁸

Fourth-century mystagogical catecheses wove together three basic elements: (i) gestures and words drawn from the liturgies of the Vigil, (ii) scriptural themes and images, (iii) analogies drawn from the natural world or the local culture. These elements then received a unique cast depending on (a) local ritual practices, (b) the mystagogue’s theological stance and temperament, and (c) the local culture and milieu. Let me illustrate, albeit quite briefly, how these basic elements and individuating threads come together in the works of Cyril, Theodore, and John Chrysostom.

Both Cyril and Theodore used the liturgical rite itself for their sequence of topics. In fact, they traced the rites—bodily gesture, sacramental sign, spoken word—in such detail that, as we saw, one can reconstruct the sequence of their respective liturgies. Cyril’s catechesis on the *apotaxis* (the “turning away” from Satan) serves as a good example of his method. First, he had the neophytes recall what they had done during the rite: “You began by entering the

¹⁶⁶ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 47.2 (SC 296:314); trans. Wilkinson, 145–46.

¹⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 3.1 (SC 50:151); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:56.

¹⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 4.1 (SC 50:182–83); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:66.

outer room of the baptistery. You faced westward, heard a voice commanding you to stretch out your hand, and renounced Satan as though to his face."¹⁶⁹ Cyril then set the gesture within the drama of salvation history. He retold the Exodus story, accenting how the Jewish people had suffered under Pharaoh, "that most savage and cruel Tyrant." He then shifted "from past to present, from symbol to reality": in the old dispensation Moses was sent by God to lead his "afflicted" people out of Egypt; in the new, "Christ came to deliver the people of the world who were overcome by sin"; in the old dispensation Pharaoh "was submerged in the sea"; in the new, Satan "disappears in the water of salvation." Cyril then explained the liturgical gesture: "I will tell you now, for you need to know, why you faced westward. The west is the quarter from which darkness appears to us; now the devil is darkness, and wields his power in darkness. So we look to the west as a symbolic gesture, and renounce the leader of shadow and darkness."¹⁷⁰ Cyril here combines natural symbol (west as the place of darkness), bodily gesture (facing west), spoken word (formula of renunciation), and biblical story (Exodus, the Christ event). Together these unfold and illuminate the neophytes' conversion: their bodies turning from west to east mirrors an interior turn; their words of renunciation annul their previous "covenant" with Satan; the gesture and words derive their power and meaning from salvation history.¹⁷¹ Because Cyril spoke in the very places where these events took place, his words had added poignancy.

Theodore's method was similar, but his theological accent was different. Whereas Cyril stressed salvation history enacted in the *present* through liturgical sign, "Theodore's genius" was, as Hugh Riley notes, "to take the same liturgical signs and move them in an

¹⁶⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 1.2 (SC 126bis:84); trans. Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 70. See the analyses in Riley, *Christian Initiation*, 22–25, 35–48, 54–63, 139–42.

¹⁷⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 1.2–4 (SC 126bis:84–88); trans. Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 71.

¹⁷¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 1.9 (SC 126bis:98).

arc pointing to the *future*.¹⁷² Theodore gave them an eschatological edge—something we will see repeated in Augustine’s mystagogy. For example, Theodore stressed that by the “awe-inspiring” Eucharist “we are led through it to the future reality, because it contains an image of the ineffable economy of Christ our Lord, in which we receive the vision and shadow of the happening that took place.”¹⁷³

Chrysostom’s mystagogy focused less on liturgical outline and more on moral attitude.¹⁷⁴ He certainly alluded to the rite and used it as a springboard, but he did not walk his hearers through it step by step. Also, the Syrian rite he used differed from the Jerusalem rite. The Syrian rite retained a tradition in which anointing took place *before* baptism. Chrysostom interpreted this not in prophetic terms (as older Syriac sources had), but in athletic metaphors: “the priest anoints you on the forehead and . . . leads you into the spiritual arena as an athlete of Christ.”¹⁷⁵ The centerpiece of his mystagogy focused on the neophytes’ “gleaming” baptismal robes. Since their robes had “imperial emblems” on them, neophytes had to maintain a “godly conduct and strict discipline.” These were, as well, “marriage robes” and were meant to last not only the seven days of the “bridal feast” but for all time. The “gleam” of their robes was to be a light to guide others.¹⁷⁶

Chrysostom also urged his hearers to imitate biblical neophytes such as the apostle Paul (“Imitate him, I beg you, and you will be able to be called newly baptized not only for 2, 3, 10 or 20 days, but you shall deserve this greeting after 10, 20, or 30 years”).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Riley, *Christian Initiation*, 454. See also Thomas Finn, “Baptismal Death and Resurrection: A Study in Fourth Century Eastern Baptismal Theology,” *Worship* 43 (1969): 175–89.

¹⁷³ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homily* 15.24 (Tonneau, 500–503); trans. Mingana, WS 6:85.

¹⁷⁴ Riley, *Christian Initiation*, 266–71.

¹⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 2.23 (SC 50:146–47); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:52.

¹⁷⁶ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 4.18, 6.24 (SC 50:192, 227); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:73, 102–3.

¹⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 4.7–10, 7.28 (SC 50:186–88, 243–44); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:68–70, 116–17.

Chrysostom drew especially on images from the local culture to illustrate his points. In one talk he took up a wrestling image and, with a characteristic twist, showed how wrestling contests in the spiritual arena differed from those in the athletic: “In the Olympic combats the judge stands impartially aloof from the combatants, favoring neither the one nor the other, but awaiting the outcome. He stands in the middle because his judgment is impartial. But in our combat with the devil, Christ does not stand aloof but is entirely on our side: . . . He anointed us as we went into the combat, but He fettered the devil.”¹⁷⁸ Chrysostom insisted that sacraments gave the neophytes new powers. They could now battle in the arena of the everyday with an uncanny moral flair.

In the fourth century, as in the third, neither the rigor of the process nor the quality of catechesis guaranteed results. Thus one finds Chrysostom complaining:

I see many after baptism living more carelessly than the uninitiated, having nothing that really distinguishes them in their way of life. It’s for this reason, you see, that neither in the marketplace nor in church is it possible to figure out who’s a member of the faithful and who’s an unbeliever unless one happens to be present at the time of the mystery and see the latter dismissed and the faithful staying on—whereas they ought to be distinguished not by where they stand but how they live.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* 3.9 (SC 50:155–56); trans. Harkins, ACW 31:58.

¹⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, *In s. Matthaei evangelium*, Homily 4.14 (PG 57:47–58); author’s translation.