

INSTITUTE FOR WORSHIP STUDIES

**THE CATECHUMENATE ANCIENT & FUTURE:
CAN ANCIENT TRADITIONS GUIDE US TODAY?**

A project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for DWS 701

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Who does not know initiation does not know the Church. Who does not know the Church does not know the Lord. And who knows neither the Church nor the Lord does not know the world as God meant it to be from before always.

Aidan Kavanagh, "Christian Initiation: Tactics and Strategy"

SECTION I: THESIS AND DEVELOPMENT

A few years ago an elated pastor of a large non-denominational evangelical church in the Portland area announced that over four hundred people had signed commitment cards indicating a first-time conversion to Jesus Christ during the church's Forty-Days of Purpose campaign. Six weeks later that same pastor, now crestfallen, confessed that not one of those four hundred new Christians had returned to the church. In his disclosure, the pastor rightly concluded that in the church's zeal to make converts it had failed in its mission to make disciples. Likewise, in his address to the 1999 International Consultation on Discipleship attended by some 450 church leaders from fifty-four countries, John Stott cast the same pall of concern about evangelicalism at large, noting that evangelicals have "experienced enormous statistical growth . . . without corresponding growth in discipleship."¹

Stott's indictment and the pastor's admission reveals a condition endemic to both the church at large and to many local churches, a condition that has plagued my own efforts to introduce seeking skeptics or new believers into the Body of Christ- the Church. While never failing to extend an embracing hand of welcome, the church, nonetheless, proved utterly inept in its preparedness to evangelize and disciple these people. It proved that the need existed for a complete re-thinking, a radical paradigm shift that starts with a view toward the ancient church.

Owing to these painful admissions and conditions, I found myself driven to the issue of Christian Initiation, which by extension ushered me into the realm of the Catechumenate. While not a "junkie" it would be fair to state I am an impassioned catechumen (student) of the Catechumenate for the sake of honoring Christ's directive to "make disciples." Moreover, it seems that alacrity to Christ's Commission lies at the heart of what John the Beloved envisioned when he paralleled abiding in Christ (meinate en emoi) with fruit-bearing (John 15:1-17). One results quite naturally in the other, which according to New Testament scholar, Marcus Dods, is evidentiary that an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ in truth exists.² But it must be observed that the imperative to abide

¹ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 13.

² W. Roberston Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. 1, The Gospel of St. John*, by Marcus Dods, D.D. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Printing Company, 1979), 828.

and therein bear fruit issues forth to the entire assembly of disciples/apostles as the plural *meinate* directs. Consequently, abiding and fruit bearing find context in a coextensive life of gatheredness, as members not of any vine, but of a particular Vine, one in which, as Dods offers, “He and His together are the true Vine of God.”³

Herein resides the ecclesia, an intentional assemblage instituted by God, whose head is Christ (Col. 1:18): whose *raison d’être* is redemption (Acts 2:40-42). Therefore, it seems thoroughly *abiding/fruit bearing-like* that the International Consultation on Discipleship defines discipleship as “a process that takes place within accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ.”⁴ By what it omits saying, the Consultation implies that something once existed that no longer exists, not at least in degree, something deserving an archaeologist’s skill and patience to unearth from the dust and rubble that time seems to have forgotten. Here, among the ruins recently rediscovered our project takes form- among the echoes of ancient voices who knew well the gravity associated with converting fully and assimilating thoroughly. And who understood it to come by means of a process of initiatory rites that, in the words of Maxwell Johnson, “are about entering a new community to which one did *not* belong before, even by birth.”⁵ This was a community whose “lifestyle,” according to Alan Kreider, “was the product of their self-identity . . . ‘resident aliens.’”⁶

The process of initiatory rites to which scholars refer, and which the church in its formative life participated, bears the title of catechumenate (learning or teaching). While the second century works of Clement of Alexandria “contain the earliest known use of the term *catechumen*,”⁷ the term and its correlates survive today albeit cloaked in no small amount of vagary. However, according to Aidan Kavanagh, “This should not frustrate us. Learning to live with rich ambiguity is not a fault but a virtue. It is the poverty of precision that is killing us.”⁸ This project delves into these vagaries/ambiguities to unearth not process per se, as though attempting to reconstruct ancient formulaic traditions, but in observing what can be known from ancient traditions, find an anchor for understating the priority for catechesis and its implications for us today.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 13.

⁵ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), xvii.

⁶ Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin Of Christendom* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999), 18.

⁷ Paul Turner, *The Hallelujah Highway: A History of the Catechumenate* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2000), 23.

⁸ Aidan Kavanagh, “Christian Initiation: Tactics and Strategy,” in *Made Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, from The Murphy Center for Liturgical Research (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 4.

According to Kavanagh, the catechumenate “embraces the whole of the Church’s policy on who a *Christian* [italic added] is and how he gets to be that way.”⁹ In its natal development, the catechumenate was inextricably wed to the sacramental and liturgical ethos of the church. However, as William Harmless observes, “the Church has not had a vital adult catechumenate for over thirteen hundred years.”¹⁰ Consequently, Kavanagh in reminding us that the ancients “understood catechesis to be a *process* [italic added] the nature and form of which were determined entirely by its ‘final cause’ namely sacramental initiation,”¹¹ infers that by losing touch with this vital process, the Church indeed misplaced its catechetical compass centuries ago, and lies in need of realigning itself under the polestar of Christ’s commission.

Therefore, I am compelled to pursue the ancient traditions believing that in them the Church will rediscover the processes and essential foundations upon which it can return to transforming converts into disciples of Jesus Christ. However, in which of the ancient catechumenates will I find them? As will be observed, the contours of the catechumenate have not always been clear. Practices were diverse. Extant fragments of sermons and the like reveal no single doctrine or praxis of the catechumenate. What extant scraps of text that have been gathered demonstrate considerable variability (e.g. where one finds the invocation of the Holy Spirit within the rites, or whether the baptismal ritual emphasizes Jesus’ baptism at the Jordan or tracks a Romans 6 burial and resurrection motif).¹² Nonetheless, as the study will indicate, the Fathers indeed unveil vital foundational elements. And while these elements are spread among several traditions, they advise us that effective catechesis for the Church today requires: a generational process of lifetime conversion beginning with evangelism and continuing until death; restoration of the Trinity to its proper authority by restoring the Creed to the liturgy and the catechetical actions of the Church; restoration of sacramental baptism-Eucharist-confirmation in unity to the initiatory process; teaching that at once effects changes in belief, behavior and belonging, and respects the value and involvement of sponsors/mentors/godparents and catechists; and, finally, the dedication of the Church as a counter-cultural community to an on-going process of sacramental initiation. With these foundational principles upon which to build, I believe the Church, particularly the evangelical protestant stream of the Church, is equipped to structure and implement sacramental initiation that converts fully and assimilates thoroughly those who have been led to Christ.

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 24.

¹¹ Ibid., 25.

¹² For an excellent and comprehensive treatment of this subject, the reader is directed to Maxwell Johnson’s, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), particularly chapters 3 & 4.

SECTION II: METHODOLOGICAL SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The project will construct *what can be known* about the process of catechesis developed and administered during the third through fifth centuries. Although evidence of institutionalization becomes apparent as early as the mid-second century,¹³ quoting De Puniet, William Harmless characterizes the period from the third through fourth centuries, particularly the fourth century, as the “golden age of catechesis.”¹⁴ Given the constraints of space, I will anchor investigation within two specific catechumenates, i.e. the so-called *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* reputedly conceived during the third century, and that of St. Augustine of Hippo implemented during the late fourth and early fifth centuries. As a further delimiting factor, I will delve specifically into three catechetical practices somewhat commonly followed by both: pre-baptismal catechesis, baptismal catechesis and rites that culminate in the celebration of the Eucharist, and post-baptismal catechesis (viz. mystagogy or pedagogy as applicable). Moreover, only passing reference will be made to particular theological issues/polemics that contributed to, as well as constrained the contours of each catechumenate.

Through a process of comparison and contrast, the project will seek to determine which, if either, catechumenate presents the most relevant and applicable model for today’s church. Providing guidance and, at times, counterpoise to the treatment I will listen to the voice of Aidan Kavanagh who, in commenting about the merits and omissions of the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (hereafter RCIA), offers a glimpse into which of the early western catechetical traditions most influenced the RCIA.

Finally, I will draw my own conclusion by passing each of the catechumenates in question, including Kavanagh’s take on the RCIA, through three filters as follows:¹⁵

- Adequacy of pre-baptismal catechesis: To what degree does the catechumenate in question address holism defined as change in belief and behavior, and as assimilation within the church, i.e. the context of belonging in which one invests her/his life within Christ’s body?¹⁶

¹³ Turner, 23.

¹⁴ Harmless, 55.

¹⁵ A fourth filter, i.e. the formational value of baptismal rites, deserves consideration also. However for two reasons it was not included within this project: First, the constraints of space would not permit a fair treatment of this important subject, particularly given the variability of administrations found within the early traditions. Second, it is quite unlikely that churches today, most particularly protestant churches, would undertake to include many of the ritual practices, such as the various chrismations contained within early baptismal rituals.

- Priority given to the role of sponsors (also called mentors or godparents) and catechists (teachers): How important does the catechumenate in question assume their roles to be? This filter responds to the haunting concern: Absent fathers/mothers, how do newborn Christians survive and later thrive in their journey as disciples of Jesus Christ?
- Continuation of post-baptismal Christian formation: This point follows the strain of the second filter by asking/answering: “Absent emphasis on continued Christian-formation, how will the maturing Christian stay the course, become fruitful and ultimately enter Heaven to the words “well done thou good and faithful servant?””

Limitations

While Robert Taft remarks that “those ignorant of history are subject to the latest cliché,”¹⁷ the paucity of extant historical documents leaves us without a comprehensive and complete history of the catechumenate. Acknowledging this, Maxwell Johnson in speaking to scholars eager to assign origin to the Syrian rites warns that “we should be cautious about assuming any ‘original’ pattern or original theological interpretation at all.”¹⁸ Paul Bradshaw offers “that we simply do not know anywhere near as much about early Christian worship as we once thought we did,” for which reason he concludes; “We must learn to remain content with a measure of ‘liturgical’ agnosticism.”¹⁹ Bradshaw qualifies his comments summarized as follows:

- That much less is known than formerly presumed to be known about liturgical practices of the first three centuries,
- “That what we do know about patterns of worship in the primitive period points towards considerable variety more often than towards rigid uniformity,”²⁰

¹⁶ Kreider, 6-7. First articulation of this priority emerged from the writings of Justin who viewed belief, behavior and belonging as the essential transformations impacting upon conversion to Christ. See Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to a.d. 325, vol. I* [CD-ROM] (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, prepared by DAJUL Enterprises, 2001-2004); available from <http://www.kwikmind.com>.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, xix.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁹ Robert E. Webber, ed., *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 2, *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, “The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship,” by Paul F. Bradshaw (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 5.

²⁰ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), x. The reader is encouraged to review the section entitled *The Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (14-20), wherein Bradshaw provides a broader treatment of the hazards involved in seeking uniformity and linearity among ancient catechetical traditions and practices.

- That fourth century catechumenal development reveals the “deliberate” accretions of former traditions, something prominently visible within the Augustinian catechumenate despite his tendency toward minimalism,
- That evidence of liturgical compromise depicts “A real mutation had taken place at the time, and many primitive customs had either disappeared or had been greatly altered from their former appearance.”²¹

So where does that leave us? How can a project justify analysis with so little available evidence? Perhaps the better question asks, what is risked if we don’t make the effort to apply the forensic skills we have at our disposal? Here Aidan Kavanagh guides me. He states that, “One attempts analysis even under such adverse conditions only because not to do so leaves a certain amnesia in control of a generation’s self-awareness- a condition that reduces its ability to function in the present and survive in the future.”²²

What can be known, however, exceeds mere conjecture. Maxwell Johnson, quoting Georg Kretshmar, points out that “there is no apostolic norm in a bare [baptismal] immersion, without accompanying rites.”²³ But what were these rites? Where can they be found? For this we turn toward extant sources, many of which originate from liturgical traditions, letters in response to profoundly practical concerns about how one conducts himself/herself as a Christian, and scraps of text such as those contained within the catechumenates under review here (i.e. the *Apostolic Tradition* and the letters and sermons of St. Augustine). Otherwise we remain mum.

Mindful of Bradshaw’s cautions, as well as Kretshmar’s test of reasonableness, this study will avoid applying exactitude or universality to any period or any catechetical doctrine or praxis, while, at the same time, offering evaluative commentary that seeks a practical answer for today’s church. At this stage the project bends toward praxis, because, in the end, we need a catechetical anchor, however organically it may develop, that returns us to the work of faithfully fulfilling Christ’s Commission to “make disciples.” While the answer will not be found in texts, per se, nor in a single standard or normative pattern, I am persuaded it can be found within liturgical tradition. For, as Aidan Kavanagh avers, “Every liturgy is traditional, and every tradition has a history.”²⁴

²¹Ibid.

²² Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1978), xi.

²³ Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 23.

²⁴ Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, xi.

SECTION III: PRE-CHRISTENDOM CATECHUMENATE ACCORDING TO THE *APOSTOCLIC TRADITION*

William Harmless writes that “Perhaps the clearest blueprint we have of a third-century catechumenate- at least, of its rites and stages- is that found in *The Apostolic Tradition*.”²⁵ Alistair Stewart-Sykes records Hippolytus’ purpose in writing the document: “And now, out of love for all the saints, we have reached the summit of the tradition which is proper for the churches, that those *who are well-taught should guard the tradition* [italic added] which has come down to us.”²⁶ Hippolytus was compelled by “the error or *falling-away* that has now come about through *ignorance* [italic added], and through those who are ignorant.”²⁷

These opening phrases introduce the reader to what Stewart-Sykes remarks as “one of the earliest liturgical manuals in existence.”²⁸ He characterizes it as a “multilayered work, representing both ancient tradition and the social struggles of a Roman community in the third century.”²⁹ As a text, *Apostolic Tradition* belongs to the genre of writing known as church orders. According to Paul Bradshaw, such material “circulates within a community and forms a part of its heritage and tradition but which is constantly subject to revision and rewriting to reflect changing historical and cultural circumstances,”³⁰ thereby rendering conclusive assignation of origin, dating and authorship frustratingly inconclusive. While it delivers an archetypal pattern of liturgical catechesis, Stewart-Sykes signals that “It would be naïve in the extreme to read *Apostolic Tradition* as a simple description of Roman liturgy in the early third century.”³¹ Instead, *Apostolic Tradition* exhibits liturgical practices of a particular community, namely the Hippolytean Community, which gave life and expression to this enduring document. Originally redacted from other ancient texts simply denoted as P

²⁵ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 40.

²⁶ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Hippolytus: On the Apostolic Tradition* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 54.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁹ Ibid., 50.

³⁰ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 5.

³¹ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 50.

(P=paradosis or tradition) by a figure reputedly named Hippolytus,³² and further redacted by a second author also named Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* articulates a process of catechesis from which Augustine derived commensurable benefit, and which influenced twentieth-century Eucharistic practice.³³

However, William Harmless adjures that “The third-century catechumenate should neither be romanticized nor underestimated. On the one hand, its selectivity and rigor would produce a spate of martyrs.”³⁴ But as Harmless also points out, that “for all its sectarian rigor, [it] did not guarantee high standards or stalwart congregations,”³⁵ a tendency indicative of challenges that inhibited the effectual work of later catechists such as Ambrose and Augustine, and provoked Hippolytus to address the prospect of fallen faithful. As Aidan Kavanagh puts it, “The fathers’ catechetical homilies suggest that they still needed more Christians less than they needed better ones, even as they wished and worked for the conversion of all.”³⁶

About this rigorist tendency, though, historical theologian, Justo Gonzalez, writes that, “The moral rigorism of Hippolytus is important because it led him [into] a polemic with Callistus which is one of the focal points in every attempt to reconstruct the development of the penitential system of the church.”³⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan records that, “Hippolytus clashed with Callistus, bishop of Rome, over the latter’s willingness to define the holiness of the church in such a way that men who had ‘indulged in sensual pleasures’ were not completely excluded if they were properly penitent.”³⁸ In assuming an inclusive trajectory, Callistus appealed on scriptural grounds that the church consists of commingled wheat and tares (viz. saints and sinners)³⁹, while Hippolytus vehemently argued that Callistus’ proposal was nothing more than “an attempt to introduce an unacceptable laxity into the life of the church.”⁴⁰ Hippolytus’ work-product as a proposal in resolution of the matter resides

³² Ibid. Stewart-Sykes delineates the hypothetical ascription of Hippolytean authorship on pages 22-32.

³³ Ibid., 74. Particular regard accrues to the Eucharistic anaphorae derived for the benefit of the Roman Catholic, Anglican and other protestant churches from that found within the *Apostolic Tradition*. See also Paul Turner, *The Hallelujah Highway: A History of the Catechumenate* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000), 38.

³⁴ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 50.

³⁵ Ibid., 51.

³⁶ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 119.

³⁷ Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought, vol. I: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 236.

³⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 157.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gonzalez, *History of Christian Thought*, 237.

within the second⁴¹ of the three sections of the *Apostolic Tradition*, and forms the architecture of third-century catechumenal practice, which would be variously adapted (and redacted) throughout the region and by ensuing traditions.

For Hippolytus the corrective to the prospect of fallen faithful lay in preventive measures that take form in an overtly rigorous catechumenal process. However, it was a process of education in which catechumens “did not think their way into a new life; they lived their way into a new way of thinking.”⁴²

To accomplish its objective, the Hippolytean catechesis depended heavily upon the influence of sponsors and catechists; took place over a long expanse of time; was prominently established within the liturgical setting of the church; and resulted in sacramental baptism that culminated in first Eucharist.⁴³ In all, it consisted of four constituent parts aimed at holistic conversion (i.e., conversion that affected change in one’s belief, behavior and belonging); catechesis, preparation for baptism, baptism and life after initiation, with a brief apostrophe that touched upon what developed in the fourth and fifth centuries as mystagogy, including an emphasis on secrecy reminiscent of the *disciplina arcanii* prominent within Ambrose’s mystagogical preaching, and that of the Eastern catechists.⁴⁴

Pre-Baptismal Catechesis

A fruitful study of the *Apostolic Tradition’s* pre-baptismal catechesis requires thoughtful reflection upon its purpose: “that those who are *well-taught* [italic added] should guard the tradition which has come down to us.”⁴⁵ A discernable contemporaneous theme surfaces also: that education, as the antidote to ignorance⁴⁶ is also the means to improved societal relations, or to what Alan Kreider calls “resocialization” that results in a “community of compassion.”⁴⁷

Toward these ends, the first step of catechesis begins with scrutiny.

⁴¹ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 97-127. These pages include text and commentary on *Apostolic Tradition* chapters. 15-21 which describes the process of catechesis.

⁴² Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 23.

⁴³ Ibid., 24-26.

⁴⁴ Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, 38-43. Turner provides a bullet-point summary on pages 42 & 43.

⁴⁵ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 54.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 21. See also the prior chapter for the compelling story of Pachomius, whose conversion resulted in large part from observation of the “articulate and attractive” (20) lives of the Christians.

Those who come forward for the first time to hear the word shall first be brought to the teachers before all the people arrive, and shall be questioned about their reason for coming to the faith. And those who have brought them shall bear witness about them, whether they are capable of hearing the word.⁴⁸

More than a person's intentions underwent scrutiny during this first meeting. Through an intense interview that dealt exhaustively with the prospect's lifestyle and conduct, both the sponsor and the prospect were brought to account. Why did he turn to the faith? Did he have the ability to hear the word? Does he have a wife? Is he a slave? Next, "enquiry should be made concerning the crafts and occupations of those who are brought to be instructed."⁴⁹ Was he a pimp? Was he an artist (sculptor or painter)? Was he a soldier? Answering affirmatively to certain professions or avocations could result in either a demand to desist or complete denial of entrance into the catechumenate.

In the case of the *Apostolic Tradition* purity preceded piety. According to Aidan Kavanagh, the catechumen "will be expected to begin living in a manner befitting a Christian."⁵⁰ For from the moment of admission into the catechumenate, the "hearer" repents from paganism and thereby is now regarded as an "incipient Christian."⁵¹ Kreider comments, "This may seem severe and legalistic to us today, even perverse."⁵² However, he continues, "the early Christian catechists were attempting not so much to impart concepts as to nurture *communities* [*Italic added*] whose values would be different from those of conventional society."⁵³

Now a catechumen, s/he will listen to the Word read and expounded for a period of three years. Speculation surrounds why three years. According to Stewart-Sykes it conformed to the "time spent before admission to philosophical schools."⁵⁴ Pierre Nautin surmises that the period tracked more of a lectionary motif, a period corresponding to the complete reading and exposition of the

⁴⁸ Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, XV-XXI (c. 217). Trans. Geoffrey J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Bramcote, Notts: Grove Books, 1976), pp. 15-21, in James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 151. Note the words "brought to the teachers house" are added by G. Dix in his translation, but do not appear in Cuming's translation. For Dix translation see Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Hippolytus: On the Apostolic Tradition* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 97.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 55.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kreider, *The Change of Conversion*, 23.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 103.

Word.⁵⁵ Regardless, three years was not strictly enforced. *Apostolic Tradition 17* records, “But if a man is keen, and perseveres well in the matter, the time shall not be judged, but only his conduct.”⁵⁶

Continuing its ecclesial tone, *Apostolic Tradition 18* relates, “When the teacher has finished giving instruction, let the catechumens pray by themselves, separated from the faithful.”⁵⁷ Something transposed into the next couple of centuries and reclaimed by the RCIA was the obvious liturgical schema apparent within this text. Though we know little about whom the teacher might have actually been, whether lay or professional, presbyter or bishop, or the text of his instruction, the setting seems clear; Catechumens were interspersed among the faithful within the context of a worshiping community, a church most likely convened in a home.⁵⁸ Moreover, catechumens dwelt on a different plain than the faithful. As the text records, “And when they [catechumens] have finished praying, they shall not give the Peace, for their kiss is not yet holy.”⁵⁹ Finally, the teacher offers dismissal after he first lays hands on them, a gesture transferring from scripture, as depicted by Ananias who imposed hands upon Saul prior to his baptism.⁶⁰ Notably, the text confers the act of pronouncing the dismissal upon either a “cleric or a layman.” Although Stewart-Sykes argues that these words reflect early transmission (paradosis=tradition) prior to Hippolytus,⁶¹ they illuminate an interesting point of conjecture open to debate today: Who is eligible or authorized to catechize? This point will be touched on again in Section V: Analysis and Conclusions. Nonetheless, by the time of Augustine, legalism professionalized ecclesial duties that had until Constantine been shared among eligible members of the local church community.

But what if a catechumen should die prior to baptism, particularly accruing to capture and execution due to his/her Christian faith? *Apostolic Tradition 19* states, “He will be justified. For he has received baptism in his own blood.”⁶² However, an imprecation against “double-mindedness in respect of his witness”⁶³ prefaces this statement, bearing the ominous warning issued to the tribes of

⁵⁵Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 42. See footnote 14 for Nautin’s comments. Moreover, note also comments by Aidan Kavanagh who also reinforces the notion that education was administered within the liturgical setting and not the classroom. This was not mere pedagogy here, but the transformation of a life formerly lived apart from Christ and the church into one now conforming to Christ and His church.

⁵⁶Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 152. Cuming Translation.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸ See Alistair Stewart-Sykes’ helpful discussion about “The Scholastic Church of the Hippolytean Community and its Church Order,” *Apostolic Tradition*, 38-45.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Acts 9:17-18; 22:12-16

⁶¹ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 105.

⁶² Ibid.

the Diaspora in the Epistle of James.⁶⁴ For, according to James, a double-minded (*dipsuchos*) man is “unstable in all his ways.” It is this very notion of instability that, in formulating the content and structure of pre-baptismal catechesis, Hippolytus seeks to abjure his congregants from acceding to. He entreats catechumen, sponsors, catechists and the church alike to uphold sound teaching, and thereby defeat the loss of tradition brought about by the instability of ignorance.

Baptismal Catechesis and Rites

In the weeks preceding baptism the rigors increase, which, according to James White meant the catechumen “underwent intensive preparation including further examination of life style and daily exorcisms.”⁶⁵ Finally, a moment arrives at which time the sponsor (and possibly the entire community of the faithful) attests to the catechumen’s life while in the throes of being a catechumen, and casts a decision as to his/her eligibility for baptism.⁶⁶ If the catechumen has been found to be worthy, s/he joins with others of his colleagues as those “chosen” (*viz. electi*) for baptism. This attestation comes in response to a second and more intense scrutiny, one that pierces the milieu of the catechumen’s Christian development. Addressing “those who brought them” (sponsors), the teacher(s) inquires, “Have they honoured the widows? Have they visited the sick? Have they done every kind of good work?”⁶⁷ Then, “when those who brought them bear witness to each: ‘He has,’ let them hear the gospel.”⁶⁸

Note the marked distinction between the focus of the two interrogations. The first essentially asks *why* does the prospect desire admission into the church, and *what* evidence has s/he brought in support of her/his appeal. The second scrutiny, however, asks *how* have the catechumen changed, by directing those who have walked the long road with them- the sponsors- to witness to the degree of Christian transformation that has transpired in the catechumen’s behavior and belief since s/he first entered the catechumenate. As Harmless states, “the concern was not theological expertise or orthodoxy, but lived faith and the practice of charity and justice.”⁶⁹ However, a third and final scrutiny awaits the catechumen in the form of an exorcism. This one, reserved for the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ James 1:8

⁶⁵ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 47.

⁶⁶ Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 24.

⁶⁷ Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 153. Cuming Translation.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 43.

bishop's administration, seeks to discern the *purity* of the catechumen's commitment, with denial of the font for those who fail.⁷⁰

On Thursday preceding baptismal Sunday (presumably Easter), *Apostolic Tradition* instructs the *electi*, as the catechumen are now called, to bathe themselves. On Friday they will fast until first Eucharist that follows baptism early Sunday morning. On Saturday the bishop will direct them to a gathering place where he will exorcise them once again, this time including the rite of *effete* (ephphetha), a rite in which the bishop seals the *electi* from invasion of "alien spirits."⁷¹ He accomplishes this by blowing in the *electi*'s face followed by signing them on the forehead, ears and nose. After he has raised them from bended knee, the bishop instructs them to keep vigil throughout the night, during which time they will hear the Word and receive instruction. What kind or content of instruction the text does not say. They are to bring nothing with them apart from a gift to be placed upon the table as was customary, which will be distributed to the poor upon conclusion of the Eucharistic service.

With just hours remaining, the *electi* await the solemn rite of baptism in seclusion but with the faithful close by. Though a full treatment of issues arising from third-century baptismal rites would furnish considerable insight into the multifarious practices in use prior to and during this time, such a treatment would not contribute significantly to our understanding of baptismal catechesis per se. Nonetheless, a few points deserve attention. Flowing water, for instance, was preferred to dead or non-flowing water, because of its cleansing properties.⁷² Note, also, that baptism is conducted in the nude, but not in the full view of the church. Reasons for this practice vary among scholars, and are not stated within the text. There were three anointings with oil, two conducted by deacons: one preceding immersion to exorcise lingering demons, and a second one immediately following the final immersion for thanksgiving. The third, administered by the bishop, occurred after the baptismal party rejoined the assembly and invoked God's grace upon the baptized.⁷³

As to immersion two issues stand out. First, it was administered by either "the bishop or the priest."⁷⁴ This will emerge as a point of controversy lasting until the present day, and formed one of the polemics that swirl around which translation of the *Apostolic Tradition* provides the most accurate

⁷⁰White, *Documents of Christian Worship*, 153. Stewart-Sykes, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 108, states that the reason for this particular exorcism is that "The candidates are sealed in this rite, in order to prevent entry of evil spirits," out of concern that "foreign objects should not enter the baptismal water."

⁷¹Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 109.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷³Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 155. Cuming Translation.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

account of the baptismal rites.⁷⁵ Secondly, the language of the baptismal rite sounds very much like the recital of a creed. Stewart-Sykes affirms this adding, “The interrogatory form of the creed comes about through the Roman practice of *stipulatio*, the normal method under Roman law of entering into a contract,”⁷⁶ a contract with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit- a trinity of immersions in recognition of the tri-unity of God.

Finally, about the bishop’s imposition of hands and prayer subsequent to immersion, some scholars view it as a sign of consignation (viz. confirmation as developed later), while others regard it as a form of epiclesis (calling down of the Holy Spirit), neither of which opinion is substantiated by the text.⁷⁷ Aidan Kavanagh, though, thinks it a form of *missa* (dismissal), quite like those that dismissed the catechumen from catechetical instruction or liturgical gatherings. However now, as Maxwell Johnson comments, “they are again dismissed by means of a similar ritual structure, but this time the ‘dismissal’ is from the baptismal bath to the Eucharistic table.”⁷⁸

The oblation of the Eucharistic elements proceeds immediately after the bishop’s prayer and the exchange of blessing among each of the *electi*. Stewart-Sykes comments that the administration of three cups follows liturgical constructs practiced within other Christian and initiatory meals, and exhibits profound symbolism.⁷⁹ A cup of wine served as an antitype of Christ’s blood shed on behalf of the faithful; a cup of milk and honey in fulfillment of the promise made to the fathers; and a cup of water to signify the washing of the inner man. The bishop then offers what appears to be a very brief pedagogical address, as the elements pass into the hands of the congregation, with an obvious Trinitarian theme attached to each of the cups. Finally, the service concludes with a warrant to “let each [person] hurry to do good works, to please God and to live properly, being devoted to the church, putting into action what he has learnt and progressing in piety.”⁸⁰

When juxtaposed beside baptismal practices common to modern evangelicalism, the solemnity and gravity of the *Apostolic Tradition* becomes exceedingly apparent. Baptism was a coronation for those who sought to walk a life faithful to Jesus Christ and His Church. It indeed was triumphal, festal and embracing, if not in formality, certainly in significance. If anything disappoints

⁷⁵Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 120-121.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁷Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 166.

⁷⁸ Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 84.

⁷⁹Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 125.

⁸⁰Ibid., 113.

with respect to the *Apostolic Tradition*, it would be the absence of content, particularly text respecting instruction from the bishop or teacher to the catechumen and, later, the *electi*.

Post-Baptismal Catechesis

“But if anything else should be said, the bishop shall say it privately to those who have received. Unbelievers must not get to know it, unless they first receive.”⁸¹

Was an oblique reference to mystagogy meant here, particularly the mysterious sounding whisper in the ear by the bishop? Or, as Botte claims, has a pre-existent block of material been imported from P (paradosis)?⁸² The text rests silent on the matter, offering nothing conclusive. But it does seem odd that both the pre-text of mystagogy and its guarded secrecy (*viz. disciplina arcanii*) show up seemingly without context following the bishop’s dismissal. Here as before, the *Apostolic Tradition* hangs no content on the skeletal apparatus of Christian formation, leaving us with just this all too brief apostrophe as an open door to further formation. I find this terribly awkward, particularly in view of the bishop’s dismissal: “putting into action what he has learnt and progressing in piety,”⁸³ which fairly assumes that all that needed saying was said in the years and weeks preceding baptism. Consequently, we have been left begging for more information, but, alas, the door closes with nothing more forthcoming.

The foregoing, however, epitomizes the essential character of the *Apostolic Tradition*- a practical guide (an enchiridion, or handbook of sorts) to catechizing seekers, and a reminder to the church of its post-baptismal commitment. And, which, as a living text, promotes no theoretical biases that would inhibit other traditions from adapting it for their use. So while it might benefit us to know the actual words the teacher or bishop said by way of instruction at any level of catechesis, our purpose is served if in acquiring an archetypal plan of guidance we obtain a blueprint for liturgical catechesis, and this the *Apostolic Tradition* furnishes.

⁸¹ Ibid., 114.

⁸² Ibid., 127. For Dix’s translation text see page 114.

⁸³ Ibid.

SECTION IV: EARLY-CHRISTENDOM: THE EMERGENT VOICE OF AUGUSTINE AND HIS LEGACY TO THE WESTERN CHURCH

By the time of Augustine, William Harmless' imprecation that "for all its rigor the third-century catechumenate failed to produce stalwart congregations,"⁸⁴ came into sharp relief. Owing to the fact it "took the Church some time fully to realize her powers to forgive sins committed after baptism,"⁸⁵ by the fourth century delayed baptisms became normative, and the catechist's chief opponent. As Edward Yarnold comments, "many who were convinced of the truth of Christianity preferred to postpone baptism at least until the passionate time of youth was over."⁸⁶ Even St. Monica thought it best that her son, Augustine, postpone baptism until he had passed through his virulent adolescence, a period lasting thirty-three years.⁸⁷ For the next few centuries, including the "golden age of the catechumenate," delayed baptisms vexed the church's efforts to convert fully and assimilate thoroughly.

Thus was Augustine's world, a world made by Constantine's legalism and a stark contrast to the world of Hippolytus. The house church was replaced with the basilica. Professional clergy assumed roles formerly available to lay members. Pax Romana presided in the place of persecution, and the church became respectable. Where there were few catechumens in Hippolytus' catechumenate, Augustine was flooded with them. It was possible to malingering as a catechumen in order to avert the rigors of Christian lifestyle and avoid the disasters attributed to post-baptismal sin. A person could join the ranks of catechumen for as little reason as to improve one's social standing, appease a boss, or acquire a promotion.⁸⁸ Sir Herbert Butterfield called such motivations "inducement[s] and compulsion[s]," ploys, as it were, to seduce or, worse, coerce people into

⁸⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁸⁵ Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: the Origins of the RCIA* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁸ Craig Alan Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 2. See footnote where Satterlee discusses the effects of the "Peace of Constantine."

Christian faith.⁸⁹ Alan Kreider records that, “Constantine offered the world a new possibility of an unbaptized, uncatechized person who nevertheless somehow was a Christian.”⁹⁰ By the fourth century, Christianity, formerly a polis of resident aliens, a counter-culture, was now assimilated without distinction into the civil culture and normalized. In a word, Christianity devolved into Christendom, an earthly kingdom, denatured and defrocked of its heavenly estate.⁹¹

Situated thus, and beguiled with threatening theological challenges, Augustine’s catechumenate reveals “the beginnings of a minimalistic approach . . . and a loss of sacramental and liturgical richness in favor of a concern for sacramental validity.”⁹² This concern for sacramental validity, and, I add, sacramental purity materializes most clearly in Augustine’s theology of grace. As Pelikan writes, “The Augustinian theology of grace was thus obliged . . . to commit itself to the principle that the efficacy of the sacraments, and *especially of baptism* [italic added], was assured ‘ex opera operato,’ by the sheer performance of the act, rather than ‘ex opera operantis,’ by the effect of the performer on the act.”⁹³ This understanding of the potency and primacy of grace relieved the catechist from ill decisions made by catechumens, though it did not absolve him from the rigorous effort to persuade, cajole, or even tantalize catechumens to the font. About this, though, Augustine assumed a realistic posture: “We can’t convert the vast majority to a good life, can we?” For, there are only a “few who walk along the narrow road.”⁹⁴

Pre-Baptismal Catechesis

“The heart of the work, and its driving force, is therefore sacred scripture, understood and adopted ‘as the sole foundation of a truly Christian education.’”⁹⁵ Not rote recital, according to Augustine, but God’s narrative of creation, redemption and re-creation. From Scripture Augustine extracted love, or “charity,” as the charter of Christian education. In his words,

In all things, indeed, not only ought our own eye to be kept fixed upon the end of the commandment, which is ‘charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith

⁸⁹Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 39.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁹¹Harmless examines the characteristics of the early Christendom more thoroughly: See, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 50-56.

⁹² Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 156. See also Johnson’s treatment of the doctrinal/theological controversies confronting Augustine (viz., Donatism and Pelagianism), 150-157.

⁹³Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 312.

⁹⁴Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 65. Here he quotes Sermon 80.8 and Sermon 224.1.

⁹⁵ Edmund Hill, O.P., trans., *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1996), 11.

unfeigned,' to which we should make all that we utter refer; but in like manner ought the gaze of the person whom we are instructing by our utterance to be moved toward the same, and guided in that direction.⁹⁶

These themes disclose Augustine's pastoral modus. Whereas *Apostolic Tradition* held the catechumen at arms length pending observable evidence of life change, Augustine, instead, immediately enfolds him in a nurturing, fatherly embrace. As to preaching, William Harmless expresses that "In his sermons, as in all his works, Augustine remained a verbal virtuoso. . . . His sermons thus display a distinctive rhetorical style and approach,"⁹⁷ a trait attributable, among others, to Ambrose his long-term mentor, catechist and baptismal bishop, as well as to Cicero whose six-part juridical rhetoric Augustine reconstituted into a powerful preaching model.⁹⁸ To Augustine, the art and responsibility for persuasion attends the effectual catechist, who must strive "both to convince the mind and to arouse the emotions."⁹⁹ Augustine's proclivity for narrative as a pedagogical tool, though, often drew criticism for its heavily allegorical tendency. However, translator Edmond Hill observes that despite the long-standing controversies between literalists and allegorists, "Augustine's exegesis is quite balanced."¹⁰⁰ And as we have already tacitly explored, Augustine held sacraments (and signs) in high regard though he venerates them "not in a spirit of carnal slavery, but rather of spiritual freedom."¹⁰¹ In sum, with Augustine we obtain a master-teacher (catechist) who appeals to every human sense as he appeals to reason also. In him resides the embodiment of warm-heartedness in equal portion to tough-mindedness, the personality of catechesis of greater emphasis than structure, and valid theology excelling, indeed replacing, pointless ritual.

Augustine's catechumenal structure, though marginally discernible, doesn't emerge fully formed.¹⁰² "What he does tell us," according to Maxwell Johnson, "indicates that the North African rites of his were similar to the other non-Roman Western rites."¹⁰³ And while a likeness of third-century Hippolytean influence seeps through, it would also be apparent in varying degree within

⁹⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *On Catechizing the Uninstructed*, Chapter 3.6 (Internet: www.newadvent.org/fathers/1303.htm), 3.

⁹⁷Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 173.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 124. See also Chart 6, page 155 for a development of the Classical Juridical Oration.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰⁰Hill, *Teaching Christianity*, 20.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 18.

¹⁰² I direct the reader to Paul Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, pages 65-66 for a survey of Augustine's catechumenate. See also, William Harmless, "Augustine's Opening Catechesis and the Classical Juridical Oration," in *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 155.

¹⁰³ Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 147.

other western catechumenates as in Milan, Gaul, Spain and Northern Italy. Consequently, it serves no useful purpose to compare Augustine with *Apostolic Tradition* primarily on structural grounds, or to suggest that Augustine's catechumenate bonds itself to any particular catechetical tradition, though it arguably parallels most closely with Milan.¹⁰⁴ Instead, Augustine fastens onto theological threats (viz. Donatism and Pelagianism) that portend dire consequences for the Church if not nipped, and where best to nip them than among inquirers of the Christian faith?

Therefore, we enter Augustine's catechumenate at the point of *evangelism*. For him, "what mattered was not simply changed minds but changed hearts and changed lives."¹⁰⁵ Yet, quite unlike Hippolytus who scrutinized the inquirers' life-style and occupation(s), Augustine probed the inquirers' motives and intentions with the thought of directing the inquirer, even if possessed of bad motives, "to feel it a pleasure to be the kind of man actually that he wishes to seem to be."¹⁰⁶ In other words, Augustine was content to interview a disingenuous sort, because in his view, the chief end of the catechist was effectual persuasion; and one cannot effectively persuade unless and until he knows the thoughts of those to whom he will direct his persuasion. Consequently, evangelism, in Augustine's mind, was not about persuading the already persuaded, anymore than a fisherman cleans pre-cleaned fish, but about stinging the heart while convincing the mind of the yet unconvinced with the full truth of God's Word. Therefore, from within the milieu of the basilica, amid the assembly of co-mingled faithful, catechumens and inquirers, as many as four or more times each week, Augustine passionately preached that "God may . . . speak through us,"¹⁰⁷ and thereby influence the reluctant soul toward the font. In only one way does Augustine's inquiry resemble Hippolytus' scrutiny: He questioned those who brought the candidate and the candidate only if s/he came on her/his own.

Augustine distinguishes three classes of inquirers- the well educated, the unlearned and those educated in "ordinary" schools.¹⁰⁸ In this way he hoped to exhort each group, and each person within the group at his/her developmental level. Augustine held that people seek Christianity because s/he has "been smitten with some sort of fear of God,"¹⁰⁹ a motive he vigorously exploited in order to at once correct error and elicit proper response to God, and did so at the pace of the catechumens' educational aptitude.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 235.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, *On Catechising*, Chapter, Chapter 5.9.

¹⁰⁷ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 118

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 120. For a grasp of Augustine's catechetical methodology, it would advantage the reader to study the section entitled "The Catechesis: Principles" on pages 123-133.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *On Catechising*, Chapter Chapter, 5.9.

Expanding further on Augustine's use of, what I will term, "allegorical narrative" might help enlighten our understanding of his catechesis. Narrative, per Harmless, had a dual aim: "both to convince the mind and to arouse the emotions."¹¹⁰ However, Augustine infused it with allegory that sought to convey life-altering meaning. For instance, as Augustine expounded Judaic covenantal history from the Old Testament, he portrayed it as a type, or "foreshadowing" of the New Testament and the redemptive theme of God.¹¹¹ In this way, Augustine revealed that "For even in times of old, and in the opening ages, the depth of this mystery [salvation through Jesus Christ] ceases not to be prefigured and prophetically announced."¹¹² Given pagan superstitions which incited people to unhealthy and wrong-headed fear of God, Augustine, by intuiting historical narrative and allegory in this way, established an effective teaching device that implored inquirers and catechumen alike to trust the truth of scripture. Ultimately, through skillful scriptural exposition delivered with humility and love by a catechist who embodied these attributes, one's formerly distorted fear of God dissolved into proper love for Him, which, in turn, led inquirers into the catechumenate, catechumen to the font, and the church to remembrance and repentance.

Paul Turner nicely summarizes the bridge between inquiry and entrance rites to the catechumenate:

. . . a preliminary catechesis followed the investigation of motives. If the candidate appeared sincere, the catechist expounded a lengthy summary of Christian teaching on the spot, including the beliefs and moral precepts of the church.¹¹³

If candidates believed these teachings and desired to observe them, they were solemnly signed with the cross on the forehead, possibly with laying-on of hands, and given a taste of salt (viz. preservation and seasoning).¹¹⁴ To Augustine, the signing of the cross was a "momentous" event that signified the candidate had been set apart for God.¹¹⁵ By contrast, *Apostolic Tradition* merely states, "let them hear the word."

Harmless writes that "Augustine's classroom was his basilica; here the rhythms of education moved to the rhythms of the liturgy itself. . . . In this classroom, silence was rare: instead the atmosphere was rowdy, emotionally charged . . . its drama was salvation history; its script was

¹¹⁰ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 125.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹¹² Augustine, *On Catechizing*, Chapter 17.28.

¹¹³ Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, 62.

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *On Catechizing*, Chapter 26.50.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

scripture; and its actors included everyone.”¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, catechumens were not the center of attention; they merely blended into the fabric of liturgical life. They received no direct or special instruction unless Augustine turned toward them during the course of a sermon, which he did with greater regularity between Lent and Easter.

The liturgy often lasted an hour and a half, during which all present, including catechumens, “actually heard, sang, cheered, prayed- God’s Word,”¹¹⁷ after which was the *Conversi ad Dominum*, or dismissal. In one particularly punctuated moment Augustine inflected:

Why do I preach? Why do I sit up here? What do I live for? For this one thing alone: that together we may live with Christ! This is my passion, this is my honor, this is my fame, this is my joy, this is my one possession! . . . But I do not want to be saved without you!¹¹⁸

About the *Conversi ad Dominum* (dismissal) we know unfortunately little. We do know that after the catechumens left, the doors were closed. To them what transpired next was a complete mystery (*viz. disciplina arcani*), only to be revealed after they passed through baptismal waters. It might well have advantaged them, though, had they known that those there remaining were “exhorted to pray . . . for the catechumens that [God] may breath[e] into them a desire for regeneration.”¹¹⁹

Augustine’s catechesis excels in pastoral richness, imaged, as it were, in an early seventh-century fresco. About this portrait Harmless writes:

It captures him in the classic pose of the ancient preacher: seated on an episcopal *catbedra*, his hands clasping a codex of Scriptures. This icon, while artistically crude, is at least apt, for it portrays Augustine as he wanted himself remembered: as a servant of the Word.¹²⁰

It contrasts significantly with the more prosaic gray-scale *Apostolic Tradition*, which though providing a generic catechumenal structure lacks for pastoral warmth and hospitality.

Situated as he was upon the *catbedra* Augustine was, nonetheless, proximate physically and emotionally to his congregation. Peter Brown comments: “He [Augustine] made his first concern to place himself among his hearers,”¹²¹ and to focus upon the heart, which he esteemed “the privileged

¹¹⁶Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 235.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 188. Taken from *Sermo* 17.2

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 190. Taken from *Epistola* 217.2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

locus of faith.”¹²² Peering deeply into the faces of those assembled, Augustine discerned a congregation that envisaged the Romanesque ethos of North Africa: its corpulent indulgence, its lust and hubris, and its bitter suffering. Sensitive to their eternal plight, Augustine contended for their salvation, he begged them to the font, and fairly assumed their place beneath its waters as intercessor and priest. Alas came Lent and the trajectory spiked; it was time to enroll names for Easter baptism.

Baptismal Catechesis and Rites

How vitally did Augustine esteem baptism? Writes Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Punic Christians of Augustine’s North Africa ‘very fittingly call baptism nothing else than “salvation,” and the sacrament of the body of Christ nothing else than “life.””¹²³ Leaving aside obvious soteriological befuddlements associated with his sacramentality of baptism, and despite the fact that Augustine himself enjoyed a rich baptismal heritage, it is at this point his catechumenate demonstrates signs of minimalism.¹²⁴ Maxwell Johnson, quoting Frederik van der Meer, states “if ever there was a man who held that the solemn paraphernalia of the actual rite *was of little importance* [italics added], but that the sacrament of baptism by water was indispensable for salvation, that man was Augustine.”¹²⁵ In the baptismal rites, as well as the season of preparation preceding them, Augustine elevates baptismal significance by, among other things, carving away distracting accretions accumulated over time, as well as righting the plane set askew by Donatist and Pelagian controversies.¹²⁶

Given Augustine’s view that the efficacy of baptism was a sacrament assured *ex opera operato*, Lent, then, was nothing less than a special time of ascetical purgation and spiritual cleansing that anticipated the baptismal bath (*viz.* salvation), that peculiar and vital sacrament. To Augustine it was “time in the womb.”

Now called petitioners (*competentes*), the former catechumens underwent a rigorous training that included “(1) a demanding penitential discipline, (2) scrutiny and exorcisms, (3) a mix of public and private catecheses.”¹²⁷ Information about this process remains scant, though, according to Harmless, some fragments offer rich glimpses into the shape of the catechesis.¹²⁸ Accordingly,

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 304.

¹²⁴Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 156.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶I encourage the reader to examine Maxwell Johnson’s treatment of what these accretions and controversies were in *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, pages 135-157.

¹²⁷Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 245.

¹²⁸Ibid.

around the beginning of Lent (the actual time is not known), and prodded by Augustine, catechumens submitted their names. During the ensuing forty days the *competentes* fasted, held vigils, were repeatedly exorcised, including exsufflations (effete) reminiscent of *Apostolic Tradition*. They distributed alms, didn't bathe, and abstained from food, drink and sex.¹²⁹ Something retained within Augustine's catechesis was renunciation of Satan, which occurred several times throughout Lent.¹³⁰ The significance of all these practices lies in Augustine's assertion that "no one chooses a new life without having repented of the old."¹³¹ As the baptismal season unfolded it revealed the texture of life emerging from death, with Lent taking form as the dark and painful period within the womb, and Easter Baptism the brilliant emergence into new life.¹³²

On Saturday, a fortnight from baptism, the *competentes* assembled for a solemn ceremony- the *tradition symboli*, or handing-over of the Creed.¹³³ Augustine recited it to them, then explained it phrase-by-phrase. The essential value of this was twofold: first, it triggered a milestone in the *competentes'* journey, the first time one of the mysteries (*disciplina arcanii*) of the faith fell upon their ears. Second, it revealed orthodox Christianity, which they would be required to accept as their own confessional faith. However, it was not for intellectual benefit alone that it was entrusted to the *competentes*, but for "love that ignited wise, justice-filled living."¹³⁴ As was true about each facet along this arduous journey, the Creed presaged radical life-change, and upon this the *competentes* reflected as they memorized the lines of its ancient text. A week later, assembled together as before, the *competentes* then handed-back the Creed (*redditio symboli*), reciting it publicly within a liturgical setting, followed by a second creedal sermon from Augustine. If they stumbled, a final opportunity awaited them to get it right, moments before baptism merely a week away.

Immediately upon correctly reciting the Creed *competentes* were handed the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:7-15), again parsed line-by-line in a sermon from Augustine. At some point during Holy Saturday (exactly when is uncertain) *competentes* were called upon to hand it back as they had the Creed. Augustine then cross-wove the intrinsically linked messages of both texts together, forming an intricate yet cogent catechesis on "what to believe" and "whom to call upon."¹³⁵ In his

¹²⁹Ibid., 251. See also, Paul Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, 63.

¹³⁰Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, 63.

¹³¹Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 252.

¹³²Ibid., 257. Taken from *Sermones* 210.6.

¹³³Ibid., 274. Taken from *Sermones* 213.8.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 276.

¹³⁵Ibid., 287. Taken from *Sermo* 56.1.

Enchiridion, Augustine adjures Laurence, to whom he addresses the treatise, to “take care to know what should be believed, hoped for, and loved . . . anybody who denies these things is either a total stranger to the name of Christ or else a heretic.”¹³⁶ Thus the *competentes* were called upon to embody piety, or wisdom, in which dwelt *orthodoxia* (right belief) with *theosebeia* (reverence toward God) and *eusebeia* (“good reverence,” or right worship).¹³⁷

“From the beginning of Holy Week to the end of the Octave, the empire went on holiday;” however, “for those who were to be baptized, these days meant a busy round of church-going.”¹³⁸ On Thursday, *competentes* broke their fast and bathed for the first time in weeks. Friday they celebrated the Passion. Saturday everyone fasted, including the faithful. As Saturday night approached, “Christians all over Hippo would light lamps for the great *lucernarium*: the vigil of the Lord’s resurrection.”¹³⁹ Throughout the long night, both faithful and *competentes* listened to the “great events of salvation history . . . recounted in reading after reading, psalm after psalm.”¹⁴⁰ The vigil celebrated *Christus Victor*, who obliterated the bondage of death, sin and demonic forces. At some point the Creed was handed-back again; then Augustine delivered a final catechesis in which he explained the meaning of the sacrament of baptism, that it “signifies a burial with Christ.”¹⁴¹

Before first-light Sunday morning, Augustine processed in company with *competentes* and other ministers from the basilica to an annex nearby, solemnly reciting or chanting Psalm 41. Once inside the three-room chamber, they assembled together at the baptistery, an elegantly appointed room suited to the occasion. Their long journey of preparation and purification now ended. Augustine, or one of his ministers, called upon the *competentes* to renounce Satan one final time and swear allegiance to Christ, perhaps calling upon them to face west to renounce and east to pledge allegiance. The water (living-water of course, because standing water harbored the seat of corruption) was blessed with the Sign of the Cross in the name of Christ. With no further pomp, the *competentes* stripped off their clothing and made their way to the font (genders were separated). One by one the *competentes* stepped into the baptismal water and were immersed three times after first answering *credo* (I believe) to a pledge of fidelity to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. After immersion,

¹³⁶Saint Augustine, *The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Bruce Harbert (Hyde Park: New City Press), 35.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 33.

¹³⁸Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechuminate*, 302.

¹³⁹*Ibid.* Taken from *Sermones* 221.1 and 223G.1.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 303. Taken from *Sermo* 219 and *Tractatus in Epistolam Ioannis* 1.13.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 306. Taken from *Sermo* 229A.1.

Augustine, invoking his prerogative and authority as bishop, signed the baptized with the oil of chrism, “For the oil of our fire, of the Holy Spirit, is a sacrament.”¹⁴² From the font the new *infantes* (infants) were clothed in white linen and their feet shod in sandals (lest their feet touch the earth), which they then wore throughout the Octave (eight days following Easter).

Eucharist followed, after the *infantes* were first warmly welcomed into the basilica by the faithful. Augustine proceeded to read from Acts, then John’s Gospel, after which the entire congregation sang Psalm 117 and the great Alleluia. The night had been long, so Augustine kept his comments brief, appealing to the *infantes* as living reminders that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” It was “the great swap,” as Harmless describes, wherein Christ, “like an important merchant from a foreign land . . . took on our flesh and we received his spirit.”¹⁴³ Then the catechumens were dismissed and the doors closed. Augustine directed his entourage to the full sanctuary where an altar held the consecrated elements. There he delivered a brief catechesis on the Eucharist, after which all present partook of the Table as a single, unified body.

Post-Baptismal Catechesis

For the next week- the Octave-Augustine catechized his *infantes* twice daily preaching, teaching and fielding questions pertaining to the resurrection life in Christ. He implored them to be on guard, to hold their baptismal faith pure, to not fall prey to heresy or schism, and to wear their baptismal garments on their heart. Harmless states, “He [Augustine] did not fear their being influenced by pagans or heretics, but rather by the crowd of bad Catholics.”¹⁴⁴ Prophetic! “Still,” writes Harmless, “Augustine’s mystagogy was not so much liturgical as eschatological. For him the mystery was endtime . . . that final horizon.”¹⁴⁵

Despite not finding what I had hoped to find- a distinctive post-baptismal catechetical process- from Augustine’s Eucharistic catechesis, or more accurately mystagogy, the discernable attributes and expectations of Christian conduct emerge. He used this period during the Octave, beginning explicitly with the second Eucharistic liturgy of Easter Sunday, to accomplish three things: First, to implore his *infantes* to remember always their journey to Jesus by retracing in their memories the many-faceted, yet integrated process from inquirers to *fideles*. He did this most skillfully by

¹⁴²Turner, *Hallelujah Highway*, 64. Taken from *Sermo* 227. Augustine did not regard chrismation as confirmation, which the medieval church would do. See William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 311.

¹⁴³ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 315.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 332.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 338.

interweaving the image of the Body of Christ as both people and bread. From seeds dropped into the ground [evangelized], which ripened into kernels that were then stored in the granary [catechumenate], then subjected to the threshing floor where they were ground and sifted [Lent], the catechumens were finally kneaded and moistened [baptism] into a “single doughy mass.”¹⁴⁶ Second, Augustine implored them to lives of peace and unity in conformity to the visage of Christ (and in direct contradiction to Donatist and Pelagian heresies). Third, he fledged his neophytes during their last rite of passage- turning in of the baptismal robes. Appealing once more to his metaphor of the threshing floor, Augustine warned his charges that they were now mixed among both the wheat and the chaff. They were, therefore, to be always on guard and live faithfully their vows before Christ and His Church.

Yet was it mystagogy in the strictest sense, or post-baptismal catechesis (pedagogy) that Augustine conducted? To anchor this issue, I appeal to Satterlee who defines mystagogy as “sustained reflection on the Church’s rites of initiation . . . and has as its goal the formation of Christians.”¹⁴⁷ In this sense it is both, and in this sense comports with Augustine’s passion and ministry. For Augustine, the cycle of catechesis never stopped revolving. It merely followed the journey of Jesus from birth to death and on to resurrection glory in an endless loop. About this he was the tireless catechist.

As we noted earlier, Augustine liturgized catechetically. As Harmless says with reverential eloquence, “In his catecheses, the sweep and swirl of time came to the fore. He saw in the liturgical present a convergence of past and future, of history and eternity,” and, might I add, God’s overarching theme and passion of Redemption. Therefore, though I am disappointed by the apparent omission of explicit post-baptismal catechesis, I will have missed the point entirely if by not observing the devotion and skill of the catechist (viz. Augustine the exemplar of catechists) I will have also failed to observe that catechesis occurred every time the church assembled. For Augustine, baptism and Eucharist defined the Church, a continuously converting organism of God’s initiation.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 320.

¹⁴⁷Satterlee, *Mystagogical Preaching*, 2.

SECTION V: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Apostolic Tradition v. Augustine's Catechumenate

Both traditions originate in the Western church (viz. North Africa and possibly Rome) distinguished by a Romans 6 burial and resurrection motif, and more developed catechetical structure than exhibited by the Eastern church (viz., Syria and Jerusalem), which held the “new birth” theme of John 3:5 as its governing premise.¹⁴⁸ This distinction merits consideration inasmuch as the later developing and long-enduring Roman Rite emanates from the Western church, and demonstrates a rich amalgam of Hippolytean structure imbued with Augustinian prolixity and pastoral richness. Moreover, despite the actions of Trent (1545-1563) that sadly corrupted the pristine character of these catechumenates, primarily removing catechesis from the liturgical setting to privatized events, and separating baptism from confirmation, the reforms of the Second Vatican Council have reclaimed them (and fragments of others) within *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum* by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship in January 1972.¹⁴⁹ In so doing, we observe something of a renaissance of these vital traditions, which have impacted not only Roman Catholic liturgical and initiatory praxis, but that of many Protestant confessions as well.¹⁵⁰

Nonetheless, each catechumenate depicts vivid contrasts worthy of observation, which appear in the Appendix, Charts I & II. More importantly, and despite their observable variability, both catechumenates corroborate three vital characteristics about which I believe we can generalize: First, the imperative of sound teaching that at once removes ignorance as it motivates people toward belief and lifestyle markedly evident of a Christian; Second, teaching enriched by living examples of committed faithful who both catechize and model (as sponsors/godparents) the Life of Christ and His Church on behalf of inquirers, catechumens, *infantes* and *fideles*; Third, the necessary dedication of the Church to the catechetical process, expressed in its commitment to (re)establish sacramental rites of baptism as a vital expression of its liturgical life. Kavanagh would take this third point even

¹⁴⁸ Maxwell Johnson develops the distinctions between east and west quite well in Chapter 2: Christian Initiation in the Pre-Nicene Period, with a useful chart on page 86, *Rites of Christian Initiation*. See also Aidan Kavanagh's treatment in *Shape of Baptism*, 47-54.

¹⁴⁹ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 126. See also his summary comments on page 70.

¹⁵⁰ An important resource for the foregoing can be found on the NAAC (North American Association for the Catechumenate) website at www.catechumenate.org. Note also that the Evangelical Free Church has instituted a catechetical process essential to church membership.

farther, suggesting that the ordos of Christian Initiation be observed as “a sustained and closely articulated process rather than as a series of separate and discrete events.”¹⁵¹

At this point I will turn toward an analysis that guides us to a practical catechetical anchor for today’s church, by processing *Apostolic Tradition* and Augustine’s Catechumenate through three dialogic filters. Interacting with us will be Aidan Kavanagh, who, in opining on the RCIA, indicates which of these Western traditions most influenced *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*.

Adequacy of pre-baptismal catechesis: To what degree does each catechumenate address holism defined as change in belief and behavior, and as assimilation within the church? In writing about the RCIA, Kavanagh stresses,

The Catechumenate is here regarded as an ecclesial and liturgical structure within which *conversion therapy* [italic added] is carried on. Catechesis is understood to be concerned with conversion in Christ and with how to live continuously in such a manner not only prior to but after initiation as well.¹⁵²

In his remarks Kavanagh eloquently states what both catechumenates agree upon, that “*Catechesis* was understood to be not about education but about conversion.”¹⁵³ Like Augustine, Kavanagh views the importance of the ceremonial details second to the strategic vision of the Church, which was to convert fully and assimilate thoroughly. In synch with *Apostolic Tradition*, Kavanagh views catechesis through the structure of a “continuing renewal process of evangelization, conversion, catechesis, and the paschal sacraments of Christian initiation.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, while catechesis educates for the purpose of sound doctrine, its chief goal is therapeutic conversion that restores both the individual and the Church to spiritual wholeness in Christ. About this, *Apostolic Tradition*, Augustine and the RCIA agree. Commenting about the RCIA’s curious resemblance to *Apostolic Tradition*, James White points out that this structural resemblance didn’t come by accident; it “was the chief source of the new rite.”¹⁵⁵

Whereas the liturgical life of the church provides the setting for catechesis neither *Apostolic Tradition* nor Augustine seem to emphasize belonging with the same vigor and priority as the RCIA. Jennifer Glenn states well the RCIA position, that “This eucharistic assembly, forever growing in love into the ‘full maturity’ of Jesus Christ, is the goal of Christian Initiation.”¹⁵⁶ Kavanagh puts it

¹⁵¹ Aidan Kavanagh, “Christian Initiation in Post-Conciliar Roman Catholicism: A Brief Report,” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press), 5.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁵³ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 120.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 126. For a detailed discussion of the Structure of the Rites of Adult Initiation, see pages 128-147.

¹⁵⁵ White, *Brief History*, 46.

¹⁵⁶ Jennifer Glenn, CCVI, “The Church: Goal of Initiation,” Assembly 5 (June 1985) : 291.

thus, “The power of the cross of Christ erupts in the world through baptism celebrated continuously in the Spirit-filled Body of Christ which is the Church.”¹⁵⁷ While evidence for communal vitality shows up in various places within *Apostolic Tradition* and Augustine’s catechumenate, neither catechumenate explicitly distinguishes it. This omission of sorts, though somewhat troubling, has found re-prioritizing in the RCIA for which we can be thankful. For what had gone wanting throughout recent centuries was continuity within the initiatory rites, principally baptism, First Eucharist and confirmation. The seeds of lost continuity arguably were planted during Augustine’s quest for sacramental validity that resulted in sacramental minimalism. However, by bringing light to the need for sacramental wholeness within the Church, the RCIA has reunited baptism-Eucharist-confirmation within the unified liturgical actions of Christian community.

On these grounds, I am inclined to look to *Apostolic Tradition* for a definitive architecture of catechesis, however abridging certain of its baptismal formalities, and eliminating exorcisms in favor of times for accountability and prayer with one’s sponsor. I lean toward Augustine for pastoral hospitality; for his evangelical passion: for the primacy of scripture as the text and authority of catechesis; and for his mystagogical and pedagogical emphases that agrees with Kavanagh’s idea of conversion therapy. And finally, I embrace the RCIA for community and sacramental unity.

Priority given to the role of sponsors/ mentors and catechists: What priority accrues to sponsors and catechists, including importance attributed to their roles, the definition of their roles, and their accountability to their respective catechumenates? Here we seek to know how catechumens were shepherded on the long, often arduous journey from inquirer to *fideles*.

Having served as both a catechist and sponsor, I am strongly persuaded of the necessity for this element in the catechetical process. Few people have the motivation to undertake and surmount even modest challenges without the encouragement of fellow sojourners who have traversed the same path before them, leave alone a matter as rigorous and beset with the hazards encountered in Christian formation. Granted the church body plays a vital formative role through its liturgical life, but within the mind and spirit of an inquirer, or new Christian, a congregation frames an amorphous, often impersonal and intimidating organism. Under the supervision of the church, accountable to it and its pastoral staff, I believe the need exists for people (lay and clergy) set apart and trained to teach and guide inquirers and new Christians, and to walk the long conversion journey with them.

But do the catechumenates we have studied agree? Kavanagh (contradicting the RCIA) does not. He writes, “caution ought to be exercised concerning the temptation to reduce the local church’s role in the forming, scrutinizing, electing, and baptizing catechumens down to a certain symbolic number of the Faithful who go through the whole of a brief ‘catechumenate’ with the

¹⁵⁷ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 5.

catechumens.”¹⁵⁸ He expresses a twofold concern: First, catechumens may be unduly influenced by the impious, those with dissimilar ecclesiastical tastes, or the overly zealous. Second, and more importantly, “The real danger lies in overlooking the matter for which the Church as a whole should have the most concern, namely, the formation of new members for initiation into itself- an act of which it is the main sacramental agent in and after Christ himself.”¹⁵⁹

Apostolic Tradition assumes an entirely different trajectory, laying a heavy load of accountability on the sponsor. As earlier observed, scrutiny was directed to sponsors, both pertaining to the catechumen’s acceptance into the catechumenate, and later for eligibility to baptismal rites. It was also incumbent upon sponsors to attend catechesis, and process through the baptismal rites with their respective catechumens. Catechists, too, were held to strict standards, and became the focus of controversy during the third-century monarchical episcopate debates. By the time these debates foment into reform, the Hippolytean School had already shed its predominantly scholastic shape for a tightly regulated process of rigorist conversion.¹⁶⁰ Teachers (catechists) pursued an ideal of fellowship and communal celebration imbued with rigorous discipline that included private and public readings, accountability, exorcisms and scrutiny.

Augustine, on the other hand, aligns more closely with Kavanagh, assuming a tone of insouciance toward sponsors. In speaking about the interrogation of inquirers he remarks,

It is certainly helpful to be informed beforehand by those who know [the candidate]: what his disposition of heart might be, what causes may have induced him to come and embrace religious observance. But if there is no one else from whom we learn this, we may question the candidate directly.¹⁶¹

In fairness to Augustine, his detached regard for the importance of sponsors (godparents as he called them) might have to do in part with the frequency of liturgical catechesis. No fewer than four times weekly and as much as twice daily during the Octave, the church assembled for worship at which time Augustine, or his duly qualified assignee, catechized the church. Moreover, this attitude did not translate similarly toward catechists; from these he clearly expected a thoroughgoing involvement as his letters to Laurence and Deogratias demonstrate. To Deogratias who reputedly had become “profitless and distasteful” even to himself, Augustine writes:

For the more extensively I desire to see the treasure of the Lord distributed, the more does it become my duty, if I ascertain that the stewards, who are my fellow-servants, find any difficulty in laying it out, to do all that lies in my power to the end

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 182.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 39-41.

¹⁶¹ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 113.

that they may be able to accomplish easily and expeditiously what they sedulously and earnestly aim at.¹⁶²

Where do these insights direct the church today? While I disagree with Kavanagh, and, to a lesser degree, Augustine, with respect to the priority of sponsors, I side with Hippolytus, and largely on grounds that guided him. Given the fact that few inquirers today possess even a modicum of spiritual instinct toward Christian faith, and who in all likelihood hold to a degree of skepticism or agnosticism (ignorance to Hippolytus), I re-affirm my position and judge it not only useful but vital that inquirers and new believers have someone at their side for guidance: a confidant of sorts to whom inquirers can direct questions and from whom receive informed answers, and someone from whom to receive necessary approbation and accountability. Therefore, I am persuaded that today's catechumenate must anticipate and plan for identifying, educating and supporting sponsors. Likewise, the church needs to render priority to the identification, education, training and supervision of catechists. Absent these important people and the roles they assume on behalf of inquirers and new believers, I fear that any well intended program of catechesis will fall short. Indeed, it will only be a *program* and lack the staying power that an organically developing process of fellowship and community might otherwise achieve.

Continuation of post-baptismal Christian formation: Absent post-baptismal catechesis, how will the maturing Christian stay the course, become fruitful and ultimately enter Heaven to the words "Well done thou good and faithful servant?" As we earlier observed, *Apostolic Tradition* leaves us wondering "what next?" pertaining to post-baptismal instruction. Given the teacher's invitation to receive questions from the newly baptized, it might be assumed that additional instruction occurred but at the initiation of the neophytes. Moreover, let's not leave aside the fact that *Apostolic Tradition* exists as a handbook of sorts that among other subjects talks about when to pray, to fast, how to care for widows, and when and under what circumstances to hold Eucharist. Therefore, though silent on mystagogy per se, or post-baptismal pedagogy, it, nonetheless, continues to guide and serve the Church as a primal rubric for orderly life and liturgy.

Augustine, however, offers enriched mystagogical perspective profoundly rooted in the Easter *triduum* (Pasch), which, according to Augustine, the community did not celebrate, rather "we enact Pasch."¹⁶³ In this manner, Augustine aligned closely with Chrysostom, a rhetorician who, like himself, did not withhold the mysteries of redemption (viz. baptism-Eucharist-consignation/confirmation) in the manner of other traditions until after sacramental baptism, but led the competentes to the font with potent metaphorical images of redemption washing through their

¹⁶² Augustine, *On Catechizing*, 1.

¹⁶³ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 301.

imaginings. His mystagogy transcended mere anamnesis; it instead provoked neophytes to realize that the mysteries of redemption held consequences: “they shaped how one saw Christ and the Church, how one felt and probed one’s heart, and how one treated everyone else.”¹⁶⁴ In other words, Augustine began mystagogical training during Easter Week and continued it throughout the Octave. However, as we stated earlier, Augustine continuously catechized. Harmless writes that Augustine “‘liturgized’ catechetically; that is, publicly, orally,” and, I add, unremittingly.

Writes Kavanagh: “While the period of postbaptismal *mystagogia* is an ancient Church structure, its *raison d’être* is as valid as it ever was.”¹⁶⁵ Which, as he quotes from the RCIA, means that “both the community and the neophytes ‘move forward together, meditating on the Gospel, sharing in the eucharist, performing works of charity. In this way they understand the paschal mystery more fully and bring it into their lives more and more.”¹⁶⁶ These words echo strains of Augustine’s mystagogy, particularly as the RCIA instructs that “initiation does not end with baptism, confirmation, and first eucharist.”¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, Kavanagh clarifies that “conversion in Christ among his holy people becomes the public possession of the whole local church each time initiation is brought to term in its premier sacramental phase.”¹⁶⁸ It heralds the fact that the church exists as “a continuously converting people.”¹⁶⁹ Although the RCIA leaves open the means of expressing this to the province of the local church, by stating the matter as it has, the missiological priority of disciple-making could not be clearer.

Of these catechumenates I’m inclined toward the RCIA, inasmuch as while remaining true to ancient, pre-medieval traditions, it elevates conversion therapy to the highest level of the Church’s liturgical purpose and actions, with dedication to scriptural authority, and in a voice necessary for our times. Moreover, it reaches back to the ancient church and links us with our ecclesial godparents—the Fathers. It borrows from each of the catechumenates under review here, taking from *Apostolic Tradition* a multi-part, integrated but adaptable architecture, one that involves the entire church community, calls for life-change, and results in baptism that culminates in first Eucharist. In tone its pastoral hospitality and pedagogical nature aligns most closely with Augustine, indeed his catechetical refrains fairly reverberate throughout the RCIA’s text and Kavanagh’s commentary. In a word, the RCIA represents the nexus between the ancient and future converting Church.

¹⁶⁴ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 338.

¹⁶⁵ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 145.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Summary Response

Where has this study taken us? In seeking a “catechetical anchor” for the church today, one which reveals the essential characteristics of sacramental catechesis, has it been found? I believe it has, and, as suspected, in multiform traditions. Drawing upon each of the catechumenates, and in light of the above analysis, I have extracted six strategic elements, which I believe to be essential for a vital catechumenate, the final structure and expression of which lies with the local church.

First: Extending Augustine’s Lenten metaphor, I am persuaded that evangelical Christianity most particularly needs to realize that becoming and growing as a Christian encompasses neither an event nor a decision, but a generational process: a lifetime of maturing through discernable stages, beginning with re-birth, until one reaches the fullness of salvation in Christ Jesus at the time of her/his death or Christ’s final advent. Kavanagh in addressing what he sees as a cross-denominational concern for identity (i.e. “Who am I as a Christian?”) states that the answer begins:

In the “making” of Christians- from the first stirrings of belief, through the catechumenate . . . to the united sacramental process of baptism-confirmation-eucharist which constitutes the assembly of the *fideles*, and beyond that into the continuing conversion which is ecclesial life together.¹⁷⁰

For Kavanagh, Christians are not born; they are made,¹⁷¹ a concept that if taken seriously will truly test the decisional proclivity of evangelical protestant faiths. The reader will recall the opening premise of this study, that while many evangelical churches have solicited decisions, they have fallen woefully short of translating these decisions into a commensurable number of disciples of Jesus Christ. And though they rightly point out that conversion begins with re-birth (John 3:3-5), they must also accept Christ’s Commission in the continuous present tense: baptizing and teaching as a continuous developmental action that terminates only with the end of the ages (Matthew 28: 16-20).

Second: For the actions of Christian Initiation to truly embrace biblical authority, evangelical Christianity must restore the Trinity to its proper priority: something about which neither *Apostolic Tradition* nor Augustine nor the RCIA exhibits the least confusion. We accomplish this when we recite the Creed, which, while existing as the apologetic pillar upon which the truth claims of Christianity hangs, further reminds us that the Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit and the Spirit inhabits the Church- Christ’s people.

Third: The catechumenates reviewed here emphasize the sacramentality of baptism-Eucharist-confirmation as vital rites of passage, which acknowledge that someone formerly outside

¹⁷⁰ Kavanagh, “Christian Initiation,” in *Made not Born*, 5.

¹⁷¹ Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism*, 119. “Made not born” is an overarching theme which Kavanagh emphasizes in nearly all of his writings.

the Christian faith has come to faith, been nurtured and instructed in the faith, assimilated within the faith, and then commissioned to live a fruitful life exemplary of the faith. And by faith, we mean not an abstract concept abiding primarily within the liturgical, theological and doctrinal statements of the Church, but the coalescence of all these things in the communal and missiological life of the Church. If these catechumenates, including the RCIA, teach nothing, they demonstrate that life in Christ means embodied sacramental participation within His kingdom here on earth- the Church.

Fourth: I believe that effective catechesis reflects a broad, practicable educational structure aimed at holistic life-change, and sensitive to the ethos of the local church. It might consist of the three sections employed in this study: pre-baptismal catechesis beginning with evangelism and concluding with entrance into baptismal catechesis; baptismal catechesis and rites, including Eucharist; and post-baptismal catechesis that extends spiritual formation at least through Pentecost, with options for additional class and community formational actions throughout ordinary time as well. Important to this task will be the church's commitment to actively support the work of competent sponsors and catechists, and to frequently ask of itself, "Does our life together reflect the redemptive purpose and expectations of Christ?" No matter what number of steps it assumes, the structure should remain fluid enough to adapt to the needs of the sponsoring church.

Fifth: The Church today must embrace the concept of church-as-community, not any community, but one focused explicitly upon Christ's redemptive acts. While neither Augustine nor *Apostolic Tradition* makes *belonging* an explicit factor, both catechumenates hold the communion of the Church in prominent view. Personal identity became subsumed into the common identity of the community of Christ. Individual expression did not find place until later, when the church removed the liturgy from congregants and made it and catechesis the private domain of popes and bishops. With the advent of RCIA this Tridentine practice has been reversed, taking form as it once did when Augustine sat among congregants, at table with them and catechized them through the liturgy. For protestant churches this idea may stretch them, because to truly embody the full orb'd concept of a polis of the redeemed, they must first reengineer their liturgical and catechetical practices to conform to what Kavanagh calls the "continuously converting church," a counter-cultural body united and organized around sacramental initiation, including its passage rites.

Finally, I believe today's Church should hear and heed Kavanagh when he states that "Initiation defines simultaneously both the Christian and the Church, and the definition is unsubordinated to any other except the gospel itself."¹⁷² Notwithstanding Harmless' earlier observation that catechesis does not guarantee stalwart congregations, its absence assures failure, most particularly failure on the one imperative Christ left with the Church- to "make disciples."

¹⁷²Ibid., 145.

Appendix:

Chart I: *Apostolic Tradition* v. Augustine's Catechumenate: Catechetical Elements

Element	Apostolic Tradition	Augustine's Catechumenate
Setting	Liturgical life of the church: most often a home	Liturgical life of the church: the basilica
Tone	Rigorist	Pastoral (rigorism in ascetical requirements especially from Lent through Easter, but pastoral voice always present)
Sponsors/Godparents	Accountable to the teacher and church. Spoke for the inquirer & catechumen Walked side-by-side with the catechumen	Friends important for evangelism Sponsor/godparent accepted but not pre-condition to entrance to catechumenate
Catechists	Patron/Presbyters at time of ^R EL: Controlled curriculum; conducted in patron's home; church held no authority over content/structure until clergy professionalized and patrons relinquished control. Thereafter, bishops or presbyters (non-patrons) taught under the aegis of the Church. Curriculum controlled by Church. ¹⁷³	Bishops or duly appointed clergy under direction of the Bishop. See letter to Deogratias. ¹⁷⁴
Cultural Climate	Pre-Constantinian legalism Acute/episodic persecution Non-professional clergy	Post-Constantinian legalism Church protected under Pax Romana Professionalization of clergy
Purpose/Objective (Belief-Behave-Belong)	Behavior change by means of teaching that overcomes <i>ignorance</i> . (Changes in belief were to effect change in behavior. Belonging subject to observable change in behavior.)	Behavior change (Change in belief in the form of persuasion that compelled behavior change and baptism into the Church.)
Authorship	Redacted document accruing to several authors including P (paradosis=tradition), a community existing prior to the second century; a figure reputedly named Hippolytus, and a later 3 rd century figure also named Hippolytus. ¹⁷⁵	Augustine's sermons, Tractates, letters. Notably influenced by rhetoricians Ambrose Bishop of Milan, and Cicero whose juridical rhetoric he adapted into a powerful sermon paradigm. ¹⁷⁶
Structural Emphasis	Structure transparent and emphasized. Baptismal actions reflective of heavy redaction, which renders generalization ill-advised.	Not clearly discernible.
Content Emphasis	Very little content. The baptismal rites offer a glimpse into instructions/comments made by the bishop.	Content rich, however, primarily directed to the entire congregation. Apart from certain sermons wherein Augustine turned toward the catechumens (approx. 21 times in all), and during Octave, little is offered by way of direct catechumenal content.
Style/Expression	Catechumen held at arm's length. Prove by your piety that you are worthy of the baptismal bath.	Embracing: Don't delay the benefits of salvation and the life of faith among Christ's faithful.
Genre	Book of church orders.	Pastoral sermons, letters, enchiridion (handbook).

¹⁷³ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 38-47.

¹⁷⁴ Augustine, *On Catechising of the Uninstructed*, 1.1.

¹⁷⁵ Stewart-Sykes, *Apostolic Tradition*, 22-32.

¹⁷⁶ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 122-125.

Chart II: *Apostolic Tradition v. Augustine’s Catechumenate: Stages and Passage Rites*¹⁷⁷

Rites	<i>Apostolic Tradition</i>	Augustine’s Catechumenate
Pre-Baptismal Catechesis: Scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catechist inquires of sponsor on behalf of catechumen • Conducted prior to worship in the home of the catechist • Inquiry is of lifestyle and occupation • Some occupations denied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catechist conducts initial inquiry of prospective catechumen’s motives • Lifestyle not taken into account.
Catechesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three years in duration (less if catechumen proved worthy) • Sessions included scripture, prayer, handlaying • Catechumens attended liturgy but dismissed prior to Eucharist. • Catechumen sent into community to conduct good works and mingle with members of the church to learn Christian life from them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catechesis began with evangelization • Enrolled into the catechumenate in solemn ceremony including handlaying, signing of the cross on the forehead, and taste of salt. • Duration of catechumenate not known, though presumed to be several years. • Catechumens attend service of the Word (<i>lectio continua</i>) with the faithful. Dismissed prior to Eucharist. • Catechumens called upon to purify their behaviors.
Baptismal Catechesis and Rites	<i>Apostolic Tradition</i>	Augustine’s Catechumenate
Process of Enrollment and Catechesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second scrutiny: Catechist poses questions to the sponsor about the worthiness (purity) of the catechumen for the baptismal bath. • Worthy catechumens were elected for baptism. • Catechumens submitted to daily handlaying and exorcism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catechumens submitted their names to the Bishop usually at beginning of Lent, but prior to Easter. • Competentes attended Lenten liturgies, and frequently submitted to exorcism and renunciations of Satan, forewent food, drink, sex and sleep. • Competentes receive Creed on Saturday a fortnight from Easter, and a sermon about its meaning • Competentes recite the Creed one week prior to Easter. The Lord’s Prayer then given to them along with an expository sermon about it.

¹⁷⁷ The reader is directed to Sections III & IV within the paper for an exposition of these events, as well as to Paul Turner, *Hallelujah Highway* pages 42-43; 65-66.

Baptismal Ritual

Apostolic Tradition

Thursday:

- Catechumens bathe

Friday:

- Fast until first Eucharist early Sunday morning.

Saturday:

- Final exorcism with *effete*
- Attend vigil

Sunday:

- Presbyters/deacons lead electi to baptistery
- Water blessed with chrism
- Electi remove clothing and renounce Satan
- Electi anointed with oil of exorcism then step into baptismal water
- Electi immersed three times in acclamation of the Trinity
- Baptized now anointed with oil of Thanksgiving and dress
- Baptized join assembly, received handlaying from the bishop who prayed for God's grace upon them and then kissed and anointed them with oil.
- Eucharist followed: bread, water, wine and a mixture of milk and honey.
- Bishop exhorts newly baptized to live well their Christian life and dismisses them.

Augustine's Catechumenate

Thursday:

- Competentes break fast and bathe

Friday:

- Competentes celebrate the Passion with the entire church community

Saturday:

- Bishop directs the competentes to a specific place.
- The entire church enters into fasting and gathers to profess faith in the Creed and hold vigil.
- Sometime during the Saturday events, competentes hand back the Lord's Prayer.
- Saturday night Christians light lamps for the great Lucernarium: Vigil of the Lord's Resurrection.

Sunday:

- Before first light the bishop, ministers and competentes process to the baptistery
- Bishop blesses the water with chrism
- Bishop calls upon competentes to renounce Satan and pledge fidelity to Jesus Christ.
- Competentes (in camera) remove clothes and proceed to baptismal waters and were immersed three times after answering credo to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Bishop signed the baptized with chrism
- Baptized donned white linen robes and sandals
- Baptized joined the faithful for first Eucharist.

Post-Baptismal Catechesis Mystagogy/Pedagogy

Apostolic Tradition

- Bishop dismisses the baptized (neophytes) with warrant to holy living.
- Bishop leaves open opportunity for neophytes with additional questions to approach him privately for further instruction.

Augustine's Catechumenate

- Bishop catechizes twice daily during the Octave (eight days following Easter).
- Infantes wear their baptismal robes/sandals throughout the Octave.

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