

# REDISCOVERING MYSTAGOGY THROUGH THE HISTORY OF CRISTIANITY

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## ABSTRACT

Mystagogy was developed within early Christian communities, particularly with regard to the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. The idea of mystagogy was conceived in patristic time during the fourth and fifth centuries. Through the homilies and catechetical teachings, the church fathers described mystagogy as part of catecheses for candidates and neophytes before and after Easter. In this article, the idea of mystagogy is reconsidered through its understandings from the Greco-Roman world to early Christianity up to the context surrounding the church of today, mainly in the context of Sacraments of Initiation for adult. How mystagogy works in Christian liturgical teachings on Initiation will be analysed and its role in the liturgical context of the church will be refreshed. The revival of mystagogy has been initiated by the Vatican II when theology, catechesis and culture were put into dialogue. This move brings us further to see mystagogy as a personal and communal formation of a Christian.

**Key Words:**

•*mystagogy* •*mystagogue* •*myste* •*catechesis* •*baptism* •*church*  
•*initiation* •*sacrament* •*cult* •*rite of passage* •*mystery* •*christian*  
*community* •*faith* •*spiritual theology* •*Vatican II* •*liturgy*  
•*revival*.

**Etymology**

Etymologically, the word *mystagogy* is derived from the Greek verb *μυεῖν* (*mueō*) which suggests an action of conducting someone or guiding a person (*agein*) who has been initiated (*mystes*). *Mystagogy*, in this respect, was widely used in a sacral context. It means 'to teach a doctrine' and therefore 'to initiate into the mysteries'.<sup>1</sup> The term 'mystagogy' which has its usage in classical Greek as 'initiating into the sacred' was then reinforced by classical Latin application. In the extended usage of this term, someone who introduced a friend into the sacred foundation of the Greek family could be called a *mystagogue*. A *mystagogue* is the person who does the leading and introduces the candidate into the divine mysteries. A *myste* could refer to someone being initiated into a group of a certain cult. Extension of the use of the words from the sacred group – or secret cults – into the secular domain made it easier for the church fathers to make use of it.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the function of the word *mystagogy* has always to do with initiation into the sacred. The word *mystagogy* also has a common root with the word 'pedagogy' and at the same time it deals with the process of assisting and educating those who are being initiated.

The community of early Christians, at this point, set aside the cultic practices of the pagans despite the fact that they felt more comfortable borrowing the language, or even some of the methods of pagan *mystagogy*. Everett Ferguson, in *Church History*, recognizes that the influence of Greco-Roman cult cannot be ignored from the early Christian community.<sup>3</sup> When the adult ranks of the Christian catechumenate started to enlarge in the fourth century – after Constantine's Edict of Tolerance offered legal protection to the struggling church – the notion of *mystagogy* was adapted to Christianity. It was used when bishops initiate a large numbers of converts 'into the mysteries'. Enrico Mazza, in *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, observes that the Christian *mystagogy* – methods and teachings – is applied to the people who had been attributed the Christian conversion offering their deep personal experience of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, because

Christianity stressed an all-encompassing, life-changing experience in Christ at the point of conversion, it was at the same time, well suited for the pagan method of *mystagogy*.

## Greco-Roman Cult to Early Christianity

The 'mystery religions' which gave birth to the expression of 'mystagogy' belonged to the world of Greco-Roman and pagan antiquity. Mazza remarks that they had their greatest expansion during the first three centuries AD. The mystery religions - being involved in the origin of agricultural rite - were arising from seasonal cults to ensure fertility for crops. Many of them invoked deities of fertility and were first celebrated locally.<sup>5</sup> Then, the celebration became cosmopolitan and more sophisticated with the passage of time. The 'mystery religions' were secret cults in which a candidate had to be initiated almost like in the secret societies. The constitutive features of a mystery society were common meals, common dance, and other ceremonies.<sup>6</sup>

The candidates were initiated especially into the several secret societies such as: the Eleusian mysteries, cult of the corn goddess Demeter or Ceres, mythological successor to Gaia, and in many Greek cities into Dionysian mysteries. They allowed people to experience religion in a way not provided for in the official public religions. There were also mystery religions in Crete, Syria, and Egypt. The remote origins of the mystery cults of Syria can be traced back to the third millennium BC, such as to the Sumero-Babylonian cult of Istar. The mystery cult also arose in Persia such as the cult of Mithra. The Persian cult of Mithra, at Rome and throughout the Empire, became widespread from the second to the fourth centuries AD.<sup>7</sup> The mystagogue in Roman cult of Mithraism is described as follows:

*"The mystagogue, dressed in white, who exhorts or teaches the initiated, and the wretched subject. These scenes seem to explore the implications of one of the key narrative scenes, after the bull's death, in which Mithras seems to threaten Sol, who kneels before him."<sup>8</sup>*

Clayton N. Jefford et alii, in his *Reading Apostolic Fathers*, point out that the apostolic fathers (*Didache*) elaborated the early Christian initiation rites with the cult which was probably developed in the region of Asia Minor, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. The rite of initiation simply means introducing

the candidate into the community.<sup>9</sup>

The mystery cults were secret for several reasons; firstly, because they flourished alongside the official religion and constituted an alternative religious experience. Secondly, they may have had teachings considered subversive of the commonly received ideas about the universe. And finally, they involved an experience and so had little to tell to someone who had not undergone the experience.<sup>10</sup> The Greek root of the 'mystery' implies that those present ought to close their mouths (*mueo*) about what they had heard or experienced. This is one of the factors making for scarcity of information about the cults. It was also noted that many participants took part in the rites of the mystery society for the sake of good fellowship and supper. There was, however, a deeper level of the cult, which was not expressed in words, but transmitted by the rites themselves to those who were capable of appreciating it.<sup>11</sup> Annemiek de Jong-van Campen, in her book *Mystagogie in Werking*, remarks that the rite in the mystery cults is also "rite of passage".<sup>12</sup> There was no formal theological or philosophical thought in it, at least not in early times. It was the religious experience which made the initiation memorable and gave the cults their hold for the personal transformation in their secret community.

In the period of Plato, a change in the use of the language of mystery was introduced. The language of mystery and the term *mysterion* was initially used with a philosophical tone. The mystery is the ultimate aim or union with the divine. Its meaning has not changed; what has changed is the manner it functioned. Mystery is now the asceticism of philosophical knowledge, leading to contemplation of the real and of the beauty, the way to the divine. Plato expressed his philosophy by borrowing the ideas and vocabulary of the mystery religions. These religions, in turn, later used the imagery of Plato's dialogues to help express their myths. The word 'theology' came from these exchanges. The importance of the use made by Plato of the mysteries lies in the fact that *mysterion* was now applied, not only to the rites themselves, but also to esoteric doctrines - something abstractly intellectual. A philosophical *mystagogy* resulted from this.<sup>13</sup>

David G. Horrell points out that Jewish-Christian community, firstly, only tried to incorporate the Jewish tradition into the mainstream of developing Christian orthodoxy.<sup>14</sup> Later on, the tradition of initiation in Jewish-Christian community interrelated with the Greek and Roman cult. Initiation into the mystery religions, which was adapted in early Christian community, enlarged the practice of initiating candidates into an

experience of the divine that was not limited to those cultures.<sup>15</sup> The real initiation into spirituality of adulthood has been a fundamental element in human society down the ages, with some *mystagogic* role of accompanying the candidates almost entirely inseparable from the practice. This initiation was underlying the specifically Christian practice of the mystagogical process.

In the early Jewish-Christian community, the mystagogical process had to do with leading the newly baptized into some knowledge of the mysteries. The Patristic preachers sometimes used the expression 'mystagogue' equivocal with 'master', applying it to God, Christ, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Evangelists, and the Doctors. The word 'mystagogue', then, transformed from one who lead the rite of the cult to 'masterhood' who is related with either intellectualist tone of *didaskalos*, or the disciplinary note of *pedagogue*.<sup>16</sup> The process of mystagogy in early Christianity has changed after the conversion of Constantine. Christianity was firmly established, and gradually from a proscribed sect became the official imperial religion by evoking The Council of Constantinople.<sup>17</sup> Van Campen notes that after the third century, Christianity took a giant step of accepting a number of catechumens, candidates, and neophytes.<sup>18</sup>

The method was no longer secret, but, it was too easy for those who courted the imperial favour to become Christian. It should be recalled that a large intake of new members required some sifting process and formal ritual entry during the centuries of persecution. During this period of history, conversions to Christianity for unworthy motives were, understandably, rare. The language and experimental approach of initiation for these adult converts were borrowed from the mystery religions, which had a long experience with their own candidates.

It has become clearer then, that the usage of the word mystagogy, which was applied afterwards in open-social sense, encouraged the Fathers to borrow it. Regan notes that borrowing, with all the purifying and profound recasting which it involved, is an early and excellent example of inculturation of the Christian faith.<sup>19</sup> The process of inculturation is the process of inculcating roots in the local culture through the mutual give and take relationship. Recent scholars, however, have made it clear that borrowing from the mystery cults did not go beyond languages and external forms. It merely goes to substantial roots of the Christian practice of initiation which can be traced back to early Jewish-Christian community, and Judaism rather than the traditional cults of Greece, Rome and farther

East.

## Mystagogy in Early Christianity

Even before the fourth century the mystagogical outlook was already largely used in the early Christian community. It was built on the experience of baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, which was helpful to those who come from afar to feel at home in the Christian community. Van Campen remarks that Christian *mystagogy* is known chiefly through the homilies preached by the church fathers, who explained to the newly baptized the experiences undergone during the preparation for the Easter celebration of baptism, chrism and Eucharist. Lenten Season and Easter Week were the usual occasions for the *mystagogic* homilies.<sup>20</sup> In the same way, the homilies and the sacrament of initiation in the early Christian Community were engaged in *mystagogic* manner. According to Hubertus Drobner, the Christian mystagogy was integrated within the process of catecheses for the Christian candidates and the newly baptized. The following discussion will deal with four church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries: Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.

### 1. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-387 AD)

Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem who participated in the Council of Constantinople, wrote the *Catecheses*, a compilation of homilies for the baptismal candidates and the newly baptized.<sup>21</sup> Drobner points out that the sermons were given in a compilation of twenty-four catechetical forms. In this collection of catechetical sermons, five *mystagogical* catecheses were given to the newly baptized (*neophytes*) during the week of Easter.<sup>22</sup> In some sense, the sermons of Cyril have often been considered the archetype of *mystagogical* homilies and it was even made clear that the sermons have been considered to be the only approach to *mystagogy*. Hence, the compilation of the mystagogic homilies is the first amongst the earliest of the genre. These homilies were also directly related to the rites – gestures and Scripture texts – which the newly baptized have experienced in the sacraments. Van Campen notes that Cyril presents Christianity not as a doctrine but as *disciplina arcana* (*discipline of the arcane*). A theological term used to describe the custom which prevailed in early Christianity, where knowledge of the more

intimate mysteries of the Christian religion was carefully kept from non Christians and even from those who were undergoing instruction in the Faith. She remarks that the process of *disciplina arcani* implies mystagogical guidance to the neophytes by using pedagogical method.<sup>23</sup>

The knowledge to the mystery of Christ, according to Cyril, is a life which the Christian must live. Of the five mystagogic catecheses, the first two homilies deal with baptism, the third with confirmation and the last two with the Eucharist, doctrine and liturgy. In the first homily, Cyril gives the recently baptized a guidance of the new domain to which they have been given entry.<sup>24</sup> In his homilies, Cyril guided new Christians to spiritual experience by connecting imageries of biblical stories as well as their own personal experience. The new Christians were described as the Israelites who were led out of slavery of Pharaoh by Moses right up to the waves of the red sea (Exodus 12).<sup>25</sup> The homilies of Cyril, on the other hand, show the typological style of patristic exegesis. Those homilies portray scriptural explanations which reflect the important persons, events, and objects of the New Testament foreshadowed by other people, events or objects in the Old Testament. In this regard, the newly baptized, immersed in the water of baptism, are saved from the fierce enemy as the Israelites were saved from Pharaoh by the water of the Red Sea.<sup>26</sup> The use of typology was an attempt to respect the unity of the Scripture as the Word of God. In this respect, Regan remarks that behind Cyril's homilies, typology of the imageries in the scriptures helped new Christians grasp the meanings which were beyond words by connecting biblical events as the way of mystagogic teachings.

## 2. *Ambrose of Milan (339-397 AD)*

Ambrose of Milan composed two sets of instructions to the newly baptized. *De Sacramentis* is the first compilation made up from notes taken during the preaching of the Bishop (probably about the year 391 AD).<sup>27</sup> The other compilation of the instructions is *De Mysteriis*, the second compilation of the series of homilies which are mystagogic.<sup>28</sup> The foregoing discussion will focus more closely with reference to this second opus. Ambrose draws lessons from the rites of baptism, showing how behind the visible and tangible rites, deeper and invisible elements are operative. His homilies which led the newly baptized to participate and appreciate the Mystery of Christ is indeed *mystagogic*. Ambrose strongly encouraged his listener that the spiritual experience for the new Christians is a journey from the visible



element or gesture to the invisible reality of Christ. In this respect, Ambrose's theology is at the same time sacramental and mystagogic. The *mystery* is an invisible reality of Christ which had its ground in the sacramental rites. Ambrose indirectly introduced a new perspective in the Greek word *mysterion* in understanding of mystery. It was soon replaced by the Latin word *sacramentum* which render us the word 'sacrament'.<sup>29</sup> It is in this sort of theology of the liturgy that *mystagogy* is claimed as a patristic theology of the liturgy.<sup>30</sup>

Ambrose's notion of *mystagogy* is bound up with the effect of the sacrament itself. Mazza notes that the mystagogic teachings of Ambrose also show the conviction that "the eyes of the soul are being opened", was fundamental to initiation, and this seems to have been due both to the preaching and to the 'washing' souls through the water and the spirit.<sup>31</sup> In general, Ambrose can attribute the same meaning to more than one rite. The poetic style of Scripture - psalms, parables, and hymns - is still present in a spirituality which has not become philosophically limiting and theologically prosaic. In *Explanatio Symboli*, Ambrose applied mystagogy by explaining *symbolum* of Eucharist. Ambrose, in this respect, used more practical explanation to the believers and catechumens as the way to reach the meaning in salvation history and their spiritual significance.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. John Chrysostom (349-407 AD)

In his work, *Catechesis Ultima ad Baptizandos*, John Chrysostom describes mystagogy in relation to the sacrament of initiation more specifically than the two Fathers mentioned above. In the process of initiation, he calls *mystagogy*, a name he does not give to anything before and after the sacramental celebration. Baptism and Eucharist, in this sense, become mystagogical. This cultic use of the language of *mystagogy* is a development which goes beyond its use to designate words of explanation of the liturgy pronounced after the sacramental celebration.<sup>33</sup> In Chrysostom's use, the expression '*mystagogy*' usually means the rite of initiation, as it existed in his time. It is taken as a whole for the neophytes to accept baptism, to renounce the devil and to unite with the Christians in the Eucharist.<sup>34</sup>

John Chrysostom gave more emphasis on the sacraments as the elements which are also important more than just a homily. Sacraments encompassed more meanings beyond the ritual acts. Initiation would then become initiation into the truths of faith, through the sacraments and not



initiation to the sacraments. Any catechesis on the occasion of the initiation only serves to improve this role of the sacraments as ritual vehicles in the process of *mystagogy*. It is based on this view of *mystagogy* that some contemporary theologians consider it as a matter of difference in the usage of the language of the *catechumenate* for the Christian formation of those baptized in infancy.<sup>35</sup> Chrysostom's baptismal homilies are not commentaries on the liturgical rites of initiation as were those of Cyril of Jerusalem. Chrysostom's homilies gave an outlook of *mystagogy* from a different angle. Those homilies are meant rather to arouse moral sense about the Christian life than to introduce liturgical teachings of Christian mysteries. In the same manner, those homilies were addressed to the whole community and not just to the neophytes.

#### 4. *Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 AD)*

Theodore of Mopsuestia did not delve on *mystagogical* terms in his preaching.<sup>36</sup> But, his preaching on liturgy became the ground idea of Christian orthodoxy. For him, the liturgical signs bring about the present reality of the past salvific events of Christ's death and resurrection, and the future hope hidden in those symbols is guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ. He sees the baptismal birth and resurrection as symbols of the real beginning of the future realization of what is now contained in the promise.<sup>37</sup>

Theodore, like Ambrose, is capable of giving quite different interpretations to the same ritual element. In the opening sentences of his first homily on the Eucharist – considered *mystagogic* – Theodore says that the deacons' stole (*orarion*), worn on the left shoulder and hanging down both in front and behind, makes one think of Christ being led to his passion. However, he says that the deacons are vested in clothes adapted to the splendour of their ministry. This, Theodore says, is the sign that the deacons do not exercise a servile ministry but a free one; the realities to which they minister lead those who belong to the household of God – the church – to freedom.<sup>38</sup>

In the same homily, two quite different interpretations of pastoral ministry to the church as the household of God are given to the one ritual element: Eucharist. The explanation would seem to be related with Ambrose's *mystagogy*, namely, for the pastoral significance of symbols. There is no one-to-one correspondence between ritual element and

theological explanation. It was Theodore who introduced this allegorical practice of comparing ritual elements of the Eucharistic celebration with events of Christ's passion. He was also interpreting the Eucharist as a ritual allegory that re-enacts the events of Jesus' passion, death, burial and resurrection. This sort of allegorizing opened the way for the medieval practice of commenting on the liturgy of the Eucharist. It is not of itself - for its origins and symbolism had become obscure - but of extrinsic and often fascinating connections. Recognizing that the Eucharist was somehow a re-enactment of Christ's passion, the medieval allegories attached to each visible or audible element in the rite, an extrinsic interpretation is drawn from the passion story.<sup>39</sup>

The newly emerging theology of sacrament and mystagogy which were brought by Theodore turned Christianity into a 'new religion', the only true and universal religion of humankind. The tension between this present age and the one to come was changed into a vertical opposition between time and eternity. Allegorical thinking, according to Theodore, instead of seeing the Old Testament as historical preparation for the New, saw it as a shadowy promise which found fulfilment in Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

At this point, it is safe to assume that mystagogy as a process of developing a connection to the mystery of Christ was widely popular and practically functioning most effectively in the context of liturgy as mentioned above. However, for a large part of Christian history, mystagogy seemingly lost its attractiveness and effectiveness due to the many changes and development in the church in terms of praxis and orthodoxy. This will be dealt with in depth in the following discussion.

### **Mystagogy in Current Christianity**

Mystagogy became unrecognized by the emergence of the popular initiation in the Catholic church: infant baptism. Infant baptism, which was old as adult baptism, became more significant in the Christian community. It was significantly common since the Edict of Constantinople, when Constantine legally accepted Christianity in all the regions of Roman colonies. Supported by some theological concerns, infant baptism appears as the initiation which is commonly practiced in the Catholic church.<sup>41</sup> Then, Second Vatican Council - announced by Pope John XXIII - is the moment when a number of factors contributed to the possible rediscovery of mystagogy. The pastoral character opened the way

for a unified vision of Christian faith. The pastoral approach would go beyond the refining of concepts into which theology had downcast. Concern for contemporary human situation, whose culture was being impulse to the theology, was a pastoral preoccupation.<sup>42</sup> Hence, theology and catechesis had become excessively intellectual that contemporary culture was rediscovering; this is fundamental in mystagogy. Mystagogy, which has disappeared in several periods of history in relation to the process of Christian initiation, is revived and restored by Second Vatican Council.

In Regan's view, mystagogy has been restored in three areas: *liturgical mystagogy*, *mystagogy of daily experience for Christians in the world*, and *the mystagogy of spiritual theology*.<sup>43</sup> The Second Vatican Council especially revives the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult or RCIA after the Ordo of Catechumenate was reintroduced and the rites of initiation for adults were revised. Interest in the application of mystagogy was also revived. In 1972, when the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was promulgated, mystagogy was again made a formal step on the path to becoming fully invested in the Catholic life. Some pastoral leaders, at the same time, have paid increasing attention to the ancient notion of mystagogy. They were attempting to recreate a mystagogic experience much like that of the early centuries of the church.<sup>44</sup> In this part, the restoration of mystagogy is illustrated in the process of catechumenate, especially in *Catechesi Tradendae*, and the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA).

### *The Revival of Christian Catecheses*

The theology provided by the Second Vatican Council, in David Regan's opinion, was more biblically based and closer to spirituality than to Scholasticism. Religious experience was no longer proscribed; it was even accepted, together with study and Episcopal preaching, as factors in which tradition grows. Liturgical renewal is also received with a great impulse at the council, which ordered a revision of the baptismal rites. A real catechumenate was to be restored.<sup>45</sup> The rite of baptism of adults was revised in the light of the restoration of the catechumenate. Moreover, the rite of baptism of *children* was to be revised 'taking into account the fact that those to be baptized are infants'. Regan observes that forms of the adult rite of baptism had been used for infants for 1,500 years. It is so because children had gradually come to constitute the majority of those to be baptized in the churches of the lands once belonging to the Greco-Roman empire. This

confusion was finally sorted out.<sup>46</sup> After the Second Vatican Council the catechumenate was given more emphasis and the focus was no longer merely for those who are prepared for baptism, but also to educate other members into the sacred mystery of Christ.

In the spirit of renewal and revival after the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II released his apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* in 1979.<sup>47</sup> The exhortation contains catechesis of Christian doctrine for children, young people, and adults in the faith. It is in an organic and systematic way of teaching with a view of initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.<sup>48</sup> Catechesis involves nourishing the seed of faith that the person received at Baptism. Furthermore, catechesis in one sense comes not only before initiation, but also after initiation. It provides the chance to be openly introduced to either catechumens or the neophytes, and to the even full-pledge members of the church. *Catechesi Tradendae* appears to be more appropriate to promote effective catechesis and mystagogy. Everyone who believes in the same faith, as well as the catechumens, was invited to the way of faith discipleship.<sup>49</sup>

The role of catechist as underlined in *Catechesi Tradendae* is an essential part of spiritual leading. They are reminded to apply to themselves as teachers who do not merely say the words, but become witnesses themselves and must effectively apply the process of catecheses in a complete and systematic manner even when dealing with young children. They should reveal, in an elementary way, all the principal mysteries of the faith in a way that allows the child to see how the various teachings form an organic whole, centred on Christ. They must promote a complete Christian initiation, so that all dimensions of the Christian life are fully integrated.<sup>50</sup> In other words, catechists should have catechetical tools at the service of the teaching church, following the definite guidance of the *Magisterium*. Moreover, memorization plays an important role in catechesis.

*Catechesi Tradendae* further explains that catecheses must be performed in the bosom of faith and piety. The entire process of initiation takes place 'within the community of the faithful' which support continuity that of 'great significance' as the fifty days of mystagogy gets underway and continues on. Even with the pre-baptismal dismissal from the assembly, the gathering of the believing community on the celebration of Sacraments is the key formative experience in the initiation journey. In this sense, liturgy of the sacraments becomes the setting and source of Mystagogy.<sup>51</sup> The rite of Sacraments provide the venue for the moment of mystagogy

through which all the baptized are continually led ever more deeply into the mystery of God revealed in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.

*Catechesi Tradendae* which applies pedagogical guidance for the faithful may be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal and communal level.<sup>52</sup> The goal of all catechetical activity is the conversion of hearts, so that the person may respond to the Lord's call with heroic generosity. Catecheses lead the Christians to make the Gospel accessible and not to misguide them in the way of Christian faith.<sup>53</sup> This exhortation profoundly opens a more conducive venue to develop new ways of catechetical guidance, and the development of mystagogy as well.

### *Restoration on Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*

The revival of catecheses includes restoration of the rite of initiation for Adults. The Congregation of Rites had published an *Ordo Baptismi Adultorum per Gradus Catechumenatus Dispositi* in 1962. The *Ordo* had helped renew the notion of a real catechumenate, served to stimulate experiences with stages in the Christian initiation of adults.<sup>54</sup> The new *Ordo* for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) giving effect to the Council's decision as to the restoration of the catechumenate was promulgated on 6 January 1972 by the Congregation for Divine Worship. In 1972, the *Ordo* follows the general outline of the catechumenate as it existed in patristic times, prescribing distinct periods of inquiry and growth.<sup>55</sup>

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA), which re-introduces mystagogy, highlights some heritages of the Fathers of church. It extends the way of guiding the candidates and neophytes. The Easter Vigil, as well as the Patristic legacy marks the celebration of the sacraments of initiation for those journeying in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Through this final step, the elect are admitted into the people of God and enter into the community of the church. The entire Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA), its pastoral notes, prayers and actions, signal incorporation and beginning of the new life in the faith of Christian spiritual experience. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA) recommends that, in the post-sacramental situation, mystagogy takes place as a fifty-day guidance program for the neophytes to integrate themselves into the community of faith by joining some church activities. In practice, however, the celebration of the sacraments seems to signal the end for new members. These endings

show themselves in a variety of ways: some new members recently initiated cease being a visible presence; others terminate their participation in the life of the parish; and still other new members stray from the sacramental life of the church.

Mystagogy, in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA) takes place in that part of ritual and liturgical period in the church which begins on Easter Vigil and ends at the Pentecost. Its aim is to lead the neophytes in search of their own spiritual experience within the community of faith.<sup>56</sup> What needs to be remembered is that the catechumenal process provides the model of faith formation and development. The initiation process does not only provide the basis for Christian living but also indicates how to continue to embrace the Christian way of life. Mystagogy tries to support and maintain the neophytes into the integration within the faithful. Even The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA) does not fully cover the whole process of mystagogy. Therefore, it is implied that there are still various ways of personal formation after the rite of initiation. The momentum must continue in the lives of the newly initiated to their own spiritual experience in their daily ordinary life.

### **Mystagogy as a Personal and Communal Formation**

It is apparent that mystagogy has lost its attractiveness after the popularity of infant baptism. This is understandable because of the prolific spread of Christianity throughout the empire when it was officially recognized and made a compulsory religion. However, mystagogy as a practice was not totally hopeless. We see this when the Second Vatican Council reintroduce mystagogy not anymore as an almost-forgotten-word, but as a methodology wherein its meaning and understanding are even expanded. When candidates were baptized, mystagogy functions to guide the newly baptized to the community of faith. After a thorough investigation on the historical background of mystagogy, there are three elements which are deemed worthy of analysis how mystagogy works in a particular context. The *first* element is the 'mystagogue', as someone who guides the candidates in the process of mystagogy. The *second* element is the 'myste' someone who is assisted by the mystagogue. And the third element is 'mystagogy at work', which is considered as a practical and developmental process, operating in a particular context.

*The Mystagogue*

The mystagogue is known as someone who leads and assists the neophytes to their spiritual experience. In this context, a mystagogue is identified as the teacher. The homilies from the church fathers can be taken as good examples. They offered several teachings in their homilies. John Paul II, in *Catechesi Tradendae*, suggests that the catechist or mystagogue teaches basic Christian doctrine under the guidance of the church *magisterium*. In addition, the mystagogue is also described as an assistant who guides the newly baptized towards integration with his/her personal faith and the Christian community. Annemiek de Jong-van Campen remarks that the mystagogue should perform his/her role as 'companion', 'journey partner' or 'midwife' to the mystery of faith and to inaugurate the neophytes into the community of faith.<sup>57</sup> The method of teaching and assisting the neophytes, in this context, is always performed in a pedagogical manner.

The mystagogue, pedagogically, is being signified by the catechist as the person who executes his/her role to impart knowledge. The mystagogue, moreover, can be someone who assists from the beginning until the end of the process in the rite of initiation. In this manner, the mystagogue - someone who is already a part of community of faith - is trained to engage with the whole process of the Rite of Initiation, such as catechist or god-parents. However, in an expanded determination of the role of a mystagogue in *Catechesi Tradendae*, it no longer belongs to particular persons, but to every Christian who has the intention to guide the myste towards integration into community of faith.<sup>58</sup> Following this flow of contention, it is then more important to determine that the role of a mystagogue is not only confined within the liturgy, but essentially also in the practice of their daily life.

*The Myste*

The myste is identified as a disciple in the pedagogical process of mystagogy. In the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA), the myste should pass the whole process of preparation before he/she becomes a neophyte. The myste, in this context, is always considered as someone who is being transformed into a new life - in new faith- and who is being inaugurated into a community of faith. In this respect, Annemiek de Jong-



van Campen adds that the myste, as neophyte, should involve his/herself with the community of faith as the concrete response to integrate him/herself into the church.<sup>59</sup>

Like the mystagogue, in the same document *Catechesi Tradendae*, the myste is also determined in a more broad sense. The neophyte is not considered as the only myste, but the meaning and understanding is extended to all faithful of every age: children, young people and adults. In this process, the myste accepts and gets involved in the organic and systematic procedure within the whole pedagogical process under the church's *Magisterium*. Thus, the myste is not merely the passive recipient of the teachings, but also the active participant in various church activities such as: the initial proclamation of the Gospel, experience of Christian living, celebration of the sacraments, integration into the ecclesial community, apostolic witness.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, a myste may be identified as the person who incorporates his/herself in the church or the community of the faithful. In this incorporation, the myste as a passive recipient, is being formed; and, as an active participant, contributes to the collective formation of the community. This mutual formation is not only limited within the ecclesiastical life, but also underlined in their daily experience.<sup>61</sup>

### *How Mystagogy works?*

Mystagogy, in this context, is recognized as the way of teaching and assisting in a pedagogical way. In the church's desire to restore the ancient catechumenate, mystagogy is at the same time, revived. On the other hand, mystagogy, unfortunately, was shortly described in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA). Concerning mystagogy as the final period of Christian Initiation, David Regan notes that the text of RCIA is too brief. The fifty-day program rarely provides the spirit and nature of this period of formation; and offers little assistance regarding the shape of mystagogy. The formal gathering of neophytes for Sunday Eucharist for the fifty days of Easter is not enough if the church is to reclaim the period of mystagogy only in its initiation process.

*Catechesi Tradendae* indirectly implies that mystagogy is not only a set of spiritual teachings within the rite, but also the guidance which touches the everyday life in the community of faith. Annemiek de Jong-van Campen, notes that mystagogy, in this respect, serves as guide to the neophytes into both realms: personal and communal formation.

Mystagogy is the process of indwelling, and transforming - '*inwoning en omvorming*' - at the heart of Christian initiation, as the '*rite of the passage*'.<sup>62</sup> Mystagogy is a communal experience, a time for the community and neophytes to grow together. The believing community continues to influence the neophytes and the neophytes continue to influence the community.

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## End Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy. A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1989), 1. Mystagogia was thus always closely connected with *mysterion*, *mystikos*, and *mystes*. *Mueō* (in Greek : *μυέω*, Dutch translation: *in de mysteriën, inwijden*, Heraclitus) means in the mystery, initiate or inaugurate. *Mueō* is also derived from the word *múō* (in Greek: *μύω*, Dutch translation: 1. *zich sluiten v.d. oogen*; 2. *de oogen sluiten*; 3. *tot rust komen*; Sophocles) which means shut or close the eye and rest, silence, quietness, tranquillity. F. Muller, *Grieksch Woordenboek* (Groningen, Den Haag: JB Wolters' U.M., 1926), 516, 519.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- <sup>3</sup> Everett Ferguson, *church History. From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, Volume 1 (Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 27-29.
- <sup>4</sup> Enrico Mazza, *op. cit.*, 3
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>6</sup> Samuel Angus, *The Mystery Religions and Christianity*, (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1985), 5-7.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-10.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Gordon, "Institutionalized Religious Options: Mithraism," in Jörg Rüpke (Ed.), *Companion to Roman Religion* (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 403.
- <sup>9</sup> Clayton N. Jefford, Kenneth J Harder, and Luois D. Amezaga, Jr (Eds.), *Reading Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher, 1996), 44. Didache gives some information about early church history and how a specific community of Christians after the time of apostles conducted its liturgy, that is, its celebration of Baptism and Eucharist.
- <sup>10</sup> Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist (Eds.), *History of the Christian Movement*, Volume I: Earliest Christianity - 1453, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2001), 87.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Annemiek de Jong-van Campen, *Mystagogie in Werking: Hoe menswording en gemeenschapsvorming gebeuren in christelijke inwijding*. (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2009), 50. *Rite of passage* is introduced by Van Gennepe. It means the transition through or across boundaries. The rites of passage are applied from category or status to another, in his standpoint, which is frightening, dangerous, and damaging, but also predictable, expected and routine.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. See also Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis, the Nature and History of Gnosticism*. Robert McLachlan Wilson (Ed.), (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publisher, 1987), 214-215. The majority of gnostic communities probably corresponded to "mystery

- religion” (secret cult) community or philosophical schools.
- 14 David G. Horrell, “Early Jewish Christianity” (Chapter Six), in Philip Francis Esler (Ed.), *The Early Christian World*. Vol. 1 (London: Taylor&Francis, 2000), 138. From the second until fourth century, Jewish-Christian tradition was developed into the symbolic, but not praxis route.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 149. The second letter of Peter represents the nascent Christian Orthodoxy of Rome, into which the symbolic world of Jewish Christianity has been incorporated.
- 16 Everett Ferguson, *op. cit.*, 152-153.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 207. Theodosius, in 392.
- 18 Annemiek de Jong-van Campen, *op. cit.*, 51.
- 19 David Regan, *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 13.
- 20 Enrico Mazza, *op.cit.*, 97.
- 21 Hubertus R. Drobner, *The church fathers, A Comprehensive Introduction*. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Trans.), (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher, 2007), 296.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 297.
- 23 Annemiek de Jong-van Campen *op. cit.*, 56.
- 24 Enrico Mazza, *op. cit.*, 151. Cyril of Jerusalem intentionally mentioned the word *Anaphora* as the early form of the Canon rite or the Eucharist.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 26 Maxwell E. Johnson. *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*. (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996), 121.
- 27 Hubertus R. Drobner, *op. cit.*, 315.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 315-316.
- 29 Maxwell E. Johnson, *op. cit.*, 123.
- 30 Enrico Mazza, *op. cit.*, 112.
- 31 The reference to Christ's miracle of curing the man born blind (John 9) is one of the evidences.
- 32 Hubertus R. Drobner, *op. cit.*, 316.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 316.
- 34 Maxwell E. Johnson, *op. cit.*, 129.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 36 Hubertus R. Drobner, *op. cit.*, 322. Friend and fellow student of Chrysostom, was ordained in Anthioch up about 383 AD and became bishop of Mopsuestia, in Cicilia, about a hundred miles from Antioch, in 392 AD. Many of his works are now missing, because he was condemned by the Fifth General Council (Constantinople, in 553 AD). It happened because over a century after his death, his thought was supposed for preparing the way of Nestorianism, and his writings were destroyed.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 325.
- 38 Maxwell E. Johnson, *op. cit.*, 132.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 41 Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and The Covenant of Grace*, (Chicago: Eerdmans Publishing, 1978). He calls theologians who were supporting infant baptism as 'Paedobaptists' i.e. Augustine, Cyprian, Iraeneus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Ireneaus, Aristides, etc. pp. 13-14.
- 42 David Regan, *op. cit.*, 27. The Second Vatican Council opens some important changes

from a privileged caste of clerics to a chance for laities who were highly educated, allowed access to the deepest fonts of Christian life. Educating the laities is the main goal to introduce the inheritance of mystery of the church.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. The experience of men and women of today is the starting-point of *Gaudium et Spes* and their joys and sorrows are counted as relevant to their Christian life.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>47</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation by John Paul II, *Catechesis in Our Time*, Rome, October, 16th, 1979. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_16101979\\_catechesi-tradendae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html) visited 16th November 2009, 05.36 am.

<sup>48</sup> The principal documents on this subject, besides Scripture and the Catechism, are Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) in 1979, *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD) in 1971, and *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) in 1997.

<sup>49</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*, art. 21.

<sup>50</sup> The mysterious words of Jesus: 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me' (Jn. 7:16). Catechists, like Saint John the Baptist, must humbly decrease, so that God's own Word, which is living and active (Heb. 4:12), may increase and penetrate people's hearts (cf. Jn. 3:30). If catecheses were only abstract teaching, then the goal would be imparting knowledge. *Catechesi Tradendae*, art. 30, 31, 37, 49.

<sup>51</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*, art. 23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 31.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 35-44.

<sup>54</sup> David Regan, *op. cit.*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Annemiek de Jong-van Campen, *op. cit.*, 75, "Sommigen van hen krijgen de rol van 'begeleider', van 'tochtgenoot', of 'vroedvrouw' van geloofsleerlingen."

<sup>58</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), art. 15-16.

<sup>59</sup> Annemiek de Jong-van Campen *op. cit.*, 75, "Een antwoord op deze vraag is bijvoorbeeld voor hen die het christelijk geloof willen doorgeven aan anderen, voor de kerk."

<sup>60</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), art. 35-43. This Pope's exhortation even mentions who can be the myste: infants, children, young people, adolescents, handicapped person, and young people without religious support.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Annemiek de Jong-van Campen (2009), p.83, and p. 94.

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