

**FORMATION FOR MISSION:  
CATECHESIS IN "THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS"**

by

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## *Summary*

The central concern of this study is the relationship between liturgy and missiology. It argues that liturgy has been neglected by missiology and establishes this through a review of missiological as well as liturgical literature. A proposal is then made for the development of *a liturgical missiology*. The central thesis of this study is that since liturgy and mission both belong to the very nature of the church missiology must take liturgy seriously as a source for doing missiology.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (=RCIA) is used to demonstrate that formation for mission can and indeed does take place through the celebration of liturgy. The four stages and three liturgical thresholds of the RCIA are analysed with the help of the anthropological theories of Victor Turner and other ritual theorists. In the description and analysis of RCIA's stages and thresholds it is shown that in this rite of the Roman Catholic Church catechesis for mission takes place not only through catechetical sessions, but most significantly through liturgical rituals.

This study shows how the RCIA might contribute to the building up of South Africa by challenging the church to be an alternative community in the midst of society. Such a community would be motivated by the Christian myth, sustained by the church's ritual and be confident in its identity as the people of God. In light of this, the RCIA has the power to facilitate the formation of Christians to take seriously their responsibility of carrying on the mission of Christ in the world and for the world.

The study concludes with an evaluation of the theoretical framework which was used in the study and some suggestions for further missiological research that would take seriously the place of ritual and its importance in the formation of a sense of mission in Christians. Three areas of concern are important for liturgical missiology: inculturation, ecclesiology, and ecumenism.

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# Dedication

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*The house of the heart is never full.*

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## *Abbreviations*

ADM	Admonitions of St. Francis of Assisi
AG	Ad <i>Gentes</i>
AT	Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus
ATE	Ad <i>Totam Ecclesiam</i>
BEM	Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry
CantSun	St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of Brother Sun
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CCL	Code of Canon Law
CDSA	Catechetical Directory of South Africa
CFD	Christian Faith and Demonology
CirL	Circular Letter concerning the preparation and celebration of the Easter Triduum
CL	Christifideles Laici
CSH	Community Serving Humanity
CT	Catechesi Tradendae
CU	Convenientes ex universo
DV	Dei verbum
EIN	Ecclesia in Africa
EJA	Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
EPII	Eucharistic Prayer II
ER	Earlier Rule of St. Francis
4LAg	Fourth Letter of Clare of Assisi to Agnes of Prague
GIRM	General Instruction of the Roman Missal
GNLY	General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar
GS	Gaudium et Spes
LG	Lumen Gentium
LOrd	A Letter to the Entire Order
LMIn	Introduction to the Lectionary
MCW	Music in Catholic Worship
NIR	National Initiative for Reconciliation
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
RCIA GI	General Introduction of the RCIA
RM	Redemptoris Missio
RomM	Roman Missal
RP	Reconciliatio et Paenitentia
SA	Slavorum Apostoli
SACBC	Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium
SEDOS	Documentation and Research Centre
TAC	Theological Advisory Commission of the SACBC
UR	Unitatis Redintegratio
USCC	United States Catholic Conference
UUS	Ut Unum Sint
WCC	World Council of Churches

All biblical quotations and references have been taken from the *New Jerusalem Bible*.

## *Figures*

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

*The assembly, remembering Christ in a profound act of recollection, discovers its own mystery, its identity as the body of Christ in continuing his surrender to God and to the work of God, until the end of time ("ready to greet him when he comes again").*

*--Mark Searle*

#### **1.0 The Research Problem: The Neglect of Liturgy in Missiology**

The problem that is the central area of concern of this thesis finds its roots in my experience. It is the problem of the neglect of the liturgy as a source for doing missiology. My intuitive sense of the problem has been confirmed by years of participation in the celebration of the liturgy. I have found that in the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Mass, there is a weekly call to mission made to the assembly through the scripture readings, the liturgical texts and the celebration itself. As I began to study missiology I often wondered why, as a discipline, missiology paid little or no attention to the liturgy as a source for doing missiology. My study of the liturgy has convinced me that any holistic approach to mission needs to be understood in terms of the church's liturgy. This perspective has grown out of a conviction that liturgy is the taproot of theology (Mitchell, L. 1990:244).

In this study *liturgy* is understood to mean the public worship of the church (Madden 1990:740). It encompasses all the cultic acts of worship which follow prescribed rites. Liturgy is ritualised, symbolic action which is done by the whole body of Christ, Head and members (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy = SC 7). It does not include scripture sharing sessions or other prayer services which do not follow a liturgical rite. This distinction is important because while the church admits to many forms of prayer the liturgy is considered the "source and fount" (SC 10) of the church's life. The Whiteheads (1984) have pointed out that the liturgy celebrates God's presence among us in a way that is formative of the whole person.

Liturgy is a school of the senses. In worship we recall Jesus' delight, and anger and sorrow. We remember and celebrate his sense of when to confront others, when to heal, when to retreat. And the ritual movement of the liturgy is meant to shape us as well...(Whitehead 1984:62).

This does not devalue other types of prayer; it only serves to emphasize the importance of the liturgy in Catholic life. Christians may gather in other ways to reflect on the scriptures and to pray together, but only liturgy embodies ritual forms and language that have the power to form us as disciples of Jesus.

Alexander Schmemmann (1963:175) has called liturgy "the ontological condition of theology." Fagerberg (1992:11) maintains that liturgy is normative for all other theologising because it is the vortex of humanity's encounter with God. This has significant implications for all of theology in general, but specifically for missiology because both liturgy and mission belong to the very nature of the church (Jala 1987:67). Both liturgy and mission have the kingdom of God as their concern; both are epiphanies of God's presence. Both make of the church a manifestation of the transformed relationship between God and humanity in every age (Fagerberg 1992:160). Schmemmann maintained that the church theologises on the meaning of this manifestation in the light of faith which he describes as a:

Living relationship to certain events: The Life, Death, Resurrection and Glorification of Jesus Christ, His Ascension to heaven, the descent of the Holy Spirit...a relationship which makes (the Church) a constant 'witness' and 'participant' of these events (Schmemmann 1972:90).

The point is that liturgy brings the church in regular contact with the very source of its life by celebrating through ritual the kerygma of faith. In this way the church is formed as a witness to the world. Liturgy is therefore a primary source for doing missiology.

Unfortunately, that is not the common perception. Lutheran pastor and liturgist<sup>1</sup>, Frank Senn, lamented the estrangement of liturgy and mission and called for their reunion: He wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Within the Roman Catholic Church the term "liturgist" refers to a person who has done formal study of the liturgy. His/her concerns may be both academic and pastoral. He/she is distinguished from parish liturgical ministers who serve the assembly within the context of liturgical celebrations, but may not have formal academic training. Those who lead a liturgical celebration are called presiders and may be ordained or nonordained ministers.

...There needs to be a more secure connection between liturgy and evangelism; that worship in word and sacrament should be regarded as a part of the mission of God and not just as something that aids the church in mission; that missionary dimensions are implicit in the celebration of the sacraments; that the central symbols of bathing and dining call attention to our practices of hospitality and raise the issue of inculturation of the liturgy; and that churches which take seriously the liturgy as their primary form of public witness need to develop a liturgical evangelism (Senn 1993:4).

Senn ably stated the challenge and articulated the areas where the relationship of liturgy and mission are apparent, but he never developed what he called "a liturgical evangelism." That development is the concern of this thesis. Not only the words of worship, but also the gestures, the movements, the rituals, the seasons, the material elements of the liturgy all form people for mission, if they are done well because they nourish faith.

The problem then is that liturgy and mission have become strangers to each other. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (= RCIA) offers us one key for opening up the way for a reunification. This Roman Catholic rite is the church process of initiating new members into the church. It consists of both liturgical rituals and directives about catechetical formation. It makes use of symbols and myth in a ritual context to initiate new members and to form in them a sense of mission. The promulgation of the *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum*<sup>2</sup> on 6 January 1972 marked a significant shift in the church's practice of initiating adults into the Catholic community (Morris 1989:8). It is a restoration of the church's ancient practice of initiation. The various periods of formation and their accompanying rituals (cf. Figure 1) facilitate the experience of God through the Word and ritual for people participating in the initiation process.

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<sup>2</sup> The English text of this rite has been translated as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA 1988). This translation was prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. After the rite's promulgation in 1972 a provisional translation was issued by the same commission in 1974. The English translation used in this study was canonically approved by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments on 19 February 1987.

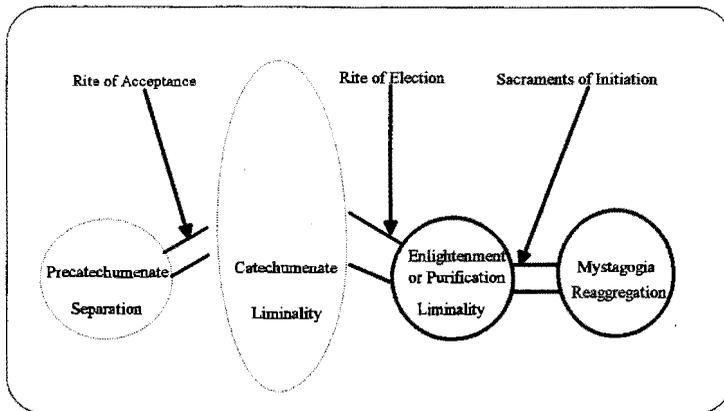


Figure 1. The four stages and three liturgical thresholds of the RCIA.

This rite, more than any other in the Roman Catholic church, demonstrates how people are formed for mission through the liturgy and how the liturgy could once again become the taproot of theology (Mitchell, L.1990:244), especially, missiology. Missiologists are challenged to develop a missiology rooted in the liturgy.

Contemporary missiologists and liturgists seem to be crafting their theology in isolation from each other. Paul Hiebert is an example of one such missiologist. He seems to suggest that because the church would better praise God through worship in heaven, mission alone is the church's primary task here on earth. He wrote:

Evangelism is the central task of the church on earth, because it is the one function the church can do better here than in heaven. Worship and fellowship, these it will do better in heaven (Hiebert 1993:161).

This text only serves to illustrate how deep the chasm between liturgy and mission is in the minds of some scholars. It points to the fact that the church's basic source for doing theology in general, and missiology in particular, has been ignored. It is imperative then that liturgy and mission once again find strength in their union. The urgency of this reunion is brought out clearly in a review of contemporary missiological and liturgical literature which will be presented in section 1.2.

### 1.1 Central Thesis: The Integral Link between Liturgy and Mission

The RCIA embodies the integral link between liturgy and mission. In order to appreciate this link Christian theologians must first be convinced that liturgy is a primary source for doing theology. It is especially important for missiology because liturgy makes use of ritual, symbol, and myth: primary sources for understanding the world view, ethos and boundaries of the cultures of peoples. The liturgy is a suprarational source for understanding the context in which mission is carried out.

Various theologians contend that liturgy is the source of *theologia prima* (Fagerberg 1992:18; Kavanagh 1984:89; Schmemmann 1966:9). Kavanagh (1984:75) has demonstrated further that liturgy is the *locus theologicus*, or the very condition for doing theology. Making specific reference to how theology develops out of the experience of an assembly's liturgical act Kavanagh wrote:

For what emerges most directly from an assembly's liturgical act is not a new species of theology among others. It is *theologia* itself. Nor is it inchoate and raw, despite the fact that it is always open to endless further specification and exploitation by human minds (Kavanagh 1984:75).

Kavanagh then defined the liturgical act as the setting in which the assembly experiences change in its life brought about through the work of God.

A liturgical act is a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral, and foundational kind. It is both precipitator and result of that adjustment to the change wrought in the worshipping assembly by its regular encounter in faith with its divine Source. This adjustment to God-wrought change is no less critical and reflective an act of theology than any other of the secondary sort (Kavanagh 1984:89).

The adjustment to which Kavanagh refers is part of a threefold process which makes up the liturgical event: 1) the assembly encounters God; 2) as a result of this encounter the assembly undergoes a change; and 3) the assembly's response to this change is an adjustment in their lives and also in the liturgical rite itself (Kavanagh 1984:74). This adjustment is what Kavanagh calls *theologia prima*.

It is the *adjustment* which is theological in all this. I hold that it is theology being born, theology in the first instance. It is what tradition has called *theologia prima* (Kavanagh 1984:74).

Kavanagh maintained that the adjustment of the assembly is not merely a theological datum but theology itself. "Theology on this primordial level is thus a sustained dialectic" (Kavanagh 1984:76). In the exchange which takes place between God and the assembly the continuing process of theologising goes on. It is out of this adjustment that theology comes into being. The encounter not only becomes the basis for theology, but helps the assembly to become more truly itself and to be more faithful to its very nature (von Allmen 1965:43). Of necessity, this means that missiology must take cognisance of the liturgical act because of its significance in the life of the People of God.

Davies has observed that missiologists do not usually mention anything about liturgy when reflecting on the mission of the church because they think it is "cultic introversion". Liturgists, on the other hand, often see mission as merely "extroverted activism" (Davies 1966:10). Neither of these views are, of course, true. They reflect distorted conceptions of both liturgy and mission. A more balanced view is represented in the words of Reformed tradition theologian, von Allmen.

The Church is neither exclusively mission, nor exclusively worship; she is mission and worship, and if she turns to the world to teach men<sup>3</sup> the love of God, it is in order to draw the world with her in celebration of this love. Mission is not carried out for its own sake, but so that the "catholicity" of God's purpose may become apparent (von Allmen 1969:110).

The point being made by von Allmen is that liturgy and mission do not exist on their own or for their own sakes. Both are part of the very nature of the church and both prepare people to participate in the reign of God.

In writing about the church and the world Kavanagh held that the church is most itself in the liturgy and therefore most open to formation for mission:

For in worship alone is the church gathered in the closest obvious proximity to its fundamental values, values which are

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<sup>3</sup> Inclusive language is used throughout the text except when in the context of direct quotations from other authors.

always assuming stimulative form in time, space, image, word, and repeated act. The richer this stimulation is, under the criteria of the Gospel, it follows that the more conscious, aware, self-possessed, and vigorously operational the given church will be (Kavanagh 1984:62).

Kavanagh believes that liturgy moulds the way in which the community responds to the world because in the liturgy the church reveals its true being (Stringer 1989:517; von Allmen 1965:53). Our neglect in this regard can only be detrimental to the work of missiology.

The formation which is experienced in the Christian community engaged in the liturgy shapes it for mission, not merely as individuals, but as a community because when it is engaged in liturgical celebration it is engaged in mission (Fueter 1976:123).<sup>4</sup> Liturgy and mission are intrinsically linked because they have to do with the very life of the church and its share in the mission of Christ in the world. Liturgy is not something which is extrinsic to the church and mission is not an option; each is a necessary complement to the other (von Allmen 1965:56).

Two points which are foundational for the development of this thesis have thus far been made: 1) liturgy is *theologia prima*, that is, the source for all theologising in the church because liturgy is the primary place of the Christian community's encounter with God; and 2) liturgy and mission are linked in a symbiotic relationship which highlights the differences of each while grounding them both in the very nature of the church. These points are further supported by both liturgical and missionary documents of the Catholic Church which in turn support the idea that liturgy and mission are intimately related. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the RCIA.

The very origin of the existence of the church is rooted in the life of the Trinity (LG = Lumen Gentium 2; Forte 1991:23). The community of the Trinity is a missionary community (Brennan 1991:145) where the act of sending is reflected in the relationships of the Father,<sup>5</sup> Son and Holy Spirit. At the centre of the

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<sup>4</sup> This idea is very common in Orthodox mission theology. The source used here was responding to the "Report on the Orthodox Consultation on Confessing Christ Through the Liturgical Life of the Church Today" which was held at Etchimiadzine, Armenia in 1975.

<sup>5</sup> The traditional form of address for the three persons of the Trinity is used here. I am aware that some feminist theologians would prefer the use of non-gender specific terms (e.g. Johnson, Elizabeth, A. 1992. *She Who Is*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co.; Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth. 1983. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins*.

Father's plan for all humanity is the mission of his Son, Jesus Christ. This plan was manifested in Christ's suffering death and resurrection. It bore fruit in the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. The church "receives the mission to proclaim and to establish among all peoples the kingdom of God" (LG 5) in Christ. It is therefore "missionary by her very nature" (AG = Ad Gentes 2). The mission though is always God's mission and should never be reduced to simply an ecclesiocentric enterprise (Bosch 1991a:393). The liturgy provides the assembly of believers with a possibility for an ever-expanding consciousness of the mission of God revealed in Christ. Through each liturgical celebration the community is reminded of its dignity as disciples of Christ and its share in his mission. In SC the bishops, gathered for Vatican II, declared that:

The Liturgy is the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church (SC 2).

Liturgy is then the church's primary source for ongoing formation. By participation in the liturgy the assembly expresses the "real nature of the church" which is missionary. Liturgy and mission are then but two names for the same reality (Shepherd 1964:33). Both liturgy and mission are the means through which the church facilitates humanity's encounter with God (Mitchell, L. 1990:244). This encounter is only possible because of the divine initiative which was taken by the Father in sending his Son (RM = Redemptoris Missio 4).

In the liturgy the Christian assembly, called together by God, gives witness to the mighty deeds of the Lord and offers praise and thanks within the context of the liturgy. Through mission that same assembly of believers gives witness to the mighty deeds of the Lord and proclaims him to the world through its life. The celebration of the liturgy and engagement in mission is the way the whole church evangelises the world (cf EN = Evangelii Nuntiandi 14). In both liturgy and mission the church is turned outward to God and to the world (Shepherd 1964:37; Senn 1993:42).

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New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.), but God as Father is, I believe, scriptural and liturgical and for this reason I retain its use.

Participation in the church's liturgy and mission is the result of baptism through which the Christian shares in the very life of the Trinity. Through baptism a person is turned through love to God and the world. Liturgy shapes the identity of the Christian community and shapes its understanding of mission (George 1974:45).

The paschal mystery of Jesus Christ dying and rising *still* among his faithful ones at Easter in baptism is what gives the Church its radical cohesion and mission, putting it at the center of a world made new (Kavanagh 1978:162-163).

Radical cohesion in the community of the church and mission to the world are at the very heart of the church's life.

Of all the revised sacramental rites of the Roman Catholic Church, the RCIA and the catechesis which is an essential part of the process, initiates new members into an eschatological community intent on mission. Each week this community is nourished by the Word of God proclaimed in the liturgy and strengthened by sharing in the eucharistic meal. They are formed for mission. This is the ideal for which the church must work if it is to carry out its prophetic mission in the world.

The liturgy is the church's "primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (SC 14) and the means for forming believers "to carry out the mission of the people of God in the Church and in the world" (RCIA GI = General Introduction of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults 2). It seems obvious then that liturgy and mission are intimately linked together. The American bishops have made an important point in regard to nourishing faith through liturgical celebrations:

Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it (MCW = Music in Catholic Worship 6).

Both the celebration of the liturgy and engagement in mission are acts of faith. They both are rooted in our participation in the life of the Trinity. The believer must be one who is in tune with the Blessed Trinity through his/her own liturgical life (George 1974:44).

By means of an analysis of the RCIA the need for a missiology rooted in the liturgy of the church will become apparent. The RCIA provides us with a foundation because this, more than any of the rites of the Roman Catholic church, has a breadth of vision (Kavanagh 1978:121) to shape the identity of Christians as sharers in the apostolic mission (RCIA 41).

The way in which the rites of the RCIA<sup>6</sup> will be examined has been outlined by Schmemmann as the way in which the enterprise of liturgical theology should progress. He formulated a three-part process in which the following areas were to be studied:

- 1) The basic structure of the rite;
- 2) The development of the rite;
- 3) The meaning of the rite (Schmemmann 1966:33).

Though such an approach is useful, in this study emphasis will be placed on the missiological formation which results when a rite is celebrated with care and dignity, when sensitivity to what the church intends to convey in the rite is exhibited, when catechesis is based on the Scripture readings which are proclaimed in the liturgy and possibilities for inculturation are implemented with understanding. If all this is kept in mind the ritual event<sup>7</sup> (Irwin 1990a:18) reveals an understanding of mission which is a significant constituent of the rite and demonstrates how liturgy is a unique source for theology.

To look at a rite in this way moves beyond the imitation of the patristic model for doing theology, and uses the insights of both Schmemmann and Kavanagh<sup>8</sup> in a way that reunites liturgy and mission, includes concerns of the contemporary church and demonstrates that liturgy and mission are sources for doing missiology. This becomes apparent in the rite itself which includes the texts, use of symbols

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<sup>6</sup> The RCIA consists of four phases or stages in the process: the pre-catechumenate, the catechumenate, the time of enlightenment, and mystagogia; and three thresholds which are marked by liturgical celebrations: The Rite of Acceptance, the Rite of Election, and the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase *ritual event* is used by liturgical theologians to distinguish the locus of liturgical theology in the actual celebration of a particular rite rather than in other theological sources, ecclesial documents or statements by the magisterium.

<sup>8</sup> Schmemmann and Kavanagh are recognised for their contribution to the development of liturgical theology. Their work has not been without criticism by other liturgists and theologians. For a concise yet thorough evaluation of their work see Irwin (1990a: 40-44; 46-48).

and gestures. In the case of the RCIA the structure, development and meaning work to clarify the missionary vocation of the assembly.

### 1.2 A Review of Related Literature: Missiological and Liturgical

In reviewing the literature for this study it soon became apparent that there is a dearth of material in contemporary literature which explores the connection between liturgy and mission. The heuristic value of this survey of contemporary missiological and liturgical literature is that it shows without a doubt that neither missiologists nor liturgists have sought to develop what is, in my opinion, the intrinsic relationship between them.

#### 1.2.1 Some Missiological Sources

This review of missiological literature makes obvious the fact that one of the contemporary challenges facing missiologists is missiology's relationship to the liturgical life of the church. In my opinion missiological literature could only benefit from serious reflection on liturgy as a source for doing missiology. Perhaps the image of a well could help illustrate this point. Liturgy and mission are water sources for the well. When missiologists draw water from the well they bring up the most life-giving sources in the church. To do missiology in a way that is integral to the very nature of the church they then theologise out of two life-giving elements of Christian life: liturgy and mission.

##### *1.2.1.1 Missiological Literature: Some Catholic Works*

In the prestigious collection of essays compiled by William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of SEDOS (Documentation and Research Centre) which was established in 1966 not one essay refers, even in passing, to the relationship between liturgy and mission. References to liturgy by the contributing missiologists are conspicuous by their absence.

Desmond O'Donnell's essay *Evangelization: The Challenge of Modernity*, contains a section on spirituality which would be appropriate for any essay addressing the modern situation of mission. O'Donnell though, excluded any

mention of liturgy from his list of seven characteristics of missionary spirituality (O'Donnell 1991:132-134). Though four of O'Donnell's seven characteristics have implications for the Christian community he neglected to point out that the liturgy has the power to confirm all of them. By excluding the ritual life of the community, it seems to me that he has missed one of the most fundamental sources of missionary spirituality.

The Brazilian Jesuit, Marcello Azevedo, addressed the question of inculturated evangelisation in the same SEDOS volume. In his essay he included a section entitled *Meaningful Theology for the Humanity of Our Time*. Here he wrote:

...The goal is not to secularize theology but to enable it to introduce the transcendent God to the secular person of today. That is only possible if theological reflection refrains from the attempt to sacralize the whole of human life and recognizes that humanity can provide itself with many answers which were formerly sought from religion (Azevedo 1991:140).

Azevedo not only omitted any mention of liturgy's role in the work of evangelisation and thus mission, he also negated the value of bringing the sacred to bear upon human life. He expressed what Bosch (1991a:362) has named the optimism of the Enlightenment paradigm for mission. This kind of optimism, Bosch (1991a:356-357) reminded us, is reminiscent of the thought which prevailed during the 1960's in the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC and produced consequences contrary to what was expected.

One more example from the SEDOS collection serves to make the point that the relationship of liturgy and mission has not been given pride of place in either liturgical or missiological works. Another Jesuit, Michael Amaladoss, is both a liturgist and missiologist, but in his concluding essay of the SEDOS volume he makes no mention of this crucial relationship. He does refer to the mystery which the church "makes present and celebrates" (Amaladoss 1991:373), but he simply states that the mystery is absolute and eternal, without any further reflection about how it might change the church which he describes as historically and culturally conditioned (Amaladoss 1991:373). This is a sad omission because though it is true that the church is indeed historically and culturally conditioned it is also a

church being renewed daily in her mission by the action of the Holy Spirit (RM 21).

In the report of the 1991 symposium on *The Church: Salvation and Mission* which was published in 1993 there is again no mention of the relationship between liturgy and mission. The purpose of the symposium was to mark the fifth anniversary of the publication of the U.S. Bishops' pastoral statement on world missions, *To the Ends of the Earth* (1986). Though the tone of all the papers which were delivered is very positive and encouraging none of them carried the discussion on the connection between liturgy and mission in the life of the church any further. Two examples from this compilation suffice to make our point.

Bishop Francis Stafford of Denver, Colorado did make reference to the church as the universal sacrament of salvation and reflected that the church was the organ of salvation for the world (Stafford 1993:34), but he did not carry his reflection further. In the last section of his essay he made reference to the need to "renew Sunday Eucharist and catechesis" (Stafford 1993:49), but no implications are drawn by Stafford for the mission of the church.

Joan Gormley gave a synthesis and listed and developed three points of convergence in five papers and the responses made to them at the 1991 symposium. The three points were 1) the uniqueness of Christ in the work of universal salvation; 2) the role of the church as an instrument for offering salvation and holiness to all; and 3) a respect for various cultures (Gormley 1993:96-98). Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the liturgy although, it would seem, that in each of these three sections of her paper liturgy is of paramount importance. Gormley's failure to point this out is indicative of the lack of liturgical awareness on the part of contemporary missiologists.

The work of the well-known American missiologist, Anthony Bellagamba, also fails to demonstrate the relationship between liturgy and mission. An example of this is an article he wrote on the future of the church especially in Africa (Bellagamba 1990:28). In this article Bellagamba provided his readers with a review of documents on the church, a summary of the work of five leading theologians in regard to how they see the church and an historical overview of the Western church and its approach to mission. He then made his case for a vision of

mission which is appropriate for a global church (Bellagamba 1990:60-68). In the last section of his article, Bellagamba fleshed out the consequences for the church in Africa. In that portion of the article he mentioned the need for local liturgy, but omitted any mention of its connection to promoting a global sense of church or a spirit of mission (Bellagamba 1990:74). He neglected to assert the fact that there is a relationship between liturgy and mission even though he maintained that:

Liturgy is the highest expression of the faith and life of the community (Bellagamba 1990:74).

In his later work, *Mission and Ministry in the Global Church* (1992), Bellagamba included a chapter on the spirituality of missionaries. This chapter contains his only attempt to link liturgy to mission and he did so in connection with the eucharist. He wrote:

...Eucharist has a privileged place in Christian spirituality, and it ought to have a prominent place in the life and ministry of missionaries...Eucharist is what missionaries ought to be -- people rooted in the present realities and yet people of the future (Bellagamba 1992:112)

Bellagamba then gave his view of how the eucharist is translated into the life of the missionary. His understanding of what it means to *do* the eucharist does not reflect the rich Catholic teaching of the eucharist. He offered the following perspective:

Missioners do eucharist when they introduce non-Western cultures to the church. They do eucharist when they learn values in other religions and share them with their sending churches. They do eucharist when they sanctify traditions unknown to the rest of the church (Bellagamba 1992:112-113).

This kind of theologising does little to facilitate the reunion of liturgy and mission. The eucharist, in Bellagamba's view, makes of the missionary little more than a conduit for conveying information and values between cultures. It reduces *doing* the eucharist to contemporary strategies for creating global consciousness. Bellagamba seems to have ignored the fact that participation in the eucharist is meant to lead the missionary into the very heart of the church's life. Von Allmen has said it well when he call the liturgy:

...the place where the very life of the Church in the world pulsates, as the place where the Church is sent into the world to fulfill her apostolic ministry, the place whither she returns from the world to offer her worship (von Allmen 1969:21).

#### 1.2.1.2 *Missiological Literature: Some Protestant Works*

Now we turn to the work of two well known Protestant missiologists: David Bosch and Charles Van Engen. Neither of these scholars presented any evidence that revealed a strong conviction about the relationship between liturgy and mission.

In his masterful missiological study, *Transforming Mission* (1991), David Bosch made no attempt to link liturgy and mission. The word *liturgy* does not even merit a listing in an otherwise comprehensive subject index. There is a reference to *worship* in Bosch's (1991a:75) section on Matthew's gospel but he failed to link it in any way with mission. The only place where the two are linked is in Bosch's (1991a:205-213) description of the missionary paradigm of the Orthodox Church. In his description he cites the work of Orthodox authors, but he does not identify with their perspective.

What is perhaps most disappointing is that in Bosch's description of what he called "the emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm" (Bosch 1991a:368-510) which has major implications for future theologising about mission because of Bosch's status in the missiological community, he again made no attempt to link liturgy and mission. The closest he came in this matter was his reflection that:

The missionary dimension of a local church's life manifests itself, among other ways, when it is truly a worshipping community (Bosch 1991a:373).

What is absent here is an appreciation of how liturgy and mission exist in an interdependent relationship. In all other aspects Bosch's book provides the reader with a comprehensive study of mission in every age. Perhaps the lack of an in-depth treatment of liturgy and mission was a result of his own experience as a member of a church of the Reformed tradition which historically has not emphasised the importance of ritual (Dix 1986:633)<sup>9</sup>, rather than his intellectual understanding of the subject.

In the collection of essays honouring Arthur Glasser, *The Good News of the Kingdom*, the last essay was written by one of the book's editors, Charles Van Engen. The focus of the article is mission in the years before the millennium. Van Engen maintained that in these intervening years before the third millennium there is need of a trinitarian theology of mission and offered the following description of it.

We need a trinitarian theology of mission that: emanates from a deeply personal, biblical and corporate *faith* in Jesus Christ (the King); is lived out in the Body of Christ as an ecumenical fellowship of *love* (the central locus of Christ's reign); and offers *hope* for the total transformation of God's world (as a sign of the present inbreaking of the coming Kingdom of God) (Van Engen 1993a:253-254).

In the whole of Van Engen's exposition of the above three points he failed to make any connection between liturgy and mission. Even though he noted that: "Jesus calls for agape love as the supreme quality of the fellowship of missionary disciples" (Van Engen 1993a:256) and might have concluded that this fellowship is built up through the liturgy, but he did not.

The final section of Van Engen's essay is devoted to the Christian virtue of hope. He argued that "hope is probably the most important single concept that the Church of Jesus Christ has to offer the world of the next millennium" (Van Engen 1993a:260). Again he made no mention of the prayer of the faith community as a source capable of renewing people in hope and mission. Unlike von Allmen who maintains that liturgical celebration itself has the power to evangelise people because it radiates the joy, hope, peace, freedom and love of Christ (von Allmen 1965:79); Van Engen failed to articulate the role of liturgy in forming people who are capable of sharing in the mission of Christ. Again, this may reflect the fact that he writes as a member of an evangelical church. Neither of these two prominent missiologists, Bosch or Van Engen, evidenced any sensitivity to ritual in Christian liturgy. The Orthodox, on the other hand, bring another perspective to the discussion.

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<sup>9</sup> Anglican liturgist, Gregory Dix, first published his classic work, *The Shape of the Liturgy* in 1945.

### 1.2.1.3 Missiological Literature: Some Orthodox Works

Among Orthodox theologians there is an insistence on the conviction that the church's missionary stance flows directly from the liturgy. Though often thought-of as a *nonmissionary* church (Schmemmann 1979:209). Orthodox missiologists have developed a theology of mission enriched by their liturgical experience.

Missiologists belonging to the Orthodox tradition have linked liturgy and mission. Three of them merit mention: Ion Bria, James Stamoolis, and Nikos Nissiotis. Schmemmann has also developed the relationship between liturgy and mission, but his work will be treated under the liturgical sources.

Perhaps it is Bria who has written the most extensively about how liturgy and mission impact upon each other. He pointed out that at the end of each celebration of the eucharistic liturgy every believer is sent out on mission to the world with the words, "Let us go forth in peace" (Bria 1986:38). He maintains that this leaves no doubt in the minds and hearts of believers that they are to be witnesses to Christ in the world.

Elsewhere Bria summarised the results of the Orthodox Consultation on Confessing Christ Through the Liturgical Life of the Church Today. In his summary Bria stated that the Orthodox missionary stance grows directly out of their experience in the liturgy (Bria 1983:214) and is lived in the lives of the participants. He has also presented the Orthodox view of mission as:

...An "ecclesial" movement: it is the extension of the incarnation and Pentecost, not the outreach of a Christian institution. Only as members of the *ecclesia*, the body of Christ, can Christians participate in the proclamation of the gospel and the sharing of the grace of God (Bria 1986:274).

Bria has articulated the way in which liturgy prepares the assembly for mission: through participation in the liturgy. Liturgy is the school of mission. Mission is the ecclesial act and liturgy is the ritual act; one enriches the other because both are communal acts, acts of the church.

James Stamoolis, through a general structural analysis of the Orthodox liturgy, has demonstrated that the structure of the liturgy serves the missionary

cause (Stamoolis 1986:88). In his overview of the structure he showed that every element is ordered so that through the liturgy the faithful are motivated to participate in the mission of Christ through the church in the world (Stamoolis 1986:91).

Stamoolis has outlined three characteristic elements of mission practice which help to further clarify the Orthodox position in regard to liturgy and mission. The first of these elements is the use of the vernacular which allowed the Orthodox mission to penetrate more deeply into the cultures of the peoples they sought to evangelise. Through the use of local languages the Orthodox church could engage the local people of an area in dialogue about the faith. Stamoolis lamented the fact that in the history of Orthodox mission the "Russification" of non-Russian peoples of the eastern regions of the Czarist empire took place.

The second element is that of reliance on indigenous clergy. Since the priest in the Orthodox tradition needs only to be able to read the various offices, preaching can be done by anyone more educated in theology. Therefore training for priestly ministry does not have to be so demanding on the academic level. Hence involvement in the church's liturgical life is able to draw more indigenous people into ministry in the church more easily and quickly.

The third element is that of the promotion of self-governing churches. This was an effort to rely on the gifts of the people native to a particular culture. Here Stamoolis has admitted that this is the element which most often failed, especially when the church was aligned to the state (Stamoolis 1984:61).

In drawing out implications from the above three elements, Stamoolis cautioned that Orthodox mission theology should not be separated from Orthodox theology as a whole (Stamoolis 1984:62). Furthermore he stated that:

It is, then, Orthodoxy's understanding of the sacramental nature of the Church that makes the liturgy a part of the Church's evangelistic witness (Stamoolis 1986:98).

The point Stamoolis has emphasised in his writings is that the liturgy is proclamatory by nature and therefore is a form of missionary witness (Stamoolis 1986:98). This witness is not given by individuals, but by the whole community through their participation in the liturgy.

Nissiotis has also stressed the communal nature of the Orthodox witness given through the liturgy. His starting point is conversion.

Ecclesial conversion means the decision of the individual, but a decision taken with the other members of this fellowship and confirmed by the Holy Spirit through and in this one community (Nissiotis 1967:264).

Nissiotis maintains that the conversion of an individual is initiated and confirmed through the celebration of baptism and nourished by the eucharist (Nissiotis 1967:264). Thus these ritual acts place conversion in the larger context of the kingdom. They are representative acts of the return of the whole cosmos to God through the church (Nissiotis 1967:268).

#### 1.2.1.4 Conclusion

This review of missiological literature points to the fact that in general missiologists, except for the Orthodox, do not reflect on the link between liturgy and mission. They have failed to delve into the liturgy as a source for doing missiology. Jala, in his study of liturgy and mission, observed that:

One...looks in vain for a more completely evolved and systematic treatment of these themes (liturgy and mission) in classical works on mission theology (Jala 1987:57).

Perhaps the Orthodox have the most to say about the relationship of liturgy and mission because their approach to mission is different from that of the Roman Catholics and Protestants. They do mission and missiology out of their experience of the liturgy. Schmemmann maintained that for the Orthodox:

The Eucharist is always the End, the sacrament of the *parousia*, and yet it is always the *beginning*, the *starting point*: now the mission begins (Schmemmann 1961:255).

For the Orthodox, mission is an extension of the liturgy. Bria has expressed this by saying that mission is "the liturgy after the liturgy" (Bria: 1980-66-71). By this he means that believers give witness to the transforming power of the liturgy in the world. The Protestants take a different approach. Bosch (1991a:212) has

observed that Protestants are inclined to portray mission in "exclusively verbalist categories". Furthermore there is an absence of a missionary spirituality to inform their activist stance especially in the area of social justice (Bosch 1991a:212).

Roman Catholics also favour a more activist approach, but their emphasis has been on the administration of the sacraments rather than on evangelisation. Evangelisation came to the forefront of Catholic missionary thinking with the publication of EN (Bosch 1991a:409).

My approach to mission is rooted in the liturgy, but moves beyond witness to include the active work of evangelisation. I do not see mission only in terms of preaching. I include any outreach on the part of the church which serves as a vehicle to make Christ known. This is done both directly and indirectly through a wide variety of services which the church provides for and with the people of God. The liturgy serves to inspire and form believers in a missionary spirit.

It is true that contemporary writers like Aylward Shorter (1994) and Tissa Balasuriya (1984) do write about the relationship between liturgy and mission, but they do not do so in order to demonstrate that liturgy has the power to form people for mission. These authors also do not stress the importance of liturgical experience in doing missiology. My position is based on the place of liturgy in the early church (Kavanagh 1978:25) which I take as normative for all future development, especially of the initiation process.

### 1.2.2. Some Liturgical Sources

Liturgists are almost equally remiss in regard to theologising about the relationship between liturgy and mission. Mission is the concern of very few liturgists; but nevertheless, there are some outstanding ones among the Orthodox, Protestants and Catholics.

#### 1.2.2.1 *Liturgical Literature: The Orthodox Perspective*

Within the Orthodox tradition, Schmemann, writing as a liturgist, was one of the most vigorous promoters of the work of reuniting liturgy and mission. He was of the opinion that the missionary imperative is implied in the Orthodox

experience of church (Schmemmann 1979:214). In his writings he stressed the relationship between eucharist and mission.

Nothing reveals better the relation between Church as fullness and the Church as mission than the Eucharist, the central act of the Church's *leitourgia*, the sacrament of the Church itself. There are two complementary movements in the eucharistic rite: *the movement of ascension* and *the movement of return* (Schmemmann 1979:214).

Schmemmann saw that missionary movement of the church as a movement towards God and the kingdom and outwards to the humanity and the world. For him the eucharist is always the starting point and the end point of mission (Schmemmann 1979:215).

In summarising Schmemmann's understanding of liturgy and mission it becomes evident that liturgy is the source of his mission theology. It is liturgy which gives the mission of the church in Orthodox theology its historical and cosmic dimensions (Schmemmann 1979:216).

#### *1.2.2.2. Liturgical Literature: The Protestant Perspective*

Among Protestants, two liturgists have attempted to bring about the reunification of liturgy and mission in theological thought. They are J-J. von Allmen of the Reformed tradition and Lutheran liturgist and pastor, Frank Senn.

Von Allmen demonstrated his conviction in regard to liturgy and mission in his writings about worship. Writing about cult von Allmen (1965:42) stated that: "worship allows the Church to emerge in its true nature." If this is true and the very nature of the church is missionary (AG 2) then the liturgy is the source of mission in the life of the church. Further he described the church in terms of its relationship with the Lord as an eschatological people assembled to meet the Lord and to become itself through the encounter (von Allmen 1965:43). When the church is assembled for worship it becomes a true manifestation of the very nature of the church on earth, an epiphany of God's presence.

For von Allmen (1965:54) worship is this epiphany because it is the heart of the church. On this point his thought converges with that of the Orthodox who also regard the assembly gathered for the liturgy as an epiphany (Fagerberg

1992:160). According to von Allmen (1965:56) "evangelization is the necessary complement to worship just as worship is the necessary complement to evangelisation." Worship he explained does not turn the assembly inwards towards itself, but upwards toward God (von Allmen 1965:56). The church needs to turn upwards toward God in praise and thanksgiving to express her very nature and also needs to turn outward toward the world so that it can give witness to the presence of the reign of God (von Allmen 1965:56).

The image which von Allmen uses to express his understanding of the relationship between liturgy and mission is that of the diastolic and systolic functions of a pulsating and pumping heart. He asserts that:

The only parochial activities which have any real justification are those which spring from worship and in their turn nourish it (von Allmen 1965:56).

It is clear from his statements that von Allmen sees an intrinsic relationship between liturgy and mission. He urged that liturgy be celebrated with great depth and reverence because it is in itself an evangelising force in peoples' lives.

...It is so important that the Christian cult should be celebrated with a maximum of theological urgency and of spiritual fervor (von Allmen 1965:79).

It is obvious that von Allmen displays a great regard for the place of liturgy in the formation of people for mission. Worshipping with spiritual fervour is the element which is an ever-present challenge for the assembly intent on giving praise and thanks to God and growing in its missionary vocation.

Frank Senn (1993:5) has written that "worship is itself an aspect of the mission of God." Senn's reflections on the relationship between liturgy and mission were developed in the context of his concern that worship in word and sacrament should be understood as part of the mission of God and not simply a tool for carrying out mission and that mission be seen as implicit in liturgical celebrations (Senn 1993:4).

Like von Allmen, Senn (1993:149-164) argued that the church is the assembly gathered together to give God praise and thanks and that liturgy is its

main task (Senn 1993:24) as God's people. He defined the missionary imperative in this way:

The apostolic task is not just to win converts; it is to proclaim what has already happened (in and through Christ) and to invite those who hear the announcement to join the worship and service of the messiah (Senn 1993:42).

Senn warns about the danger of interpreting this apostolic task too subjectively and therefore frames it in the context of the community of believers.

The church's witness can become individual testimony to what God has done *for me*, whereas the true apostolic witness is to what God has done in Christ for the life of the world (Senn 1993:50).

This communal sense is important because it reflects the influence of the community in the formation of the individual for mission. In the RCIA this is seen throughout the process, as will become clear in the rest of this study.

For Senn the mark of sharing in the mission of Christ is the willingness to participate in the pattern of Christ's death and resurrection in one's own life.

The missionary life is the "dying life" poured out on behalf of others. This pattern is seen in Jesus, in his service and witness, *latreia* and *martyria*, and it is to be reproduced in those who follow him (Senn 1993: 66).

In liturgy this happens sacramentally. Baptism, though unrepeatable, is never over and done because it becomes the pattern for the whole of one's Christian life (Senn 1993:66). Senn advocates the implementation of the RCIA as a means for inviting people into this pattern of life. His insights will be helpful in the subsequent chapters.

#### *1.2.2.3 Liturgical Literature: The Catholic Perspective*

One of the most thorough treatments of the relationship between liturgy and mission among Roman Catholic scholars is the doctoral thesis of Dominic Jala, *Liturgy and Mission* (1987). In the first part of his study he outlines a history of liturgy in the missions. Two main points emerged: emphasis was placed on

catechetics rather than on liturgy and the primary liturgical concern from 1950-1980 was the use of the vernacular (Jala 1987:12-15). This part of Jala's study provides the reader with no new insights into his general theme of liturgy and mission.

Where Jala excels is in the manner in which he uses church documents to present a theology which highlights the relationship between liturgy and mission.<sup>10</sup> Jala situates the question of the relationship of liturgy and mission in the context of the functions of the persons of the Trinity and salvation history (Jala 1987:67). His words echo some of the authors we have already considered:

The goal of the whole trinitarian movement that is encompassed in the divine plan of salvation is that, as everything came from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit so everything should go to the Father, through the Son in the Spirit (Jala 1987:329).

Concern about the fulfilment of the divine plan is a thread running through Jala's study. Liturgy is for him the summit of the mission of the church. The liturgy builds up the church from within and provides her with a source of energy and strength to move outward toward the world. Jala concluded:

Seen in this light, liturgy ceases to be considered merely as an exterior step following evangelisation. Missionary activity would then imply building up a community in faith, introducing man into the Church where he can grow in faith, receive the Word and the sacraments and increase his life for his neighbour and thus be also an effective evangeliser (Jala 1987:67).

Jala took a complementary position to the above text in a further reflection on the relationship of liturgy and mission and AG 9.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Catholic liturgists who are considered as founders of the early liturgical movement wrote on the relationship between liturgy and mission. They laid special emphasis on liturgy and justice. Some of those founders are: Virgil Michel, OSB., Gerald Ellard, SJ., Romano Guardini, Reynold Hillenbrand and Johannes Hofinger, SJ. For an excellent compilation of the writings of these liturgists and others from the early period of the liturgical movement cf. Hughes (1990).

<sup>11</sup> AG 9 stresses the need for missionary activity during this period of time between the first coming of Jesus in history and his second coming as the Lord of glory. Jala echoed the words of the decree which stated: "Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than a manifestation or epiphany of God's will, and the fulfilment of that will in the world and in world history." Missionary activity, carried on in this way, helps the mystical body to mature into the fullness of Christ.

In this way of looking at things, liturgy is seen as instrumental in achieving the global goal of missionary activity which is presented as the gradual epiphany of God's saving plan in the world and in history. It is the making present of Christ in the world, the tending towards the eschatological fullness. This tension is characterised by the expansion of the people of God, the enlargement of the mystical Body, the growth of the spiritual temple where God is adored in spirit and in truth (Jala 1987:157).

The kind of growth of the mystical body to which Jala refers is only possible because of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. Jala views the work of the Spirit from an eschatological perspective (Jala 1987:229). Liturgy and mission are "signs of the active presence of the eschatological Spirit in the Church and in the world" (Jala 1987:231).

Jala's study of liturgy and mission is the only one which presents a comprehensive theological foundation for the essential relationship of liturgy and mission. The fruit of Jala's research will also be employed in our discussion of the sacraments of initiation in chapter six because these chapters will stress the importance of baptism and eucharist in formation for mission.

James Dunning's works give special emphasis to the relationship of liturgy and mission in the context of the RCIA. He wrote: "The way we initiate new members says what we believe Church to be" (Dunning 1981:32). He sees the work of initiation as a task which properly belongs to the whole community. He cites the early church as an example:

...One of the lessons of history most difficult to comprehend is that in the Church of the first centuries those who initiated, welcomed, and journeyed with people to Christ and the Christian community were ordinary folks (Dunning 1981:15).

The point is that the community was responsible for mission. The early community understood its mission in terms of the initiation of new members. They reached out to others in faith and in a spirit of mission. The "mission was to share Good News which created the Church" (Dunning 1981:15).

Perhaps Dunning's most profound contribution is in regard to strategies for the implementation of the RCIA and its meaning for parish life. He considers it as fundamental for enkindling a sense of mission in those who want to join the church

and those who are already the baptised. He sees the change in the church's understanding of the sacraments of initiation included in the shift in thinking about the role of the laity in the church. In his most thorough study of the RCIA he wrote:

The sacraments of initiation incorporated that shift. More than any other rites, they translated the vision of the church as a community into practice. They enfolded it in rites that celebrate God's universal presence in the community of all the baptised and the universal call of the entire community to mission (Dunning 1993b:13).

This vision of the church, he maintained, cannot be conveyed by an individual pastor, catechist or sponsor; only an entire community can convey the fact that the church is a community committed to conversion, worship and mission (Dunning 1993b:14).

More than presenting a single treatise on mission and liturgy, Dunning has this idea running through everything he has written. His works will be used extensively in chapter three to six which describe the catechumenal process of Christian initiation.

Finally, it should be noted that the December, 1994 issue of *Theological Studies*<sup>12</sup> published a review of literature about sacramental theology. The review concentrated on the works dealing with the sacraments in general, rather than on individual sacraments. The authors divided the works into five categories: Post-Rahnerian Formulations, those related to Liberation Theology, works which reflected a post-modern perspective, the works of feminist theologians and in the final section, studies of African and Asian theologians.

In the whole of this fifty page article there is no mention of liturgy and mission. The related ideas of evangelisation and inculturation which comes closest to concern about the relationship of liturgy and mission could only be found in the section which reviewed the work of the Liberation theologians, but even that could not accurately either be called liturgical theology or missiology. The authors pointed out Segundo Galilea's concern about evangelisation, but for him the link is with popular religion,<sup>13</sup> not liturgy (Power et al. 1994:678).

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Power et al. (1994:657-705).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. SC 13. Popular religion is a phrase that denotes folk religion, i.e., devotions,

#### *1.2.2.4 Conclusion*

This entire survey of literature indicates the need for liturgists and missiologists to collaborate in efforts to more clearly articulate the intrinsic relationship between liturgy and mission. Liturgists have taken a small step in that direction. There seems to be a small, but growing consensus about the need for the reunification of liturgy and mission among those writings about liturgy in the Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic Traditions. Missiologists must soon follow suit, otherwise the church cannot help but be impoverished by the absence of their contribution. My position is that unless liturgy and mission are reunited liturgy will be perceived as an otherworldly activity and mission will be denied its deepest motivation. Hence the need for this present study.

#### *1.3 A Theoretical Framework*

Before looking at the immediate theoretical framework for this thesis it is necessary for the reader to understand the author's stance from which she does missiology. Here a case is being made for what I call "liturgical missiology." My conviction is that liturgy is the source of all theology, but especially missiology because liturgy and mission are essential to the very life of the church (cf. 1.1). The underlying principle is that of *lex orandi, lex credendi* (Kavanagh 1984:150). How we pray expresses what we believe and together these shape how we engage in mission.

Given this principle it is also evident that liturgy is not celebrated in a vacuum and so it always in dialogue with the particular context of those who are celebrating a particular rite. Context is integral to the dialogue between liturgy and context, but ultimately liturgy is always counter-cultural or counter context, not in the sense of being against culture or context, but in the sense that liturgy critiques culture and context. Liturgy puts us in touch with mystery, the transcendent God made visible in Christ Jesus (Casel 1962:38). It is in the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum* (Power 1990:44) in which we are invited to participate through baptism, but indeed through all the liturgical rites of the church because liturgical rites are made up of myths, symbols and rituals. Liturgy can speak to culture in a

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religious practices which are not included in the liturgical rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

unique way because culture is also made up of myths, symbols and rituals (Power 1990:45). They are the component parts of V. Turner's (1974:50-51) concept of "anti-structure." This anti-structural quality of the liturgy puts it at odds with the dominant culture because it challenges the values of every society (Luzbetak 1988:269).

Participation in this mystery takes place in the human context and is expressed in cultural forms, which in turn affects how people relate to their context and culture. Participation in the celebration of the liturgy can facilitate conversion. Seen in this light, conversion enables us to embrace everything in a culture that will support participation in the mystery of Christ, and discern all the inimical elements that would cause our conversion to be diminished or compromised.

There is neither anything here that could be likened to secularised civil religion or cultural Christianity (Dunning 1989c:40; Warren 1989a:67) nor is there any semblance of a detached, transcendent religion that has a fear of anything social, economic or political (Luzbetak 1988:381). Liturgy has to do with the most basic human rituals, birth, death, healing, eating, drinking, loving and making holy. These do not lead to an escape from the human context, they lead to an embrace of our human context that transforms that very context (Luzbetak 1988:268). Liturgical rites become paradigmatic because they illuminate social reality and we find in them root metaphors for shaping our world view (Turner, V. 1974:13-15; Luzbetak 1988:269) Liturgical ritual calls upon humanity to remember its basic identity as image of God and its most basic myth, for as Luzbetak (1988:383) has pointed out: "Ritual is, after all, the memory of a faith community."

The theoretical framework of this current study has developed out of such a stance. The missiological perspective has been shaped by the Franciscan approach (cf. 1.3.1) to mission. It has been enriched by the insights of the social sciences. The anthropological insights into the ritual process developed by Victor Turner have been most helpful (cf. 1.3.2). He identified the ritual process as having a tripartite structure consisting of three stages: separation, liminality and reaggregation as a basic, anthropological way to understand rites of passage. The theoretical foundation for this examination of the RCIA and its implications for

mission are then based on what I have called a *liturgical missiology*, flowing from an integration of the Franciscan approach to mission and the insights of the anthropological theory of V. Turner on the ritual process. V. Turner, himself theorised about liminality in relationship to the Franciscans because he believed that Francis wanted to structure his community's living situation in such a way that it would facilitate a sustained experience of *communitas*<sup>14</sup> because his community would live in a liminal lifestyle (Turner, V. 1969:145-150). V. Turner wrote:

...Francis appears quite deliberately to be compelling the friars to inhabit the fringes and interstices of the social structure of his time, and to keep them in a permanently liminal state...(Turner, V. 1969:145).

Besides V. Turner's theory of liminality, the work of Schreiter (1985) was used to open up the issues of identity, cultural and personal boundaries, and world view. Luzbetak (1988) offered further insights in regard to the role of ritual, myth and symbol in cultural change. His contribution was especially helpful in applying anthropological theory to Catholic liturgy. He provided a missiological foundation for the insights developed in regard to the RCIA and its value in forming a person for mission.

Mircea Eliade's (1961) work provided an historical context for rites of passage and the universality of cosmic symbols which are used in the liturgy and, we believe, can have an important role to play in missiology. Clifford Geertz (1973) has also helped to deepen our insights into culture and symbols and along with V. Turner provided the researcher with many of examples of initiation in various cultures.

Finally, the ritual theorists Bell (1992) and Driver (1991) have provided additional theoretical tools for understanding the dynamics of ritual. In this same vein, the ritual studies of Grimes (1993), as related to liturgy, have opened up new avenues of thought for this author. James and Evelyn Whitehead (1982) also furnished insights into V. Turner's ritual process with their application of his

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<sup>14</sup> *Communitas* is a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances. It is a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:250).

principles to the stages of human growth. More will be said about these contributors in section 1.3.2.

At the beginning of this study there was no conscious effort to use the Franciscan tradition as part of the theoretical framework, but as it progressed it became evident that the legacy of Francis of Assisi's own model for mission was a key factor in shaping the perspective out of which this author embarks on mission. As V. Turner's insights became clearer the relationship between the Franciscan approach to mission and liminality became apparent.

### 1.3.1 The Franciscan Approach to Mission

The missiological stance from which this study emanates is informed by the fact of my identity as a member of the Franciscan Order.<sup>15</sup> Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order was the first religious founder to include directives about mission in his rule.<sup>16</sup> He based himself on the missionary discourse found in chapter ten of Matthew's gospel and used a portion of this text to begin the sixteenth chapter of his *Earlier Rule* (ER). Cajetan Esser noted that this text not only was the foundation for Francis' missionary inspiration, but of his whole understanding of Gospel living. He wrote: "This Gospel injunction, in fact, was the normative model for the evangelical life of the Friars Minor" (Esser 1977:36). For Francis the missionary discourse became the paradigm for his understanding of mission.

In the sixteenth chapter of Francis' ER he outlined three strategies for mission which were appropriate for his followers. In contemporary terms they might be expressed as: 1) witness, 2) proclamation, and 3) martyrdom (Armstrong & Brady 1982:121-122). These three aspects of his understanding have shaped the missiological framework out of which I write. Before I demonstrate how these three are operative in my own missiological stance, there is one more scriptural text which is foundational in the Franciscan paradigm of mission, namely, 1 Peter 2:11 (Armstrong & Brady 1982:155). Francis used the

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<sup>15</sup> The Franciscan Order is one of the religious families of the Roman Catholic Church. It was founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209. The official name of his community is the Order of Friars Minor. It is the first of the mendicant religious orders founded in the Middle Ages.

<sup>16</sup> My own exposure to a critical study of Francis's writings began under the direction of Ignatius Brady, OFM, in 1973 during my years of study at the Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University.

phrase "pilgrims and strangers" to describe the attitude which he wanted to inform his followers' missionary stance. For Francis, to be a pilgrim meant to be "on the way," to be *in via*, a traveller in transit from one place to another. To be a stranger meant, to Francis that one lives in such a way that he or she can be at home everywhere while not being at home anywhere. Such a person stands between two universes, the present one and the one yet to come (Billot 1973:5).

This attitude of being a pilgrim and stranger allows one to step lightly through the world with the purpose of making God known. Francis wrote in his *Letter to the Entire Order (=LOrd)*:

Give praise to God since He is good (Ps 135:1) and exalt Him by your deeds (Tob 13:6), for He has sent you into the entire world for this reason: that in word and deed you may give witness to His voice and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except Him (Tob 13:4) (LOrd 8-9).

From Christ, Francis received a global vision of mission. Francis' followers were to go everywhere in the world to make God known. This text from Francis' writings reveals his profound belief that it is God himself who sends people on mission and the purpose for which one is sent on mission: to make God known to all peoples, everywhere in the world. To this end he articulated the three ways of being on mission mentioned above. Each one bears some consideration.

The first way to be on mission which was advocated by Francis was that of witness, not the witness of an individual, but the witness of a community that lives peacefully in the midst of others. In this way his followers were to give witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives and to the fact that they are Christians. Francis wrote very simply of how the friars and sisters could give such witness:

One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake (1Pet 2:13) and to acknowledge that they are Christians (ER 16:6).

Francis taught his followers to be humble before others. This was not the effect of a negative self image, but an outcome of his desire to follow Christ who put himself at the service of all (Esser 1972: 4).

Francis' description of a life of witness parallels my own conviction that mission is rooted in one's way of life. It is a way of life that is respectful of other peoples and cultures (AG 22) and one that is relational. If witness is going to be effective, relationships must be built up with the local people. If the native peoples are approached with respect then these become "liberating encounters" (Botha et al. 1994:26). This is the work of the pilgrim church.

The church, in the first five chapters of AG, is not presented as the sender, but the one sent on mission as a pilgrim church (AG 2), that is, a church *in via*. The church is a church in motion, on the move so that all nations may know the saving power of God (AG 1). This is how Francis saw the church and his community.

This image of the pilgrim church shatters the pre-conciliar image of the church as "a mighty fortress", insular and impenetrable. With this document as well as LG and GS the church's stance to the world changed. The church no longer sees itself as over and against the world, but as a church with a mission to the whole world (Bosch 1991a:373-374).

It is this pilgrim church which is also the sacrament of salvation for the world. When this church is engaged in the praise of God and in the proclamation of the Good News it is engaged in mission. Jala has said it this way:

No liturgical assembly can ever pretend to be a closed up unit. If it has been gathered, nourished and animated by the trinitarian God, it is in order that it may go forth and carry out its mission in the world until the accomplishment of everything is reached in Christ (Jala 1987:303).

This same sense of mission is expressed in AG 9 which states that mission is the work of the pilgrim church and that it is an *epiphany* of God's will for the world. This is what it means to give witness. Furthermore, this mission is to the whole world because of the church's share in the mission of the Son and Holy Spirit (Müller 1987:42).

The second way to be on mission which Francis directed his followers to take was that of proclamation. This proclamation was a way of opening people to the life of the Trinity. In ER he wrote:

Another way (to be on mission) is to proclaim the word of God when they see it pleases the Lord, so that they (non-Christians) believe in the all-powerful God -- Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit -- the Creator of all, in the Son Who is the Redeemer and Savior, and that they be baptized and become Christians; because whoever has not been born again of water and the Holy Spirit cannot enter into the kingdom of God (cf. Jn 3:5) (ER 16:7).

Though witness was the primary stage in Francis' concept of mission it was meant to lead to direct proclamation, sharing Christ with others. This in turn was to lead to baptism. These two ways of being on mission were not independent of each other (Esser 1972:4), but were meant to act as a complement one for the other. Preaching of the word was not to be divorced from the witness of their lives (Esser 1972:4).

The hoped-for outcome of their preaching was that people would be moved to belief in the Trinity. This was meant to lead them to seek baptism. Baptism was for Francis a means for sharing life with the community of the Trinity in the community of the church (Armstrong & Brady 1982:12-16).

My own understanding of proclamation is shaped by Francis' teaching and that of Vatican II. The aims of missionary activity, according to AG are evangelisation of peoples and the extension of the church to places where it had previously not taken root. The primary purpose is to establish the local church (AG 6). This is in fact the desired result of proclamation. Incorporation into the church is then not a matter of mere individual conversion, but conversion in faith to Christ within the context of the faith community (RCIA 4). Conversion results in baptism, and in sharing in the life of the Trinity. Here at the local level is where catechumens and baptised alike share in the apostolic mission of the church (RCIA 41).

The vision of the church which is present in AG places the responsibility of mission at the feet of the whole church as an expression of her nature. It is the

fundamental duty of the entire people of God (Müller 1987:44). Proclamation invites people to become part of the body of Christ by baptism, confirmation and eucharist. Their participation in the church strengthens them for mission..

Martyrdom is a special form of bearing witness to Christ. It is the symbol of the totality of the missionary's commitment to Christ. Martyrdom is a call that not only requires witness in word and deed, but also the gift of one's life.

In Francis' paradigm of mission the third way to be on mission was not something that was chosen, but was a gift. This third way to express one's sense of mission was that of martyrdom. It is the result of surrender to the Lord. Francis wrote:

And all the brothers (and sisters), wherever they may be should remember that they gave themselves and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. And for love of Him, they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies, both visible and invisible, because the Lord says: Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it (cf. Lk 9:24) in eternal life (Mt 24:46) (ER 16:10-11).

The martyrdom to which Francis referred is not a way of being on mission that is open to everyone, but participation in the dying and rising of Jesus, a sharing in his paschal mystery is open to all who are baptised into his death and resurrection (SC 6). This participation becomes the pattern of Christian life: dying and rising in Christ Jesus.

In the light of the less than inspiring history (Bosch 1991a:205) of the church's attitude toward unbelievers during the Middle Ages Francis' understanding of martyrdom as a way of being on mission is as valid today as it was in his own time. Francis believed in the universality of salvation and this continues to be part of the motivation for mission in the Franciscan family.

John Pobee has pointed out that martyrdom has been called "Hallowing the Holy Name" and quotes Tertullian's famous saying: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" (Pobee 1992:27). His view is that the possibility of martyrdom is a consequence of baptism, of one's commitment to sharing in the suffering of Christ. The readiness to share in the paschal mystery of Christ is evidenced in our readiness to approach the table of the Lord and share in the

eucharist. It is at the table of the Lord that we learn what it means to be the body of Christ and what it means to be ready to have our own bodies broken for the good of the world.

In the weekly Sunday eucharist we renew our desire to be transformed into Christ's body and share in his mission. Gabe Huck has written eloquently of our sharing in the eucharist at the Lord's table:

Here we bring our hunger for the reign of God -- and that is why we come fasting to this liturgy -- and here we are fed with a morsel of the bread of the poor and sip of the heavenly banquet. Here we have joined ourselves to one another in a broken loaf and a common cup joined ourselves with absolutely none of the world's distinctions. And we have joined in communion also with all the baptized who ever came to this table. In some sense -- because baptism makes us not members of a club but nonmembers of every club, thus only human brothers and sisters -- we have joined with everyone, facing what evil has made of our world, yet glimpsing and tasting the reign of God (Huck 1989b:94).

This sense of baptism and eucharist is what shapes the Christian community for mission. Here liturgy is not an escape, but an opening to the world with and in the presence of Christ. It is out of such a vision of church, baptism, eucharist, and mission that my missiological stance has been formed.

### **1.3.2 A Perspective from the Social Sciences**

The analytical framework which has proved to be most helpful in this study is the result of Victor Turner's anthropological work on ritual and social drama as they effect social status (Ostdiek 1993:43). I have applied V. Turner's categories and descriptions to the stages in the catechumenal process of the RCIA. V. Turner's work has its point of departure in Arnold van Gennep's seminal work, *The Rites of Passage* (1960). Van Gennep (1960:20-21) provided V. Turner with the tripartite process for understanding rituals for the rites of passage. Eliade helped to refine this understanding of initiation by putting it in the context of history and affirming V. Turner's sense of the movement in rites of passage. He also introduced the concept of self-transcendence as necessary for the proper growth of

a person. Eliade argued that every person has within him/her a religious dimension that has him/her strive to be more:

...(The) religious man *wants to be other* than he finds himself on the "natural" level and undertake to make himself in accordance with the ideal image revealed to him by myths...Initiation is equivalent to spiritual maturing (Eliade 1961:187-188).

The preliminary phase of the process begins with separation rites whose function is to detach persons from their old status or sense of identity. Separation occurs when a person is taken out of the ordinary pattern and flow of his or her life (Whitehead & Whitehead 1982:52). Once this separation takes place a person enters the liminal stage of the rites of passage. Identity is an essential area of concern in this study because in the initiation process the identity of a person undergoes a change. He/she begins crossing the boundaries of his/her relationship with the Catholic church and with his/her culture, and hence, in Schreiter's view, identity changes. As he has stated: "To restructure boundaries is to restructure identity" (Schreiter 1985:65). We might then say that to learn culture is to learn one's identity (Luzbetak 1988:192). This is what happens to a person in the initiation process of the RCIA. They learn what might be called "Catholic culture." By this we mean that Catholics have beliefs and customs and rites which are supracultural (Luzbetak 1988:109). Catholics throughout the world, for example, understand the meaning of genuflection upon entering a church, signing oneself with holy water, or fasting before receiving holy communion. The rite, as a structure, is universal but it is meant to be adapted and inculturated by local churches.

We return now to the structure of the tripartite process of initiation. The second phase of the process is perhaps the most crucial. In moving from one's initial state to a new social state a person passes through a threshold into what is called liminality (Turner V. 1969:181). This condition of liminality is an in-between phase. Persons in this phase have a sense of being on the boundaries of their lives. They are moving to a new sense of identity and meaning (Luzbetak 1988:270; Ostdiek 1993:43). During this phase V. Turner observed that persons enter into a new set of social relationships which have meaning outside their

culture of origin. These relationships help to redefine one's identity because they are at the heart of human interaction without which there would be no society (Driver 1991:160; Luzbetak 1988:270; Turner, V. 1969:83). The concluding phase is concerned with reaggregation into society. Within the context of the RCIA reaggregation begins during the period of mystagogia when the newly initiated assume greater responsibility for the life of the community and participate in the mission.

In no way does the use of the RCIA diminish or obliterate the need for inculturation, as has been argued elsewhere (Karecki 1990). Inculturation is an imperative because of the incarnation (Karecki 1990:6):

If the Church is to be in a position to offer all people the mystery of salvation and the life by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived (AG 10).

Faith must be inculturated in every culture where the church is planted. The RCIA simply provides the rite for initiation; the rituals that make up that rite can and are being inculturated (cf. 1.4.2.2) The rituals which make up that rite should be carefully considered for the meaning they convey and then inculturated so their meaning can be understood in a specific cultural context. It is assumed that the meaning of the ritual will deepen as it is inculturated.

The RCIA is sensitive to differing cultural expressions and encourages inculturation: in the manner of greeting, the reception of people as inquirers, the use of touch in the ritual signing of a catechumen, the use of traditional names, in signs of acceptance and celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

Work is already being done to inculturate the rite of initiation in a deeper way in other countries. The Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe has begun its work by offering sessions for catechists during which they can prepare the rites with cultural symbols and values in mind (Russell 1991:20). In Burkina Faso experimentation with Christian Initiation Rites has been going on since 1974 (Karecki 1990:53). In the Rite of Acceptance customs of the Mossi are brought in to enhance the rite (cf. 4.1.1.3). For now, we say with Chupungco (1982:62),

that "a borrowed rite is an alien rite." Schreier (1985:21) has made the point that the gospel is always an incarnate reality. Our faith is a faith that we have heard and seen through others. He notes the importance of the relationship between the local church and the universal church.

Church is a complex of those cultural patterns in which the gospel has taken on flesh, at once enmeshed in the local situation, extending through communities in our own time and in the past, and reach out to the eschatological realization of the fullness of God's reign. Thus there is no local theology without the larger church, that concrete community of Christians, united through word and sacrament in the one Lord. The gospel without church does not come to its full realization; the church without gospel is a dead letter. Without church there is no integral incarnation of the gospel (Schreier 1985:21).

This places responsibility on the local church to take seriously the rigorous work of inculturation. In this process the universal church is a dialogue partner that helps the local church to refine its understanding of the gospel and its inculturation within cultures.

V. Turner's theory has significant consequences for liturgy because the tripartite process of separation, liminality and reaggregation takes place in a ritual context (Bynum 119:30; Holmes 1973:391; Luzbetak 1988:269; Turner, V., 1972a:391). Arbuckle (1990:107-108) has applied V. Turner's theory to the RCIA and to liturgy in general as a means of communication within a ritual context (Arbuckle 1988:21-23). I, too, have applied V. Turner's theory to the RCIA, but I have related it specifically to the process of formation in the RCIA. The point being made is that the experience of liminality is able to be utilised in developing a sense of mission and an approach to mission that respects other peoples and cultures. His/her own experience of liminality in entering "Catholic culture" and being in a "betwixt and between" state can be an asset in trying to navigate his/her way in another cultural configuration. This is what Taylor (1991:154) calls an experience of *intercultural liminality*. This concept is helpful because it shows the usefulness of V. Turner's explanation of liminality and how the experience of it in the initiation process of the RCIA works to form persons for mission and provides them with an experience of liminality, a context for reflection on that

experience, and a faith perspective for understanding what they have experienced that can serve them well in responding to the call to mission.

Figure 1 above, depicts the stages and thresholds of the RCIA. The stages of the RCIA process (Ostdiek 1993:43) which correspond to V. Turner's tripartite scheme are represented by circles. In chapters three, four, five and six we begin with the same diagram in order to give the reader a visual representation of what stage we are describing and analysing in the RCIA. The segment being studied is indicated by a shaded portion of the diagram. The catechumenate and the period of enlightenment are both characterised by an experience of liminality, but ritually they are two distinct stages in the RCIA process. The catechumen is in a "between and between" state which V. Turner (1969:95; 1972a:394) calls "anti-structure". These are the times when *communitas* is most possible (Turner, V. 1969:97). The first two stages are marked off with dotted lines to convey the fact that these two stages do not have a definite time frame (Morris 1989:55). They can be of different length depending on the need of each person who enters into the process.

The last two stages, the time of enlightenment and *mystagogia*<sup>17</sup> each have definite time parameters. The period of enlightenment takes place during the Lenten season (RCIA 118) immediately preceding the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil (RCIA 207). The period of *mystagogia* lasts for the fifty days from Easter Sunday to the Feast of Pentecost (RCIA 249).

The three thresholds are marked by communal rituals which celebrate the movement from one stage to another. This corresponds to V. Turner's (1967:94-95) concept of ritual mobility. These rituals celebrate movement into new centres of meaning and presence (Seubert 1989:491).

Liminality characterises the period of the catechumenate and the period of enlightenment. Catechumens have made a choice to break with their previous way of living to respond to Christ's call in their lives. They live in an *in between* state of separation from certain values, attitudes and relationships, but do not totally belong to the community of faith. They live at a stage of "anti-structure." By using this term V. Turner distinguished society from the liminal periods. In a liturgical

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<sup>17</sup> The term *mystagogia* means catechetical instruction on the sacraments to reveal their deeper meaning. It takes place after having celebrated the sacraments. Traditionally, *mystagogia*, has meant "to initiate into the mysteries" (Mazza 1989:1). This term will be more fully explained in chapter six.

context it is this experience of antistructure which opens one to God, aids in the formation of new social bonds within the believing community, and engenders a sense of mission out of which a person relates to the world.

Despite the fact that V. Turner's theory of the stages in the ritual process have been helpful in this study, he is not without his critics. Bynum (1991) has criticised V. Turner's theory of liminality from her point of view as a medieval historian. Bynum (1991:30-31) has noted that "there are some obvious problems with applying V. Turner's writings to historical research." She argued that in her study of the stories of the lives of medieval women she did not find V. Turner's ideas of processual symbols and rites applicable (Bynum 1991:32) and so concluded that V. Turner's theories could not be applied universally.<sup>18</sup> In spite of her criticism, Bynum (1991:45) acknowledged that V. Turner's understanding of dominant symbols<sup>19</sup> could be helpful for understanding Christian ritual.

Although Driver (1991:227) admitted that V. Turner was the "chief theorist of the transformative role of ritual in society"; he was, nevertheless, critical of some of his explanations. He wrote:

Turner's writings, however, pose an interpretative problem, because his statements concerning "the ritual process" are not entirely consistent (Driver 1991:227).

Driver's main criticism of V. Turner is not with his overall theory, but with some of his definitions which he feels lack precision (1991:238). In articulating his own understanding of community and the sacraments Driver relied extensively on V. Turner's theory of the ritual process (Driver 1991:152-165; 195-222).<sup>20</sup>

Bell (1992:21) also detected the inconsistency of V. Turner's definition of ritual in her study of the power of ritual. She does not see this as a problem as long as one understands that V. Turner's theory is not static and realises that as his thought developed so did his definition of ritual (Bell 1992:21; 37-46).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For the complete critique of Bynum (1991:27-51).

<sup>19</sup> Turner, V. & Turner, E. (1978: 245) defined a *dominant symbol* as a symbol which appears in many different ritual contexts, sometimes presiding over the whole procedure, sometimes over particular phases...because of their properties they are readily analyzable in a cultural frame of reference.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Driver:(1991:152-191) for a very helpful discussion of liminality.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bell (1992) is most useful for a study of ritual in the context of power in relationships.

In the light of such criticisms why do I use V. Turner's theory of ritual process for an analytical framework? The work of any scholar is open to criticism, especially if it has put forth some seminal theories. V. Turner, in spite of the limitations of his work which have been noted above, made valid observations in terms of the processual form of ritual (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:249), especially in regard to rites of passage (Turner, V. 1969:94-96; Holmes 1973:388-391; Nichols 1985:402; Seubert 1989:490-491). It is his work on liminality that has been utilised in this study for the interpretation of the stages and thresholds of the RCIA and so his contribution remains valid. In the subsequent chapters its usefulness will become apparent.

The results of V. Turner's research will enrich our understanding of not only personal change, but also that of symbol and ritual in human life and the liturgy (Ostdiek 1993:45-48). His theory of the ritual process which marks rites of passage will be applied in chapters three, four, five and six, all of which deal with the stages of the RCIA. In this context I shall also focus on the question of identity formation. Identity formation will be analysed in terms of world view, group boundaries (Schreiter 1985:43-70), myth (Luzbetak 1988:267-276) and ethos (Geertz 1973:126-141). Now terminology relevant to this study will be defined.

#### 1.4 Defining Terminology

Certain key words are basic to understanding the nature of this study, hence it is important to give a precise definition of the following: mission, evangelisation and conversion. Other words which pertain to the anthropological aspects of the RCIA are also defined below, while other terms are defined (as needed) within the text. Within the RCIA the words used in the actual texts of the rites are important because they are *performative language* (Ostdiek 1993:41) that is, they convey not only mental or intellectual orientations, but engage participants in ritual discourse (Bell 1992:228).<sup>22</sup> This will become evident in my analysis of the RCIA.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. (Bell, Catherine 1992: 37-46) for a thorough discussion of performance theory and language which include the issue of ritual discourse in which the words, symbols and actions initiate a dialogue between the ritual elements and the participants.

## 1.4.1 Theological Terms

### 1.4.1.1 Mission

In *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch (1991a:9) wrote: "Ultimately, mission remains undefinable". Though it true that mission is a concept that has layers of meaning, for the purpose of this study there is a need to clarify how mission is understood and used. Literally mission means to be sent. This action of sending finds its origins in the very life of the Trinity (AG 2). Mission is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, sent by the Father (RM 5), who in turn entrusted it to the church through the action of the Holy Spirit (RM 1).

Members of the church share in the mission entrusted to it by reason of their baptism (RCIA 41). Participation in the mission of Christ requires of each member a readiness to undergo conversion and formation so that the church can be an epiphany of God's will for all humanity. Members of the body of Christ are witnesses to the world of the Father's love which they have experienced in the church (Keating 1992:48). Though the church must do all it can to hasten the reign of God, his plan will not be fully realised until Christ comes again in glory. Hence, mission is not an option, but the responsibility of all the baptised. It might be best summarised by Bosch's (1991a:11) phrase: *church-in-mission* which is inclusive of the concepts of the church as sacrament and as an eschatological sign of the kingdom.

### 1.4.1.2 Evangelisation

Claude Geffré wrote that:

Evangelization describes the proclamation (by word and example) of the Good News to the nations (Geffré 1982:478)

This definition includes both preaching and action. It calls for credibility in terms of the manner in which one lives so that witness can support one's words. Further, Geffré made a helpful distinction between evangelisation and mission:

The word *mission* has a wider meaning than evangelization: besides the fundamental task of evangelization, the mission of the Church covers all pastoral and sacramental activities as well

as the different forms of service to humanity in accordance with the gospel (Geffré 1982:478).

Bosch is in agreement with Geffré that mission is the wider term (Bosch 1991a:10), but reflecting his own Protestant tradition, used the term *evangelism* rather than *evangelisation* (Bosch 1991a:409).<sup>23</sup> For Bosch evangelism is:

The proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit (Bosch 1991a:10-11).

The Catholic perspective is reflected in AG 2 which maintains that "the church is missionary by her very nature," but in EN we find evangelization is presented as the way the church lives out its missionary nature:

Evangelization is the special grace and vocation of the church. It is her essential function. The church exists to preach the gospel, and is to preach and teach the word of God so that through her the gift of grace may be given to us, sinners may be reconciled to God, and the sacrifice of the Mass, the memorial of his glorious death and resurrection may be perpetuated (EN 14).

This apostolic exhortation names evangelisation as one of the functions of the church. It would then seem that this document corroborates the insights of Bosch (1991:10) and Geffré (1982:478). Müller contends that in EN Paul VI was trying to correct defective explanations of mission and reorient expansionist and ecclesiocentric views of mission (Müller 1987:45). Evangelisation, it was felt, was a more "neutral term" devoid of historical overtones (Müller 1987:46).

Chapter five of RM clarifies the terms *mission* and *evangelisation*. It refers to mission as a "single but complex reality" (RM 41) and evangelisation as the initial proclamation of the gospel. It is named as one of the means for carrying out mission (RM 44). In light of our discussion of the Franciscan paradigm of mission, it is interesting to note that John Paul II listed three ways in which one could

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Bosch (1991:409-420), for a comprehensive discussion and description of the term *evangelism*. Bosch lists eighteen qualities of evangelism. He reiterated his conviction that evangelism is a dimension of mission.

engage in evangelisation: witness (RM 42-43), proclamation of the gospel (RM 44- 45) and martyrdom (RM 45). The pontiff concludes that these three have conversion as their aim.

#### *1.4.1.3 Conversion*

Gelpi (1993a:10), relying on the work of Lonergan (1971), distinguishes five kinds of conversion: affective, religious, intellectual, moral, and socio-political. The RCIA 37 calls for the initial conversion to faith in a person's life in order to be accepted as a catechumen.

John Paul II in RM 46 defines conversion in the following way:

Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple. (RM 46).

Conversion in RM 46 is understood as fundamentally a conversion to faith or a religious conversion, the fruit of evangelisation (EN 32). The evangelical missiologist, Orlando Costas, held that:

Conversion is, therefore, a passage...from death and decay to life and freedom. In conversion, women and men are liberated from the enslavement of the past and given the freedom of the future; they are turned from the god of this age, who passes away, to the God who is always the future of every past (Costas 1980:184-185).

The use of the word "passage" suggests that Costas sees conversion as a process, not only a momentary experience. It implies transformation so that one can give witness to the presence of God at work in the world and service for the kingdom. Costas (1980:185) also maintains that conversion places one in a dialectical relationship with the world. Conversion demands a break with everything in the society that militates against the gospel, while at the same time bringing the person into a new relationship with society, but from a Christian perspective.

Pamela Jackson, writing in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, described the kind of conversion to faith that is envisaged in the RCIA:

The faith to which the RCIA is intended to enable adults to convert is a life lived as part of a Spirit-filled community

celebrating the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection in the eucharist. This thus goes beyond doctrinal assent to include real transformation of mind, emotional life and behaviour, and arises in response to grace (Jackson 1990:294).

The above definitions of conversion all embody some aspect of conversion in the RCIA. In the initiation process conversion is a dynamic process which takes place in the midst of the community (RCIA 4) and leads to a commitment to Christ and his mission.

#### 1.4.2 Anthropological Terms

Some anthropological terms still need to be defined so that the reader has an easier access to their specific usage in this study. The use of the words liminality and *communitas* have already been defined in section 1.3.2. They will be used repeatedly in our analysis of the stages of the initiation process of the RCIA and will take on greater meaning as they are used. These terms are: culture, ritual, symbol, myth, identity, boundaries, world view, ethos, and root metaphor. All of these terms will be used in the succeeding chapters.

##### 1.4.2.1 Culture

Culture forms the concrete context of a people's life. Schreier describes it as representing:

...A way of life for a given time and place, replete with values, symbols, and meanings, reaching out with hopes and dreams, often struggling for a better world (Schreier 1985:21).

Admittedly it is a difficult task to define culture. It is an elusive reality. For the purpose of this study I accept Luzbetak's definition. He insists on a composite view of culture which he believes is most helpful for the missiological enterprise.

Culture is viewed as:

...A dynamic system of socially acquired and socially shared ideas according to which an interacting group of human beings is to adapt itself to its physical, social and ideational environment (Luzbetak 1988:74).

Intrinsic to this idea is that culture is never static, but always dynamic. Culture is always in the process of dialogue. Though it is an ordered system that order can change and does change as members of the culture undergo change. Culture is not a static reality, but dynamic and in process. Ritual is formative and expressive of personal and communal identity. For this reason ritual is, of necessity, always communal, never private, and always related to social processes (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:244).

#### 1.4.2.2 *Ritual*

Today rite and ritual are used interchangeably in ritual studies (cf. Bell 1992; Driver 1991). The word "rite" comes from the Latin, *ritus* which means structure (Madigan 1993:832). The rituals of the RCIA can be embellished with cultural practices, but we might argue that the rituals of passage in the RCIA can be closely linked to the primordial rituals within cultures so that people in various cultures are able to understand their meaning and interiorise them for themselves (Eliade 1961:188-192). Ritual is part of rite. We might say that it fleshes out a rite. Worgul defined ritual as:

Behavior which is repetitive, interpersonal and value oriented. Ritual is a performance of activity. This behavior is not random, but displays observable repetition both in its structural organization and its chronological framework. Every ritual develops a pulse or rhythm which is part of the larger life rhythm of a people (Worgul 1990:1101).

With this definition in mind it becomes evident that the RCIA is both rite and ritual. Rite is the framework for the initiation process of the Catholic Church and it contains rituals which bring about what the rite intends. Turner, V. & Turner, E. (1978:244) link ritual with distinct phases of the social process of change. They also note that ritual is a generating source of culture and structure.

Relating these anthropological insights into ritual to religious ritual Madigan (1993:832) has noted that ritual in a religious context is comprised of symbolic actions that unify the participant with the sacred. Closely related to ritual is symbol.

#### 1.4.2.3 *Symbol*<sup>24</sup>

Arbuckle defines symbol as:

...A window onto the inexpressible, the infinite, the transcendent; it is a response to a subjective need for something deeper, something beyond. It is any reality which by its own dynamism leads people to another deeper and often mysterious reality through a sharing in the dynamism that the symbol offers or evokes (Arbuckle 1982a:203).

Arbuckle distinguished between sign and symbol by pointing out that the sign is "univocal, unambiguous, and conventional; while a symbol is multivalent and ambiguous (Arbuckle 1982:203). Geertz (1973:93) has pointed out that symbols give meaning to a culture. They always carry persons who interact with them in the context of ritual beyond themselves. Symbols, in the context of Christian ritual are meant to open up the window of faith by which people can find meaning in their lives.

V. Turner made a distinction between dominant symbols (cf. note 15) and instrumental symbols. Both are used in the liturgy in general and in the RCIA specifically. Dominant symbols, Turner, V. & Turner, E. (1978:246) note, have three levels of meaning: the *manifest* or apparent to the subject; the *latent*, that which is not fully known and is related to other contexts; and the *hidden* meaning of which the subject is completely unconscious yet related to the current experience of the symbol or an experience which took place in the past.

Instrumental symbols are those dependent on the ostensible purpose of a particular ritual for their use. They need to be interpreted in their wider context (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:246). Part of this wider context is the community's myth which is related to ritual and symbol.

#### 1.4.2.4 *Myth*

The root meaning of the word "myth" is message, or story. Luzbetak (1988:266) says that it is "a story accepted as true by the people who narrate it." Myth, as used by anthropologists, is a story of primordial or cosmic times. Myths speak of ultimate realities, of the sacred and the meaning of life (Eliade 1961:95).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rahner (1974: 224-242) for a theological understanding of symbol.

Driver (1991:91) has noted that myth makes ritual performance understandable. Myths are not fairytales, but as Eliade reminds us, they are what is "really real."

The myth proclaims the appearance of a new cosmic event. Hence it is always the recital of creation; it tells how something as accomplished, began to *be*. It is for this reason that myth is bound up with ontology; it speaks of *realities*, of what *really* happened, of what was fully manifested (Eliade 1961:95).

In chapter seven we will describe the Liturgy of the Word at the Easter Vigil when the sacraments of initiation are celebrated. The Liturgy of the Word describes the myth which gives shape to the rituals of baptism. This definition of also supports the use of the scripture in the context of liturgical rituals because it contains the Christian myth (Luzbetak 1988:267).

Christian initiation is about change, about conversion. People are changed. They develop a new sense of who they are in Christ. Their sense of identity is deepened and because of this their world view and personal and cultural boundaries are renegotiated and cultural transformation takes place. These are changes are articulated through the use of root metaphors which have their roots in culture (Worgul 1990:1105). We continue by defining these terms.

#### *1.4.2.5 Identity*

Identity is a person's sense of self. It is the integral unity of a person's gifts, potential and images of who they are as a unique person (Fowler 1984:24). It is what distinguishes me from others. Identity formation happens gradually in a process of unfolding in which a person has a changing sense of his/her identity (Pottebaum 1992:82). Identity formation does not happen in isolation, but rather in and through interaction with others.

Schreiter (1985:66) has pointed out that identity is structured in terms of group membership and world view. I learn who I am in the context of my family, neighbourhood, faith community, and the larger cultural group. Schreiter advocated a semiotic description of identity in terms of boundaries and the sign

markers for those boundaries. Boundaries define identity in terms of the conditions of group membership.

#### 1.4.2.6. *Boundaries*

Luzbetak (1988:172) has shown that the individual person is the bearer of culture, but that culture is always a communal or societal possession. It is the culture that sets the boundaries for insiders and outsiders. "Outsiderhood" has been defined by V. Turner as:

...The condition of being either permanently and by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behavior of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system (Turner, V. 1972a:394).

Boundaries delineate the outsiders from the insiders. The outsiders often carry a negative connotation given to them by insiders. Since they are viewed in a negative light, the insiders often perceive the outsiders as malevolent (Schreiter 1985:64). Identity is shaped by group membership either as outsiders or insiders. If the boundaries change the culture changes too (Schreiter 1985:72). Boundaries not only define group membership they also define the limits of accepted behaviour (Driver 1991:35).

Ritual often sets boundaries. Ritual is related to what Schreiter calls *codes* in a culture which serve as boundary markers. These codes are signs that give messages about the culture. They communicate acceptable behaviour, membership, incorporation and exclusion on the communal and the personal level and so shape identity (Schreiter 1985:67). A related issue is that of the process of shaping world view.

#### 1.4.2.7 *World view*

Geertz defined world view as a people's:

...Picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order (Geertz 1973:127).

World view has both an invisible and visible dimension because it represents the deepest questions about life (Luzbetak 1988:252). It provides a vantage point from which one views and understands all of life.

Luzbetak has delineated three dimensions of world view: the cognitive, emotional, and motivational. The cognitive dimension "tells a society what and how to think about life and the world" (Luzbetak 1988:253). The emotional dimension of a world view tells members of a society "how to feel about, evaluate and react to the world and all reality" (Luzbetak 1988:254). The third dimension, the motivational is concerned with "a society's basic priorities, purposes, concerns, ideals, desires, hopes, longings, goals, and drives corresponding to its understanding of nature" (Luzbetak 1988:255).

Geertz has related world view to ritual and has shown that ritual can have a transforming impact on world view.

In a ritual, the world lived and the world imagined, fused together under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that transformation in one's sense of reality (Geertz 1973:112).

Closely related to world view is ethos. Geertz maintains that both are in a dialectical relationship with each other.

#### *1.4.2.8 Ethos*

Geertz (1971:26-3:127) has defined ethos in terms of a people's underlying attitude toward themselves and their world. It includes the moral and aesthetic elements of a culture. More precisely Geertz described a people's ethos as:

...The tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects (Geertz 1973:127).

Catherine Bell, commenting on Geertz's concept of ethos, has noted that he also defines ethos in terms of dispositions. Geertz also linked symbols with ethos and maintained that both are related to ritual. He maintained that symbols help to shape ethos by "inducing in the worshipper a certain distinctive set of dispositions

which lend a chronic character to the flow of his activity and the quality of his experience" (Geertz 1973:95).

#### 1.4.2.9 Root metaphor

Another term that is closely related to world view is the concept of root metaphor. Root metaphors are a culture's basis for a common interpretation of life and action (Worgul 1990:1105). Luzbetak has defined root metaphors as:

...Basic value-laden analogies used to describe the world view. They pervade the whole culture and are expressed in social institutions, myths and, above all, in rituals that deeply influence the beliefs, emotions, and actions of a society (Luzbetak 1988:269).

Worgul (1990:1105) has articulated the functions of root metaphors. His insights are important because they not only can be applied to cultural transformation, but also the transformation wrought in a person through the grace of conversion.

Root metaphors find their origins in the context of a breach of social order. The breach brings about a crisis (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:248). This crisis brings people to question the presuppositions of cultural life and thought. Root metaphors are related to boundaries in that they:

Set the interpretative parameters of culture. They constitute a hermeneutical horizon for articulating the meaning of life as experience and lived within a particular culture (Worgul 1990:1105).

Finally, root metaphors are the basis for group coherence and bonding. They also serve as a means for correcting the community's behaviour. They are expressed in ritual as a call to reform, renewal, conversion and correction (Worgul 1990:1105).

The root metaphor which the RCIA attempts to "enshrine" at the heart of the religious domain of every culture is *the dying and rising of Christ*, on which the initiation process and baptism itself is modelled. *Conversion* is another root metaphor which plays a significant role in the understanding and implementation of the RCIA among any people. It is basic to an acceptance of the gospel message of

Christ. It serves as the foundation for identity formation. *Journey* is still another root metaphor for the initiation process itself and the whole of the Christian life. It is communicated through the very movement of the process itself.

In reviewing the above definitions it becomes clear that they find expression in both the liturgy and in culture. Christian ritual is shaped by socio-cultural as well as theological issues and values. Liturgy does not obliterate cultural uniqueness, instead it is the ritual environment in which the deepest values of a culture can be expressed. It also has the power to nurture values and shape world view for mission. For this reason missiology cannot afford to ignore liturgy as a source of missiological reflection. Ultimately liturgy as a paradigmatic moment along a journey is an experience of transformation and liberation that leads to mission.

### 1.5 The Parameters of this Study

Since its promulgation in 1972 the RCIA has been the object of intensive study by liturgists, catechists and theologians. The bibliography of this study attests to this fact. I have benefited from works which reflect scholarly research and those which are more pastoral in nature. My own approach focuses on only one aspect of the RCIA. In the following chapters I will demonstrate that the RCIA is not only a liturgical rite, but a means for forming people to assume their share of responsibility for carrying out the mission of Christ in the world.

The language used in this study moves back and forth from theological analysis, to anthropological insights gained from the social scientists to the language of faith which finds its source in religious experience of the rite. A large portion of chapters three, four, five, and six is descriptive. This was a deliberate decision because if the rite is to be implemented and inculturated, it must be understood. Pastoral ministers who might benefit from this study would need to be familiar with the various elements in each part of the rite so that meaningful inculturation could be undertaken at the parish and diocesan levels.

Admittedly, I am presenting an ideal picture of the implementation of the RCIA. My conviction is that the ideal must be stated clearly and with all its demands so that it becomes the standard by which implementation is measured. At

the parish level the quality of the implementation will always vary. In fact, none of the four parishes which were used in this study have implemented the rite fully; nor have they inculturated it. For this reason the empirical data gained from the questionnaire in Appendix One and the material gained in interviews is only used in a limited way.

Nevertheless, the RCIA has the power to form people for mission. On the basis of this, I will argue for what I call a *liturgical missiology*. By this I mean that the liturgy should become a primary source for doing missiology, especially when formulating a theology of mission.

The image of the well which was mentioned above (cf. 1.2.1) helps to visualise the operative concept. Liturgy and mission form a common source because both are rooted in the very nature of the church. If missiology is going to truly reflect the nature of the church it dare not omit the liturgy as a missiological source. The basis for this proposal finds its foundation in the first section of this introduction.

The second chapter is historical in content. Its purpose is to provide a historical backdrop for our reflections upon the contemporary RCIA. In the analysis of the factors for the decline of the adult catechumenate we find the inspiration for the restoration of the RCIA which was mandated by Vatican II (SC 64).

The following four chapters (three to six) will concentrate on a description of the four stages of the RCIA. I will also reflect on the experiences of four parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg as they have tried to implement the RCIA from 1990-1993. The catechumenate directors were sent questionnaires (cf. Appendix 1) to gain factual information about the who, what and how of the RCIA in their parishes. Further, they were interviewed (cf. Appendix 2) as a follow-up with the aim of evaluating their experience as related to formation for mission among the catechumens of their parishes. I will make use of this material in a limited way in chapters four, five and six because my main focus will be the text of the RCIA itself. In each chapter the missiological implications will be discussed with the aim of showing how these liturgical rites and the catechesis that accompanies them can form a person for mission. By drawing out the implications

for mission at various moments in the initiation process we demonstrate how liturgy is a source for doing missiology.

Chapter seven situates the RCIA in a particular context: post-apartheid South Africa. We pose the question: Can the RCIA be a means for offering the church a creative social strategy in the context of a new democratic state? I argue that it can indeed because it challenges the church to be an alternative community which takes a prophetic stance in society (Bosch 1982:8) and can be an instrument of reconciliation.

In the seventh chapter I also present what I consider is a theology of mission based on the experience of the RCIA. From that theology I draw out a practical process for the inculturation of the RCIA.

In the concluding chapter I evaluate the adequacy of the theoretical framework used in this study for the development of missiology and identify further priorities for research in "liturgical missiology."

#### 1.6 Motivation for this Study

The motivation for engaging in this study is threefold:

- my personal Christian formation;
- my experience of guiding the implementation of the RCIA in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg from 1988-1993;
- my own experience of awakening to the call to mission.

To all appearances nothing in my family background would indicate that I would be interested in mission or missiology, yet one thing made a difference, the liturgy. The liturgical life of our parish drew me into the mystery of Christ as it unfolded during the course of the liturgical year. Family customs and celebrations strengthened this experience. I became a *liturgical person*, someone formed by the celebration of the liturgy without even knowing it. This did not become apparent until years later when through higher studies I reflected on my experience. This particular study is not simply an intellectual fascination for me; it is something I live and breathe each day.

Through many providential circumstances the call to mission concretised in an invitation to live among poor people in a Chicago ghetto. That in turn led to a further call to go on mission to South Africa. Out of these experiences and those

afforded me for formal study of the liturgy and missiology I have come to the conviction that liturgy and mission are the foundational elements of Christian life. Liturgy gives expression to the faith of the believing community and forms one for mission to the world.

For six years I worked in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg as the Director of its Office of Worship. As founder and director it was my duty to implement the revised rites of the church. In 1988 I formed a team of people from the diocese to implement the RCIA. The plan of implementation began with introductory workshops to acquaint the clergy and the laity with the RCIA process. This was followed by sessions with entire parishes in order to ensure total parish support for the process. Next, training sessions were jointly sponsored by the Office of Worship and the diocese's Department of Catechetics for those people who were willing to assume leadership roles in the RCIA.

In 1990 Johannesburg became the first diocese in South Africa to celebrate the Rite of Election at the cathedral church with the bishop presiding. This celebration has since become a yearly diocesan tradition. Parishes now see it as integral for a total experience of the RCIA. The following year another diocesan tradition was inaugurated. During the last phase of the RCIA the rite encourages dioceses to make provision for the celebration of a Mass at which the bishop presides (RCIA 249). This celebration is another opportunity for the newly initiated of the diocese to participate in a liturgical rite at the diocesan level which gives them another experience of the larger church.

In this entire effort at implementation of the RCIA I was able to meet and talk with catechumens and candidates throughout the diocese. In my exchanges with them and with their sponsors I became convinced of the potential power of the RCIA to inspire and challenge Catholics to assume responsibility for participation in the mission of Christ.

This study is, I think, immensely practical and holds implications not only for how academics do liturgical theology and missiology, but also for those who are deeply committed to helping facilitate the coming of the kingdom of God.

### 1.7 Summary

This introductory chapter has laid the foundation for the unfolding of the rest of this thesis in which the RCIA is used as a *lens* through which to view the possibilities for using the liturgy as a source for doing missiology. The opening section of this chapter makes the case for such an enterprise. I have stated clearly that the problem I am addressing is the neglect of liturgy by missiology. The review of missiological and liturgical literature substantiates my contention that no extensive work has been done by either missiologists or liturgists to establish the relationship between liturgy and mission. I argue that the RCIA is an example of how a liturgical rite of the church can form people for mission.

The following section deals with the theoretical framework in which this study has taken shape. This framework is made up of two sections. They serve to reinforce the central argument of this thesis. One focuses on my own particular understanding of mission in terms of the Franciscan charism; the other, uses V. Turner's theory of the ritual process to examine how a person is formed for mission in the context of the RCIA. Both are related to my particular way of doing missiology. Besides V. Turner other anthropologists and ritual theorists have been used to enrich V. Turner's theory of the ritual process.

The focus of this thesis is both liturgical and missiological. The three terms that have been defined have implications for both disciplines. Since they are used in various ways there was need to clarify our usage of them in the context of this study. Other terms will be defined in the context in which they are used.

The RCIA is a rite of the Roman Catholic church. The stages in this rite have provided the outlines of this study. The parameters have been set by the statement of the problem. The RCIA is used as a means for solving the problem. The RCIA is not a panacea for forming people with the sense of mission. It only holds the possibility open for this formation to occur.

Finally, though this thesis uses a Roman Catholic rite to approach the problem, the implications of this study and the conclusions which will be drawn in the course of the study will have validity for Christians of other denominations. It was Kavanagh who noted that:

The structures and rites for becoming a Christian lie on the turbulent leading edge of the Church's mission of ministry in the world (Kavanagh 1978:154).

Every Christian church carries on mission because it shares in the mission of Christ to extend the reign of God. The work of mission is dependent upon the formation of the members of the church. Hence every church must take seriously the implications of its initiatory processes. Senn has said it most convincingly:

Worship in word and sacraments is an integral part of God's mission of reconciling the world to himself because the acts of proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments are very means of grace by which God calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies a people who shall be "a light to the nations" (Senn 1993:134).

All Christians are called to be this light. The RCIA is only the beginning of a lifelong work. The work of mission requires that the Christian person be committed to ongoing conversion.

The RCIA embodies the work that was done to restore the catechumenate, the church's ancient practice of initiation. This process existed long before the church was divided so it presents a challenge to all the Christian churches (Bishop 1979:24). To take seriously this rite is to tap one of the richest expressions of the meaning of Christian life. In terms of church unity, it might also serve as a vehicle for a more ecumenical approach toward Christian initiation which would not only benefit the various Christian churches, but also serve to extend the reign of God.

## **Chapter Two**

### ***The Adult Catechumenate: An Historical Perspective***

*The RCIA is a masterpiece because of the way it depicts the sacraments of initiation; even more, its importance lies in the understanding of church which it expresses. Indeed some maintain that, when the final page of the history of liturgical renewal brought about by Vatican II is written, the RCIA will be portrayed as its most significant contribution to sacramental life and liturgy.*

*--Michael Downey*

#### **2.0 The Purpose of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an historical context for an examination of the development, decline, and the restoration of the RCIA. From the vantage point of history the missiological implications inherent in the historical evolution of the rites of Christian initiation will be assessed. This will furnish us with a backdrop for understanding the mandate issued at Vatican II for the restoration and implementation of the catechumenate (SC 64).

This historical overview will serve as a springboard from which I will reflect on the stages and thresholds of the RCIA and their implications for mission in subsequent chapters.

#### **2.1 The Origins of the Church's Praxis of Initiation**

Christian initiation is a complex process which leads one to full membership in the church. The ritual patterns of baptism are what Paul Bradshaw calls a "study in diversity" (Bradshaw 1992:161). The ritual process of Christian initiation has its historical roots in the scriptures. The first references to baptism in the New Testament are of John's baptism (Mullins 1991:256). Before considering the nature and meaning of John's baptism and Christian baptism a word needs to be said about initiation in the Jewish tradition.

##### **2.1.1 Jewish Proselyte Baptism**

In ancient religions of the Greek and Roman world initiation was characterised by a certain dualism (Gavin 1969:27), a separation of historical

reality from the life of the divinity (Ganoczy 1976:26).<sup>1</sup> This was not the case in Judaism. Proselyte baptism, the Jewish rite of *tebilah*, was rooted in the human journey to faith and commitment. It recognised the personal history of the individual candidate and that God had revealed himself in history to the Jewish people (Ganoczy 1976:27; Gavin 1969:27). It was in practice in the early first century and therefore it would have been known by the early Christians (Ganoczy 1976:27; Mullins 1991:259). Though the Jews remained aloof from Roman society (Gavin 1969:28) and saw the Gentile world as a danger, they continued to engage in at least some propagandist activities (Gavin 1969:28). The aim of these activities was to introduce the non-Jewish world to the revelation of God in a gradual way. As Judaism spread through the Hellenistic world its monotheistic beliefs, ethical code and mysticism became attractive to various peoples (Mullins 1991:260). The process led to proselyte baptism.

Mullins (1991:259) has pointed out that proselyte baptism was purificatory in nature and meant to cleanse the candidate from any defilement so that the person could participate in the Jewish cult.

The initiation rite constituted the immediate introduction of the convert into liturgy and worship. Thus the initiation of the male proselyte into full membership of the community of Israel involved a triple ritual, consisting of circumcision, baptism and the offering of sacrifice, the latter two constituting the rite in the case of the female (Mullins 1991:260).

In this process the initiate was gradually integrated into the community. Gavin notes the presence of a *master* or *sponsor* for the initiate present at the time of ritual washing in the Tannaitic sources (Gavin 1969:36). He indicates that the Mishna specified that the water for the bath had to be *living water* in sufficient quantity so that complete immersion was possible (Beasley-Murray 1977:148) and every part of the body was touched by the water.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In mystery religions this is exemplified in the cult of the god, Osiris. An initiate into this cult had one concern: completing the mystical journey to share life with Osiris. Ganoczy pointed out that there was an absence of an historical dimension in the initiate's pursuit of life with the divinity in any of the mystery religions. Cf. Ganoczy 1976:7-27 for a discussion of the place of historicity in human existence.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough discussion of the sources which describe the rite of proselyte baptism and the question of the influence that proselyte baptism had on Christian baptism cf. Gavin 1969.

During the period before the actual baptism was celebrated the convert received instruction which was dogmatic, ethical and eschatological (Gavin 1969:39). The purpose of such instruction was to impress upon the candidate the seriousness of the step he/she was about to take. He/she had to realise that they were embarking on a completely different way of life and in the context of a whole new set of relationships. All previous relationships were considered nullified (Mullins 1991:260). This new identity marked not the completion of the initiate's journey, but the beginning of a journey which would lead to new choices and decisions that would either strengthen or weaken his/her commitment to life within the Jewish community (Ganoczy 1976:28).

The rite of proselyte baptism within the Jewish community was well known to first century Christians (Cullmann 1952:9; Ganoczy 1976:27). The baptism practised by John the Baptist needs to be seen in light of the Jewish rite (Mullins 1991: 257). Bradshaw and Fuller<sup>3</sup> have raised doubts about the relationship of John's baptism to proselyte baptism, but their questions do not affect the basic thesis of this study. Setting John's baptism in the context of proselyte baptism simply provides a backdrop for the Baptist's initiatory practice.

### 2.1.2 John's Baptism

John's baptism was preparatory in nature. His call was for repentance (Mk 1:3-4), and *metanoia*, a change of heart (Ganoczy 1976:30; Mullins 1991:256). John summoned people to a moral realignment of life which demanded a choice and a commitment to life for the kingdom. John's baptism prepared for the time that was yet to come.

The rite of baptism used by John was not seen as effecting forgiveness and purification, but rather as an external expression of what had already happened interiorly within a person (Mullins 1991:257). It was mere preparation for a time and date that had not been revealed, but one that believers knew would come

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<sup>3</sup> Bradshaw cites three possible influences on the baptismal practices of John the Baptist, but has reservations about each one: 1) the ablutions of the Essene community at Qumran, though these were not initiatory in character; 2) Jewish proselyte baptism, but Bradshaw doubts the date of this practice; and 3) the ritual purifications within the Israelite tradition though these also were not connected with initiation (Bradshaw 1992:45). Fuller cites the work of German scholars who favour the Qumran influence on the Baptist, but he himself does not accept this position without reservation (Fuller 1976:8-10).

(Ganoczy 1976:29). John's baptism was called "a baptism of repentance and has been graphically described as an empty hand stretched out to God for his forgiveness." (Mullins 1991: 258). The baptism of John was dominated by a profound eschatological sense, something that also marked Jewish proselyte baptism (Fuller 1976:9; Gavin 1969:32). It was both preparatory and transitory in nature since John himself declared:

I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16).

John clearly understood that his baptism would only open people to receive the baptism mandated by the Messiah (Meier 1979:213-214). This baptism that was yet to come would be distinguished from John's by the gift of the Holy Spirit. John's baptism signified repentance preparatory to the advent of the reign of God (Fuller 1976:9). It prepared one for God's future coming in glory. Ganoczy agreed that John's baptism must be seen in the light of this eschatological perspective and wrote that:

The God of freedom must be met with readiness; the change of attitude means standing prepared for his coming at any moment of the night or day and working actively for his arrival: 'Prepare ye, ' he says, 'the way of the Lord' (Ganoczy 1976:29).

John could do nothing to hasten the coming of reign of God; he could only help to prepare humankind for that coming. John simply set the stage for the mission of Jesus, which the Messiah embarked upon after his own baptism in the Jordan. I now turn our attention to the meaning of Jesus' baptism.

Jesus' baptism was a key to the baptism which would be celebrated in the church after the gift of the Spirit was given at Pentecost (Mullins 1991:258).

In baptising Jesus, John did not confer the Spirit. The Spirit's descent on Jesus was a new initiative of God; it signified the return of the quenched Spirit in a Spirit-anointed Messiah. (Mullins 1991:258).

In the context of Jesus' identity as this Spirit-filled messiah (Ganoczy 1976: 30) Cullmann raised the question: "What meaning has Baptism to the forgiveness of sins for Jesus himself" (Cullmann 1952:18)? He answers his own question by pointing out that at the moment of his baptism Jesus received a commission to assume the role of the suffering Servant of God who took on himself the sins of his people. Unlike other Jews who came to the Jordan to be baptised by John for their own sins, Jesus was baptised not for his own sins, but for those of the whole people (Cullmann 1952:18).

The significance of Jesus' own baptism is linked to his own death which effects the forgiveness of sins for all people and inaugurates the beginning of eschatological time (Mullins 1991:258). Cullmann has observed that by going down into the Jordan Jesus affirmed his solidarity with his whole people (Cullmann 1952:18). Baptism is then connected with Jesus' mission (Meier 1979:214-215). Mission flowed from the experience of his baptism in the Jordan. His subsequent preaching proclaimed the irruption of the reign of God (Fuller 1976:9).

The Synoptic Gospels regard the authority for the mission which Jesus undertook as intimately bound up with his experience in the Jordan (Fuller 1976:10). For this reason Kavanagh, relying on Beasley-Murray, asserts that though Jesus' baptism was different from Christian baptism it nevertheless is the source of it and gives it its meaning (Kavanagh 1978:13). It was different because of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then was given for mission.

The Baptism which Christ brings is thus not only preparatory and transitory but final, and will lead directly into the Kingdom of God (Cullmann 1952:10).

The new element then in Christian baptism is the impartation of the Holy Spirit. Neither Jewish proselyte baptism nor the baptism of John the Baptist imparted the Spirit to candidates (Cullmann 1952:10). This was only possible in Christian baptism and its celebration was only possible after the church was constituted as the locus of the Holy Spirit (Cullmann 1952:10; Ganoczy 1976:31).

### 2.1.3 Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul: An Overview

The Acts of the Apostles supplies us with the account of the astonishing happenings in Jerusalem as Jews gathered there for the celebration of the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41). People were moved by Peter's call to repentance and were baptised in the name of Jesus and with the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This experience was soon repeated elsewhere, even in Samaria (Ganoczy 1976:31). That many people came to believe in Christ through the preaching of the apostles is without question. The form their initiation took and its normative value in the process of the development of a ritual of baptism is however fraught with difficulties.<sup>4</sup> This author has adopted Cullmann's position concerning the place of Pentecost in the light of salvation history and the meaning of baptism. He wrote:

The temporal centre of all history, the death and resurrection of Christ, is also the centre of the history of Baptism. But Pentecost represents the decisive turning point for the subsequent course of this history, not only because it completes the salvation events but also because the further unfolding of salvation history begins from here. The Church is constituted here as the locus of the Holy Spirit, as the Body of Christ crucified and risen. Thus the baptismal death of Christ completed once for all on the cross passes over into Church Baptism (Cullmann 1952:22).

In this passage Cullmann connected baptism with the death and resurrection of Jesus. This connection was made because of the teaching of Paul as developed in his letters (Cullmann 1952:30). I now turn attention to Paul's writings to discover the meaning of baptism because it was a significant factor in shaping the church's baptismal praxis (Tremel 1964:189).

Baptism was one of the major areas for Paul's theologising (Mullins 1991:352) and it reveals some of his deepest thoughts about the meaning of life in Christ (Cullmann 1952:30). For this reason three texts have been selected because they reveal the profound meaning of Christian baptism and the demands placed on those initiated into the Christian community. These texts were chosen because of

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<sup>4</sup> For a thorough discussion of the critical issues surrounding the questions about the form baptism in the Acts of the Apostles cf. Beasley-Murray, G.R. (1977:93-98).

their relevance in the understanding and practice of baptism in subsequent centuries.

#### 2.1.3.1 *Romans 6*

The argumentation used by Paul in *Romans 6* is framed within the antithesis between life and death (Tremel 1964:195). He saw baptism as an initiation into the death of Christ with the hope of sharing in his resurrection (Searle 1980a:4). Beasley-Murray (1977) has provided a summary of the different positions regarding Paul's theology of baptism. In regard to Paul's teaching Beasley-Murray concluded that:

It can be shown that his interpretation of baptism in relation to the redemptive event of Christ has a threefold reference: first, it relates the baptized to the death and resurrection of Christ, involving him (her) in the actual dying and rising of Christ Himself; secondly, it involves a corresponding event in the life of the baptized believer, whereby an end is put to his old God-estranged life and a new one begins in Christ and His Kingdom and His Spirit; thirdly, it demands a corresponding 'crucifixion' of the flesh and a new life in the power of the Spirit that accords with the grace received which 'dying' and 'rising' begins in the baptismal event (Beasley-Murray 1977:132).

For Paul, something quite drastic happens to a person when he/she is baptised. He/she participates in the death and resurrection of Christ for there is an organic unity in Christ's dying and rising (Tremel 1964:195). Beasley-Murray opined that Paul's use of the word *buried* is significant because it can be linked to his knowledge of both Jewish proselyte baptism and the practice of Christian baptism by immersion.

The symbolism of immersion as representing burial is striking, and if baptism is at all to be compared with prophetic symbolism, the parallelism of act and even symbolized is not unimportant (Beasley-Murray 1977:133).

Further in this same passage Beasley-Murray quoted C. H. Dodd who observed that "Immersion is a sort of burial...emergence a sort of resurrection" (in Beasley-Murray 1977:133), Beasley-Murray developed this view and related it to the kerygma:

Dodd's assertion can be made only because the kerygma gives this significance to baptism; its whole meaning is derived from Christ and His redemption -- it is the kerygma *in action*, and if the action suitably bodies forth the content of the kerygma, so much clearer is its speech (Beasley-Murray 1977:133).

Tremel considered Paul's use of the word *buried* as a stroke of genius because it so aptly illustrates what happens to the Christian in the rite of baptism (Tremel 1964:196). Conjecturing about Paul's substitution of the word *died* for *buried* Tremel noted that:

The original meaning of the term 'baptize' might have helped him to make this substitution, but he was undoubtedly helped more by the traditional relationship between the events of salvation and the rite of Christian initiation (Tremel 1964:197).

Paul made no attempt to link the words *death*, *burial* and *crucifixion* with the stages of the rite of baptism, but the use of these words helped him to develop the relationship between Christ's paschal mystery and the experience of the initiate in baptism (Beasley-Murray 1977:134; Cullmann 1952:32; Tremel 1964:197). His intent was not to provide a fully developed theology of baptism, but rather to answer the objections of those who argued that people should continue sinning so that grace may abound (Beasley-Murray 1977:143)! Paul knew that such reasoning would obscure the work of the free gift of grace which was at work in the baptised person. Cranfield's commentary on Romans asserts that:

Baptism, according to Paul, while it is no magical rite effecting mechanically that which it signifies, is no empty sign but a decisive event by which a particular man (person) is powerfully and unequivocally claimed by God as a beneficiary of His saving deed in Christ (Cranfield 1985:132).

Or as Beasley-Murray has put it:

The characteristic nature of the initiation into the Christian life, as described in Rom. 6.1ff, provides the ethical pattern for both the beginning and continuance of that life. The Christian life is rooted in participation in the event of Golgotha and the Empty Tomb through union with Christ; that union involves a death to the old existence and resurrection to the new; it further demands that he that is so joined to the Christ accept the death sentence

on his old way of life and seek grace whereby the new existence may be realized in his conduct (Beasley-Murray 1977:144).

In the decisive event of baptism the initiate draws close to God through union with the crucified Christ and his resurrection and experiences what it means to be reconciled to God. Further, the initiate learns that through baptism his/her life must be conformed to this pattern of dying and rising (Beasley-Murray 1977:142). It is clear that for Paul baptism opened up the possibility of new life for the newly baptised within the Christian community, the church. It also placed a duty upon the neophyte to conform his/her behaviour to that of Christ. This is a theme which also finds expression in Paul's letter to the Colossians.

#### 2.1.3.2 *Colossians 2:11-12*

Fuller (1976:21) has pointed out that in this passage from Paul's *Letter to the Colossians* we have another baptismal hymn.

In him you have been circumcised,  
with a circumcision performed, not by human hands,  
but by a complete stripping of your natural self.  
This is circumcision according to Christ.  
You have been buried with him by your baptism;  
by which, too, you have been raised up with him  
through your belief in the power of God who raised  
him from the dead (Col 2:11-12).

The hymn uses images that are metaphorical. *Circumcision, stripping, burial, and being raised up* convey the relationship that exists between the ritual experience of baptism and the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Caird (1984: 193) has demonstrated that a theory advanced by A. Scott seems to capture the essential reason why Paul used these images, especially circumcision. Caird wrote:

The true circumcision of Christians took place when Christ on their behalf underwent the spiritual counterpart of circumcision in the stripping off his physical body...What Christians are required to strip off is not their physical bodies, but 'the old nature with its practices' and this they do at baptism (Caird 1984:193-194).

Here circumcision is an analogy to baptism. Baptism into Christ is likened to a spiritual circumcision, the true initiation (Caird 1984:192; Fuller 1976:22). The stripping away of the "natural self" makes way for the "new life" which Paul later wrote about in Romans 6 (Fuller 1976:22). The old nature that "natural self" makes way for transformation of personhood in Christ (Caird 1984:192). This kind of alteration in a person's way of living will be one of the key signs of true conversion in the initiation process (Searle 1980a:8).

Conversion of life is the sign that the person "has been raised up" with Christ. It is true that in Romans sharing in Christ's resurrection is written about in the future tense, but as Caird (1984:194) has argued if baptism is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ then the grace or effects of the resurrection can be experienced and seen in the Christian's way of life. Participation in Christ's resurrection is the basis of a new moral way of life; the actual resurrection of the Christian person will take place at the parousia (Keck 1979:59). A support for the Christian is his/her membership in the community of faith. Paul considered this communal dimension of baptism in 1 Corinthians.

#### 2.1.3.3 1 Corinthians 12:13

Paul took up the unity of the believer in the body of Christ, the church in 1 Cor. 12 (Beasley-Murray 1977:167). This unity is the work of the Spirit who makes believers one in the body of Christ (Cullmann 1952:39-40). Paul reminded the Corinthians that the basis of unity was not in nationality or citizenship, but in belonging to the body of Christ. In this passage from First Corinthians Paul defined how this unity comes about: *We were baptised into one body in a single Spirit* (Cullmann 1952:30).

The setting for the act of baptism is the church. The church is the body of Christ. Cullmann noted that Barth was emphatic about the building up of the church through baptism (in Cullmann 1952:31). A reciprocal relationship exists between the church as the setting for baptism and the act of baptism by which people become members of the church, the body of the risen Christ. What happened on Golgotha and what is celebrated by the church in baptism are connected in the words of Cullmann "*in their innermost essence*" (Cullmann

1952:33). Baptism into the body of Christ opens one to the unity which is a gift of the Spirit. The Spirit always leads the believer to deeper union with Christ and other members of the body.

Doubtless it is impossible to contemplate being baptized to Christ without being baptized to the Body...(Beasley-Murray 1977:171).

Belonging to Christ means belonging to one another in him. It means putting one's gifts at the service of the community. In this text Paul is articulating a basic teaching about the unity inherent in the multiplicity and diversity of the spiritual gifts of the members of the Christian community (Kilgallen 1987:109). Paul linked the different gifts at work within the one body, with the one Spirit who bestowed them and the one person, Christ, through whom they were bestowed on the different members of the community (Kilgallen 1987: 114-115). All the gifts were given ultimately for the building up of the one body and serve the one Lord into whom all were baptised (Beker 1988:307; Kilgallen 1987:115).

Beker (1988:307) has pointed out that although the image of the body is used only rarely by Paul ( 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:4-5), it belongs to those metaphors that express the reality of communal participation in Christ which becomes a reality through our incorporation in him. This image is a significant one because it not only images the participation a believer has in Christ, but also gives expression to the idea of mutual interdependence in the life of the church (Beker 1988:308). This is different than a mere aggregate of people, it is rather one body of mutually interdependent members.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Beker noted that while Paul's concept of *ekklesia* would most likely have been borrowed from Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Judaic usage his image of the body is innovative (Beker 1988:316). For Paul the body of Christ is the *ekklesia*, the eschatological people of God. It exists in the here and now because of the work of Christ (Beker 1988:317). Membership in the *ekklesia* comes about through baptism (Beasley-Murray 1977:170) and the one Spirit given in baptism shares his gifts with all. Baptism obliterates all that divides people and harmonises

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete treatment of the unity of the body of Christ cf. Beker, J.C. (1988:307-310).

all the gifts for the glory of God and the upbuilding of the church itself (Beasley-Murray 1977:171).

This very concept of the body presumes that members have different gifts and functions, but these do not divide; rather, they make for interdependence with one another (Beasley-Murray 1977:171) and lead believers to marvel at the diversity of God's gifts given in the Spirit.

Paul's conception of baptism is rooted in both his Jewish heritage and the paschal mystery of Christ. It is a grace that leads people to participation in that mystery and calls forth in them a response of love towards all other people. The experience of unity in Christ leads believers to respond in faith to the working of the Spirit in themselves and in others. For believers are united in one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Eph. 4:5). The New Testament was only the beginning of what became a rich and diverse legacy of the practice of Christian baptism (Fuller 1976:26).

## 2.2 Post-Apostolic Times until the Fifth Century

In the New Testament no ritual pattern for the celebration of baptism is given. We know only that the apostles took seriously Jesus' words to them instructing them to:

Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey all the commands I gave you (Mt. 28:19-20)

We know too that water was used and the Holy Spirit was conferred upon those who came to believe in Christ (Bradshaw 1992:46). The baptismal act was interpreted in a variety of ways (Acts 2:38; Jn. 3:5ff; Heb. 6:4; and 1 Pet. 2:9 besides the Pauline texts) which suggests the manner of celebrating baptism was as diverse as the interpretations given in the scriptures (Grant 1976:32).

After the Apostolic Age the history of the church's process of initiation continued to develop in a complex manner despite the fact that scholarly research has generally tried to harmonise the diverse elements in the study of early baptismal rites (Bradshaw 1992:161; Grant 1976:32). Grant is of the opinion that the history

of the practice of baptism is a history of change as the church sought to respond to different times and circumstances (Grant 1976:32). Whitaker (1981:22) and Dujarier (1979b:30) agree with Grant's position and more recently it has been corroborated by Bradshaw (1992:161). The studies by these authors all confirm that no one single rite of baptism existed in the early church; rather an assortment of rites which developed in the various centres of church life: Rome, Syria, Jerusalem, North Africa, Milan and Egypt. These are outlined on the following page and one can readily see that only the essentials are the same, while the process, the timing and the order differ in each location. What emerges is not a single act, but a continuum of events centering around proclamation, an assent of faith, conversion, instruction and baptism (Kavanagh 1978:36). The post-apostolic church had one goal: to bring people to life in Christ; while at the same time having a diversity of ritual practice.

The chart given below (Fig. 2) indicates the rich liturgical practice concerning baptism that existed in the post-apostolic church. Now I turn to some important sources for understanding this historical development of the catechumenate and its accompanying theology (Osborne 1987:62). As more Gentiles joined the church a process took shape that was able to sustain conversion and growth (Mitchell, L. 1991:17).

### 2.2.1 The *Didache*<sup>6</sup>

Unknown until 1883, the *Didache* is the earliest of the Church-order books. It is concerned with church organisation, liturgy and customs of the early Christian communities (Finn 1992a:32). In essence it is a liturgical and catechetical text. Since it was first published by Philotheos Bryennios no consensus has been reached about its date of composition (Deiss 1979:73). Audet is of the opinion that the *Didache* was written circa 70 C.E. in Syria (in Osborne 1987:62), James White dates it as late first or early second century (White 1992:151) and Kavanagh (1978:36) accepts a date prior to 100 C.E.

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<sup>6</sup> The full title of the *Didache* is the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.

## The Various Traditions Of Christian Initiation in the Post-Apostolic Era

Syria	Jerusalem	North Africa	Milan	Egypt	Rome
<p>-Pre-baptismal anointing of the head alone, signifying eschatological kingship;</p> <p>-Anointing the central act, not immersion;</p> <p>-Eucharist.</p> <p>-No sign of Easter as preferred time;</p> <p>-No strongly ritualised catechumenate until the 4th century and then without sponsors or the pre-baptismal exorcism.</p> <p>Subsequent anointing of the whole body led to reinterpretation as a healing ritual. Then the conferring of the Spirit and kingship themes transferred to the immersion itself.</p>	<p>-Oldest sources indicate pre-baptismal cathartic and apotropaic ritual;</p> <p>-Death/resurrection event based on Rom. 6 rather than as a birth event based on Jn. 3;</p> <p>-Much variation according to Cyril of Jerusalem.</p> <p>Egeria's Testimony: Five stage process:</p> <p>1) Registration of names of those for baptism before Lent;</p> <p>2) Examination and enrolment;</p> <p>3) Exorcism and Catechesis daily for the 7 weeks of Lent; bishop to teach Creed in the last two weeks;</p> <p>4) The Baptism and Communion;</p> <p>5) Instruction on the Mysteries.</p>	<p>-Tertullian's outline of the rite:</p> <p>-Prayer over the water;</p> <p>-Renunciation of the devil with imposition of the bishop's hand;</p> <p>-Triple profession of faith and triple immersion;</p> <p>-Unction;</p> <p>-Sign of the cross;</p> <p>-Imposition of hands in benediction, inviting and welcoming the Holy Spirit;</p> <p>-Eucharist.</p>	<p>-Ambrose has given evidence of a five part process practised by the church in Milan.</p> <p>1) Enrolment for Easter baptism took place on the feast of Epiphany;</p> <p>2) Pre-baptismal anointing took place before the renunciation of the devil and the exorcism is viewed as a source of strength for combat with the devil;</p> <p>3) Post-baptismal unction performed by the bishop;</p> <p>4) Washing of the Feet of the Newly Baptised;</p> <p>5) Spiritual sealing with and invocation of the Holy Spirit, no mention of the use of oil is made by Ambrose;</p> <p>-Eucharist.</p>	<p>-Forty day period of fast began immediately after Epiphany on 6 January. This was not transferred to a pre-Easter setting until the 6th century.</p> <p>-No pre-baptismal catechumenate longer than forty days;</p> <p>-No sign of regular exorcisms;</p> <p>-Enrolment at the beginning of fasting period;</p> <p>-Final examination of suitability toward the end of the forty days.</p> <p>-Pre-baptismal anointing;</p> <p>-Thre-fold Credal interrogation;</p> <p>-Immersion</p> <p>-Eucharist.</p> <p>There is some question as to whether or not the Egyptian church knew a post-baptismal anointing. This is also a question of debate in regard to Roman baptismal practice.</p>	<p>-Period of instruction for 3 yrs.;</p> <p>-Sponsors give testimony as to whether catechumens have a capacity to hear the Word and the quality of their lives;</p> <p>-Period of final preparation with daily exorcisms and 2 days of fasting immediately before baptism;</p> <p>-Night vigil with baptism beginning at cockcrow;</p> <p>-Prayer over the water &amp; blessing of oils;</p> <p>-Removal of clothes &amp; renunciation of Satan;</p> <p>-Bodies anointed with oil of exorcism;</p> <p>-Triple immersion with triple credal questions;</p> <p>-Anointing by presbyter;</p> <p>-Dressing in the white garment;</p> <p>-Joined assembly;</p> <p>-Laying on of hands by the bishop, prayer, anointing of the head with oil of thanksgiving, signing of the forehead, and kiss;</p> <p>-Eucharist: bread &amp; wine and the milk and honey.</p>

*Figure 2 A Summary of the Various Traditions of Christian Initiation. Cf. Bradshaw 1992:161-183; Kavanagh 1978:40-70; Wilkinson 1971:61-63; Whitaker 1981:22-51; Finn 1992a:32-55; Finn 1992b:36-77; and Dujarier 1979:35-71.*

the Greek Christian communities and would also have been known by the Greek speaking Jews living in the Diaspora (Finn 1992a:32).

The document has a profoundly Jewish character about it (Kavanagh 1978:37). It puts before the candidates for baptism a way of life and a way of death.

Now the way of life is : "first love the God who made you; secondly, your neighbor as yourself": do not do to another "what you do not wish" to be done to Yourself ...The way of death is this. First of all it is wicked and altogether accursed: murders, adulteries, lustful desires, fornications, thefts, duplicity,...It is the way of persecutors of the good (in Finn 1992a:33-35).

This text points out the ethical demands which were placed on the candidates for baptism and is reminiscent of Jewish proselyte baptism (Gavin 1969:56). It was expected that they would choose the way of life, one of high moral standards. This seems to have been core material for instruction (Kavanagh 1978:36-37).

The Didache also contains very practical instructions about how baptism was to be conducted. This four sentence text helps us to appreciate how baptism was being practised after the age of the apostles (Osborne 1987:63).

Regarding baptism. 1. Baptize as follows: after first explaining all these points (above), "Baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19), in running water. 2. But if you have no running water, baptize in other water; and if you cannot in cold, then warm. 3. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." 4. Before the baptism, let the baptizer and the candidate for baptism fast, as well as any as are able. Require the candidate to fast one or two days previously (in Finn 1992a:36).

This text indicates the Syrian preference for immersion in running waters for baptism. Finn believes that this method was chosen because John baptised Christ in the flowing waters of the Jordan River (Finn 1992a:33). Infusion seems only to have been used when there was no source of running water available (Osborne 1987:63). The formula was the Trinitarian one of Matthew which was given as part of the Great Commission. The sequence of the text reflects the initiatory

pattern of the RCIA: Disciple-making, baptising, teaching. This pattern characterised the initiation process of the church until its demise in the fifth century.

The central verb of the Matthean text which was cited in the *Didache* is *matheteusate*, in the imperative sense (Bosch 1991a:73). This is a particularly Matthean word that fits into the context of the whole of his gospel. Montague explained that:

To be a disciple is to follow Jesus, to share his life-style and his table, to listen to his word, accept it and live by it, to share his mission, to accompany him through the storm, to learn how to live in the community of other disciples, to forgive and be reconciled, to bear public witness to Jesus and finally to make other disciples (Montague 1989:327).

The community of the apostles was to precipitate an experience of conversion and belief in Jesus by an invitation to all people to share in body of Christ. They were to make disciples who would in turn make disciples of others (Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983:252).

This mission to make disciples led to an ecclesial action: to baptise. To be a true disciple one must share his life and mission. To do this a person must be baptised:

In Matthew "mission" denotes a long-term program: sacrament, continuous formation, and an ethic in accordance with the new justice...Proclamation was not enough. Initiation and formation were required. An ecclesial framework was required (Legrand 1990:78).

The church, the community of disciples, was that framework. It provided the context for a life-time work of formation (Montague 1989:326). Though Bosch cautions against overemphasising Matthew's use of the word *church* (Bosch 1991a:82); Legrand (1990) and Meier (1979) see discipleship and mission in the context of the church. Meier wrote:

For Matthew's church, then, baptism plunges one into the mystery of the communal life of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and therefore constitutes all those so baptized as members of the

family or people of God, as disciples and therefore as brothers of Jesus (Meier 1979:214).

The baptised life is life within the church, the body of Christ. This is the church which Christ established for mission.

The church which he (Christ) now establishes and immediately sends on universal mission is sustained by his energizing presence until the end of the world, whenever that may be. The church proceeds from the risen Son of Man, is sustained in its mission, cult and teaching throughout history by this Son of Man, and in the end will arrive at his judgment seat for the final hearing (Meier 1979:215).

The church exists for mission. Its mission of evangelisation is more than preaching (Montague 1989:327). It is a life time journey of conversion. To be baptised is to be initiated into a way of life of justice and orthopraxis (Bosch 1991a:81) This means living according to God's will (Meier 1979:214). It is a life lived in a community, the church:

The missionary commandment thereupon specifies the ecclesial actions that are to comprise Christian initiation: baptism and a Christian instruction calculated to lead to practice: "to carry out" (Legrand 1990:78).

Disciple-making, baptising and teaching are all components of the Christian life. They comprise some of the fundamental aspects of its mission.

Mission and initiation in the life of the church are explicitly linked in this ancient text from Matthew. As the primacy of initiation died within the church so did the sense of mission among the faithful. Once these three elements of disciple-making, baptising and teaching were separated from one another the process of initiation was weakened and eventually was totally obscured. Mission went on, but not in this Matthean pattern.

I have looked at the rudimentary elements of baptism as it was celebrated in antiquity. I shall show how these basic elements will be found in every later experience of baptism in the church.

### 2.2.2 The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus

*The Apostolic Tradition* (=AT) is Western Christianity's oldest extant liturgical document (Finn 1992b:43). Scholarly consensus attributes it to Hippolytus, the Roman presbyter (170?-253), and dates it at the turn of the second century. Scholars believe it reflects Roman liturgical practice from the time of the Roman bishop, Victor I (189-198), a generation after Justin (Deiss 1979:123; Finn 1992b:43). Easton held that:

*The Apostolic Tradition*, is more than a source for Roman customs at the beginning of the third century; it may with equal safety be invoked for the practice of even fifty years earlier (Easton 1934:25).

The principal section of the AT encompasses chapters 15-21 which deal with the process of Christian initiation.

The picture which emerges from the Apostolic Tradition is of catechumens forming a separate class in the church, distinct from the baptized faithful. They are Christians *in fieri*. Their participation in the life of the community, although restricted, is not optional..They are excluded from the privileges of membership as uninitiated, but to those in the outside world they are members with a real place in the life and concern of the church (Mitchell, L. 1991:19).

AT called for a three-year catechumenate for those who desired to be baptised, but some consideration was given to differences in readiness on the part of the catechumens. Number 17 of AT states:

Catechumens will be under instruction for a period of three years. If someone is zealous and applies himself well to the work of the catechumenate, not the period of time but evidence of conversion alone shall be judged (in Finn 1992b:47).

It is apparent that great care was taken in the instruction of the catechumens. The period of instruction had been expanded and developed to include the daily laying on of hands during the prayer of exorcism (No. 20 in Finn 1992b:48). The church took a cautious stance in accepting people for initiation. The church was still in jeopardy of persecution and lived on the fringes of the

religious, political, social and legal world (Finn 1992b: 43). Thus the expansion of the period of instruction and the careful selection of candidates for initiation. Kavanagh has noted that:

The crux of this admission process has nothing to say about the intentions of the applicant: it is his (her) manner of living that is to be ascertained and, apparently, nothing more (Kavanagh 1978:55).

Kavanagh further observed that from the time a person was accepted as a catechumen it was expected that he/she would live in a manner that reflected his acceptance in the community of faith.

From this point on, the applicant, if accepted into the catechumenate, will be expected to begin living in a manner befitting a Christian -- a manner that will be gradually molded by the teaching, moral support, prayer, example and ritual patterns of the Christian community itself (Kavanagh 1978:55).

It is evident that the Christian community had a holistic concept of Christian formation. They did not merely emphasize right doctrine (orthodoxy), but also right living (orthopraxis). In this light the very practical concerns of Nos. 15 and 16 of AT had grown out of the community's pastoral concern for the growth of the catechumen (Kavanagh 1978:55). There is specific description for the instruction (Mitchell, L.1991:19), but No.19 situates the instruction in the context of prayer and concludes with the laying on of hands by the teacher and a formal dismissal (in Finn 1992b:48). From this text I conclude that not only the content of the instruction, but the context of the liturgical service itself helped to form the catechumen in Christian life and mission.

No. 15 instructed those who wanted to be "hearers of the word" (audientes) to meet with the teachers in the community in order to articulate how they have come to faith. Their sponsors were to testify about their readiness for instruction and their quality of life (in Finn 1992b:46).

No. 16 calls for an inquiry to be made regarding the jobs and professions of those who seek to be "hearers" and it lists those occupations which would jeopardise the person's conversion and his/her commitment to a Christian way of

living. With only a cursory examination of this text it seems almost irrelevant until one recognises that in each of the professions listed there are values that would be opposed to Christian faith.

If anyone is a sculptor or painter let him be taught not to make idols: let him either cease or repent. If anyone is an actor or is engaged in theatrical presentation, let him cease or be rejected...He who is a priest of idols, or an idol attendant, let him cease or be rejected (in Finn 1992b:46-47).

The one who paints or makes idols would not be able to keep the Ten Commandments. The one who is an actor runs the risks of being called upon to mock Christian beliefs. These seemingly harmless activities presented dangerous risks for the one seeking to belong to Christ (Mitchell, L.1991:19).

At the end of the three year catechumenate those who were deemed ready for the final stage of preparation for baptism were chosen by the church and they became "the elect," those being enlightened (photizomenoi) (Mitchell, L.1991:19). No. 20 of AT includes the matters about which the catechumens were to be examined before they are chosen for baptism.

Let the life of each be examined: whether they have lived with integrity while they were catechumens, whether they visited the sick, whether they did every sort of good work (in Finn 1992b:48).

After the examination the sponsors testified to their behaviour. Their acceptance as the elect meant that they would daily hear the gospel, have hands laid upon them, and be exorcised by the bishop in order to be strengthened to break with any evil in their lives and any cultural practices which would compromise their faith (Finn 1992b:44). The examination and the exorcisms formed what were called scrutinies. These helped the catechumen to purify his/her motivation for becoming a Christian. Kavanagh explained that:

The Church claims that conversion as its own and gives itself to the catechumen in return. The liturgical scrutinies of Lent are therefore both in whole and in each of their parts salient dimensions of the whole catechetical process by which one is

formed for full participation in a life of faith (Kavanagh 1978:60).

A detailed process of preparation was clearly in place by the time Hippolytus wrote the AT. The climax of the process was baptism at dawn on Easter and participation in the Lord's supper (Mitchell, L.1991:19).

The second part of No. 20 is concerned with the immediate preparations for baptism. This includes bathing on Thursday, the fifth day of the week, fasting on Friday and Saturday. On Saturday there was a meeting with the bishop at which he would lay hands upon the catechumens and exorcise them. The bishop would then exhale on their faces breathing the breath of life into them, sign them with a cross on their foreheads, ears and noses. The evening would be spent in vigil, hearing the scriptures and receiving instruction (in Finn 1992b:48-49; Mitchell, L.1991:20).

The actual ritual of baptism of the Roman tradition has been outlined above (Fig. 2). Hippolytus included both infants and adults in the baptismal ritual (AT 21). It is assumed then that both baptism and eucharist were given to both the children and adults. The custom of baptising infants will later be one of the factors for the decline of the catechumenate. Grant summarised the situation at the time of Hippolytus:

Evidently, then, there were two developments in baptismal practice. On the one hand, adult baptism had been combined with an extended period of instruction...On the other hand, the practice of child baptism had arisen along with adult baptism. Apparently this baptism was as a rule for children rather than for infants, although infants seem not to have been excluded (Grant 1976:35).

Other post-apostolic writers also raised no objection to baptising children (Grant 1976:36) and Jeremias concluded that this was a practice that had arisen from the New Testament baptism of whole households (Jeremias 1969:32).

In AT the development of the ritual for baptism and the accumulation of symbolism (Osborne 1987:68) with a variety of ministries present and active is evident. The laity assume the roles of teachers and sponsors besides being members of the assembly of believers who have the primary responsibility in the

process of initiation, that is, to live their Christian life with integrity. The whole process led the catechumen to full membership in the church with the right to participate in the eucharist and the duty to share in the church's mission.

### 2.2.3 The Witness of Egeria and Cyril: The Jerusalem Experience

The classical era of Christian initiation from around 350-450 was a time blessed by superb teachers and theologians unparalleled in any other period of the church's life (Searle 1980a:11). One person belonging to this group was Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem. Though he was thrice exiled during his episcopate he succeeded in leaving us a treasury of twenty-four catechetical homilies which continue to enrich the church (Deiss 1979:269; Jackson 1991:431).

The second source that gives insights into how initiation was practised in Jerusalem is the travel journal of the pilgrim Egeria, a devout woman from Southern Gaul or Spain who visited Jerusalem in the 380s (Mitchell, L. 1991:24; Yarnold 1971:8). Her vivid account portrays the liturgical life of Jerusalem and the Holy Land (Searle 1980a:11). Her writings provide us with a context for Cyril's pre-baptismal and mystagogical catechesis (Finn 1992a:52). Due to the fact that Jerusalem was a place of pilgrimage what was done there was reported and copied throughout the Christian world (Mitchell, L. 1991:24). The question of the authenticity of Cyril's work does not pose a particular problem for this study since the content of the catechesis remains the same, but nevertheless, it should be noted that the mystagogical lectures are believed to have been written by Cyril's successor, John (Deiss 1979: 270-271; Mitchell, L. 1991:24).<sup>7</sup> First the testimony of Egeria will be considered and then that of Cyril's catechesis.

Egeria tells us that Lent in Jerusalem lasted eight weeks. This was a period when the clergy and laity intensified their regular schedule of worship and candidates for baptism were engaged in the immediate preparations for initiation into the church (Mitchell, L. 1991:25; Wilkinson 1971:71).

By the time Egeria visited Jerusalem piety had become more historical in tone than eschatological (Mitchell, L. 1991 :24) and the sacred sites of the Holy

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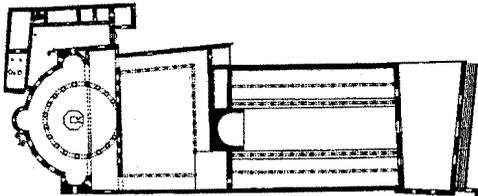
<sup>7</sup> Cf. (Cross 1986:xxxvi-xxxvii) for a discussion on the authenticity of the catechetical sermons of Cyril. Cross gives evidence on both sides of the debate, but concludes that they are authentic because of the internal evidence of passage 18.33).

Land became popular venues for celebrating the great feasts of the church. It is because of the material furnished us by Egeria's diary that one has a sense of the environment in which the Lenten and Easter rites were celebrated.

The major edifice, where the pre-baptismal preparation took place, was the basilical church known as the Martyrium, built on what was thought to be Golgotha. The Anastasis, where the *Catechesis on the Mysteries* were delivered, was round and built over what was believed to be Christ's tomb. It was joined to the Martyrium by a garden court, where the baptistery stood, as well as by a cruciform monument marking the reputed site of the crucifixion (Finn 1992a: 52).

This setting suggests that the celebration of the sacraments of redemption by the church in Jerusalem was shaped by the fact that redemption was won there (Searle 1980a: 12).

Figure 2.1. *Martyrium and Anastasis on Golgotha.* (Foley 1991a: 48).



The church is indebted to Egeria for her detailed description of the process of initiation for baptism and communion in Jerusalem. This process is described in summary form above (Fig. 2.0). This process indicates that 1) a hierarchically ordered church was functioning well in Jerusalem; 2) sponsors played a significant role in the initiation process because of the testimony of the catechumens' readiness to receive the Easter Sacraments and the quality of their lives; 3) the initiation process was carried out in the context of the liturgical year and catechesis was shaped by the mysteries being celebrated and the readings<sup>8</sup> from the lectionary and the Creed; 4) the immediate preparation for baptism was reserved for the Lenten

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Baldwin 1990 for an excellent study of the lectionary used in Jerusalem and how it formed the syllabus for catechetical instruction. Baldwin noted that the syllabus "covered both the content of the Scriptures as well as an exposition of Christian doctrine" (Baldwin 1990: 119).

season; 5) the ritual pattern of initiation was layered with symbolism enriched by the historical setting; 6) the rituals were celebrated in the midst of the assembly of believers; 7) the theological emphasis was on participation in the paschal mystery of Christ and 8) preparation for initiation was a priority though there is no mention of a lengthy catechumenate. One can assume that there was a catechumenate because the candidates for initiation were presented and examined before Lent so that they could be enrolled as the elect. Leonel Mitchell has noted that:

Those who were well reported were enrolled by the bishop and others were told to amend their ways before coming to the font. Each male candidate was accompanied by a godfather and each female candidate by a godmother. After their enrollment they were seated in a semi-circle facing the bishop and clergy, all together forming a complete circle. The sponsors and such others of the faithful as wished were permitted to attend the lectures, but the ordinary catechumens were excluded (Mitchell, L. 1991:25).

Egeria's eye witness account is an invaluable source for the actual practice of Christian initiation in Jerusalem. Cyril's contribution to the liturgical legacy of the church of Jerusalem is the next focus.

According to Egeria the Lenten instruction given by the bishop lasted for three hours each day (in Finn 1992a:54). Cyril's exposition of the Lenten scriptures and the Creed was meant to prepare the elect for a more well-informed participation in the liturgies of Holy Week and their own initiation.

His subject is God's Law: during the forty days he goes through the whole Bible, beginning with Genesis, and first relating the literal meaning of each passage, then interpreting its spiritual meaning. He also teaches them at this time all about the resurrection and the faith. And this is called *Catechesis*. After five weeks' teaching they receive the Creed, whose content he explains article by article in the same way as he explained the Scriptures, first literally and then spiritually (Mitchell, L. 1991 :27).

In the *Procatechesis* Cyril told the elect that before they simply heard the scriptures with their ears but now as the elect the Holy Spirit was fashioning their

minds and hearts into a house of God (in Cross 1986:44). Leonel Mitchell has pointed out that the topics for Cyril's lectures were traditional for over a century. He then described Cyril's outline:

The outline of Cyril's lectures is clearly the baptismal creed of the Jerusalem Church, which is taught to the candidates in the *traditio symboli* in the fifth lecture (Mitchell, L. 1991:28).

The topics which he considered are the following:

Lectures One and Two: Is. 1:16 and Ez. 18:20 which deal with the need for moral integrity and repentance and confession of sins as a preparation for baptism and eucharist.

Lecture Three: Rom. 6:3 on the meaning of baptism.

Lecture Four: Traditional doctrine -- "monarchy of God, Christology, the Virgin birth, crucifixion, burial, ascension, the coming judgment, Holy Spirit, soul, body, and our resurrection.

Lecture Five: The outline of the Creed.

Remaining Lectures: The Creed (Mitchell, L. 1991:28-30).

The Creed was expected to be memorised. It is worth noting that the Creed was not used within the liturgy in the early church, except at baptism (Mitchell, L. 1991:30). In the context of the last lecture the elect recited the Creed with Cyril and individually, a ceremony that was called the *redditio symboli* (Mitchell, L. 1991:31). Cyril concluded the pre-baptismal lectures by describing what topics he would consider in his mystagogical lectures.

In these you will be instructed again in the seasons for each of the things that took place (at initiation). You will be given proofs from the Old and New Testaments, first, of course, for the things that were done before your baptism, and next how you have been made clean with the washing of water by the Word, then how you have entered into the right to be called "Christ" in virtue of your "priesthood," then how you have been given the "sealing" of fellowship with the Holy Spirit, then about the mysteries of the altar of the new covenant and finally, how for the rest of your life you must walk worthily of the grace you have received (in Mitchell, L. 1991:31-32).

Catechesis in the church in Jerusalem was clearly biblical, doctrinal and practical. Detailed sacramental instruction only came after the liturgical celebration of the rites. This suggests that the sacramental catechesis was also experiential. Neophytes were led to a deeper understanding of what had happened to them in initiation. This method will be considered in chapters four and six when the contemporary rite of initiation will be examined.

The mystagogical catechesis contains a phrase by phrase exposition of the *Lord's Prayer*. This was given in the last lecture on the eucharistic liturgy. Both Cross (1986) and Mitchell, L. (1991) agree that the placement of the *Lord's Prayer* is deliberate. They are of the opinion that its placement means that the newly baptised were expected to incorporate the prayer into their new way of living as a kind of guiding spirituality with the goal of enabling them to live life in Christ (Mitchell, L. 1991:35).

Cyril's teaching is Christological to the core (Osborne 1987:72). It had been shaped by the events of Christ's paschal mystery (Jackson 1991:444). There is no mention of the mission of the newly baptised to reach out to others. Perhaps the reason for this omission is that by the fourth century Christians had gained some prominence after years of persecution and the church experienced an influx of converts (Searle 1980a:10). Bishops, during this period, directed the work of evangelisation outside the boundaries of the urban areas which resulted in the development of parishes that were entrusted to the care of priests and also outside the empire (Comby 1985:80). In spite of the rapid growth of the church during the fourth century the discipline regarding Christian initiation remained intact and healthy (Searle 1980a:11). Only a century later the situation will have changed drastically. The catechumenate will have lost its liturgical foundation and will not have been rediscovered until the reforms of Vatican II.

### 2.3 The Decline of the Catechumenate

Nathan Mitchell has observed that to assess the disintegration of the catechumenate is to do more than study the degeneration of a liturgical rite. It is to study the drastic changes taking place in Christianity. He said, "It is to grow aware of a more fundamental decay within Christian life" (Mitchell, N. 1976:50).

This fundamental decay occurred because so seminal a rite as that of Christian initiation was being dismembered.

By the latter half of the fourth century Christianity began to be equated with heightened social status rather than discipleship (Comby 1985:45). In the face of a growing numbers of converts the church shortened the preparation period for baptism and catechesis was perceived to be about education rather than conversion (Kavanagh 1978:118-120). Baptisms began to be celebrated not only during the Easter season, but throughout the year. In this context the liturgical rites which hitherto marked the stages of the catechumenate were collapsed into a single rite which was celebrated at times when the liturgical assembly could not be present. This robbed the assembly of their formative role in initiating new members. In the benign milieu in which Christianity found itself from the fourth to the sixth centuries all of these changes were seen as pastoral accommodations (Kavanagh 1978:116).

The result of these accommodations was that the church cut herself off from her most important work for the world: initiating men and women into life in Christ (Kavanagh 1978:115). In dealing with so fundamental a rite as that of Christian initiation it becomes apparent that the rite itself did not cause its own malfunction, but that several extrinsic factors led to its demise.

### **2.3.1 The Factors for the Disintegration of the Catechumenate**

The disintegration of the process of Christian initiation did not begin with the dismemberment of the ritual elements; it was the result of several factors. Though these factors were initially seen as pastoral accommodations (Stenzel 1967:32), they had devastating consequences for a once vigorous and life-giving rite.

The first factor that led to the demise of the catechumenate was the church's practice of baptising infants. By the year 600 candidates for initiation were almost exclusively infants (Grant 1976:37; Searle 1980a:13). As a result the catechumenal process could not be applied to infants and the rite lost its meaning.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the process which led to the separation of baptism and confirmation cf. Grant 1976:36-39 which summarises the debate between J. Jeremias and K. Aland on the topic. The classic work by Lampe presents a thorough study of the gift of the Spirit in the initiation process: cf. Lampe 1951.

Secondly, the church became more concerned about administering baptism to large numbers of adults and infants and less about the formation of people to live a Christian life (Searle 1980a:13-14). The preparation for baptism had lost its significance and so did the post-baptismal catechesis. Hence, the beginning of the phenomenon of having nominal Christians who were baptised, but not evangelised and yet were considered full members of the Christian community.

Thirdly, the insistence of the Roman Church on reserving the action of the laying on of hands and the consignation with chrism to the bishop severed the unity of the rite. This factor coupled with the practice of infant baptism created a separate sacrament of confirmation. The unity between baptism and confirmation was also lost when the order of reception was changed to baptism, eucharist, and confirmation with an interval of several years between each sacrament (Mitchell, N. 1976:54).

The fourth factor which precipitated the disintegration of the rite of initiation was the practice of having baptisms outside of the Easter season. Once this happened the catechumenate could no longer function. It has lost its original context of the liturgical year for the formation of catechumens (Searle 1980a 15; Walsh 1988:69). The symbolism inherent in the scripture readings and liturgical texts were no longer there to support the ritual actions of the rite.

The fifth factor which had devastating effects on the rite of Christian initiation is that of minimalism which caused the loss of the heuristic power of symbols (Mitchell, N.1976:73). Without the visible symbol of immersion, for instance, the meaning of baptism (as articulated in Rom. 6) of being buried with Christ in order to rise to new life is lost when baptism is administered by infusion.

Cerebralization of the celebration of the sacraments is the sixth and final factor in the list of practices which brought about the dissolution of the initiation process. Gestures were replaced with words.

When tactile contacts are severely minimalized, there is a tendency to replace tactile conversation with verbal conversation. Perhaps this helps to explain why, in the medieval period, there was a general tendency to replace the tactile dimension of sacramental acts with a visual dimension, for the liturgy was seen as the *dramatic* enactment of a past event (Mitchell, N. 1976:73; Osborne 1987:77).

Too many words kill the power of a liturgical ritual. There is nothing deadlier than didactic liturgy (Fagerberg 1992:201) because this is the very thing that divests liturgy of its power to teach by symbol and gesture. Liturgy is then no longer an epiphany of God's presence and action in our lives (Fagerberg 1992:223).

The Roman Church is still suffering from the effects of the dissolution of the rite of Christian initiation. At the end of the twentieth century the church is still in the process of coping with the effects of the demise of the catechumenate. Aidan Kavanagh has diagnosed the situation with incisive acumen:

The catechumenate in preparation for baptism had ceased to exist; catechesis had been separated from the liturgy and deritualized; and what had once been a single initiatory process consummated in two paschal phases (baptism/consignation and eucharist) had now become four sacraments (baptism-penance-communion-confirmation) loosely based on personality development in preadolescent individuals and knit together by religious education and therapy to serve them (Kavanagh 1978:70).

The contemporary church faces the embarrassing dilemma of having promulgated the restored RCIA while continuing to maintain the "four sacrament order" referred to in the passage from Kavanagh. The result is a schizophrenic praxis of initiation and a diminishment of Christian formation for responsible membership in the church and a commitment to mission.

#### 2.4 The Restoration of the Catechumenate

The disintegration of the of the process of Christian initiation was met with timid efforts at reform (Dujarier 1981:31). The great John Chrysostom, through his preaching, tried to reverse the situation. Through his fiery sermons he sought to restore the idea that conversion of life was at the very heart of the baptismal commitment.

I have said it before, I say it now, and I shall say it again and again: unless a person has corrected the defects of his character and has developed a faculty for virtue, let him not be baptized. Consider your soul as a portrait that you have painted. Before the Holy Spirit comes to apply his divine brush, erase your bad habits (in Dujarier 1979b:88).

The great Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, deplored the lack of catechumens being enrolled for baptism who would take the spiritual journey of conversion seriously. In his commentary on the miraculous catch in Luke 4:5 we read his lament:

I, too, Lord know for me it is dark when you do not command.  
No one has yet inscribed, it is still night for me. I put out the  
net of the word at Epiphany, and I have not yet taken anything  
(in Dujarier 1979b:82).

The Council of Braga (572 C.E.) required adult candidates for baptism to have three weeks of preparation before the celebration of the sacrament. In Germany, St. Boniface ordered that a two month period of preparation be made compulsory (Gelpi 1993a:188). Such attempts, in the end had little effect (Kavanagh 1978:119).

By medieval times the catechumenate had disappeared (Mitchell, N.1976:62-69). Aquinas himself, argued in favour of the separation of baptism and confirmation. He likened the grace of baptism to an aid in spiritual childhood, and confirmation as pertaining to spiritual maturity (Mitchell, N. 1976:68). Hence the Catholic church's justification for the separation of baptism and confirmation, the death of the catechumenate and the dissolution of the initiation process which took shape in the third and fourth centuries (Kavanagh 1978:81).

It was not until modern times that the catechumenate began to be taken seriously. In the nineteenth century this can be seen in the structure drawn up by Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa) for a catechumenate which could be implemented by his society in their missionary work (Heintz & Renaud 1990:58). By the twentieth century there was general confusion about the Roman Catholic Church's initiatory practice (Kavanagh 1978:81). Protestant scholars like Brunner, Barth, Cullmann, Leenhardt, Jeremias and Aland began to debate the practice of infant baptism. Liturgical research by Anglican liturgist, Gregory Dix helped to form the questions about the relationship between baptism and confirmation. Lampe opposed Dix and argued for the reunion of water baptism and "Spirit baptism" (Kavanagh 1978:87-88). Despite the debate that was going on among the Protestants, in the Roman Catholic Church it was not

until Pius XII's promulgation of the *Ordo Sabbati Sancti*<sup>10</sup> (1951) that Catholic theologians and liturgists began to rethink baptism in its paschal context (Kavanagh 1978:91). This set the stage for the reforms which were mandated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

#### 2.4.1 Nineteenth Century Catholic Missionary Practice in Africa and the Catechumenate

The nineteenth century witnessed a great upsurge in interest in missionary outreach in the churches of Europe and North America. These missionary efforts were carried out in the midst of a world that had been divided up by European imperialists (Comby & MacCulloch 1989:169). The continent of Africa held a special appeal and with the exception of the ancient Christian churches of Egypt and Ethiopia and a few coastal outposts, contemporary Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa goes back to the nineteenth century (Baur 1994:103).

Initially, the work of both Protestant and Catholic missionaries was restricted to liberated slaves (Baur 1994:103; Comby & MacCulloch 1989:181). As in the case of the missionary expansion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, nineteenth century missionary evangelisation was tied to exploration and trade routes as well as colonisation (Baur 1994:106-109). This was especially true in Africa where climatic conditions were difficult and travel was treacherous. Africa soon became known as the "graveyard of missionaries" (Comby & MacCulloch 1989:182).

One missionary who was motivated by great faith in Christ was Charles Lavigerie. He became the most influential of the Catholic missionaries of the nineteenth century. Lavigerie began his missionary efforts in Algiers (Comby & MacCulloch 1989:182), but before this time he had read and studied everything that was published about Africa (Heintz & Renaud 1990:11). While Bishop of Nancy, France he applied for an African diocese. In 1867 Algiers was erected as archiepiscopal see and Lavigerie was appointed its first archbishop (Baur 1994:184; Comby & MacCulloch 1989:182). The following year he founded the

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<sup>10</sup> This document was initiated at the request of the German, French and Austrian bishops. It was meant for experimental use. The ordo restored the baptismal character of the Lent-Easter season. In 1955 its use was extended to the whole church.

Missionaries for Africa, more popularly known as the White Fathers because of the colour of their habit. In 1869 he founded the White Sisters, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (Heintz & Renaud 1990:15).

Lavigerie shaped the spirit of these communities through numerous writings and speeches. He bound the members of the two institutes by a special oath to life-long work in the missions of Africa (Baur 1994:185). Though he is best known for his antislavery campaign in Africa (Baur 1994:185), he also, perhaps unknowingly, initiated the movement for the church's restoration of the catechumenate in modern times (Dujarier 1979b:139).

In 1879 in a letter to the missionaries of Equatorial Africa he wrote of his plan to begin a catechumenate which he submitted to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith which is now called the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples:

I have laid before the S.C. for the Propagation of the Faith a plan which consists in imposing once again, with appropriate adaptation, the discipline which the Church applied to the pagans from the beginning. The Fathers are aware that my plan was highly praised and approved by the authorities (Heintz & Renaud 1990:55-56).

In another letter written in 1881 he described the form that his plan would take. He envisioned three categories of persons in his catechumenate: postulants who over a two-year period would be taught the basic doctrines of the church but were forbidden to come to Mass; catechumens who would spend another two years being introduced to the mysteries of the church, except for the eucharist and they would be present for the liturgy of the word; finally those considered to be ready to receive baptism and eucharist (Baur 1994:187; Heintz & Renaud 1990:57). In a letter to Fr. Livinhac, who was working among the Baganda people Cardinal Lavigerie warned against admitting people to baptism too soon:

You must also explain that you can admit into the ranks of the faithful, and consequently to Baptism, only those who feel they have the courage to put into practice, with the grace of God, the law of Our Lord in its entirety, even if it entails the shedding of their blood...I insist on this. I want you to follow

this regulation which I impose as an absolute requirement (Heintz & Renaud 1990:58).

Lavigerie grasped the importance of preparation for baptism, progressive stages of catechesis and the emphasis on conversion in the process of initiation in the life of the church, but failed to link the stages of the process with liturgical rites. It was rooted in the life of the people, but not in the liturgical life of the church (Fischer 1990:101). Instead of the liturgical rites medals were given to persons accepted as postulants and rosaries were given to persons beginning the catechumenate (Dujarier 1979b:139). Lavigerie also seems to have put aside the questions concerning confirmation as a sacrament of initiation.

Despite the flaws in Lavigerie's plan he aroused great interest in the catechumenate and the process of Christian initiation. The seed planted by Lavigerie would be watered, nurtured and harvested only in the following century.

#### **2.4.2 Vatican II and the Restoration of the Catechumenate**

Missionaries struggled with the rite of baptism because the liturgical ceremonies of the catechumenate were gathered together in one rite (Fischer 1990:101). The rest of the world was yet to be awakened to the genius of the catechumenate. France was to become a leader in the call for the restoration of the catechumenate (Bourgeois 1981:42). In the aftermath of World War II the church in France experienced an influx of requests for baptism and in an effort to answer these requests research was carried out to seek historical guidance. A restored catechumenate received official recognition in the Diocese of Lyons in November of 1953 (Bourgeois 1981:43).<sup>11</sup> Though the French experience is of great importance it is also problematic because of its stress on reaching out to lapsed Catholics who were mainly from the intellectual elite (Bourgeois 1981:62; Kavanagh 1978:96). It nevertheless stimulated interest in the catechumenate and affected the discussion about the catechumenate at Vatican II. French scholarship in the area of Christian initiation provided a rich source of theological and practical data which helped to set the stage at the Council (Kavanagh 1978:97).

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<sup>11</sup> The essay quoted above by Bourgeois chronicles the restoration of the catechumenate in France. The author traces its historical development and reflects on its unique approach to the process of restoration.

The first session of the Second Vatican Council was convened on 11 October 1962. Some preparatory work on the initiation process had been done by the French and the Germans so that material for the debate on the reform of initiation was already organised when the bishops gathered (Kavanagh 1978:102). The reform of the Mass was the first issue handled by the Council, then the reform of the sacramental rites. The initiation of adults was the last of sacramental rites to receive consideration. The initial context for initiation was the experience of the bishops present at the Council. Their experience centered around the rite for baptism contained in the *Roman Ritual* issued in 1614! This book reflected the late medieval practice of making infant baptism normative (Kavanagh 1978:104-105). This was the immediate setting in which the mandate for the reform of the rite of initiation of adults developed. It is no wonder that Keifer saw the RCIA as a reform "without precedent" in the church (Keifer 1974:402).

SC was promulgated in December, 1963. Article 64 of that constitution mandated the restoration of the catechumenate with its liturgical rites.

The catechumenate for adults, divided into several stages, is to be restored and put into use at the discretion of the local Ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of well-suited instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals (SC 64).

In the following article the Council allowed for the inclusion of elements of traditional initiation rites which were compatible with the rite of Christian initiation. Article 66 called for the revision of the rites for the baptism of adults with attention given to the restored catechumenate. The actual work of restoration was given to a commission.

Balthasar Fischer became the first chairperson of Commission Twenty-two of the Concilium (Fischer 1990:102). The work of the commission lasted for five years. On the feast of the Epiphany, 1972 the new RCIA was officially promulgated. The late Ralph Keifer applauded the bold step that the church had taken, but noted that it was a radical departure from contemporary pastoral practice.

The program to reform the order of initiation has issued in the promulgation of rites which are, historically and culturally

speaking, a massive rejection of the presupposition of pastoral practice and of most churchgoers as to what membership in the church means. This is a revolution quite without precedent because the Catholic Church has never before in its history done such violence to its liturgical practice as to make its rites so thoroughly incongruous with its concrete reality. A step like this is either a statement that the rite is wholly irrelevant or that the church is willing to change and to change radically its concrete reality. Such an approach is either suicide or prophecy of a very high order (Keifer 1974:402).

Keifer captured the magnitude of the step the church had taken in its promulgation of the new rite. As a liturgist he was able to grasp the ecclesiology inherent in the rite and the demands it would place upon the church.

Eighteen years after the promulgation of the RCIA Fischer, himself, recalled the extent of the reform:

Our draft restored the main features of the classic catechumenate for adults: reception into the catechumenate, election, scrutines, the rite of the Easter Vigil, and the mystagogia. We even succeeded...in safeguarding the classic sequence of the sacraments of initiation by establishing the rule, now sanctioned in the new code of canon law (883.2), that a priest who baptizes adults has the faculty given by the law itself to confirm them (Fischer 1990:103).

Radical indeed! This was a crucial restoration because of the strategic vision of the Church as both local and universal and what it can become in the future through its implementation of the RCIA (Kavanagh 1978:127). In this rite catechumens are not seen as people making a private enquiry into the life of the church, but as public persons intent on joining a community of faith.

The rite develops in stages with liturgical rites celebrated at the transition points:

- The Precatechumenate: a time of evangelisation and inquiry with no fixed duration of time.
- Rite of Acceptance: a liturgical rite marking the beginning of the catechumenate.
- The Catechumenate: a time of nurturing the initial grace of conversion that is enriched by lectionary catechesis, prayers, exorcisms, and blessings.

**Rite of Election:** a liturgical rite in which the church formally ratifies the catechumens' readiness to enter into the final preparation for the reception of the sacraments of initiation.

**Period of Enlightenment:** the time immediately preceding the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil. It takes place during the Lenten Season.

**Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation:** a liturgical rite integrated into the Easter Vigil. It includes the celebration of baptism, confirmation and the eucharist.

**Mystagogia:** a time in which the newly initiated experience full membership in the church by means of participation in the Sunday eucharist and continuing catechesis. It usually lasts for the duration of the Easter season.

The promulgation of the RCIA carries with it the force to direct the renewal of the church for years to come because it touches the very heart of the life of the church: initiation of new members. First, the RCIA has made the initiation of adults the normal practice. Second, it restored the catechumenate to its original ideal in content and duration. Thirdly, presbyters have been allowed to administer confirmation when adults are baptised. Fourth, baptism and confirmation are brought together in one liturgical celebration. Fifthly, the rite has clearly distinguished pre-baptismal and post-baptismal catechesis (Kavanagh 1978:147; Keifer 1974:400). Finally, the RCIA has restored to the assembly the primary responsibility for the initiation of new members. RCIA 9 assumes that the community of faith is:

Fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ.

The RCIA brings together the best within the church's life: her worship and her mission. This is evident at every stage of the initiation process. This consciousness of mission grows within a person because the person's inner expanse begins to be configured in new ways (Seubert 1989:497) as they interact with the community of believers and with God who has called him/her to a new way of living. His/her personal and cultural boundaries shift within the initiation process and we have what Schreiter (1985:118) calls the beginning of the establishment of Christian identity. This happens gradually in the midst of the community (RCIA 4)

through the experience of ritual, myth and symbol as they work a change in a person's mind and heart.

Within the initiation process the mentality of individuals undergoes a change, which hopefully will bring about new ways of thinking and acting (conversion), but also social change (cf. chapter 7) (Luzbetak 1988:300-302). The rituals of the RCIA help to "rehearse" new ways of thinking, living and being in mission.

## 2.5 Summary

In this chapter the historical background of the church's practice of initiation has been examined. In the first part of the chapter the nature of Jewish proselyte baptism and its possible influence on John's baptism was outlined since both were purificatory in nature.

In the section on John's baptism the purpose of his rite as preparatory to the baptism that would be mandated by the Messiah was reviewed. Then followed a consideration of Jesus' baptism by John and its relationship to baptism practised by the church.

In the final section on the scriptural foundation for baptism I showed that no clear and definite rite of baptism can be found in the Acts of the Apostles. The distinguishing feature of Christian baptism was clearly seen as the gift of the Spirit. Paul provided us with a theology of baptism that was rooted in the paschal mystery of Christ. Conversion was regarded as a sure sign of faith in Christ.

The image of the body of Christ emerged as a central element of Paul's theology of baptism. This concept has profound implications for how people understand the meaning of baptism and Christian responsibility.

The second section dealt with the practice of baptism in the post-apostolic age of the church's life. Four sources from antiquity were helpful in shaping an understanding of baptism based on early Christian praxis: *The Didache*, the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, *Egeria's Journal* and Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Homilies*. It became evident that pre-baptismal and post-baptismal catechesis were fundamental parts of the initiation process in the early church and that liturgical rites were integral to the whole process. The assembly was the

general context for the celebration of the rites and that by the fourth century various ministries were developed to serve in the ministry of initiation.

The factors which led to the disintegration of the catechumenate and the entire initiation process were outlined in the third section. I argued that practices which were considered pastoral accommodations of the initiation process became fundamentally destructive of that very process. The devastating outcome was the dissolution of the church's practice of initiating new adult members.

The final section focused on an overview of the process whereby the catechumenate was restored in the life of the church. The radical nature of this restoration was highlighted to emphasise the importance of the rite of Christian initiation.

The next four chapters describe and analyse the stages of the RCIA and their accompanying liturgical rites. In these chapters we will utilise the insights of both ritual theorists and anthropologists as analytical tools for understanding the experience of person going through the initiation process. The missionary dimension will come into sharp focus and it will become evident that the RCIA, probably more than in any other of the church's rites, sees formation for mission as fundamental to Christian identity. This clear from the text, the way scripture readings are used in the celebration of each rite, the process of initiation itself and the liturgical rites marking each stage in the initiation journey.

## Chapter Three

### *The Precatechumenate*

*In conversation with catechumens, the emphasis should be made more on our listening than on our speaking...The pre-catechumenate is not the moment to stuff the head of the inquirer with synthetic theology or the latest catechism. It is a period for listening more than for speaking...Let us, therefore, welcome and love them before making them understand us; let us listen to them before speaking to them.*

—D.S. Amalorpavadass

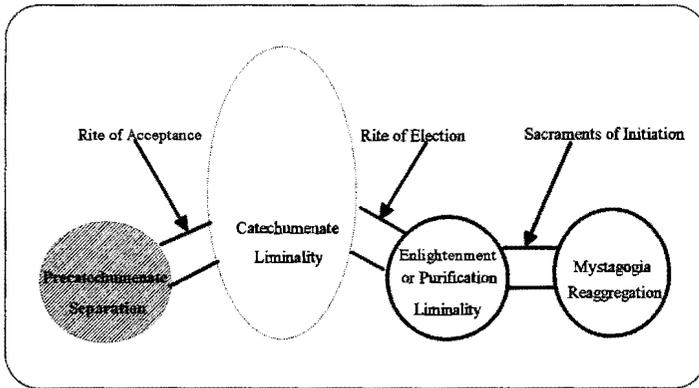


Figure 3. Four stages and three liturgical thresholds of the RCIA with the pre-catechumenate highlighted as the focus of this chapter.

### 3.0 The Purpose of the Chapter

With the historical background of the previous chapter in mind, attention now will focus on the stages of the RCIA. The rituals of the RCIA itself will be the vehicle used for learning how the church shapes its members for mission. This chapter, along with the next three, will be an application of the ancient principle: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The rite itself becomes the guide for discovering the vision out of which the church engages in formation for mission. Geertz (1973), Turner, V. (1974) and Ostdiek (1993) are companions on this journey of exploration into the relationship between culture, ritual and liturgy.

Throughout the four stages of the RCIA: -- the pre-catechumenate, catechumenate, illumination and mystagogia -- mission is clearly present and

baptism becomes the paradigm of how faith in Jesus is lived and mission carried out (Bishop 1979:18; Kavanagh 1978:92). The liturgical celebrations: -- the rite of acceptance into the catechumenate, the minor exorcisms and blessings, the rite of election, the handing over of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation -- all celebrate in liturgical ritual the work of the Holy Spirit in those making the catechumenal journey (Lewinski 1983:11).

This chapter will describe the precatechumenate. It begins informally and without any special liturgical rite. It sets the stage for future development. Then the relational character of this stage will be examined by looking at the role of the parish, the sponsor, and the catechumenate team in relating to the inquirer<sup>1</sup> and vice versa. Evangelisation during the precatechumenate takes the form of story-telling and opens the way for conversion. Since conversion is the touchstone of the entire process of initiation this issue will also be examined in the context of the RCIA. Lonergan's (1971) analysis will furnish insights into the centrality of conversion in Christian life. Reflection on formation for mission at this stage of the RCIA will follow. In this enterprise the insights of some ritual theorists and anthropologists will be beneficial as we reflect on the issue of identity in terms of changing perceptions as related to world view, shifting of boundaries which are both personal and communal; the emotional corollaries of personal dispositions which have been formed by one's personal and cultural history and which are challenged through interaction with the fundamental myth of the Catholic faith.

### 3.1 Some Basic Understandings

The first period of the RCIA is the precatechumenate. This is a stage of evangelisation. Lewinski has commented that:

The period of evangelization should be a time to share the gospel in its simplicity, but also to communicate the profound message it holds. This is the time for inquirers to sort out their beliefs and assumptions about God, others, self, church and faith (Lewinski 1983:14).

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<sup>1</sup> Those who are interested in joining the Roman Catholic Church are referred to in various ways. In this study the terms inquirer or newcomer are used interchangeably.

This period leads the inquirer to make a decision to respond to the gift of faith. The RCIA recognises this moment as the grace of initial conversion (RCIA 6). No time frame is given for the precatechumenate; it is not programmed in any way. It is dependent on a person's readiness to take another step on his/her spiritual journey (RCIA 5). Thomas Morris stated the aim of the precatechumenate as:

The goal of this period of formation is to help the inquirers come to an initial awareness of God's saving presence in their lives, and to help them discern their initial readiness to embrace the way of life of Jesus Christ (Morris 1989:55).

The baptised members of the faith community are directly involved in the formation of inquirers. Referring to the baptised the rite says:

During the period of evangelisation and precatechumenate, the faithful should remember that for the Church and its members the supreme purpose of the apostolate is that Christ's message is made known to the world by word and deed and that his grace is communicated. They should therefore show themselves ready to give the candidates evidence of the spirit of the Christian community and to welcome them into their homes, into personal conversation and into community gatherings (RCIA 9.1).

The rite links mission to the life of the community. The baptised members have a clear responsibility for making Christ known and loved. The community is called upon to give witness by its participation in the "supreme apostolate" of the church. The lived commitment of the community is the one that is actually formative (Warren 1989a:36). This is more than doctrinal formation. It is formation for life and highlights the lifelong character of catechesis.

Though no liturgical rites formally mark this stage the RCIA makes some suggestions about praying with and for the inquirers. The rite provides for an optional reception of the inquirers, but clearly states that it should not be a ritual celebration (RCIA 39.1). The rite does not want to pre-empt the free decision of the inquirers to decide for themselves if they indeed want to become Catholic Christians. Such a reception celebrates the "right intention" of the inquirers, not a definite commitment (RCIA 39.1). The rite proposes that during this reception the inquirer might be introduced by a friend and then welcomed and received by the

parish priest or another representative of the parish (RCIA 39.3). This celebration would take place in the context of a small group context, perhaps at a gathering of the catechumenate team<sup>2</sup> and some representatives of the parish.

The rite indicates that prayers of exorcism and blessings may also be used during this period of the precatechumenate for the spiritual well-being of the inquirers (RCIA 40). These prayers, although included in the rites for the catechumenate, are used to ask for the blessings of God on the inquirers. Form C of the blessing prayers gives an indication of the concern of the church for those who are inquirers:

God of power,  
look upon these your servants  
as they deepen their understanding of the Gospel.  
Grant that they may come to know and love you  
and always heed your will  
with receptive minds and generous hearts.  
Teach them and enfold them within your Church,  
so that they may share your holy mysteries  
both on earth and in heaven. Amen. (RCIA 97 C).

The prayer clearly conveys the church's conviction that the gospel engenders faith in Christ. By participating in the initiation process the church hopes that the men and women who are inquirers come to know and love the Lord. During the precatechumenate evangelisation is aimed at creating the environment wherein this will become a reality. The church's role as a nurturer of faith is also expressed when the priest prays that they will be enfolded by the life of the church. This prayer, as well as all liturgical orations, are what Schaller (1985:5-8) has described as performative language. He has noted that:

...The uttering of these words is an initial component of the act,  
and the performance is itself the object of the utterance  
(Schaller 1985:8).

Performative language indicates the action underlying the words that are spoken. In the above prayer the action or performance is that of God "looking upon," "granting," "teaching," and enfolding." The expectation, held in faith, is that God will do and is indeed doing these things for the inquirers. These acts validate the

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<sup>2</sup> The catechumenate team is usually comprised of the parish RCIA coordinator, parish priest, liturgical coordinator, catechetical coordinator, and sponsor coordinator.

choice the inquirers have made to pursue membership within the Catholic community (Schaller 1985:10).

...By saying a certain set of words, one is not merely reporting something, but is rather doing something. The words from an "outward and audible sign" for an inward action (Schaller 1985:11).

Performative language does not simply state a fact or a feeling, but conveys the sense of active participation on the part of the one to whom the statement or in the case of liturgy, the oration, is addressed as well as the assembly making the prayer. Action is always a constituent element of performative language. Ostdiek (1993:47) has reminded us that rituals have to be infused with meaning. These do not work like magic formulas. How the above prayer is prayed would either diminish or enhance the power of the words spoken by the presider<sup>3</sup> on behalf of the assembly gathered in faith to pray for the inquirers (Driver 1991:187).

The whole tenor of the precatechumenate is one of welcome. Emphasis is placed on the formation of relationships of trust. In this climate the inquirers feel free to share their stories and members of the catechumenate team can help them to see their spiritual journey in the light of faith that leads to conversion (Morris 1989:56-57).

In this kind of process those who form the parish catechumenate team need to be well grounded in the church's faith and life. The team members and sponsors<sup>4</sup> must have a profound respect for the working of the Spirit within the life of the inquirer. John Paul II has written:

On her part, the Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom. Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. *The Church proposes; she imposes nothing.* She respects individuals, cultures, and she honours the sanctuary of conscience (RM 39).

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<sup>3</sup> In Roman Catholic liturgical celebrations the presider leads the celebration. He/she acts as the president of the liturgical assembly. Depending on type of celebration the presider may be ordained or nonordained.

<sup>4</sup> A sponsor is an active member of the parish who accompanies the catechumen during the initiation process. The role of the sponsor will be explained in 3.2.3.

This respect is actively experienced in the precatechumenate in what Thomas Groome (1980:184) called "shared praxis." He defined the meaning of this approach in the following way:

..Shared praxis can be described as a group of Christians sharing in dialogue their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith (Groome 1980:184).

Groome's description of "shared praxis" forms what might be called the context of evangelisation during the precatechumenate. By sharing their stories the inquirers are led to see the action of God in their lives and also to be open to the stories of faith in the scriptures and ultimately to the story of Jesus himself (Dunning 1981:52). Keifer has underlined the importance of such an approach to evangelisation:

Unless we can learn to speak of God as a living and present reality, we are doomed (and the word is appropriate) to failure. At the present time there is no pastoral vacuum more serious than the inability to show people the presence of God in their lives...For all our discussion of the possibilities of ministry in the church today, what is truly remarkable is the low priority assigned for any effort to form ministers who might be willing to take the risk required to articulate for others their own experience and understanding of a personal God (Keifer 1974:403).

Within the context of the RCIA shared praxis is the setting where sharing one's experience and understanding of a personal God is made possible. In an atmosphere of respect and trust the inquirers and the members of the parish learn to express their faith experiences of how God is working in their lives. This sets in motion a process by which the person is opened to the need for ongoing catechesis within the context of the community's life and mission:

Through catechesis the community attends to the seasons of a person's life throughout his or her lifetime but also to such seasons in its own communal life. Indeed it is the lifelong character of catechesis that allows us not to try to do too much on any single occasion, not to try each time to recapitulate every understanding (Warren 1989a:17).

Warren's insights point out the interaction that takes place between the individual and the community. Catechesis clearly happens in the context of the community's life. The RCIA has reappropriated this truth from the practice of the early church when it placed the responsibility for the initiation process on the parish community. This is more specifically mission *ad intra*. It is part of the pastoral ministry of the church to provide for the faith development of the inquirers. The community of the baptised reaches out in a spirit of evangelisation to the catechumens. Both the inquirers and the community are formed for mission *ad extra* in the process.

Two secondary aims of the period of catechumenate have been put forward by Dunning (1981:52-53). Fulfilment of these aims helps the inquirer to understand the changes going on within their lives. The first aim is that the inquirers begin to appropriate the religious language that will help them to interpret the meaning of their lives in terms of the pattern provided by Jesus, dying and rising to new life (Dunning 1981:52; Kemp 1979:18). The second goal is that the inquirers become more ready for in-depth examination of doctrine because they have been exposed to stories of faith; their own, biblical stories, the church's stories and stories of the parish (Dunning 1981:52).

### 3.2 Establishing Relationships

Many commentators on the RCIA have observed that during the precatechumenate relationships are established that aid the entire initiation process (Dunning 1981:45; Morris 1989:56; Sellner 1988:34-35). These relationships are all based on the bonds that have been cultivated with people in the parish. The parish is the context for the RCIA.

#### 3.2.1 The Assembly

The rite places the responsibility for initiation on the entire faith community (Lewinski 1983:5). Initiation is no longer seen as simply a matter of participating in a number of classes in which the parish priest acts as catechist, spiritual director, and celebrant of the rites (Lewinski 1983:5). The rite itself states unequivocally that:

The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ. In the various circumstances of daily life, even as in the apostolate, all the followers of Christ have the obligation of spreading the faith according to their abilities (RCIA 9).

The RCIA sees initiation as part of the mission of the community (RCIA 9). The baptized members of the community reach out to those interested in joining the Catholic community of faith. In helping to initiate new members the church shares in the mission of Christ. A communal and participatory ecclesiology is central to the RCIA's theology of initiation (Vincie 1993:24). This makes the assembly the ritual subject of the liturgical rites celebrated by the community of faith. Vincie has pointed out that the introduction to the RCIA:

...Places great value on both the presence and participation of the assembly in the rites of initiation. Reminiscent of the patristic teaching that one's presence in the liturgical assembly builds the community and one's absence diminishes it, the document places its exhortation for presence and participation within a discussion of the local church's apostolic mission (Vincie 1993:25).

This moves the initiation process out of the parish presbytery or classroom and into the very heart of the community:

The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful (RCIA 4).

Two important points are made in the above text. First, initiation is not seen as an isolated sacramental event, but a process of evangelisation that is punctuated with liturgical rites which celebrate the deepening of a person's commitment to Christ. Secondly, this process takes place within the community where individuals making such a spiritual journey are accompanied by members of the assembly (Lewinski 1983:7). RCIA 45 states that:

It is desirable that the entire Christian community or some part of it, consisting of friends and acquaintances, catechists and priests, take an active part in the celebration (RCIA 45).

The assembly's role is to provide those being initiated with an experience of the church gathered in the context of the liturgy. This is when the church is most truly what she was called by God to be "a people to be a personal possession to sing the praises of God" (1 Pet 2:9).

This is part of the church's self-definition: a community called together by God in Christ and in the power of the Spirit, and which responds to that call through official public worship. When catechumens or candidates are invited to these liturgies or parts thereof, they are invited to participate in the liturgical assembly as it actualizes itself as church through its ritual action (Vincie 1993:29).

From the very beginning then of the spiritual journey people interested in joining the church have an experience of what it means to be church. Dunning maintains that:

The most powerful invitation...to hear the Good News comes from the life of the community itself in which people can see that this parish truly lives and wants to share Good News (Dunning 1981:41).

The assembly exercises its role in the ecclesial and liturgical formation of the initiates. When the rituals being performed enact meaning and are integrated into the experience of those being initiated their world view begins to be altered as the world envisioned in the liturgy challenges the world view and ethos out of which they live their lives (Luzbetak 1988:254-255; Ostdiek 1993:48).

Though the liturgy provides one environment for catechetical formation it also takes place within the context of the inquirers' group. Peter Ball (1988:12) has suggested that this setting helps the inquirer to have a sense of knowing at least some of the people of the parish while also being known. This more humane setting encourages people to develop relationships and experiences of trust (Morris 1989:56). People gradually begin to feel at home and more free to ask the questions that concern them as well as share their stories.

Nevertheless it is the liturgical assembly that actualises the church, a community which accepts its responsibility for the church's life and mission to the world. The assembly is the active ritual subject (Ostdiek 1993:47) for the

accomplishment of initiation. The participation of the members of the assembly contributes to the intent of each liturgical celebration (Driver 1991:147; Vincie 1993:95).

### 3.2.2 The Inquirer

Who are the inquirers who come to share the life of the Catholic community? The rite answers quite simply that inquirers are those "who are not yet Christians" (RCIA 36). In the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg during the period from 1990-1993 most inquirers had not had previous membership in other Christian churches.<sup>5</sup> The faith history of members of other Christian churches who want to join the Catholic Church must be respected. They may meet with the catechumens and share with them insights they have gained from the scriptures and the liturgy, but in the celebration of the liturgical rituals they are to be clearly distinguished from the catechumens.

In the catechesis of the community and in the celebration of these rites, care must be taken to maintain the distinction between the catechumens and the baptized candidates (RCIA 549).

Catechumens are the focus of interest in this study. The underlying vision of the RCIA is applicable for both catechumens and candidates and in pastoral situations catechesis can be similar in content. Both catechumens and candidates have been drawn to the church for a variety of reasons. They often have had contact with someone who is a Catholic, or they have had occasion to be present for some Catholic liturgical celebration; or have had a colleague at work approach them about becoming a Catholic. They generally have one thing in common: they are seekers on a quest for meaning in their lives (Dunning 1981:42) and they have experienced an awakening of faith which perhaps, they cannot yet articulate (Dujarier 1979a:25).

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<sup>5</sup> During the years 1990-1993 when the author worked with the catechumens of the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg the majority of persons joining the Roman Catholic Church were not previously members of other Christian churches. The RCIA provides special rites to mark the liturgical thresholds for those who had been baptised in other churches as well as for uncatechised adults preparing for confirmation and eucharist within the Roman Catholic Church. These rites clearly respect the baptismal dignity of persons baptised in other Christian churches and in no way do they suggest that a person is to be baptised again. The focus of this study is on those who have not been baptised previously.

The inquirers are also people who have questions. They have questions about Catholic customs and practices (Dunning 1981:43). They want to know why Catholics genuflect when they enter a church. They sometimes have more serious questions about church discipline or clerical celibacy. Other people are simply drawn to the Catholic Church and have no questions, because they are not yet free enough to ask them, but most people have some kind of questions (Morris 1989:57).

Inquirers often know the basic story of Christ and the church, but it cannot be presumed that they know the meaning of that story (Lewinski 1983:14). As Searle has observed:

The church gives the converts the means to reinterpret the world and their place in it -- both the framework for interpretation (the church's understanding of life and history, drawn from scripture and doctrine) and the language (the vocabulary of conversion, largely drawn from prayer and liturgy). The more such a framework and language "speak" to the convert's experience, the more he or she will feel at home in the church (Searle 1991a:6).

The time of the precatechumenate is the setting in which this happens. The inquirers begin to see their story in the context of Jesus' story and that of the church. They grow in their ability to interpret their life experience in the light of faith. As their sense of identity changes so does their world view. It begins to be shaped by the story of Jesus and that of the faith community.

During the precatechumenate the inquirers begin the ritual process and experience the first stage of rites of passage, namely, separation (Searle 1980b:45). This separation occurs because boundaries have been crossed. Though the inquirer has not yet committed himself/herself to become a Catholic he/she has nonetheless crossed the boundary which defined him/her as "outsider" (Turner, V. 1972a:394) in relationship to the Catholic community. Though the whole RCIA represents the macro pattern of rites of passage: separation, liminality, and reincorporation, each stage of this process contains it in a micro version. If a person continues to inquire into the *what* and *why* of Catholic life he/she will eventually experience liminality because he/she will have separated

himself/herself from familiar patterns of daily life and in this case, spiritual concerns, to begin to take on a new set of values which will give shape to a new world view and ethos.

The precatechumenate signals a time when world view questions begin to be reformulated in the context of a new community and tradition. The process of being initiated into the Christian tradition, Schreier (1985:115) has said, is as "analogous to the entire language system." He continues:

Faith is analogous to language competence. Theology and the expressive tradition (liturgy, wider forms of praxis) are analogous to language performance. The loci of orthodoxy (however construed: Scriptures, creeds, councils, confessions, magisterium) represent a grammar, mediating competence and performance. (Schreier 1985:115).

The inquirer begins the task of gaining competence in understanding and living the faith of the church in Christ. This in turn begins to alter his/her world view and to reshape the dispositions which comprise the ethos of his/her identity. For Geertz, this process not only forms identity, but also culture. Bell has pointed out that Geertz saw this process as leading to decisive action:

The dialectical nature of this fusion of ethos and world view is made clear in Geertz's related discussion of symbolic systems, such as religion, which involve both "models for" and "models of" reality...The simplest ritual activities are seen to "fuse" a people's conceptions of order and their dispositions (moods and motivations) for action (Bell 1992:26-27).

The action which the inquirer is preparing to make is that of making a decisive choice for Christ, the most basic Christian sacrament (Searle 1980b:48) by responding to the call to conversion which becomes clearer and louder throughout the process.

Missiologists, it seems, would do well to dialogue with liturgical ritual as well as the social sciences so that they might gain access to another window from which to view the boundaries of the expanse of interior space within a person where the journey of conversion begins (Seubert 1989:497). Efiade (1958:172) maintained that the "religious man (woman) lives in an open cosmos and he (she) is

open to the world." Eliade's insight raises questions about boundaries. His view suggests that for the religious person boundaries do not apply in relating to the "Holy" present in the entire world. Salvation is not a strictly private experience (Eliade 1958:179). If one believes the Great Commission, salvation cannot but be a universal experience which leads one further along on the journey of Christian life and makes clear the demands of discipleship. It is to take up the pilgrim way and to devote oneself:

...Wholly to "walking" toward the supreme truth, which, in highly evolved religions, is synonymous with the Hidden God, the *Deus absconditus* (Eliade 1958:184).

This kind of dialogue might lead missiologists to deeper theological understandings of how a person is formed for mission through his/her experience of moving through rites of passage in which they encounter Christ and come to know him and love him as the centre of their lives. Missiologists might also study how existing programmes of Christian initiation fail to produce effective formation for mission in the lives of new members. Such research might be done at the interdenominational level so that the various Christian traditions benefit from it.

### 3.2.3 The Sponsor

During the time of the pre-catechumenate a special relationship begins to take shape between the inquirer and a person from the parish who has been named his/her sponsor. Since the tradition of the church is a living one the RCIA envisions no better way to pass on that tradition than through human relationships. This does not merely involve the task of passing on information, but rather assumes a living witness of personal faith (Hater 1990:66; Lewinski 1993:9). In order for this to be done in a very personal way the church appoints a sponsor for each inquirer. He or she relates personally to the inquirer as a personal representative of the parish community (Lewinski 1993:10; Morris 1989:49). Such a member of the parish accompanies each inquirer during his/her initiation journey. The sponsor becomes a mentor for the person interested in becoming a Catholic Christian (Lewinski 1993:11). This dimension of the RCIA process bespeaks the church's vision of the RCIA as something more than an educational programme. The

bishops of the Second Vatican Council articulated this same idea in the document on the church's missionary activity:

The catechumenate is not a mere expounding of doctrines and precepts, but a training period for the whole of Christian life. It is an apprenticeship of appropriate length, during which disciples are joined to Christ their Teacher (AG 14).

Originally, sponsorship was exercised spontaneously by members of the faith community (Dunning 1981:63; Villaça & Dujarier 1981:252). In the early church this kind of person-to-person evangelisation was seen as an essential part of what it meant to be a Christian (cf. 2.2.2). The witness of these members of the community helped to bring people to faith through the grace of the Holy Spirit (Villaça & Dujarier 1981:253). Theodore of Mopsuestia likened the sponsor to a guide who would lead a stranger through an unknown city so that he/she could become familiar with the people and customs of that place (Villaça & Dujarier 1981:253). The sponsor needs to have a close relationship with the inquirer so that he/she can give testimony before the inquirer is accepted into the Order of Catechumens (Villaça & Dujarier 1981:254). The RCIA speaks of the sponsor in this way:

A sponsor accompanies any candidate<sup>6</sup> seeking admission as a catechumen. Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidates' moral character, faith, and intention (RCIA 10).

If the above text is to be translated into reality then sponsors themselves need some formation so that they understand what it means to be a sponsor. Different authors have described the role of the sponsor in various terms, here I will simply list some of the main qualities of those who are asked to be sponsors.

Sponsors are primarily mentors and companions (Lewinski 1993:10-11). Since they are to be a support, witness, and guide for the candidates in their Christian apprenticeship (AG 14) they must be people who are able to form

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<sup>6</sup> The rite uses the word candidate because the identity of the person seeking to become a Catholic Christian is given various names: in the precatechumenate he/she is called an inquirer; in the catechumenate, a catechumen; during the time of illumination, the elect; and after celebrating the sacraments of initiation, a neophyte or newly initiated.

relationships. If there is no contact with the candidate there will no opportunity to be a support, witness and guide. This most often happens informally so the sponsor will need to be in frequent contact with the candidate. Sellmer (1988:34) describes the sponsor as the "Ministry of Being a Loving Friend."

A sponsor must be someone who can listen. Unlike the catechist, who fulfils a teaching function, the sponsor must show concern by raising questions which will help to free candidates to share. This will happen only if the candidate perceives a listening attitude in the sponsor. Developing the habit of good and attentive listening may not come easily to all. It requires a high degree of selflessness:

Good listeners put themselves completely in the presence of the speaker, giving the speaker their undivided attention. They are not preoccupied with getting a response ready while they are supposed to be listening. They not only hear the speaker's words, but they also try to understand what the speaker wants to communicate through those words (Lewinski 1993:16).

This kind of listening conveys respect for the candidate's life journey (Morris 1989:56) and builds that relationship of trust. Respect is closely allied to the ability to listen.

Sponsors need to manifest a sincere respect for the candidate's cultural and religious background. People who are interested in becoming members of the Catholic Church come with their personal histories. This sense of respect extends to the person's ethnic background and cultural heritage, values and beliefs (Lewinski 1993:18). The sponsor must also move beyond respect to understand the process of change going on within the inquirer. Change always comes slowly whether it is cultural or personal (Luzbetak 1988:300). In the context of the RCIA change is the outward sign of conversion. The sponsor needs to appreciate the process through which the inquirer is going. His/her world view and dispositions are being challenged and he/she is trying to readjust his/her inner rhythms to a nascent form of his/her Catholic identity (Kelleher 1988:18).

The sponsor will need to be someone who can deal sensitively with differences and not be threatened. In this area Morris offers some helpful insights in dealing with personal experience. He noted that there are two levels of

experience: the first is the level of the sensory and at this level things and people are experienced *as they are* (Morris 1989:61). He described the second, deeper level in this way:

One shifts to move behind the sensory to possible meanings of the interaction...The depth dimension of human experience breaks open to a new level of awareness; it is a disclosure situation. Because of it, one enlarges his or her basic world vision or horizon. New levels of meaning emerge that are interpreted from a variety of perspectives (Morris 1989:61).

The sponsor will need to be someone who can appreciate this deeper level of the meaning of human experience if he/she is going to be able to respond to the candidate in a way that is respectful and even challenging if need be.

Morris has also pointed out that these depth experiences can open a person to the religious dimension of that very experience. He wrote:

The religious dimension...is a particular way of viewing these depth experiences that opens one up to seeing within these moments the mystery we call God. There is a recognition of an invitation to a new relationship with the holy. That experience of God is then allowed to come to stand within the community's tradition for verification (Morris 1989:61).

In order for the religious experience of a candidate to be appreciated by the sponsor he/she needs to be in touch with his/her own religious experience (Barry 1988b:10). The sponsor would benefit from personal spiritual direction so that he/she understands the various ways in which people grow in their relationships with Christ. The sponsor would also need to become aware of the workings of grace within himself/herself so that in probing the meaning of his/her religious experience he/she will discover some classical patterns of growth in faith.<sup>7</sup> This will help the sponsor to be respectful of the candidate's experience even if it is different from his/hers. One of the tasks of the sponsor is not only to appreciate the candidate's religious experience, but facilitate his/her ability to articulate the meaning of that experience and bring that experience into dialogue with Catholic tradition (Morris 1989:62).

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<sup>7</sup> For an excellent contemporary study of religious experience cf. Johnston (1995:192-297).

Sponsors need to be dependable and available to the catechumen. Morris recommends that the sponsor meet with the candidate to reflect on and talk about the candidate's faith development at least once a week (Morris 1989:50). Lewinski gives no definite guideline, he simply proposes that the candidate and the sponsor are in frequent contact (Lewinski 1993:23). Further, Lewinski points out that the sponsor should facilitate an ever-widening circle of contacts with people in the parish for the candidate (Lewinski 1993:24).

Perhaps one of the most important qualities of a sponsor is that he/she be prayerful (Lewinski 1993:13). Sponsors who attend to their own spiritual development are likely to have the best understanding of the spiritual development of others (Wilde 1988:46). Prayer, both personal and communal, deepens faith and helps to strengthen one's relationship with God (Barry 1988a:18-19). Lewinski commends the use of the Sunday scriptures and the psalms for prayer:

The scriptures are a firm foundation for prayer. Take just a few lines from scripture, and spend time in silence reflecting upon the message, and then allow a prayer to flow freely from your heart (Lewinski 1993:14).

The role of the sponsor is intrinsic to the whole initiation process. The relationship that he/she develops with a particular candidate can have a great impact on the process of faith development. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to represent the parish in this way (Morris 1989:49). The sponsor will guide the candidate through the initiation into full membership in the church. This ministry is at the very heart of the church's mission for in the oft quoted text of Tertullian, "Christians are made, not born."

### 3.2.4 The Catechist

The other person who plays a significant role in the initiation process is the catechist.<sup>8</sup> This role varies in each of the stages of the initiation process. Here I will simply comment on the role of the catechist during the pre-catechumenate. De Villers offers this insight into this ministry:

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. (Hirmer 1986:8). In the South African adaptation of the RCIA, Our Journey Together, the term catechist is not used. Hirmer uses the term "animator." In the next chapter we shall discuss some of the ramifications of this change (cf. 4.1.2).

During the period of the precatechumenate, when inquirers come with many questions about Catholic practices and beliefs, the catechist for initiation is first and foremost a person of hospitality (De Villers 1994:4-5).

De Villers' view of the role of the catechist during the precatechumenate reflects the general tone of this stage. This is a time of welcoming and of sharing aspects of the life of the church in an informal way.

Furthermore, De Villers shares the opinion of Dunning and Morris that during this time catechesis takes the form of storytelling, especially those prompted by the questions of the inquirers.

This catechist shares faith by telling and retelling his or her own story of God's loving presence as expressed within the Catholic Christian tradition as well as in the everyday encounters with the "mystery" that is God (De Villers 1994:5).

Telling the community's story requires that the catechist must cherish that story. He/she must be able to interpret that tradition, as kept alive by the community, from the faith perspective. This does not imply that the catechist ignores the shadow side of history, but only that one remembers those shadows in the light of the whole tradition. Warren has offered this perceptive insight:

The catechist who forgets the lived tradition has ceased to be part of the pilgrimage of the community and no longer dwells in its memories and celebrations. Once the catechist has moved from anamnesis, the memories remembered because they are cherished, to memorization, the facts that are drilled in but will never be cherished, the catechist has moved from being an enlivener to being a doctrinal manager (Warren 1989a:51).

This is a danger at every stage of the initiation process, if the catechumenate team members see initiation in terms of transmitting doctrinal information to the inquirers or catechumens. The etymological roots of *catechesis* and *catechist* are in the Greek word, *katechein*: *kata*, meaning *down* and *echein*, *to sound* (Dunning 1993b:29). The catechist then, is one who resounds or re-echoes the tradition of the church to those who are seeking membership in the community. The catechist is much more than an animator. He/she is a "wisdom figure" in the community;

one who is able to hand on in love the faith of the community (CT= Catechesi Tradendae 23).

This presupposes that the community has interiorised its own tradition and celebrates that tradition in the liturgy. If it loses its religious centre it runs the risk of atrophying. Warren cautioned:

Cut off from its own story and living ritual, the community finds that the only resources left to itself in its fragmented condition are the resources of abstraction and logical thought, enforced by the catechist. At such a juncture there is a danger that the community is actually disguising its loss of its inner life by continuing to impose...an account of that life, but not now in the mode of festivity but of its opposite, the mode of compulsion. A related danger here is that the community, with the catechist as its proxy, can move entirely from celebrative, festive renderings of its tradition to textual ones (Warren 1989a:51-52)

These convincingly put observations bespeak the intrinsic relationship between ritual and teaching. One is reminded of Jungmann's (1959:180) now famous dictum: "The most effective form of preaching the faith is the celebration of a feast." Liturgy and mission are linked in celebration for this is how it embodies and re-echoes the faith. Catechesis is an ecclesial action which leads individuals and the community on the way of continual conversion.

Since the inquirers generally come from a variety of backgrounds (Lewinski 1983:14) they each have their own questions about Catholic life which are often dependent upon how they came into contact with the Catholic Church (Lewinski 1993:5) and how they experienced a particular embodiment of Catholic life. In the face of such diversity the catechist, during the precatechumenate, needs to be a person who can listen without judgement and encourage the open-ended nature of the inquiry process (De Villers 1994:5). His/her response to this diversity will either encourage inquirers to ask questions and explore the faith or it may extinguish the first stirrings of faith. Much depends on the catechist's understanding of evangelisation.

Within the RCIA the assembly as a whole, the sponsor and the catechist are all engaged in Christian mission. Mission has been described as a "complex of

activities aimed at the realisation of the reign of God in history" (Botha et al 1994:21). Those involved in the formation of the inquirers are indeed engaged in such complex activities that are meant to prod the inquirers on in their journey of conversion. The sponsors accompany the inquirers on this journey and help them to negotiate the unfamiliar terrain of Catholic life. The catechists serve as educators in the faith for the inquirers as they gradually confront themselves and their culture and begin to experience life within the Catholic community of faith. Luzbetak believes that:

The locus of culture change is the individual *mind*. When culture changes, it is the set of ideas that individuals share with one another that changes. Because the commission given the Church is to "make disciples" of all nations, the Church's task is that of an educator: its task is to bring about a change in the mind and heart of "disciples." It is the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) that must be adopted. To be effective, the approach employed by church works in bringing about any change, religious, or socio-economic, must be aimed at the *mind and heart* of the people (Luzbetak 1988:301).

Catechists work for cultural change as they help to inform the conversion of individuals in the church. AG 17 makes reference to the special and irreplaceable contribution to the propagation of the faith and of the church. Catechists, like the assembly, play a role in the ecclesial formation of those to whom they minister. At the precatechumenate stage they prepare materials adequate to the faith development of the inquirers, helping them to come to a decision about following Christ within the Catholic Church. They sow the seed of the word of God hoping that it will yield a rich harvest in the lives of the inquirers.

### 3.3 A Time of Evangelisation

Evangelisation during the precatechumenate takes the form of storytelling. Within a group where there are trusting relationships the inquirer can be free to share his/her personal story. Morris has noted that:

When we want to share something of ourselves, when we want to understand someone, when we want to include others, we

begin to tell and listen to stories. Storytelling is a language of self-disclosure (Morris 1989:56).

The presumption is that God has been working throughout the person's religious journey. During the precatechumenate he/she is helped to raise ultimate questions about their stories so that they come to see God's presence in their lives (Dunning 1981:50). This can happen in what I have referred to above as shared praxis (cf. 3.1). In meetings of the inquirer and his/her sponsor or in groups with other inquirers and their sponsors stories and questions are raised to lead people to faith in the living God (Dunning 1981:50). These are not therapy or "rap" sessions, but times of discovery and rediscovery of God and the true meaning of life (Morris 1989:56-57). Gradually the inquirers are introduced to the myths which serve as the foundation of the Catholic community's faith life. They learn that to be in touch with the myth of the community is to be in touch with the mind and heart of a people (Luzbetak 1988:267). The whole initiation process is meant to lead people not only to knowledge of the central myth of Christianity, the paschal mystery of Christ, but to participation in this mystery through ritual.

### 3.3.1 The Story Method

Evangelisation develops during the precatechumenate by helping the inquirer to relate his/ her personal story to the stories of persons of faith in the scriptures. Dunning contends that the filter through which all stories must ultimately pass is the paschal mystery. The fourth article of the RCIA supports Dunning's claim because it states that the whole initiation process must lead people to reflect on the paschal mystery (RCIA 4). He summarised evangelisation during the precatechumenate in this way:

Therefore, the hallmark of this period is the dialogue between the inquirers' stories and the most moving stories of dying and rising, exodus, and journey in the Old and New Testament. The Good News is that God's presence and love carried Abraham, Moses, and Israel through slavery to freedom and carried Jesus through death to life (Dunning 1981:51).

Dunning then raises the central question of the precatechumenate: "Does that same Good News hold true for me" (Dunning 1981:51)? This question leads the inquirer to view his/her own story in the light of the stories of biblical persons, but also the stories of men and women down through the centuries (Morris 1989:57). This process helps the inquirer to recognise the stirrings of God in his/her own life (Morris 1989:57). Evangelisation during the precatechumenate is sensitive to the needs of the inquirers, but also is an invitation to accept the good news of God's love (Hater 1990:14). The church continues Jesus' mission of evangelisation (Gigliani 1992:5) by reaching out to the inquirers, listening to their concerns and questions, but always leading them to reflect on these in the light of Christ. Searle has observed that the inquirer is helped to surrender to God in faith as the community shares with him/her the word of God:

The community's word of faith does not deny or ignore his experience, but helps him to interpret it as a call to conversion, a call to surrender to the God who leads him in his life: a pillar of obscurity to his waking mind, but a pillar of fire in the darkness of his unknowing (Searle 1980b:53).

The community's word of faith is its foundational myth. It is myth that informs all of the church's life and liturgy. Myth provides a paradigmatic model for the life of the community. It does this by continually making the community aware of its origins. Within the context of ritual:

It is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated the myths, that *establishes* the world as a reality. Every myth shows how a reality came into existence...To tell how things came into existence is to explain them and at the same time indirectly to answer another question: *Why* did they come into existence (Eliade 1958:97)?

As the church repeats these myths the paradigms of Christianity become accessible to the inquirer. Eliade (1958:99) maintained that in this repetition two things happen: 1) persons remain in relationship to the sacred, and hence in reality; and 2) they work for the sanctification of the world. The whole cosmos continues to be transfused with divine life. This happens gradually as persons commit themselves to a process whereby their lives are shaped by the myths of the community of faith.

This is evident in the lives of the saints whose stories are also shared with the inquirers. The saints are persons whose world views were shaped by their relationship with Christ and informed by the central myths of the Christian community. They were able to exert an influence over the societies in which they lived because they themselves had undergone a transformation through conversion to Christ.

Since conversion to Christ will be embodied in the Catholic community stories of the saints and other men and women who lived lives of outstanding holiness should also be brought to the attention of the inquirers (Dunning 1981:51). Dunning suggests that the parish neophytes<sup>9</sup> might share their experiences with the inquirers. This shared praxis will enable the inquirer to begin to name his/her own experiences of God (Morris 1989:57). This in turn will help to clarify the issue of conversion to Christ who is the centre of evangelisation.

Evangelization will always contain -- as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism -- a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy (EN 27).

The goal of the precatechumenate is clear. It aims at facilitating in the inquirers an awareness of God's call in their lives. In this respect the Latin American evangelical Protestant theologian, Costas, has made two observations about evangelisation which are especially applicable at this stage in the initiation process. I shall look at them in the next section.

### 3.3.2 The Context for Evangelisation

Reflecting what might be regarded as an ecumenical consensus, Costas defines evangelisation as a witness that takes place within a social, political, historical and economic context (Costas 1989:21). Since humanity does not exist in the abstract this contextual dimension must be taken into consideration (RM 43). The RCIA recognises this fact and makes provision for adaptation by local conferences of bishops (RCIA GI 30). It is the local church that is responsible for

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<sup>9</sup> Neophytes are those people who have been initiated into the Catholic Church at the most recent Easter Vigil celebration on Holy Saturday night. Since they would have just completed the initiation process they would have relevant experiences to share with inquirers.

handing on the faith received from the apostles (RCIA GI 7). People from within a specific context are the agents of evangelisation. They are able to use the local language, customs and symbols to convey the message of Christ (Luzbetak 1988:240). Kavanagh has summarised well the local church's role in evangelisation at this stage of the initiation process:

By living well its own life of faith, the local church has not only attracted those of open hearts to itself: it has also taken on obligations to such persons as well. In this initial and preformal dialectic between the inquirer and the local church a certain incipient but real communion with God and Christ in the Spirit has already been born. The solid theological reality of this communion, however potential and incipient it may yet be, stamps what follow with the mark of necessity rather than of vaguely recommended convenience (Kavanagh 1978:129).

In the environment that is created during the precatechumenate the local church gives witness and the fruitfulness of that witness shows itself in the life of the inquirer and his/her relationship with the Lord.

The second observation that Costas made about evangelisation is that it involves persons who experience the liberating quality of God's love manifested in the person of Christ (Costas 1989:23). This sums up the goal of the precatechumenate. Sponsors, catechists, members of the catechumenate team seek to assist the inquirers to name their experience of God and as a result they find that indeed, the Good News is meant for them. This is essential for as Costas has rightly observed:

God who has spoken in Jesus Christ addresses each and every human being in his or her time and space. The gospel is not a generic message, although it has a universal and social dimension. It is a personal word from God for all and for each human being (Costas 1989:24).

Evangelisation seeks to initiate people ever more deeply into the mystery of Christ and his love (Hater 1990:15), but God's love is not "cheap grace." It is demanding and calls for conversion. As the precatechumenate progresses the grace of initial conversion should become more and more obvious (Lewinski 1983:15). This faith conversion begins to manifest itself:

As a concrete commitment of one's soul and body to the society of those who know Jesus Christ and him alone to be "the way, the truth, and the life" (Kavanagh 1978:129).

This commitment to Christ takes place in a concrete set of relationships in the local church, but it stretches beyond the local church to the whole Roman Catholic community. The parameters of one's commitment to Christ have their starting point in the church, but extend outwards to all people to prepare the way for the full manifestation of the reign of God. This initial grace of conversion embodies the definition that Paul VI expressed in EN for evangelisation:

Carrying forth of the good news to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of men and renew the human race...It is the aim of evangelization, therefore, to effect this interior transformation. In a word, the church may be truly said to evangelize when, solely in virtue of that news which she proclaims, she seeks to convert both the individual consciences of men and their collective conscience, all the activities in which they are engaged and, finally, their lives and the whole environment which surrounds them (EN 18).

Paul VI articulated an understanding of evangelisation that is at once concerned about the interior life of persons, and is at the same time contextual. As already pointed out above (cf. 1.4.1.2) evangelisation is an essential function of the church which aims at leading people to experiencing deeper life in Christ. For this reason RM states:

The proclamation of the word of God has *Christian conversion* as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith...Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple (RM 46).

At some point in the precatechumenate, be it months or years (De Villers 1994:5), the inquirer is moved to respond to the call of Christ. When that happens the catechumenate team, the catechist and the sponsor offer themselves as companions on the journey of conversion. The inquirers become increasingly dissatisfied with their lives, their relationships and sense that a crisis is looming (Searle 1980b:38).

This is an indication that the call to conversion has been issued. The challenge of responding in faith is yet to be made.

### 3.4 The Call to Conversion

The word *conversion* has fallen on hard times. Stories of missionary efforts to convert people in distant lands and of diverse tribes are an unfortunate reality in the history of Christian mission. Okure, reflecting on past missionary efforts in Africa, has noted that in the past missionaries did not think in terms of initiation, but rather of conversion.

When the early missionaries first came to Africa, their aim was "to convert" the Africans, summarily described as "pagans." From the vocabulary used, conversion was something done *to* the people, not something that the people were led to undertake through their personal contact with the proclamation of the Gospel as was the case in the NT era, or which God did to them (Okure 1993:119).

Further in her article Okure (1993) gave a cogent assessment of the focus of past missionary activity. Her stinging observations disclose the obvious Eurocentric and dualist tenets of missionary thinking and work which are still operative today:

That activity which went with conversion centered on the pastoral agent or the missionary is still evident even today in the use of such phrases as "to make converts" or "to save souls" (Okure 1993:119).

Despite the misconceptions of mission and conversion which informed missionary activity in the past (perhaps even today), conversion is an essential part of the Christian journey (Braxton 1984:110-111). In this section I will examine conversion in the context of the initiation process. I concur with Jackson's (1991) understanding of conversion within the RCIA because of its holistic scope and because it contains all the basic elements of a definition of conversion that reflects the dynamics of the RCIA (cf. 1.4.1.3). Now I want to utilise the views of other authors to demonstrate that the RCIA embodies such a holistic understanding of conversion and corrects some of the past misunderstandings of conversion.

The precatechumenate is a time for assessing where each inquirer is in his/her personal journey (Searle 1990a:8). Part of that assessment will lead to an honest appraisal by the inquirer himself/herself and the catechumenate team of the action of God in each one's life. Each person who is working with inquirers must be sensitive to what is being left behind, the present direction, desires for the future and evidence of any resistance (Searle 1990a:8). Searle has made a helpful distinction for our discussion:

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a ritualization of initiation rather than of conversion. The distinction is important: The Church's role is to initiate rather than to convert. While initiation will have a role in enabling the convert to recognize what is at stake, to find language in which to express it and way in which to live out, initiation is always the church's response to a conversion that is already in process...Ultimately, the purpose of evangelization/precatechumenate is less to prepare people to enter the catechumenate than to help them come to terms honestly with what is happening to them (Searle 1990:8).

Searle's distinction contrasts previous views of conversion with those operative in the RCIA. What is the understanding of conversion in the RCIA? How does it differ from past understandings of conversion? How does it affect relationships with those who are inquirers? Is there an appreciation of the cultural dimension to conversion in the RCIA? These are some of the questions that await exploration.

#### 3.4.1 Conversion in the RCIA

As noted above (cf. 3.3.2), Paul VI (EN 18) stated that the aim of evangelisation was to facilitate an interior transformation of the human person. This indicates the centrality of conversion in the Roman Catholic practice of evangelisation. In the RCIA we have what might be called a liturgical theology of conversion. It is an application of *lex orandi, lex credendi* principle (cf. 3.0; Duggan 1987:103). An analysis of the rite reveals six aspects of conversion operative in the prayers and actions (Duggan 1987:103-105).

#### *3.4.1.1 Conversion to Life with and in the Risen Christ*

This is more than intellectual knowledge about Christ. Conversion in this context is understood as a human response to the divine initiative (Duggan 1987:104; Lewinski 1983:15; Nissiotis 1967:264-265). A covenant is entered into which implies a mutual commitment on the part of the Lord and the individual person (Nissiotis 1967:261). It also suggests that conversion, like any relationship implies development and growth. It involves mutual self-revelation.

Identity formation begins to take place as the individual comes to understand the meaning of the paschal mystery of Christ. He/she chooses to believe that Christ's dying and rising is the pattern for Christian life. Since the paschal mystery is one of Christianity's root metaphors the church presents its living memory of it (Schreier 1985:55) and celebrates it in the liturgy. As the individual participates in the liturgical life of the church he/she is challenged to change and grow. The centrality of the paschal mystery in identity formation cannot be ignored because it is this pattern that continues to call the individual to ongoing conversion. Appropriation of this root metaphor on the part of the individual renders him/her capable of becoming a prophetic witness.

#### *3.4.1.2 The Christocentric Focus of Conversion*

It is to Christ that one turns in faith and love, none other (Duggan 1987:104). It is a participation in his paschal mystery:

The whole initiation must bear a markedly paschal character, since the initiation of the Christian is the first sacramental sharing in Christ's dying and rising and since, in addition, the period of purification and enlightenment ordinarily coincides with Lent and the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy with the Easter season (RCIA 8).

The sacramental sharing referred to in the above text is the closest that the rite comes to giving an actual definition of conversion (Duggan 1987:104). The rite names the fundamental pattern of the experience of conversion as the dying and rising of Jesus.

The celebration of the rites takes place within the movement of the liturgical year. The liturgical year is the context in which the world view (= myth)

is presented. From the Advent season which begins the liturgical year until the Feast of Christ the King at the close of the liturgical year, the church celebrates the mystery of Christ as revealed in the scripture readings for each Sunday and the seasons and feasts (Searle 1987b:16-17). The seasons of Lent and Easter are especially appropriate because the lectionary readings support the experience of the catechumens. During the entire initiation process, but especially during the Lenten season, the members of the assembly support the conversion process of the catechumens by desiring to be renewed in their own conversion (RCIA 4).

#### *3.4.1.3 Conversion as a Sacramental Experience*

The Christian faith is incarnational. Interior change needs to be embodied. Interior transformation needs external support; new patterns of behaviour and new attitudes need to be sustained through interaction with people who are also committed to living this new way of life (Searle 1990a:8). Conversion is also sacramental in the sense that within the RCIA it is celebrated through liturgical rituals. These rites effect what they signify (Duggan 1987:104). They are constitutive of the developing conversion and support the inquirer's (catechumen's) response to the Lord.

#### *3.4.1.4 Conversion in the RCIA as a Communal Process*

Christ to whom the inquirer turns is found in his body (Lewinski 1983:18). The call to conversion as experienced within the Roman Catholic community is not just the recognition of Jesus as my personal Saviour. It is "an encounter with the living Christ incarnate in the Church of every age" (Duggan 1978:104). The newcomer is not alone on his/her journey of conversion. He/she is supported by the whole community of the baptised. Boundaries are reorganised as consciousness of one's new identity is taking shape (Schreiter 1985:72). The inquirer is no longer an outsider, but neither is he/she admitted to full membership and therefore participation in the eucharistic liturgy. The inquirer then also begins to experience the "betwixt and between" sense of liminality. This boundary will be crossed at the time of initiation. The role of the community in supporting the work of the Holy Spirit in those seeking to join the church is clearly stated in the RCIA:

By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously (RCIA 4).

The participation of the assembly in the RCIA makes possible new bonds to be formed between the catechumens and the parish community. Conversion is mediated by sponsors and catechists as well as the whole community. The presence of the catechumens in a parish is a source of growth for the entire community as members of the parish share their own conversion journey with the newcomers (Duggan 1987:105).

#### *3.4.1.5 Conversion as a Spiritual Journey*

Conversion is that "interior transformation" which Paul VI wrote about in EN. Conversion is a process rather than a moment or an event:

The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place (RCIA 5).

The RCIA recognises that conversion and all growth takes place over time. The Holy Spirit works in a diversity of ways when calling a person to deepening stages of faith. The rite understands conversion to be a lifelong process. In the sense of this journey the church is very clearly a pilgrim church (AG 2). This journey does not conclude with the celebration of the sacraments of initiation (Duggan 1987:105), but only finds strength in the union with Christ and the church which these sacraments bring. The journey continues:

Conversion is not a once-for-all action. Continual growth and conversion mark the entire life of the Christian...The openness which is the fundamental attitude of the Christian serves as the basis for continual growth and development. A continual openness means that the Christian can never be content with what he now does (Curran 1978:237).

### 3.4.1.6 *Conversion implies the Transformation of the Whole Person*

Conversion is the transformation of the individual person in his or her world. Through this process one begins to perceive the world differently (McBrien 1981:9). Though our concern here is conversion to faith in Christ we recognise that in this conversion of faith there are other dimensions. Gelpi (1993a:17-18) lists five different types of conversions: affective, religious, intellectual, moral, and sociopolitical. These five types of conversions are reminders that in identity formation every aspect of a person's life is challenged, reoriented, transformed. This is a reminder of the fact that every aspect of the human person is called to conversion. The human person is addressed holistically in the RCIA. This is borne out in the fact that the initiation process is not merely information oriented, but transformative in nature (Costas 1989:112).

### 3.4.2 **The Dimensions of Conversion**

It is abundantly clear that conversion is multi-faceted. It happens in a unique way in each person's life. Despite this fact, there are some common dimensions of conversion. Gelpi (1993a) has pointed out five of them. He expanded Longeran's (1971:238) initial three types of conversion: intellectual, moral and religious to include the affective and the sociopolitical and has demonstrated their interplay.

The five forms of conversion all resemble one another in that in each of them the convert passes from irresponsible to responsible conduct (Gelpi 1993a:27).

Further Gelpi notes that primary and central dynamic of Christian conversion is that of repentance (Gelpi 1993a:196). In this act of repentance the candidate opens himself/herself to healing of any fear, guilt or resentment. They become taken up with the beauty, goodness and compassion of God. Conversion is clearly a developmental process. It is a transforming experience which leads us to see ourselves, others and our world differently (Braxton 1984:108-109). Hoge, referring to his sociological study of converts, has pointed out that:

Early on in this sociological survey we learned that converts vary widely in terms of the personal impact of the converting

experience. For some, converting from one denomination to another is seen almost like switching brands of merchandise or transferring schools...Other converts have an inner conversion almost as dramatic as the apostle Paul's Damascus Road experience (Hoge 1981:39-40).

Here our focus is on those people who have experienced an inner conversion, but even then there is an awareness that there is a wide spectrum of experiences (Searle 1990a:5).

Before describing the five basic types of conversion using the insights of Lonergan and Gelpi it would be helpful to examine four aspects of conversion that have been named by Searle (1990a:5-8): change, response to change, surrender and encounter and ascent.

### *3.4.2.1 Four Aspects of Conversion*

#### *3.4.2.1.1 Change*

By change Searle means that one experiences alterations to one's world, relationships, and one's self. These changes, Searle (1990a:5) are not chosen, but are undergone. One lives with a sense of loss and a sense that the very core of one's being is being altered. Change is an invitation to transformation, but the transformation is dependent upon the response that is made by the individual.

#### *3.4.2.1.2 Response to Change*

Searle, using St. Augustine as an example, has pointed out that:

A conversion like St. Augustine's, lasting many years, is the story of a succession of experiments in self-preservation before the defenses and the false images finally crumble and the "restless heart" find its true home (Searle 1990a:6).

Concern for self-preservation inhibits one's ability to respond to the call to conversion, when one realises that this is an invitation to personal transformation. In genuine conversion the person identifies correctly the summons to live, think and act differently. There is a profound experience of shifting personal and cultural boundaries as one's old world view seems sharply out of focus while a new vision is yet taking shape. The ethos that is moulded by one's world view also is in flux.

Dispositions and attitudes which were once so familiar now seem strange and out of place. One's identity is being changed.<sup>10</sup>

#### 3.4.2.1.3 Surrender and Encounter

In the conversion process one has a distinct sense that the fundamental myths that have sustained one's identity are crumbling (Eliade 1958:211). They cannot support the changing sense of self that one is experiencing. The person wants union with God, but is fearful of losing himself/herself (Searle 1990a:6). It is too terrifying to imagine surrendering oneself to One who is so utterly Other so that conversion ultimately must be experienced as a pure gift.

The convert is one who is converted. Conversion is described in retrospect as something that happens to one -- either suddenly or over a long period -- rather than something achieved by oneself (Searle 1990a:7).

#### 3.4.2.1.4 Ascent

Searle used this term to refer to the consequences of one's conversion as they are integrated into and lived out in a person's life. He explained:

Now the convert begins to live out his or her conversion, acting upon the newly received affirmation that one's existence is important and that one's life has meaning...One's living situation may be much as it always was, but it is the new self, with its new perspectives, its freedom from old delusions, that makes the difference (Searle 1990a:7).

The word "ascent" is common in Roman Catholic mystical theology. Searle's use of it here suggests that he is applying the same sense of striving in faith out of love with the deliberate intention of doing all out of love.<sup>11</sup> The convert will need to be supported in his/her efforts to live out of his/her conversion experience. If the convert does not experience such support the conversion experience can fade and die. Searle noted that:

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<sup>10</sup> What is presented here and throughout my thesis is what the RCIA intends. When implemented at the parish level what is intended is not necessarily what happens. Cf. Crosby (1991:177-196); Whitehead & Whitehead (1982:33-61); and Schreier (1985:144-158).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Johnston (1995:201-207) for a thorough treatment of the *via purgativa* (purgative way) in mystical theology.

Inner transformation needs external support; inner change calls for outer changes; new habits of mind and behavior must be sustained through interaction with people who live the new way. The new "self" seeks embodiment in a new "world," particularly in a world of new relationships. With them the subjective experience will fade into forgetfulness or appear increasingly unreal (Searle 1990a:7-8).

These insights indicate that communal support is of great importance to the person who is trying to respond to the call to conversion. One's whole sense of identity is being transformed and with community support these changes might not be long-lasting.

Searle (1990a) considered these four elements common in any Christian conversion. Gelpi's (1993a) five types of conversion furnish more information for understanding the dynamics of conversion.

#### *3.4.2.2 Five Types of Conversion*

Christian conversion aims at the transformation of the person through faith in the person of Jesus (Gelpi 1993a:29). It is holistic because it further aims at addressing a person's motivation for his/her life choices and his/her way of living in the world.

##### *3.4.2.2.1 Affective Conversion*

Affective conversion is concerned with the healthy emotional development of a person. Ultimately this affectivity leads the individual to fall in love with God and his people (Duggan 1987:105). Before this can happen a person must undergo emotional self-confrontation. There must be a reordering of one's emotions to put them at the service of the kingdom so that falling in love with God and his people becomes a reality. Gelpi (1993a:35) has pointed out that affective conversion leads on to confront negative emotions that inhibit growth and development and has consequences for the other types of conversions.

Affective conversion animates intellectual conversion by inspiring the search for truth with gusto, with imaginative flexibility, and with playfulness. Affective conversion animates moral conversion by engendering a passionate love of virtue and a heartfelt appreciation for lives that incarnate it. Affective

conversion also purifies felt perceptions of reality from misleading projections from the past and thus frees the heart to judge the fitting moral response...Affective conversion animates religious conversion by sensitizing the heart to the vision of divine beauty incarnate. Affective conversion animates sociopolitical conversion by suffusing the pursuit of a just social order with reforming zeal, vision and hope (Gelpi 1993a:35-36).

In short, affective conversion brings life and warmth to the person converting. Christian conversion suffused with affectivity is capable of drawing people to Christ. It has the capacity to inspire and call forth courage in responding to the call to discipleship. Lonergan did not include this affective dimension in his analysis of conversion. The religious conversion is the key to understanding Lonergan's insights into conversion.

#### 3.4.2.2.2 Religious Conversion

Lonergan offered this definition of religious conversion:

Religious conversion is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts (Lonergan 1971:240).

Religious conversion is described by Lonergan as "being-in-love" and the ground of all self-transcendence (Lonergan 1971:241). Lonergan departs from his usual style of writing and says that: "When someone transcendent is my beloved, he is in my heart, real to me from within me" (Lonergan 1971:109). When one learns to love in this way he/she learns self-transcendence. Ultimately it is religious conversion that forms and informs all other types of conversion (Johnston 1995:113). This kind of love is a gift and this love becomes the motivation of our choices, concerns, relationships and it leads to truth (Lonergan 1971:242). It is this religious conversion that brings one to God and to true identity in him:

Indeed, whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, is, even unawares, being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity (GS 36).

More practically, religious conversion denotes a turning away from ignorance or even opposition to God, to belief in the historical revelation of God and an acceptance in faith of its consequences (Gelpi 1993a:17-18). In the RCIA this is evidenced in the grace of initial conversion. Gelpi cautions those working with inquirers not to underestimate how difficult this part of the process can be for them:

One should not, however, underestimate the claims that this first dynamic makes on the converts. It requires of them an initial repentance, in which they face and renounce in a preliminary way attitudes, beliefs, commitments and social entanglements that stand in the way of their consenting in faith to the God revealed in Jesus and in the divine Mother<sup>12</sup> whom he sends (Gelpi 1993a:196).

This is precisely why the RCIA provides for the support of the community as the inquirers move through the conversion process (RCIA 9.1). This is also the reason why the rite contains prayers and blessings for the newcomers to the community.

#### 3.4.2.2.3 Intellectual Conversion

Loneragan described intellectual conversion as:

A radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth<sup>13</sup> concerning reality, objectivity and human knowledge (Loneragan 1971:238).

Loneragan (1971:239) argued that only the critical realist can know the world as mediated by meaning. He maintained that:

He can do so only inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding, and judging is a process of self-transcendence (Loneragan 1971:239).

Self-transcendence is possible only for the one who has undergone an intellectual conversion. Johnston (1995:11-112) noted that Loneragan formulated three

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<sup>12</sup> Gelpi (1993a) refers to the Holy Spirit as the divine Mother.

<sup>13</sup> Loneragan used the word myth to mean a fallacy in the way of knowing. He wrote: Now this myth overlooks the distinction between the world of immediacy, say, the world of the infant and, on the other hand, the world mediated by meaning (Loneragan 1971:238).

principles for such self-transcendence: being attentive, intelligent and reasonable. These three lead one to intellectual conversion. Bacik wrote of the outcome of such a conversion:

Nonetheless, intellectual conversion can bring deep joy and quiet delight as we expand our horizons, sharpen our insights, and improve our judgments (Bacik 1989:34).

Intellectual or cognitive conversion calls a person from supine acquiescence in beliefs to a thoughtful and reasoned commitment to belief (Gelpi 1993a:17). In the context of this study the intellectual dimension of conversion also means a level of mastery and understanding of the church's teaching in which one's intellectual presuppositions about the church's teaching are challenged.. It implies an acquisition of new knowledge of scripture, the church's life, prayer, and tradition (Duggan 1987:105). Though secondary, these are the practical results of the grace of intellectual conversion. Intellectual conversion leads one on a never ending quest for the truth which ultimately leads one to self-transcendence. Lonergan wrote:

...To discover the self-transcendence proper to the human process of coming to know, is to break often long-ingrained habits of thought and speech. It is to acquire the mastery in one's own house that is to be had only when one knows precisely what one is doing when one is knowing. It is a conversion, a new beginning, a fresh start. It opens the way to ever further clarifications and developments (Lonergan 1971:239-240).

A further development in the process of conversion is that one is called upon to examine one's motivation and seek integrity between what one knows and how one lives. Intellectual conversion informs moral conversion.

#### 3.4.2.2.4 Moral Conversion

Lonergan (1971:240) understood moral conversion to mean a change in "the criteria of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values." It is this capacity to make choices based on values that makes one's life authentic. Conn, commenting on Lonergan's understanding of moral conversion wrote:

Precisely in this developing drive toward authenticity lies the possibility of moral conversion. For, in Lonergan's view, it is within this long and gradual process of personal becoming and increasing autonomy that...the subjective effects of these personal acts accumulate as habits, tendencies and dispositions determining the concrete shape of our very selves (Com 1988:49).

Moral conversion entails turning from sin and the adoption of a specifically Christian ethic (Duggan 1987:105). The person turns from irresponsible choices to a way of life in which personal choices are measured against ethical norms and ideals (Gelpi 1993a:17). Johnston (1995:112) reminded us of Lonergan's guiding principle for moral conversion: be responsible. To be faithful to this principle leads one to act out of objective good. This is to act virtuously and morally. The need to examine one's motivation is an ongoing concern.

In the initiation process the prayers of exorcism and those for the Lenten scrutinies<sup>14</sup> strengthen the person against temptation and implore God to help them to make the right choices on the journey. One of the prayers in the rite for the second scrutiny reads:

Father of mercy,  
you led the man born blind  
to the kingdom of light  
through the gift of faith in your Son.

Free these elect<sup>15</sup>  
from the false values that surround and blind them.

Set them firmly in your truth,  
children of the light for ever.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen (RCIA 168).

The RCIA, moreover, is realistic about the struggle with sin and selfishness within a person. During the initiation process the catechumens are led to evaluate their lives and the choices they make in light of the teaching of Christ. Evidence of conversion shows itself in a movement away from selfishness and irresponsible

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<sup>14</sup> The scrutinies are celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. They are linked to the gospel used in the the Sunday liturgy. These will be explained in the fifth chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Once the catechumens are accepted by the bishop for the final stage of preparation for the sacraments of initiation they are called "the elect."

moral choices to ones made in the light of the teachings of Christ. As Lonergan (1971:240) pointed out: "Deciding is one thing, doing is another." Moral conversion must lead to action, to living differently, to making moral choices. This led Gelpi to distinguish sociopolitical conversion from moral conversion.

#### 3.4.2.2.5 Sociopolitical Conversion

Sociopolitical conversion develops progressively as the catechumens are exposed to the scriptures in the context of the liturgy. They become equipped for responsible stewardship toward the world (Ball 1988:90). As the scriptures are proclaimed week after week they challenge the catechumen to live justly and work for the reform of unjust social, economic and political structures (Gelpi 1993a:17). Moral conversion inspires sociopolitical conversion. Personal authenticity leads one to work to change situations of institutionalised violence and/or oppression. Sociopolitical conversion seeks systemic change.

Sociopolitical conversion commits one to the cause of dealing with the injustices perpetrated by large, impersonal institutions. (Gelpi 1993a:48).

Gelpi further maintains that sociopolitical conversion widens personal conversion by deprivatising it in two ways.

First of all, it actively dedicates the convert to some cause of universal moral import. Second, responsible political activism forces one to confront and identify with the Others, with persons and groups different from oneself whose very difference can pose a potential personal threat (Gelpi 1993a:49).

In light of South African history this type of conversion seems especially necessary if members of the church are going to see that working for justice and peace is an essential element of Christian life. For too long South Africans have been taught to see "the Others" as inferior, as incompatible, as people not worthy of human respect. Propaganda from the past governments has shaped personal awareness of injustice by creating a false value system and an erroneous understanding of human dignity. Gelpi observed:

...Until we have learned to identify and resist the ways in which unjust institutional structures shape our personal self-awareness, we cannot act with full responsibility even in our interpersonal dealings with one another...Only when we actively confront institutional corruption and injustice do we come to understand the extent to which they have consciously and unconsciously shaped and used us as individual person to tainted and exploitative ends. Only in dealing with the members of a less advantaged social class do we come to recognize our own classist conditioning..Only by dealing with the members of a different do we learn fully to confront our own racial prejudices. Only by facing the members of other nations we have wronged, can we transcend mindless nationalism (Gelpi 1993a:50-51).

Sociopolitical conversion has profound ramifications for identity formation and for mission. It has to do with world view, boundaries, ethos and myth. All these must be confronted by the gospel if there is to be real conversion. For too long in South Africa, this type of conversion has been ignored to the detriment of mission because divided church bodies have not questioned the basis for their division according to race.

The RCIA sees the search for justice and peace as apostolic activity. Initiation into the life of the church is not a turning away from the world, but rather living life in the world in a new way, in the spirit of Christ. In South Africa this necessarily entails confronting the injustices of the past, making restitution where possible and living different in the present so that reconciliation becomes a concrete possibility so that Christians live their baptismal commitments with integrity.

The instruction that the catechumens received during this period should be of a kind that while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ (RCIA 78).

The RCIA sees a concern for the world as being inspired by the kind of instruction offered to the catechumen. The kind of instruction that informs conversion leads the person to concern for the needs of the world. It is centrifugal in nature.

Conversion marks the birth of the movement out of a merely private existence into a public consciousness. Conversion is the beginning of active solidarity with the purposes of the kingdom of God in the world. No longer preoccupied with our private lives, we are engaged in a vocation for the world (Wallis 1981:9).

The vocation for the world is the Christian vocation. It presupposes a conversion to faith in Jesus Christ who became "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6) for the world. Each of the above types of conversion: the affective, intellectual, moral and sociopolitical are informed by religious conversion.

The grace of conversion as well as forms of support offered to the inquirer take place and are interpreted within a cultural context. This context cannot be ignored.

### 3.4.3 Conversion and Culture

Paul VI taught that evangelisation cannot take place in some superficial way, but rather must touch the very centre of life.

The gospel must impregnate the culture and the whole way of life of man, taking these words in the wisest and fullest... This work must always take the human person as its starting point, coming back to the interrelationship between persons and their relation with God (EN 20).

The above text is the very antithesis of what Okure described has happened in Africa:

It was understood that everything Africans had prior to the coming of Christianity was devilish, pagan and wicked, or totally opposed to the ways of Christianity; so they had to be given up. Hence the converts were made to reject wholesale the cultural heritage and way of life of their ancestors, at least in theory. Worse still they were made to hold these practices in contempt (Okure 1993:119).

Shorter concurs with Okure's assessment of the church's attitude toward African culture in colonial times:

In the colonial period Africans were made to feel ashamed of their culture. They were made to accept alien values and alien ways. They were completely passive. Their very being was conferred on them from outside (Shorter 1978:21).

This attitude is repudiated by contemporary church documents and especially by the RCIA which respects local customs and cultures (RCIA 33, 35, 39). In fact, AG 22 exhorts missionaries to be sensitive to the ways in which a culture's customs and traditions can contribute to the life of the church:

From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life (AG 22).

Even with this positive attitude toward culture there is still a need to be clear about the meaning of culture so that there can then be an understanding of its role in the conversion process. The insights of both anthropologists and missiologists can be helpful.

Most definitions of culture incorporate, but not without modification, E.B. Tylor's famous definition of culture which he defined as learned behaviour of a society (Luzbetak 1988:134).<sup>16</sup> Contemporary definitions are more dynamic and reflect the advances made in the social sciences toward understanding cultures.

Miranda articulated the following more dynamic definition of culture:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit or implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached value; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further actions (Miranda 1993:147).

This definition encompasses all the elements of a culture that would be of interest to most social scientists. It does not, though, include any mention of patterns of behaviour that reflect the culture's religious dimension.

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<sup>16</sup> For insights into Tylor's unilineal view of the evolution of culture cf. Ekwunife (1987:5-6).

Arbuckle has defined culture in terms of a process and does include the religious dimension:

Culture is not an entity, but is primarily a process that is persuasively at work, particularly in the unconscious of the group and individuals. It is a pattern of shared assumptions expressed in symbols, myths, and rituals that a group has invented, discovered or developed while coping with problems of external adaptation and internal cohesion...Finally, culture is not one aspect of life along with, for example, religious, political, and economic activity. It embraces all human activity (Arbuckle 1995:328-329).

This definition presents serious challenges to the church as it seeks more and more to be a world church. In the context of the RCIA it means that the representatives of the parish who minister to newcomers during the initiation process need to: 1) be able to appreciate the cultural background of the inquirer if he/she is not from the dominant culture (Shorter 1977:23); 2) exhibit sensitivity to cultural forms of expression of religious experience (Costas 1989:23); 3) invite the inquirer to express himself/herself through rituals and symbols (Okure 1993:121); and 4) be empathetic and prepared to learn from the inquirer's culture (Arbuckle 1995:329). The above definition, I think, complements the one I espoused that was formulated by Luzbetak (1988:74; cf. 1.4.2.1).

Another perspective is provided by the Orthodox missiologist, Yannoulatos who has included seven elements in his definition of culture as a conscious activity of humankind.

Roughly, these elements can be summed up as follows: (a) formation of a system of contact, of a code of understanding, that is of language; (b) solutions given to the very first need for humankind's survival, concerning shelter and maintenance, that is, development of an elementary technical skills and economics; (c) regulation of the living together, of the basic human unity, man-woman, for the perpetuation of the human species; (d) organization of a clan, race, nation, which means a regulation of social relations; (e) definition of what is good or bad, in other words, making social rules; (f) artistic expressions of the beliefs and problematics of the individual and of society; and (g) experience of the "Holy," of what is beyond everyday reality through a form of religious beliefs (Yannoulatos 1985:185).

It is Yannoulatos' inclusion of peoples' relationship to the "Holy" that is relevant for this study. This openness to the "Holy" is fundamental to the initiation process because it is a sign of growing faith. Braxton has insightfully pointed out that this openness is:

...Palpable realization of the religious dimension at the ground of all human experience and activity. Religious conversion is deeply embedded sense of the holy or the sacred. It is a tacit awareness of the absolute meaning, purpose and graciousness of one's own life and the entire universe...As we grow in this fundamental awareness, we gradually grasp the source of our experience of "holy mystery" as not some impersonal energy or blind force but as an intelligent, loving, even personal reality (Braxton 1984:111-112).

From the anthropological perspective Braxton's description of the religious conversion indicates a change in world view. As one senses the presence of the "Holy" one's questions about life and ultimate meaning deepen. These questions lead one to reappraise one's orientation toward the world and all of life (Luzbetak 1988:252). This awareness of the "Holy" and its accompanying change of world view within a person still does not constitute Christian conversion.

Braxton (1984:112) suggests that persons coming to faith in Christ are fundamentally trying to answer the biblical question which Jesus addressed to Simon Peter and the disciples: "Who do people say I am" (Mk. 8:28)? He wrote:

In Christian conversion we recognize in the life, ministry, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus the presence of the Father's Christ -- and thus in Christ you have... the sacrament of the encounter with God, Emmanuel, God with us (Braxton 1984:112).

In LG, the bishops at Vatican II stated that Christ was sent by the Father to be the Head of a new and universal people (LG 13). Does this idea imply some universal culture? I think not. I think rather, that it means that Christ is the bearer of salvation of all people and the church is the universal sacrament of that salvation. The church impregnates the gospel in every culture with respect and gratitude for every culture:

The Church everywhere effects her universality by accepting, uniting and exalting in the way that is properly hers, with motherly care, every real human value. At the same time, she strives in every clime and every historical situation to win for God each and every human person, in order to unite them with one another and with him in his truth and his love.

All individuals, all nations, cultures and civilizations have their own part to play and their own place in God's mysterious plan and in the universal history of salvation (SA=Slavorum Apostoli 19).

The above text reflects the vast change that the church's missionary approach has undergone. It is a concrete expression of the church's conviction that:

Culture, as an act and attainment of humankind created in the likeness of God, is not outside the rays of the divine energies; it is not unrelated to the breathing of the Spirit who controls all things, "visible and invisible" (Yannoulatos 1985:187).

From the vantage point of Christianity cultures are not merely human creations, but a gift of God. They bear testimony to the diversity of God's gifts to humanity. They develop best in relationship to God. This is the church's stance toward cultures.<sup>17</sup> Mistakes were and are made when individuals or groups of peoples do not share this perspective. Mistakes are made when evangelisers do not have an appreciation and respect for other cultures (Okure 1993:121). Mistakes are also made when conversion and faith are not given the opportunity to be expressed in cultural forms. These mistakes made in the past, and perhaps even in the present, point out even more clearly the real genius of the RCIA.

In the RCIA the assembly is the primary minister of evangelisation and initiation. The members of the assembly, as they live the gospel, transform the culture and impregnate it with the seeds of the gospel. Those members of the

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<sup>17</sup> The question of liturgical inculturation is a very serious one yet to be faced by the church in South Africa. The RCIA opens many possibilities for inculturation, but a process needs to be developed in order for it to become a reality in South Africa. Hirmer (1986) offered one adaptation of the RCIA, but it obscures the very genius of the rite because it ignores a catechesis based on the lectionary and instead provides catechetical discussion material. Hirmer's understanding of the RCIA is not clear. On page v of his book, *Our Journey Together* he poses the question: "How can we introduce OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER and the RCIA in a parish?" This question suggests that he sees the catechetical sessions of his book and the RCIA as two different things. Cf. Karecki (1990) for a study of liturgical inculturation in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg and a proposed plan for addressing the question of liturgical inculturation.

assembly who form the catechumenate team, hopefully, are formed in the vision of church inherent in the rite. The rite respects cultural diversity (e.g. RCIA 54). Those who minister to the inquirers and catechumens need to have that same respect. The church has numerous documents<sup>18</sup> which extol cultural diversity and the respect for cultural expressions of faith; the problem is that we who are the church have not appropriated them.

Further, the liturgical celebrations which are integral to the RCIA also allow for inculturation. Faith and culture both find expression in these celebrations. This makes for a liturgy that not only expresses faith, but also one that sustains people in their daily living of the gospel.

All people are meant to become members of the body of Christ (LG 13). They become members by walking the way of conversion. They are accompanied by those already on the journey who are willing share the story of Christ with those he is calling.

The central argument of this thesis is that the RCIA reflects the church's profound concern for mission and that if this rite is used well it forms Catholics with a keen sense of their missionary responsibility. During the precatechumenate this is evident in three ways.

First, the precatechumenate is only the first of several stages of the RCIA. This fact conveys the message that Christian life is a pilgrimage, a journey (Searle 1980b:35). It is a missionary journey and Christ is the first missionary, the one who evangelises. It is Christ who calls a person to join the church. In the storytelling method of catechesis inquirers are led to see how God has been on mission in their lives preparing them for this part of the journey. In a process of sharing and reflection inquirers begin to see that Catholic Christian life is about mission.

Secondly, from the beginning of the initiation process it becomes clear that the community act as the primary evangelisers (RCIA 9). God converts, the church initiates in a way that reflects the ongoing nature of authentic conversion. The community of the baptised gives witness to the inquirers of God's wonderful deeds and his constant fidelity in their lives (RCIA 9.1).

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. SC 37, 38; LG 3, 13; GS 58; AG 19, 22; EN 63; and CT 53.

Thirdly, by respecting cultural differences in the inquirers and their expressions of conversion and faith the faith community demonstrates the openness of the church toward other cultures. This makes for more authentic and effective mission. John Paul II advocated such openness in SA where he reflected on the missionary efforts of Saints Cyril and Methodius:

For this purpose they desired to become similar in every aspect to those to whom they were bringing the Gospel; they wished to become part of those peoples and to share their lot in everything (SA 9).

This kind of attitude reveals a stance of respect toward other peoples and cultures. Christianity then is not experienced as something foreign, but rather as the very heart of life and culture.

### 3.5 Summary

During the precatechumenate mission is concretely manifested in the initiation process and in the witness that is given by the catechumenate team. The precatechumenate aims at helping the inquirer to clarify how God is calling him/her to share in his life and mission. This does not imply that a person must negate his or her culture to become a Catholic Christian (AG 22). The church respects all cultures while at the same challenging anything in a culture that would compromise the gospel.

These three elements of formation for mission which find expression during the precatechumenate will be further developed in the subsequent chapters. They exist here in embryo form since the precatechumenate is not considered one of the formal stages in the RCIA. They are concerned mainly about the witness of the community and its effect on the inquirer.

In this chapter I described the initial stage of the initiation process and its constituent elements in the introductory section. In the second section we looked at the persons involved in this stage of the initiation process: the assembly, the inquirer, the sponsor and the catechist. I demonstrated how each one is called to cooperate in the ministry of initiation.

I also observed how the inquirer is already experiencing, at least in some initial way, a sense of liminality. Through the experience of separation and acquaintance with the fundamental myth of the Catholic community we saw how the inquirer's world view, ethos, dispositions and a sense of group boundaries begin to change, hence evidence of new identity formation as a Catholic becomes apparent.

In the third section I examined the method of evangelisation which is used during the precatechumenate. This method respects the individual and makes provisions for sharing of the Catholic community's story in the light of the story of Jesus. In this way it shows appreciation for the unique story of each individual while reflecting on each person's story in relationship to the call to be a disciple of Christ.

Conversion was the focus of the fourth section. Here I looked specifically at conversion within the context of the RCIA and the various dimensions of conversion. I made use of Lonergan's (1971) analysis of three types of conversion. These were augmented by the insights of Gelpi (1993a) and Johnston (1995) into the work of Lonergan. Then I considered the relationship between the gospel and culture and how this would find concrete expression in the RCIA. Although the RCIA is a rite of the universal church it needs to take cognisance of the cultures in which the church lives so that its rituals have meaning for the people celebrating them.

At some point during the precatechumenate people express their desire to join the Catholic Church. This leads them to make a request to become a catechumen. The catechumenate begins with the Rite of Acceptance as a Catechumen, the first of the formal stages of the initiation process as described in the RCIA. With the inquirer's acceptance as a catechumen he or she experiences the first phases of liminality. I now focus attention on the catechumenate and make use of the insights of cultural anthropologists and ritual theorists in an analysis of how the initiation process contributes to new identity formation.

## Chapter Four

### *The Catechumenate: An Experience of Liminality*

*Both catechumens and baptized receive continuing education in mystery. When we "gather" in Christ's name, we will have much to learn about God's vision for his creation and our participation in it. --Regis Duffy, OFM*

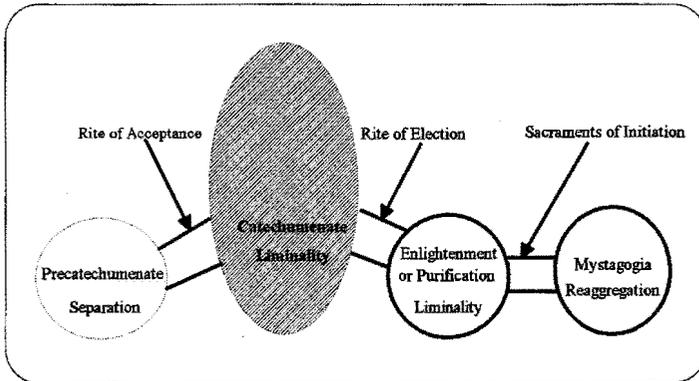


Figure 4 Four stages and three liturgical thresholds of the RCIA with the catechumenate highlighted as the focus of this chapter.

#### 4.0 The Purpose of the Chapter

During the precatechumenate, formation for mission is communicated primarily through the witness of the catechumenate team and the parish as a whole. In reaching out to the inquirers through the work of evangelisation and through a respect for the cultural diversity of individuals the community gives evidence of its commitment to mission. The precatechumenate marks the beginning of the initiation process and the shifting of boundaries for the inquirer as well as the community. Though not formally accepted as a catechumen the inquirer is no longer a "complete" outsider. He/she begins to share with members of the parish community his/her journey of coming to faith in Christ. The door to immense terrain that is both familiar and mysterious (Driver 1991:5) begins to open for the inquirer. It is familiar because no doubt an inquirer seeks to join the

Catholic community God is already working within his/her life. It is mysterious because no human being can fathom the plan of God for his/her life.

In making known his/her request to become an inquirer a person enters, at least in some small way, a state of liminality. There is no formal ritual to mark this decision and perhaps this is a weakness of the RCIA. If the insights of Geertz and other anthropologists are correct then some ritual should mark this change in status (Geertz 1973:380). Though it is true that there is no commitment on the part of inquirer to become a member of the church, a boundary has been crossed. A formal request has been made by the inquirer by which he/she formalises his/her interest in the Catholic Church.

Schreier (1985:44) named group boundaries and world view as dual notions which make up identity. When a person asks to be an inquirer he/she has crossed the boundary which saw him/her as an outsider to become an insider, though not a member. The process of inquiry will yield a change in world view through catechesis which in turn will help to fashion a changing sense of identity. Throughout the catechumenate these elements are deepened and enriched by catechesis that grows out of an experience of the liturgy and readings from the scriptures (Dooley 1988:10).

At the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance, which marks the formal beginning of the catechumenate, the inquirers' status again changes. They become catechumens and enter into a state of liminality. The catechumens are, as V. Turner observed, in a *betwixt and between* stage. Though they are no longer inquirers, they are still not full members of the Christian community. This is a difficult and often bewildering time for them. Sponsors and catechists will need to be attentive to the needs of the catechumens. Kathleen Hughes cautions:

However well educated or professionally competent, the catechumen will feel like a child needing to learn a new language and a new way of life, ignorant of the basics but sometimes not even knowing the right questions to ask. Chasms will open between the catechumen, the family and friends, yet new relationships will only gradually be formed (Hughes 1992:3).

Hughes' insights capture the essence of this stage of the catechumenate. The catechumens experience the very public and communal nature of their decision to respond to the call of conversion to Christ in the midst of a parish community. This can be a difficult transition since it is so public. They need the "wisdom of the elders" in the community to traverse this part of the journey with openness and courage as they respond in faith to God's call to conversion.

I begin this chapter with a description of the Rite of Acceptance. This rite signals the beginning of the catechumenate and a change in status from inquirer to catechumen. It is significant because it serves as a threshold over which the inquirer passes in order to become a catechumen and with the celebration of this rite he/she is ushered into a state of liminality. The whole of the catechumenate prolongs this sense of separation from patterns of behaviour and relating that are familiar and secure and leads to a sense of being part of the community of faith, but not yet fully belonging. I shall apply Turner's insights into rites of passage in order to better understand the meaning of liminality. The skills of navigating through this period of liminality continue to take root in the catechumen's life as he/she continues on his/her lifelong journey of conversion.

Next, I will consider the method of catechesis used during the catechumenate and how, with the RCIA, the lectionary acts as a sourcebook during the catechumen's journey of conversion. We shall examine the liturgical rites of this period to discover their potential for imbuing the catechumen, and indeed the whole parish community with a sense of mission.

After a consideration of the method of catechesis and the rites which are celebrated during this period of the catechumenate we will make some observations in terms of our analytical framework of identity formation with regard to boundaries and world view. We will also show how a commitment to mission means, at least in some sense, living in the betwixt and between state of liminality.

A person committed to mission lives in this world and at the same time is citizen of the kingdom of God. Hauerwas and Willimon have called the Christian who takes seriously his/her call to live as a sign of contradiction within the world a "resident alien" (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:12). To be on the cutting edge of the kingdom is to live in a state of liminality which is sustained, we would argue,

through regular, weekly participation in the liturgy of the church. The bonds of *communitas* are renewed so that the assembly is sent out on mission with a renewed vision of the reign of God. The catechumens experience this each week as they participate in the Mass until the liturgy of the word. They are formed by coming in contact with the community's myth through the proclamation of the scriptures within the liturgy. They also come in contact with *the Word*, Jesus Christ, who is present in the readings as they are proclaimed (SC 7). It is Christ who calls the catechumens and the whole assembly of believers to conversion and hence a new sense of identity.

From a sociological point of view Greeley, basing himself on Geertz, has explained how vision or world view is shaped by ritual:

The sacred symbol, then, represents a conviction about the inherent structure of reality. It explains that reality to us and tells us how we ought to live so as to be at harmony with reality. Whether the symbols be a credal proposition, a religious organization or liturgical ritual (a people's) world view is their picture of the way things, in sheer actuality, are, a concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order. Religious belief and ritual confront and mutually confirm one another; the ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the world view describes. The world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression (Greeley 1971:60).

From his perspective as a sociologist, Greeley has summarised the importance of world view and the power of ritual to shape a person's vision of life. This is in fact, how the initiation process works to shape a person's world view and hence his/her identity as a Christian. This will become evident as we examine the various stages of the initiation process beginning with the catechumenate.

The rituals of the RCIA will be analysed with the help of anthropologists Turner, Geertz and Firth and ritual theorists, Driver and Bell. Their insights will be of help in a reflection on identity formation in the process of Christian initiation.

#### 4.1 A Description of the Rite of Acceptance

The catechumenate begins with a liturgical ritual, the Rite of Acceptance. This rite is situated between the periods of inquiry and the catechumenate. Within the context of a ritual celebration catechumens begin to experience liminality in a very concrete way as they publicly state, before the community, their desire to continue their faith journey within the Roman Catholic community (Morris 1989:70) and hence, change their status from that of inquirers to catechumens. For at least a year, if the rite is taken seriously, the catechumens will live a liminal existence (Holmes 1973:389). They enter what V. Turner (1972a:391) calls an anti-structural state. By this he means that they have experiences that:

Represent a stripping and leveling of men (persons) before the transcendental. In liminal sacredness many of the relationships, values, norms, etc., which prevail in the domain of pragmatic structure are reversed, expunged, suspended, reinterpreted, or replaced by a wholly other set (Turner, V. 1972a:391).

This makes the experience of liminality frightening for some people because of the sense of separation that occurs and with it an accompanying sense of a loss of status (Turner, V. 1972a: 395). At this point in the initiation process the individual has been accepted by the community, but relationships are still new and there may be a sense of insecurity. Flanagan (1991:242) observed that in the context of religious ritual the loss of status which characterises the liminal state of rites of passage ushers one into a healthy, but nonetheless frightening sense of inferiority before God. V. Turner (1969:105) saw a mystical dimension in this stripping of a person's status before the transcendental. There is a new awareness of the limits of Ione's creaturehood before God. Liminality makes possible the breaking down of the usual status boundaries which exist in society and helps to create a sense of oneness with all humankind, a oneness that V. Turner named *communitas* (V. Turner 1969:96-97).

During this period the catechumen may experience a sense of estrangement or alienation from some of the elements of his/her culture which may be in conflict with those of the Gospel. This sense of alienation or estrangement is to be expected because as he/she becomes more in touch with the person of Jesus

through reflection on his life as presented in the gospels certain values and attitudes in every culture come into question. Though Christians are not completely alienated from their culture they will, at times, be in conflict with prevailing values of their culture and or society. This happens because the underlying root metaphors of a specific culture are being challenged by the Gospel. Shorter explained:

By inviting people to believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ that we proclaim, we are not intending to detach them from their culture or from the truths contained in the religion to which they adhered before and which are expressed in terms of their own culture. Moreover, by inviting them to believe in the Gospel we are also asking them to contribute to Christianity from the riches of their own religious and cultural traditions (Shorter 1988:99-100).

Luzbetak (1988:202-203) has pointed out that Christians are called to live in every culture and are challenged to give a prophetic witness by the way they live. As catechumens interiorise the root metaphor of Christian life, the paschal mystery, they may experience some internal conflict as they integrate their new experience.

We are saying that in a pluralistic society, Christian living will call for a very special kind of enculturation. Christians must be, so to speak, "bicultural" -- citizens of *two* cities, citizens of this world without compromising their primary citizenship that is not of this world. In cold anthropological terms, Christians form a distinct, uncompromising subsociety within a larger society -- a "little flock" (Lk. 12:32) and a tiny "mustard seed" (Mt. 13:31ff), a bit of yeast (Mt. 13:33) called to help transform the world rather than to be transformed by it (Luzbetak 1988:203).

As one journeys through the separation phase of the ritual process there will occur, according to V. Turner (1972a:393), a sense of "outsiderhood" because of the nature of this stage in the process:

Separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or the group from with an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from an established set of cultural conditions (a "state") (Turner, V. 1972a:393).

As the catechumen struggles to take this step in the initiation process ritual fuses his/her conception of order and his/her dispositions for action (Bell 1992:27). The ritual celebration of the Rite of Acceptance helps the catechumen to navigate his/her way through this passage.

Ritual helps individuals come to terms with what is happening in their lives by giving it a name and bringing it to symbolization. In a sense, a ritual acts like a fulcrum, first bringing what is already experienced to full public expression and at the same time negotiating the beginnings of a new passage and a deeper commitment to the process (Hughes 1992:2).

Hughes' insights also can be applied to the importance of ritual celebrations to mark the stages in the rites of passage are borne out in the Rite of Acceptance. A description of this rite will make this eminently clear.

Before this rite is celebrated an inquirer needs to express his/her desire to follow Christ and have some sense of the conversion to which he/she is being called. The parish, through the catechumenate team, provides at least a basic introduction into church teaching before the inquirer makes his or her request to become a catechumen. Since the decision to follow Christ in the Catholic community cannot be programmed the precatechumenate should not be rushed. The inquirer must give some external evidence of repentance and first faith before the Rite of Acceptance is celebrated (RCIA 42), but a distinction must be made between the process of initiation and conversion. Searle has said it well:

The church's role is to initiate rather than to convert. While initiation will have a role in enabling the convert to recognize what is at stake, to find language in which to express it and ways in which to live it out, initiation is always the church's response to a conversion that is already in process. Even evangelization does not itself convert, for only those already underway, already sitting loose to their former "world," are capable of hearing the gospel and responding to it (Searle 1990a:8).

The request to become a catechumen is in itself evidence of a conversion in process, but the request can be a costly one because it often creates tension within the person. It is the tension of separation which is the first stage of liminality. Through ritual action the Rite of Acceptance helps the catechumen to come to terms with the issue of separation through an experience of welcome and acceptance by the members of the parish. This is expressed through symbols and ritual actions. Ritual does not shield the individual from the human challenge of decision and action, but rather engages the person at a deeper level so that the tension can be expressed in a nonthreatening way through ritual (Flanagan 1991:239). As Guardini noted, this is the power of the symbol in liturgy:

The symbolising power of the liturgy becomes a school of measure and of spiritual restraint. The people who really live by the liturgy will come to learn that the bodily movements, the actions, and the material objects which it employs are all of the highest significance. It offers great opportunities of expression, of knowledge, and of spiritual experience; it is emancipating in its action, and capable of presenting a truth far more strongly and convincingly than can mere word of mouth (Guardini 1935:170).

The Rite of Acceptance has three main parts: the reception of the candidates, the celebration of the word of God, and the dismissal of the candidates (RCIA 44). It has the symbolising power to communicate the hospitality and acceptance which eases the tension of separation for the inquirer and ushers him/her into liminality.

#### **4.1.1 Reception of Candidates**

The rite begins outside the church doors (in inclement weather the rite begins just inside the doors of the church). The priest and other ministers as well as the assembly are gathered to greet the candidates. The very act of meeting at the door symbolically marks the beginning of a new phase in the life of the catechumen. The rite manifests the quality of hospitality as the ministers and assembly gather near the door to welcome the candidates who are desirous of following Christ. This is a graced moment which signals the inquirer's readiness to stand at the door, knock and to seek entry.

#### 4.1.1.1 *Opening Dialogue*

After some words of welcome the presider invites the sponsors and the candidates to come forward. The opening dialogue begins with some introduction of the candidates to the assembly. Two forms are given within the rite, but the rite itself allows for spontaneity and creativity. Depending on the cultural forms of introduction among specific peoples this part of the rite can be celebrated in various ways. If the candidates are not known by the assembly then it is good for the sponsors to introduce them by name. The sponsors act as a "social bridge" to facilitate social discourse between the inquirer and the community. The sponsors are guarantors of the inquirers' "social identity and, up to this point, of their reliability (Firth 1972:6). This expresses the personal relationship that exists between the candidate and the sponsor and the candidate's desire to be known by his or her own name. Firth has offered this anthropological insight:

Forms of greeting and parting are symbolic devices...An announcement of presence, the statement of pleasure at someone's arrival or of sadness at his going away are highly variable. What is of prime relevance is the establishment or perpetuation of a social relationship, the recognition of the other person as a social entity, a personal element in a common social situation (Firth 1972:1-2).

This is what the announcement of the catechumens by their sponsors signifies especially if this is their first contact with the assembly. Their welcome by the presider, as president of the liturgical assembly, is an anagogical sign of the recognition of the assembly of their presence. It is anagogical because, in the words of Grimes (1993:151), it "does not need to be authorised precisely because it carries authority in its very doing." The welcome validates itself as a ritual action because it is performative.

The candidates are then asked what they request of the church as they begin the catechumenate. The presider asks: "What do you ask of God's Church" (RCIA 51)? The way in which the question is answered depends entirely on the candidate. For those more timid the reply might be short and to the point; for

those more at ease with speaking in front of others it could be more spontaneous and full. The main content of the answer should centre around faith. The church does not bestow faith, but it can support and nurture it.

The pastoral importance of this recognition is that it prompts the church to listen before it speaks; that is the task of the period of evangelization or precatechumenate. Recognizing that conversion can occur at many levels and in many ways, the catechumenate team will want to listen very carefully to what inquirers have to say about themselves and not be too quick to interpret the person's experience in religious language before they have had a chance to describe that experience in their own terms (Searle 1990a:8).

Searle's observation is an important one. The ritual questioning of the candidates simply gives expression to all that they have expressed in the precatechumenate sessions. This dialogue helps the candidate to give expression to the faith experiences he/she has been having throughout the time of the precatechumenate.

After this initial question the presider asks: "What does faith offer you" (RCIA 51)? Again the reply may be spontaneous. With this, the presider gives a reply which builds on those of the candidates and then inquires about their readiness. Form C expresses the church's faith in the risen Lord as well as a sense of discipleship. The presider may use these or similar words:

This is eternal life: to know the one true God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. Christ has been raised from the dead and appointed by God as the Lord of life and the ruler of all things, seen and unseen.

If, then, you wish to become his disciples and members of his Church, you must be guided to the fullness of the truth that he has revealed to us. You must learn to make the mind of Christ Jesus your own. You must strive to pattern your life on the teachings of the Gospel and so to love the Lord your God and your neighbor. For this was Christ's command and he was its perfect example.

Is each of you ready to accept these teachings of the Gospel (RCIA 52)?

Though this statement of the presider we are reminded that:

...Ritual enacts, performs, or objectifies religious beliefs (action gives expression to thought) and in so doing actually fuses the conceptual and the dispositional aspects of religious symbols (ritual integrates thought and action) (Bell 1992:27).

The rest of the ritual actions of the Rite of Acceptance will demonstrate the veracity and validity of Bell's insights. The presider's ending question provides the inquirers with the means for giving expression to their interior dispositions which will be enacted through the rite.

Then the sponsors are asked if they are indeed ready to help the candidates on their journey. This is followed by a prayer for those who will become catechumens. The prayer is important because it acknowledges God's initiative in calling the candidates in diverse ways and also the fact that the candidates have responded. It embodies Searle's distinction between "converting" and "initiating" mentioned above. The prayer highlights the freedom with which the candidates have publicly answered God's call in the midst of the assembly.

Father of mercy, we thank you for these your servants. You have sought and summoned them in many ways and they have turned to seek you.

You have called them today and they have answered in our presence: we praise you, Lord and we bless you (RCIA 53).

#### *4.1.1.2 The Act of Signing*

The prayer is followed by the signing of the candidates with the cross. One by one candidates come forward with their sponsors and beginning with their foreheads the presider and the sponsors sign all the senses of each candidate. Each prayer of signing prepares the candidate for life in and with Christ and a share in his mission. They read:

Receive the cross on your forehead. It is Christ himself who now strengthens you with this sign of his love. Learn to know him and follow him.

Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord.

Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes that you may see the glory of God.

Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God.

Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith.

Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.

Receive the sign of the cross on your hands, that Christ may be known in the work which you do.

Receive the sign of the cross on your feet, that you may walk in the way of Christ.

Then the priest confers a blessing upon the candidates.

I sign you with the sign of eternal life in the name of the Father, and of the Son, +<sup>1</sup> and of the Holy Spirit (RCIA 56).

In this symbolic gesture the candidates experience in a very real way the centrality of the cross in Christian life. Fragomeni has observed that:

Catechumens receive the sign of the cross on their entire bodies, being marked with the magnitude of Christ's love and the immensity of Christ's pain, as a reminder of where the journey of initiation into Christ is leading. The disciples are not promised a rose garden or some middle-class success. Rather their "blessed assurance" is a road that leads to Calvary and immersion in the Blood of the Lamb (Fragomeni 1988:9).

This signing of all the senses makes the rite both personal and prophetic. This symbolic gesture is personal, because each candidate's whole person comes under the sign of the cross. He/she is challenged to reinterpret his/her whole life in the light of the cross. There is no mistaking the fact that Christian life leads to one's *kenosis*. The signing is also prophetic because it challenges the candidate's understanding of Christian life and focuses his/her attention on the cross as the way to life in Christ. Hughes (1992:9) has suggested that the signing of all the senses

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<sup>1</sup> This sign is used in liturgical rubrics to indicate that at this point the priest gives a Trinitarian blessing to the person (s).

rather than just the forehead indicates that becoming a Catholic is not simply about acquiring sufficient knowledge, but engaging in a process in which the catechumen comes to experience the presence of Christ in his/her own person. Each catechumen is challenged by this ritual action and confirmed in one's personal call to live one's whole life for Christ. It is, therefore, personal and prophetic in nature. This makes "all activities a living worship, of making all journeys and resting places the place of Christ's manifestations" (Hughes 1992:9). Conversion leads one to a life of worship in which everything one does is for God's praise and glory. It also leads to mission in which Christ and his reign is manifested to the world. This section of the rite concludes with a prayer for perseverance on the part of the candidates.

The gesture of signing points to the fact that the body itself is an instrument of communication within ritual (Firth 1972:18). The act of signing has no equivalent in simple speech. To say the words of signing without the gesture would be to fall prey to ritual minimalism (Kavanagh 1982:80). When each prayer is accompanied by the action of signing text and action are merged and create a synergistic relationship that empowers the ritual (Jacques 1995:7). During the catechumenate the catechumens will be signed in acts of anointing and at the Easter Vigil they will be signed with chrism. These repeated acts of signing become interconnected for the catechumens. They unite them with the past generations of Christians who have been signed with the cross and participate in the mystery of the cross as the pattern of Christian life. Through the signing during the Rite of Acceptance the catechumens of each successive generation join their ranks. The whole community of believers in witnessing this action remembers its identity.

That is to say, it discovers and reinvents, enforces and reinforces its identity, and in this way gives 'life' to its members (Buckland 1995:51).

The ritual is then never merely repeated, but owned and shaped afresh by the community as it celebrates it. "Thus ritual presents itself as 'cultural memory': the preservation of identity through the repetition of the past in the midst of change

(Buckland 1995:53). In this way ritual shapes the identity of the whole assembly and the catechumens.

#### *4.1.1.3 Entrance into the Church*

It is only at this point that the catechumens and their sponsors are invited to enter the church for the liturgy of the word. Entry into the church building makes the crossing of the threshold a lived experience for the inquirers. They experience crossing a boundary quite literally through their bodily movement. The ritual is experienced in its performance, not merely as texts put on paper by liturgical scholars (Stringer 1989:515). For the assembly this opening up of space affirms its identity as a people serious about initiation of new members. Their identity as a welcoming assembly also becomes evident in their act of opening the doors, and through the procession in which they lead the inquirers into their midst (Seubert 1989:500).

Again we are led to see the union of thought and action in ritual. The ritual has meaning in its performance, as it is done. Driver (1991:85) adds that the "doing" is also a "showing," a display. Rituals enact meaning and each gesture, like the gesture of opening the doors of the church conveys meaning, not with the use of commentary, but through ritual action. All liturgical ritual actions "have social, personal, and religious consequences" (Driver 1991:98). They call for commitment:

The work of ritual cannot get done if no hands are dirty. The serious must play if ritual is to be capable of any lasting transformations. In Christian theological perspective, work done playfully is a sign of grace. That is, it cannot be accounted for rationally, for it is transformative work accomplished through play (Driver 1991:99).

This ludic quality of ritual to which Driver makes reference is what enhances the solidarity of the participants in ritual. This "play" is made possible through liminality because it brings about the anti-structural quality of ritual and in this case worship (Nichols 1985:405). Driver (1991:98) pointed out the difference between play-acting and ritual play. The gestures and movements made by those participating in the ritual: greeting, opening the door, signing, processing, all these

are not pretend actions of actors on a stage, but ritual play. "In rituals...there is no question of illusion" (Driver 1991:98). The gestures are meaningful, communal actions and have social, personal, and religious consequences (Driver 1991:98). These gestures of ritual are enactments of some of the deepest aspects of the Christian myth.

All those gathered at the entrance process into the church while singing. The first part of the Rite of Acceptance was about offering the catechumens hospitable support and their acceptance into the Christian community (Fragomeni 1988:9), now the community gathers around the table of the word to be nourished and challenged by it. The rite suggests that the Lectionary for Mass be carried in the procession into the church and that it might be revered with incense to show special reverence for it (RCIA 61). In two of the parishes that have implemented the RCIA to some extent, St. Peter's in Kagiso and St. Margaret's in Diepkloof in the Johannesburg diocese, this procession includes dancing and ululating as the Lectionary is carried into the church. One of the dancers usually carries an incense pot in the procession before the lectionary so that the fragrant aroma of the incense gives honour to the word of God and envelops all those who are present.

At this juncture, before moving to the liturgy of the word, the question of inculturation might be raised in regard to how the RCIA is celebrated. In the four parishes studied none of them had seriously considered the challenges of inculturation. In the Diepkloof and Kagiso parishes African dances and music have been integrated into the structure of the rite, but nothing more has been attempted. In other parts of Africa this is not the case.

Among the Mossi people of Burkina Faso in West Africa the Rite of Acceptance has taken the following form:

**Dialogue preparatory to welcoming the strangers:**  
Delegates present the strangers' request to the family chief (liturgical minister), who (according to Mossi custom), insist that all the members of the family should be consulted, and designates a spokesman to treat the question.

**Welcome:** The strangers are greeted by the delegated spokesperson.

**Preliminary interrogation:** Strangers are questioned about their desire to enter the Christian community. Once their reasons are accepted members of the community are designated to act as guides to the strangers.

**Exorcism and Signation:** Each official makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of his/her catechumen. He/she then ties a crucifix around the catechumen's neck.

**Welcome Drink:** A drink consisting of salt, water, and flour which has been prepared by the sponsors is given to the inquirers.

**Naming:** A theophoric indigenous name is given in addition to that of a saint's name.

**Entrance procession:** A procession into the family court (church) takes place after the consent of the family (assembly) takes place. The strangers are welcomed as sons and daughters.

**Celebration of the Word of God:** After the readings the catechumens are instructed to observe (and not to speak), to see and learn since they are still ignorant of family customs.

**The Eucharistic Celebration:** The catechumens remain without taking part in the eucharistic meal (Uzukwu 1982: 266).

This rite clearly demonstrates the liminal status of the catechumens. The boundaries which held them as outsiders have been broken down, but the boundaries to full membership remain because they are "still ignorant of family customs." The use of the naming ritual supports their new identity as catechumens in the church. It makes use of traditional cultural names as well as the names of Christian saints. The status of the catechumens is clear, they are liminars. They have special status in the community which is shown through the wearing of a crucifix.

The Mossi rite is clearly an effort at the inculturation of the universal church's Rite of Acceptance. This gives clear evidence of the profound understanding of the rite. In spite of this the Mossi rite seems to have failed to understand the nature of participation in the liturgy since the catechumens remain as observers for the liturgy of the eucharist. It might also be an expression of cultural sensitivity to sending the catechumens out, but it nevertheless misses the

meaning of what SC 14 means by "full, conscious, and active participation" in the liturgy. Catholics in South Africa have yet to work so creatively with the RCIA. Perhaps the church still has to come to an equally profound understanding of the rite so that local churches can begin to inculturate it. I now continue with the description of the Rite of Acceptance.

#### 4.1.2 The Liturgy of the Word

The procession into the church is followed by the usual liturgy of the word which is part of every Sunday liturgy. It includes three readings from the scriptures. The rite suggests scripture texts to be used at Sunday Masses (RCIA 62), but the readings for the particular Sunday on which the rite is celebrated may also be used. The homily helps to interpret the readings in their local context for the whole assembly, but more specifically for the new catechumens. To emphasise the place of the word of God in Catholic life each catechumen may be given a Bible or a Sunday Missal since catechesis during the catechumenate is based on the Sunday readings (RCIA 64). This gesture expresses the Roman Catholic position in regard to the ecclesial nature of Christian life. In distinguishing between an evangelical and a Roman Catholic understanding of the role of scripture in Christian existence Bevans wrote:

Roman Catholics begin from a conviction of the radical ecclesial nature of Christian life -- Scripture is the fruit of ecclesial reflection and must always be interpreted within an ecclesial matrix (Bevans 1995:156).

Perhaps the reason why Bevans has stressed the ecclesial nature of scripture for Roman Catholics is because of what has been written in regard to the role of the word of God in the church in the *Lectionary for Mass, Introduction* (= LMIn) when it was promulgated in 1969:

Whenever...the Church, gathered by the Holy Spirit for liturgical celebration, announces and proclaims the word of God, it has the experience of being a new people in whom the covenant made in the past is fulfilled. Baptism and confirmation in the Spirit have made all the faithful messengers of God's word because of the grace of hearing they have received. They must therefore be bearers of the same word in

the Church and in the world, at least by the witness of their way of life (LMIn 7.2).

This text links together the formative role of the word of the God in Catholic life and the missionary responsibility of every fully initiated Catholic. Furthermore this text reminds us of the living, active quality of the word proclaimed in the liturgical assembly, a thought which is expressed throughout the document (LMIn 4.3).

Giving a copy of the Bible or Missal to the catechumens has powerful symbolic value. With few words the church conveys to the catechumens that the word of God is meant not only to accompany them on their journey, but also be their "daily bread."

The energy for the journey comes from the word. Catechumens are to be involved intimately with the word; it is the orientation of the period into which they are now entering. They are to read the word, devour the words and ultimately *become* the word (Fragomeni 1988:9-10).

Though I agree with Fragomeni's insights regarding the presentation of the scriptures to the catechumens it also needs to be stressed that the energy that the word provides for conversion is also made available for mission. This is what the church intends and states in the text quoted above from LMIn 7.2. It is the word that motivates, impels the Christian to move outward in mission and give witness to Christ. John Paul II's conviction is that witness is the most basic form of mission.

The missionary who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and transcendent realities (RM 42).

This stress on mission as belonging to the very nature of the church is not always apparent even if stated in church documents. Bevans (1995:159) argues that most Catholics would not include being missionary in a definition of what it means to be Catholic. This is precisely why the RCIA is so important. It places scripture at the centre of catechesis and aims at facilitating the development of a more vital and dynamic mission consciousness in Catholics.

### 4.1.3 Intercessions

Two more ritual elements remain in the Rite of Acceptance: the intercessions for the catechumens and their dismissal from the assembly. The intercessions express the community's prayer for them. The prayers ask God to reveal Christ more and more to catechumens, to increase their generosity in responding to the Lord, they also ask that the community would be inspired to be supportive, that those preparing for initiation grow in a spirit of service and that the catechumens be found worthy to be initiated into the life of the Trinity. What this means has been well explained by Raya:

Christian Initiation is a symphony composed of three movements or sacraments, namely Baptism, Chrismation,<sup>2</sup> and Eucharist, which introduces human being via a long process of preparation into the movement of life and love of God-Trinity, anchoring them in divinization, and leading them to the mystical experience of union with, Father-Son-Spirit (Raya 1993:68).

### 4.1.4 The Dismissal

The dismissal sends the catechumens out of the assembly to reflect more deeply on the word of God that they have just heard. Pastorally, the dismissal is the most often misunderstood and problematic part of the rite, yet the rite envisions the dismissal taking place every Sunday. Barbernitz offers this observation about the dismissal:

Dismissal emphasizes the presence of Jesus in his Word as real presence. Catechumens participate fully in the sharing of the Word. It is a dramatic sign to the community of what the catechumens are doing (Barbernitz 1983:20).

Barbernitz's point is well taken. The catechumens are present for almost the entire liturgy of the Word before they are dismissed at the end of the homily<sup>3</sup>. At this point on the journey the word of God is their nourishment, they are not yet admitted to the table of the eucharist. This is problematic for many people. Some

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<sup>2</sup> Chrismation is the term used by the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church as well as by the Orthodox church for the ritual action of anointing the newly baptised with the oil of chrism. Roman Catholics use the name Confirmation for this action and that of the laying on of hands.

<sup>3</sup> In the Mass of the Roman Rite the liturgy of the Word begins with the first reading from the scriptures that are assigned for a particular Sunday. The liturgy of the Word concludes with the General Intercessions.

feel that it is unkind to dismiss the catechumens while some would argue that it would make them feel more a part of the community if they remained. Why then would the rite call for the dismissal?

#### *4.1.4.1 Objections*

Dunning answered this question and gave four reasons why the dismissal could be a powerful symbolic act for the assembly and the catechumens. He wrote:

This is not a matter of exclusion. Sponsors and catechists leave with them (catechumens) after the Service of the Word to break open that Word and put it into dialogue with their personal journeys. It is time to strengthen belief in Christ's Real Presence in his Word.

Second, it is bad catechesis and liturgy to invite catechumens to remain for a eucharistic meal which they cannot share.

Third, the dismissal gives powerful witness to the rest of the community concerning the depth of the journey into faith which leads to the sharing of the eucharistic meal on that journey. Sacraments are celebrations of faith, and catechumens give public witness to the challenges to grow in faith.

Fourth, there is a long, but presently neglected, practice of eucharistic fast to build anticipation of the Eucharist. For catechumens, this fast and dismissal from the communion-meal can help the Easter Eucharist become the climax of initiation (Dunning 1981:57-58).

All of Dunning's reasons take the rite seriously. They reinforce the power of a ritual action in forming the identity of a people. Though catechumens have some measure of belonging and are recognised by Canon Law they are not yet full members and the dismissal makes this clear. Their identity as catechumens is reinforced and the beginnings of a new world view become apparent. The reasons given by Dunning for the dismissal do not obfuscate the issues involved in membership and identity. Instead, the dismissal, as argued by Dunning, is a powerful challenge to the catechumens and the assembly of the meaning of initiation. Form B for the dismissal states well the meaning of the ritual action of dismissal. The presider, addressing the catechumens says:

My dear friends, this community now sends you forth to reflect more deeply upon the word of God which you have shared with us today. Be assured of our loving support and prayers for you. We look forward to the day when you will share fully in the Lord's Table (RCIA 67).

These very clear words of dismissal provide the context for understanding its meaning. The procedure for the dismissal also serves to make clear the working social relationships which exist between the catechumens and the assembly (Firth 1972:30). Firth pointed out that greeting and parting behaviour has three major social themes: attention-producing, identification, and reduction of uncertainty (Firth 1972:30-31). All three are present in the dismissal. In the ritual of the dismissal catechumens are the focus of attention. The assembly becomes aware of them through their presence at the liturgy and their dismissal. The catechumens are a clearly recognisable group in the parish. They are seated together in the assembly and are dismissed as a group. Their anxiety about how to behave during the other parts of the Mass are diminished because they are clearly excused from the participation by reason of their status as catechumens. The ritual gestures of welcome and dismissal serve to bring clarity to the social status of the catechumens in the assembly and establishes lines of communication between them and the assembly.

The dismissal is related to the element of secrecy which marked participation in the eucharist from the beginnings of Christianity. It clearly indicates one of the boundaries of group membership in the Christian community. Yarnold has pointed out that:

By the fourth century and first half of the fifth, this practice of preserving the central elements of the faith as a secret from outsiders became universal...The liturgy showed signs of the precautions taken to preserve this secrecy. Those who were not baptized had to leave the church before the eucharistic part of the liturgy... (Yarnold 1971:51).

Mystagogical catechesis was devoted to explaining the meaning of the sacraments to the newly initiated after they had experienced them.

When the catechumens gathered on the paschal night, they were unprepared for what they were about to experience.

While they knew the purpose of their assembly, they knew not the form it would take. It was the general belief that in the baptismal experience the neophyte had participated in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the significance of which lies beyond the understanding of the new baptized, but which needs none the less to be articulated (Baerwald 1990:882).

Pre-baptismal catechesis had to do with the central truth of the faith. Post-baptismal catechesis had to do with elaborating the mysteries, the myth of Christian life.

The RCIA has restored the use of the dismissal because of its power to convey the importance of initiation as a process. The eucharist is a sign of unity (SC 47) in faith and in baptism. Catechumens, though welcomed by the assembly, are not yet one in faith and baptism with the assembly. Hence, their presence at the eucharistic liturgy would be a counter-sign, especially since they cannot receive the eucharist.<sup>4</sup> This boundary of group identity will not be crossed until the sacraments of initiation are celebrated at the Easter Vigil.

The Maryvale Parish was the only one of the four parishes studied that had implemented the dismissal rite.<sup>5</sup> Besides practical considerations members of the other parishes felt that it was not hospitable to send people out of the assembly before the end of Mass (cf. Appendix 1). Their opinions betray a misunderstanding of ritual. They have not understood the theology of the rite which is part of the initiation process into "Catholic culture." Rituals are not things that are watched or observed, but are actions done by the community (cf. section 1.4). Driver (1991:154) maintains that "what needs stressing, ...is not just that the greatest quantity of rituals are social, but that ritual activity is interactive and social by nature." Huck (1989a:23) has demonstrated that "rituals are the deeds of people...no one is audience." It is precisely for these reasons that SC 14 calls for

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<sup>4</sup> It is not the purpose of this thesis to take up the question of the sacramental initiation of children. Nevertheless this question, as related to the order of the sacraments of initiation is discussed briefly in 4.1.4.2. In regard to the question of visitors who are from other faiths and who might be participating in the eucharist of the Roman Catholic Church, ATE (= Ad Totam Ecclesiam), the Directory on Ecumenism, governs these matters.

<sup>5</sup> In the Diepkloof and Kagiso parishes it was not done because of a lack of a space where the catechumens could meet. In St. Anthony's parish, Coronationville, after evaluating their present practice, the catechumenate team decided to implement the dismissal with the 1995 group of catechumens.

"full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations." The document further cautions that the members of the assembly:

Should not be there as silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred service conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full involvement (SC 48).

In this vision of the role of the assembly the members are the ritual subjects (cf section 3.2.1) of the liturgical action. The kind of participation envisaged by SC 48 presumes a measure of understanding and devotion which catechumens would not normally have because of the developmental nature of catechesis. In light of the above observations it would be a distortion of the rite to have catechumens stay for the liturgy of the eucharist because they cannot participate in its primary ritual action: eating and drinking the body and blood of the Lord Jesus.

The dismissal brings to closure the Rite of Acceptance. The catechumens then meet to reflect on the scriptures of the Sunday<sup>6</sup> because lectionary catechesis is the heart of the catechumenate. The dismissal and the time for reflection on the Sunday scriptures will be repeated Sunday after Sunday. It is the practice of reflection on the scriptures that builds faith and a sense of mission. The Word of God, proclaimed within the midst of the assembly is the "food" of the catechumens on their journey of initiation. It is through the Word that a new world view begins to take shape for the catechumens as well as a new sense of identity.

Dunning has argued elsewhere in favour of changing the name of this ritual action from *dismissal* to *sending forth* (Dunning 1989b: 34). He believes that since the actual words of the rite do not use the word *dismissal* a change of name might make the ritual action more understandable and inviting. He contends that the catechumens are made to feel special through this action.

Far from making the candidates inferior, we tell them how their presence is a gift to us...They remind us of our faith and the call to be the Body of Christ broken for the life of the world. We

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<sup>6</sup> On each Sunday the Liturgy of the Word contains three scripture readings: the first, from the Hebrew scriptures (except during the Easter season when the first reading is always from the Acts of the Apostles), the second, from one of the New Testament letters and the third, from the Gospels.

send them forth as symbols of our own journey (Dunning 1989b:34).

The name *dismissal* is not essential as long as the meaning of this ritual action is clear to the catechumens and the parish. For the catechumens it means that they are called to develop their love for the word of God and use it for the measure of their own lives. They leave the assembly to deepen their faith. The dismissal raises questions about why the catechumens leave and why baptised members of the assembly stay. These are questions that challenge faith (Dunning 1989b:35).

When sponsors join the catechumens after Mass for a reflection session on the scripture they communicate the appreciation of the community for the gift that the catechumens are to the whole parish. They show this by their own willingness to share with the catechumens and listen to how they relate the word of God to their own lives. For the parish the dismissal remains a challenge which has the community reflect on its participation in the eucharistic meal and the meaning of baptism. The dismissal also challenges the community to seize this moment of grace and recommit itself to the ministry of initiation. The dismissal reinforces for the baptised members of the assembly and conveys to the catechumens the group boundaries (= identity) of being a Catholic member. The dismissal is a powerful "tool" for socialisation in the community of faith.

#### *4.1.4.2 Baptised Children*

Kavanagh (1978:196) has raised another serious issue which stems from this question of the dismissal. Namely, what about children in the assembly who have been baptised, but have not been confirmed or have received the eucharist? Or perhaps children who have been baptised and have received the eucharist, but are not yet confirmed? Kavanagh has pointed out the theological problem raised by the church's affirmation of the RCIA as the normative way people are initiated into the church, and yet, maintains a separate order for sacramental initiation of children in which confirmation is presented as a sacrament of maturity rather than a sacrament of initiation.

The CDSA = Catechetical Directory for Southern Africa states that confirmation is a sacrament of initiation (CDSA 13.2), but in the section of the text

that is concerned with the catechesis of young adults it suggests that the sacrament celebrates maturity rather than initiation:

They (young adults) begin to exercise responsibility for themselves and for others more fully than before through their interpersonal relationships and vocational choices (CDSA 12.1).

Furthermore, CDSA 12.3 in dealing with the content of catechesis for young adults suggests areas of concentration which also support a maturity oriented understanding of confirmation, rather than as a sacrament of initiation. The content headings include: Skills in Leadership, Vocational Guidance, Marriage Preparation Programmes, and Lay Ministries. Finally, CDSA 13.1 directs that:

The catechesis of youth must take place within the context of personal development, or it will be of limited value (CDSA 13.1).

This document of the SACBC (= Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference) is a typical example of the ambivalence of Catholic practice in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. Kavanagh (1978:196) has shown that two theological models are at work in Catholic practice which have differing meanings, catechesis, and ritual forms. The more ancient one respects the sacramental order of baptism-confirmation-eucharist for both adults and children while a second order is operative in the case of infants and young children. This second order follows the baptism, eucharist and confirmation pattern with an interval of several years separating the celebration of each sacrament. Kavanagh observed that:

The sacramental ethos of the first is directly baptismal, paschal and trinitarian: that of the second has more to do with marking an educational or life-crisis point in the personal development of the recipients, and it is enhanced by the presence of the bishop at the event (Kavanagh 1978:196).

In light of this inconsistency in the church's initiatory practices baptised children remain in the Sunday assembly even though they have not been confirmed or may have not been prepared to receive the eucharist.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Brown, K. & Sokol, F.C. eds. (1989). This book presents a series of essays on Christian Initiation of Children. The essays discuss the pastoral questions surrounding the

It is important to note that the RCIA contains the ritual celebration of the sacraments of initiation for children who have not been baptised as infants which includes the celebration of the three sacraments of initiation in the same liturgical gathering (RCIA 252-259). The RCIA also provides directives for the catechetical formation (RCIA 254).

As the paschal theology inherent in the RCIA comes to the fore the church will have to confront its schizophrenic initiatory practice and policies. Once these are faced, the *how* and the *what* of catechesis will also need to be addressed so that a consistent practice of initiation can be developed that will reflect the theology of the sacraments of initiation. Then the ancient order for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation will be restored for both adults and infants and the church will celebrate these sacraments with greater integrity.

#### 4.2 Catechesis during the Catechumenate

In the RCIA the operative vision of liturgical catechesis does not equate liturgy and catechesis. Rather, it envisions a catechesis flowing out of the liturgy and leading people to deeper participation in the liturgy (Dunning 1993b:7). Ostdiek (1990:169) has written about what he called a "pedagogy of signs" to explain liturgical catechesis. He wrote:

The classical theological dictum that liturgy is "first theology" and what theologians do is "second theology" offers us a parallel. Liturgy with its formative power is a "first catechesis," while the systematic reflection on that experience done under the guidance of a catechist is "second theology" (Ostdiek 1990:169).

Liturgical catechesis is then not only intellectual formation, but holistic formation of the human person in the "Christian way of life" (RCIA 75.2) that is expressed in word and ritual action.

A description of the kind of catechesis which the RCIA intends is contained in the document itself. It lists four ways in which catechesis can facilitate the

transformation of the catechumen. Each element deserves our attention. No. 75 of the rite states:

The catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the dispositions manifested at their acceptance into the catechumenate are brought to maturity (RCIA 75).

The opening paragraph of no. 75 sketches a multidimensional process of formation which takes place in the midst of the community which is intended to foster the catechumen's growth in faith so that it reaches some measure of maturity.

This process attends not only to the mind but to the heart; not only to beliefs held but to the morality of the gospel; not only to dogmas and precepts but to the whole spiritual life; not only to the inner life but to participation both in the liturgical life of the church and in her apostolic mission (Searle 1991a:4).

Herein lies the genius of the RCIA. Its aim is the initiation of the person in a way that respects the personal nature of his/her faith while at the same time immersing the person in the life of the church so that he/she can share in the mission of Christ to extend the reign of God. This becomes more apparent in the other four paragraphs of no. 75.

#### *4.2.1 The Four Ways of Catechesis during the Catechumenate*

The aim of all the catechesis that takes place during the catechumenate is that catechumens become immersed in the mystery of salvation. As this happens the world view of the catechumens is being reshaped through myth and ritual. There is present within the RCIA an organic relationship between catechesis and liturgy.

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<sup>8</sup> This sentence echoes the sentiments of AG 14. It seems that many bishops who came from "younger" churches and participated in Vatican II were concerned not only about the restoration of the catechumenate, but about the quality of adult catechesis.

#### *4.2.1.1 The First Way: Liturgical Catechesis*

Word and worship become the warp and woof of the fabric out of which catechesis in the RCIA is designed. The daily life of the catechumen is the context in which the word shapes their world view because the fundamental myths of Christian life are put before him/her through the scriptures.

A suitable catechesis is provided by priests or deacons, or by catechists and other of the faithful, planned to be gradual and complete in coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate (RCIA 75.1).

The liturgical year is the context for the catechesis which is intended for the pastoral formation of the catechumens. The lectionary is the sourcebook, the catechism, as it were, for initiating the catechumens into the mystery of salvation.

The word proclaimed enables the catechumen to enter into the mystery of Christ from a particular perspective because in the liturgical celebration the texts go beyond a purely exegetical meaning and assume a sacramental meaning in their liturgical proclamation...The readings are given a particular focus in the context of the liturgical season...We hear the word, and it is a mirror in which we look at our life. We are called as a people of covenant to commit ourselves to the word of God made flesh in Christ and to endeavor to conform our way of life to that word (Dooley 1988:18).

This process allows for catechumens to reflect upon their own lives in relationship to the word.

The catechumens, within this context of participation in God's call to conversion, are invited to consider some concrete steps or changes that need to happen in their lives because of today's word as experienced in their life, the scriptures and the tradition (Morris 1989:84).

The readings heard during the liturgy of the word in the context of the Sunday liturgical assembly are the same readings that are used as the source for reflection and catechesis.

The lectionary is a liturgical book. Catechesis from the lectionary can never lose sight of that context. The lectionary is proclamation for the purpose of deepening faith and renewing life. The lectionary is not a textbook that one learns (Dooley 1988:13).

Dooley's understanding of catechesis during the catechumenate moves beyond scripture sharing or shared praxis that was done during the precatechumenate (cf. 3.1) because it is placed within the context of a liturgical celebration of the word. During the precatechumenate sessions inquirers were encouraged to share their own stories; during the catechumenate it is God's story and the story of the community which helps the catechumens and the baptised alike to understand their individual stories.

The little story I call my life is given cosmic, eternal significance as it is caught up within God's larger account of history (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:55).

This happens within the context of the liturgy as the word is proclaimed in the midst of the assembly. One's personal story is seen in the context of the community's foundational myths and in this way is given greater meaning because it is linked to all of salvation history. Dooley has made another important point that echoes SC 7 which clearly states that within the liturgical celebration Christ is present in the word and in the assembly:

In the gathering and in the proclamation of the word we make manifest the Christ who is already present. The readings call us to identify ourselves as the concrete sign of Christ in the world. In the assembly we are no longer simply a group of individuals but we are a people in whom Christ is present (Dooley 1988:14).

The assembly into which the catechumens are seeking membership is not a closed group of people, but an outward looking people who have been gathered together by the Lord for the sake of mission. The evangelisation begun during the precatechumenate now continues in a deeper, more developed way.

Liturgical catechesis is not without its problems. Pastors and catechumenate teams sometimes question whether catechumens can learn what

they consider to be enough Catholic doctrine without following a catechism with regular lessons. They are working out of an educational model for the catechetical sessions. The aim of such a model is to impart information. The aim of the catechetical sessions of the RCIA is to facilitate transformation or what Dooley calls "total formation" (Dooley 1988:21). Dunning answers critics of lectionary based catechesis by recalling the conviction of the Council Fathers in SC:

To those who claim that lectionary readings will not cover the basic Christian doctrines, our church responds: 'Within the cycle of a year the church unfolds the entire mystery of Christ' (SC 102)...In any event, the Catholic difference is that teaching comes out of the sacramental community, not vice versa...If catechumens do not have the experience, they may mouth empty theology and doctrine (Dunning 1989b:37).

Dunning's point is an important one. It needs to be the firm conviction of all those who would implement the RCIA in their parishes. It is also firmly rooted in the belief that the liturgy is the source of all theology which we made in section 1.1. this method of catechesis builds on the experience of the community as the word is proclaimed in their midst and which always leads to mission. Bifet shares this view:

The Christian message is not proclaimed in order to devise a theology, but principally in order to transform man and society from Gospel principles...The Word is alive: he calls, converts, transforms, sends...The Christian community becomes missionary by listening to the Word, celebrating it and putting it into practice (Bifet 1993: 103;106).

Liturgical catechesis prepares the catechumens to become missionary, to be sent out to carry on the mission of Christ in the world. In essence this is what it means to be church (RM 1). As catechumens are prepared to become members of the church they are also being prepared to be Christian missionaries. John Paul stressed that:

Only from inside the Church's mystery of communion is the 'identity' of the lay faithful made known, and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can

their vocation and mission in the Church and world be defined  
(CL = Christifideles Laici 8).

Christians realise their identity and vocation to the extent that they participate in the mission of the Trinity. In that same apostolic exhortation John Paul II reminded the members of the church that by reason of baptism they share in the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet and king. They do this through their participation in the liturgy; when they proclaim the kingdom through the witness of their lives; and by endeavouring to restore creation to its original value through works of charity and justice (CL 14).

This happens through liturgical catechesis. As the catechumens participate in the liturgical rituals and hear the myths of Christian faith proclaimed in a liturgical context they begin to see that ritual and myth work to mediate changes in identity and shape world views (Searle 1991b:14).

In the South African adaptation of the RCIA, *Our Journey Together*, liturgical catechesis is not possible because the sequence of catechetical lessons do not follow the liturgical year. What is celebrated in the liturgy does not serve as the foundation of catechesis. I regard this as a serious flaw in the text. Hirmer (1986) composed forty-seven catechetical sessions that do not follow the lectionary readings for each Sunday. The only time he does follow the lectionary is during Lent and Easter. He has therefore ignored the relationship between myth and ritual as a means for fostering identity formation. Hirmer also failed to follow the principles of good mystagogia and provides catechetical instruction on the sacraments of initiation before they are celebrated. The most serious omission is that of the role of the catechist. Hirmer used the term "animator." Though this is contemporary term it does not contain the richness of meaning of the term "catechist" which is used in the RCIA. Catechists do not simply stimulate growth; they give instruction and they hand down the faith (CT 62).

Though this text was approved for use in South Africa by the SACBC it seems that the bishops were not aware of the implications of such an adaptation of the RCIA. Future editions might make use of the abundance of material published that could correct the defects of the current text.

#### 4.2.1.2 *The Second Way : Catechesis through the Witness of Others*

The second article of no. 75 is a lengthy one. In the first section it delineates the areas for growth in the life of the catechumen and responsibility of the community to foster such growth:

As they become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation. Thus formed, 'the new converted set out on a spiritual journey'...(AG 14) (RCIA 75.2).

Clearly this article places responsibility for the ministry of initiation on the assembly, the entire Christian community. If the catechumens are to grow and come to know Christ more deeply then the community must take seriously its mission. Dunning sees the ministry of initiation in terms of the community's mission.

One way to describe a community is in terms of its mission. We become who we are by doing what we are. Before there were church structures, there was mission -- "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The disciples who were sent forth became a community whose life came from sharing the good news. Mission makes church (Dunning 1993b:100).

To be engaged in the ministry of the initiation of new members is at the heart of her mission. In this way preaching or any other works in which the church engages aims at making Christ known to people and ultimately to their incorporation into the church through baptism. John Paul II made a similar point in connection with conversion:

Conversion to Christ is joined to Baptism not only because of the Church's practice, but also by the will of Christ himself, who sent the Apostles to make disciples of all nations to baptize them (cf. Mt. 28:19)...Baptism is not simply a seal of conversion, a kind of external sign indicating conversion and attesting to it. Rather, it is the Sacrament which signifies and

effects rebirth from the Spirit, establishes real and unbreakable bonds with the Blessed Trinity, and makes us members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church (RM 47).

John Paul II seems to be echoing the teaching contained in AG 20-21 in which particular churches were urged to take part in the mission of Christ and of the universal church to proclaim the reign of God. John Paul II noted the relationship between baptism and mission and so highlighted their importance in the life of the church.

Section 75.2 also outlines the holistic nature of the catechesis intended in the rite. Mongoven (1987:248) commented on the pioneering work of Jungmann in insisting on the relationship between liturgy and catechetics and noted that:

Catechesis should not be simply dogmatic instruction but ought to be centered around the liturgical year and prepare the catechetical community for full and active participation in the liturgy (Mongoven 1987:248).

Article 75.2 assumes that at the parish level catechumens are being given the kind of formation that will serve them well on their journey into the Christian mystery (Willumsen 1985:13). They are becoming acquainted with the church's teachings; growing in prayer; participating in the liturgy of the word; and sharing in the apostolic activity of the parish. In this way the catechumens are given more than information about Christ and the church. Instead, they are exposed to the enormous richness and diversity of Catholic life (Searle 1991a:9). Though the catechumens live in a state of liminality and the accompanying betwixt and between feeling, a growing sense of belonging begins to take shape as they experience *communitas* among the members of the catechumenal group. The pain of living in this liminal state is acknowledged in the last section of the article.

Since this transition brings with it a progressive change of outlook and conduct, it should become manifest by means of its social consequences and it should develop gradually during the period of the catechumenate. Since the Lord in whom they believe is a sign of contradiction, the newly converted often experience divisions and separations, but they also taste the joy that God gives without measure (RCIA 75.2).

The difficult realities of Christian life come to the fore in this section, but these are balanced out as the catechumens begin to form new relationships with members of the parish and experience their support and the richness of life in the church.

The words and the symbols of the rite are thus two-edged. On the one hand, they are structures of conformity, easily becoming conventions demanding no more than a modicum of conformity from their participants to be "effective" in structuring the life of the Christian people. On the other hand, they are subversive memories, symbols of radical dispossession threatening to confront participants with the terrifying prospect of falling into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31)...Hence the concern of the church not just to catechise and baptize but to offer catechumens a place of liminality and time to work through their conversion at every level (Searle 1991b:17).

What Searle has in mind is liturgical ritual at its best. It is ritual that engages persons and draws to the mystery of Christ present and active in the midst of the assembly. It is this kind of ritual that calls forth the best in each person and enables them to grow through opening themselves to the work of the Spirit in their lives. Rites and symbols point to a surplus of meanings that go beyond their immediate and empirical use and open participants to various levels of meaning which are conveyed through the texts and actions of the rites. Flanagan, studying the liturgy from a sociological viewpoint, has argued persuasively for the value of following the rites as they have been structured by the church.

By following the contours laid down in a book of rules, it establishes a social form whose shape has an exactitude that mirrors the directions in (the) text it follows. The liturgical enactment fulfils that which the text stipulates it should express. An exact order is reproduced that elicits a reappraisal of what has already been seen, but which has not been fully understood. There is a discipline in the layout of the text, which follows a grammar, which embodies stylistic conventions that regulate what lies on the page, and which gives it a predictable quality. Far from being a liability that imprisons the author's message, the formalised layout of the text facilitates an amplification of the message, that minimises unnecessary misunderstandings arising over its form of presentation. It frees the message (Flanagan 1991:283).

When a community accedes to the discipline of a liturgical rite it allows itself to be shaped by that rite and to enter into the meaning which the church is trying to convey. The rite, when used this way, becomes a paradigm for understanding the meaning of the ritual action and it has the capacity to enable the participants to move beyond the immediate situation and see the significance of the meaning of the rite in other social settings. Ritual is not merely to mirror secular social life, it is rather, to free people from the exigencies of the ephemeral and superficial to enter into a state of liminality where transcendent values may emerge. Good ritual can and does bear the weight of repetition or as V. Turner (1972a:391) has observed: "The archaic is not the obsolete." Ritual guides hermeneutics (Driver 1991:142) so that the meaning intended by the church is liberated through enactment.

To be initiated is not to have learned 'truths to believe' but to have received a tradition, in a way through all the pores of one's skin. Initiation comes about through a process of education which is like life: it is not the end of a simple intellectual course (indispensable though such may be today, but originally an identity (Chauvet 1995:31)

This does not mean that tradition is simply handed down in some mindless way. If the local church has accepted the tradition and creatively made it its own then that tradition becomes a living reality in the life of that community. It is that living reality which is communicated to the catechumens. This living reality is Christ.

The missionary dimension of every ecclesial community is the genuine expression of conformation to Christ and, therefore, of participation in the consecration and mission of the Lord (Bifet 1993:159).

Through the celebration of the rite of initiation not only the catechumens, but the whole parish community is also reminded of its sacramental identity and they are invited to reaffirm it (Searle 1991b:19). The community is invited to delve more deeply into the mystery of God's grace made available to us through the person of Christ. The catechumens and the baptised continually face the issues of group boundaries and world view in the process of initiation. As their sense of identity grows so does their sense of mission. This came out clearly in the comments made by catechumenate staffs in the initial questionnaire used to

ascertain the sense of mission apparent in the newly initiated (cf. Appendix One). Once a community opens itself to the touch of grace in Christ it is led on a pilgrimage where the darkness of faith leads to the brightness of the reign of God.

#### *4.2.1.3 The Third Way : Catechesis through Participation*

The third section of no.75 again stresses the communal nature of the initiation process while highlighting the maternal role of the church.

The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing. Celebrations of the word of God are arranged for their benefit, and at Mass they may also take part with the faithful in the liturgy of the word, thus better preparing for their eventual participation in the liturgy of the eucharist. Ordinarily, however, when they are present in the assembly of the faithful they should be kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the eucharist begins (unless their dismissal would present practical or pastoral problems). For they must await their baptism, which will join them to God's priestly people and empower them to participate in Christ's new worship (RCIA 75.3).

The third way in which catechesis takes place during the catechumenate is through liturgical rites. The church acts as a mother by providing sustenance for those who will become her members through liturgical celebrations. Participation in the rites themselves facilitate faith coming to consciousness (Dunning 1993b:122). Catechesis which is attentive to what is most characteristic of liturgical experience provides a starting point and focus for catechetical reflection.

This kind of catechesis seeks to form catechumens with a view to the transformation of the whole person. With the meaning of liturgical catechesis in mind Ostdiek concluded that:

Since transformation is a journey of faith and conversion that takes a lifetime, liturgical catechesis is needed by disciples of every age according to their level of development ...(Ostdiek 1990:170-171).

Good liturgical catechesis is rooted in a healthy sense of ritual. Within the RCIA ritual assists the process of conversion because it makes for identity formation in

the life of the catechumen. In crossing the threshold of the door of the church the catechumen has crossed a boundary literally, but also symbolically. The interaction of the signs within the liturgical ritual help to shape identity for the participants. Schreier (1985:65) wrote: "To restructure boundaries is to restructure identity." In the Rite of Acceptance boundaries are restructured. The inquirer is no longer on the outside looking in and questioning. He/she is invited into the community. This invitation begins a change in status. Though not yet a full member they are nonetheless in relationship with the church.

Catechumens are linked with the Church in a special way, since, moved by the Holy Spirit, they are expressing an explicit desire to be incorporated in the Church. By this very desire, as well as by the life of faith, hope and charity which they lead, they are joined to the Church which already cherishes them as its own (CCL = Code of Canon Law 206.1).

The restructured identity may not be immediately felt, but nevertheless the meaning is conveyed in various ways in the Rite of Acceptance: the welcome, the signing, the procession into the assembly, and the reception of the Bible or Missal. Ritual though is not about emotions, it is about meaning being conveyed through symbols and gestures. Huck, reflecting on the use of gesture within a ritual, maintains that: "It is the gesture of what I mean, not of what I feel" (Huck 1989:29). This is true of all rituals. The ritual or parts of a ritual signify not the present emotional state, but the meaning that is the foundation for the ritual or the ritual gestures. They act as what V. Turner (1978:244) called a *ritual system* which is part of what he calls a larger social process or drama. The Rite of Acceptance is the beginning of a rite of passage that is not completed until the sacraments of initiation are celebrated. Of this first phase of the rite of passage V. Turner wrote:

The first phase, separation, comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or the group from either an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from an established set of cultural conditions (a "state") (Turner, V. 1972a:393).

To some extent the precatechumenate is a preparation for this separation and change of status, yet the ambiguity of the liminal state remains no matter how

much preparation has been undertaken because of the threshold that has been crossed in the Rite of Acceptance. This liminal phase facilitates conversion and community. It is a stripping away of all that is familiar and secure. Turner described it in this way:

During the intervening liminal period, the second phase, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger," or "liminar" ) becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt-and-between all fixed points of classification, he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state (Turner, V. 1972a:393).

V. Turner believed that during this period of liminality *communitas* emerges. It is an experience of relating to other ritual participants, at least at the symbolic level, with a sense of an undifferentiated, ecstatic oneness (Arbuckle 1988:22). This is what V. Turner calls antistructure by which he means:

A way of relating which is full of unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises in all kind of groups, situations, and circumstances. It is a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:250).

For the individual *communitas* is a liberation from conformity to society's values and behaviours to live at a much deeper level. In the case of the catechumens and those guiding them it means they are free to answer a deeper call to discipleship. It does this because in the liminal state *communitas* has people strain toward the universal and that which unites (V. Turner 1974:202).

In Schreiter's terms the catechumens are undergoing identity formation. Boundaries are being restructured and that which informs their world views is changing (Schreiter 1985:66). This happens through this third way of catechesis which is envisioned in no.75.3 of the RCIA. The value of catechesis, through the lectionary and ritual, is that the catechumens are formed in a more holistic way. This way of catechesis clearly places value on the intellectual, but also utilises symbols to convey meaning. This approach reaches more deeply into the personal identity of an individual via symbols and rituals. They confirm a person's identity

while at the same time challenging it with Christian symbols and meanings. Metaphors are created which reveal the message of Christ in the scriptures and in liturgical celebrations which do not ignore cultural sign systems, but rather unlock them so that linkages can be made (Schreier 1985:69). This kind of instruction is not didactic in nature, but intuitive. Catherine Dooley has pointed out that:

Liturgical rites do not celebrate ideas; they celebrate Christ's presence in our lives, revealed and discovered in the presence of the community gathered in his name. To catechize through the liturgy is to form the catechumen in a liturgical spirituality that is trinitarian and paschal, communal and sacramental, committed to the promotion of the reign of God (Dooley 1988:10-11).

It is this kind of spirituality that carries the catechumen through the initiation process, beyond mystagogia through a life time of Christian living. Liturgical rites that celebrate the mystery of Christ are renewed in the life of the parish community each Sunday as the church moves through the liturgical year.

#### *4.2.1.4 The Fourth Way: Catechesis through Sharing in Mission*

The fourth way in which catechumens are prepared for Christian initiation is by sharing in the mission of the church. The text states:

Since the Church's life is apostolic, catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith (RCIA 75.4).

This article calls for the witness of faith on the part of the catechumens. It calls for Christian praxis. It presupposes that catechumens learn by doing. The Lectionary for Mass reiterates this thought, and also teaches that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that believers are able to translate the word of God into concrete action "in the power of the Spirit, we who are hearers of the word are called to be "doers of the word" (LMIn 6).

The catechumens are not merely to join one of the parish ministry groups. Rather, after serious reflection on the word of God they need to be helped to see how they might use their gifts not only for the church, but also for the world (Dunning 1993b:136-137). Catechists and sponsors alike need to provide

opportunities for the catechumens to become aware of how they might be of service. When such an awareness arises from the conversion experience it has deeper and more long lasting effect (Morris 1989:95). The catechetical team might need to direct the catechumens to different avenues of service. Writing out of years of pastoral experience Dunning has given this advice:

From the very beginning, when the person enters the Church as a catechumen, there should be exposure to what other Catholic Christians are doing to proclaim the Good News. That applies especially to the area of social justice. Since RCIA process can be (a) deeply personal experience of the Lord, perhaps for the first time, broader issues of the community and justice might be neglected. That is understandable, the catechesis constantly needs to relate personal conversions to God with God's concern for the hungry, thirsty, naked, prisoners and the poor (Dunning 1981:71).

Dunning's words are a reminder of the centrifugal nature of mission. Conversion to God implies a reaching out to God's people. Apostolic witness needs to be a very real part of the initiation process if we are going to be faithful to what the church intends in the RCIA. The apostolic involvement that is envisioned by the RCIA is not merely a service project that is seen merely as part of the process and nothing more. Mission and witness are part of the lifelong journey of conversion to which the church has invited the catechumen. It is a necessary dimension of Christian transformation.

Perhaps this stage of the RCIA process most clearly reflects the church's mission to make disciples of all peoples. It is a period of serious and regular reflection on the word of God as the source of Christian formation. Catechumens are being formed for the sake of mission. The local parish shares in the mission of Christ :

By actualizing the church through its liturgy and by inviting candidates/catechumens to partake in that action, the assembly helps to form them in what it means to be church (Vincie 1993:29).

This sense of being church is rooted in how the parish understands its identity and the ecclesiology which has shaped its initiation praxis. Before looking at the

ecclesiology inherent in the RCIA we need to say something about four other rites that may be celebrated during the catechumenate.

#### 4.3 Optional Rites

Celebrations of the word of God, minor exorcisms, blessings and anointings enrich the initiation process at the catechumenate stage. Though these rites are optional they all aim at strengthening and supporting the catechumen in his/her decision to respond to Christ's call to conversion.

##### **4.3.1 Celebrations of the Word of God**

The RCIA directs that during the catechumenate celebrations of the word of God should be arranged for the catechumens. No. 81 distinguishes between three types of celebrations: special celebrations for the catechumens and celebrations which are connected with catechetical instruction. The special celebrations might mark the beginning of new liturgical seasons or special feasts of the liturgical year. Other celebrations could be prepared to reinforce catechetical teaching: e.g., creation, social responsibility, repentance. These celebrations should, ideally, prepare the catechumens to enter into the liturgy of the Word in Sunday Mass with more understanding. This follows from the church's conviction that God speaks to the assembly through the scriptures and awakens its members to faith. This is evident in every sacramental rite of the church.

The RCIA is permeated with appreciation of the role of the scriptures, and implementation efforts must be faithful to this emphasis. The image of conversion which emerges from the Rite is thoroughly Christocentric, and this focus will best be maintained in pastoral efforts which use the Christian scriptures at every point in the candidate's development (Duggan 1980: 332).

The three kinds of celebrations of the word of God are the concrete manifestation of the way the church's conviction about the role of the scriptures in the initiation process can be implemented. Nevertheless, Moudry has cautioned that a distinction must be made between these celebrations:

There is a difference between celebrations of the word and the liturgy of the word. The latter refers to what we do in the eucharistic assembly, particularly on Sunday. Second, they emphasize that among the celebrations of the word, the liturgy of the word at eucharist holds a unique place both for formation of the catechumens and the ongoing conversion of the faithful...The word that is proclaimed in the eucharistic assembly interacts with the meal ritual in a distinct and pre-eminent fashion. It is not just another "celebration of the word" in support of catechesis (Moudry 1992:17).

Moudry's insights remind us how important the liturgy of the word is for the ongoing formation of the Christian assembly. He also pointed out that if the liturgy of the word is done in the way the revised liturgy intends, the scripture readings for each Sunday will awaken in the catechumens a deep hunger for the eucharist. So the liturgy of the word has an intrinsic connection with the liturgy of the eucharist (Moudry 1992:18). Pastorally, parish liturgy teams must ask themselves whether or not this is apparent in the Sunday celebrations of the liturgy of the word.

The liturgy of the word is not merely a prelude to the liturgy of the eucharist, but a symbol of Christ's presence (SC 7). That presence is as real as Christ's presence in the eucharist. It is not didactic instruction or a catechetical lesson. Again, Moudry provides us with a valuable insight:

The text and the preacher together reveal what God is doing here and now in this assembly of hearers. Proclamation serves not so much to inform as to reveal how the lives of the hearers are being interpreted because God is present and acting in this proclaimed word (Moudry 1992:20).

The distinction between informing and revealing is significant. In the past Catholics have emphasised the pre-eminence of doctrine in preparing people for baptism, but since Vatican II stress has been placed on the word, especially the word proclaimed in the liturgy as foundational for formation in faith.

Most readily recognized among convictions about growth in faith is the foundational role that scripture has in determining Christian faith...The continued growth of faith is nourished far more by scripture than by doctrine (Challancin 1990:24).

It is because scripture can effect growth in faith that the catechumens, when they are dismissed from the assembly, are sent forth to reflect on the scriptures which

were proclaimed in the midst of the assembly and through which the Lord wishes to meet them.

According to RCIA 82 celebrations of the word arranged especially for the catechumens have a fourfold purpose:

1. To implant in their hearts the teachings they are receiving;
2. To give them instruction and experience in the different aspects and ways of prayer;
3. To explain to them the signs, celebrations, and seasons of the liturgy;
4. To prepare them gradually to enter the worship assembly of the entire community.

These services of the word extend liturgical catechesis because they celebrate Christ's presence in the word in the form of ritual prayer. They presuppose the use of sacramentals<sup>9</sup> such as water, candles, and incense, they also call for movement, and gestures. In this way the catechumens are made aware of the myriad ways God can speak to them through the word that is proclaimed, listened to, celebrated and integrated into one's life. Through the seasons of the liturgical year the mystery of Christ becomes present and catechumens are drawn into that mystery as it is revealed to them through the word proclaimed. At another level they are also enfolded by the mystery through the celebration of the seasons of the liturgical year. This happens not by words, but through the colours which symbolise each season and the customs which disclose to the catechumens the depth and riches of the paschal mystery made present in Christ.

The third context for celebrations of the word is that of catechetical instruction. These services could be used to enhance input sessions which are led by the catechist. Celebrations of the word in this context help to reinforce what was studied. This moves catechesis out of an educational model into a catechumenal model where the catechumens become disciples of the Word (Ivory 1982:218). Furthermore the catechumen learns to praise God as he is revealed in the Word within this ritual context. The ritual frees him/her to experience God's word in new ways, sometimes comforting, sometimes challenging, but always effective.

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<sup>9</sup> Sacramentals are certain religious practices and objects, e.g., signing oneself with holy water, blessing of foods at Eastertime, incense, candles, etc. (Cross 1958:1199).

In the catechumenal process, the Word of God contests the choices and priorities that summarize our lives. There are no theories here. The Word of God presents radically different choices and priorities...Because God's Word reveals our redemptive need, it discloses the ground of our praise. Because God's Word shows the void in which we have been and from which we continue to be rescued, it prods our dull tongues to praise the gracious gift of God's love (Duffy 1984a:54-55).

The power of the word of God acts upon the catechumen and moves him/her to offer praise. This response cannot be programmed. God's word simply invites and inspires and as the Letter to the Hebrews teaches it is: "Living and effective... it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

#### 4.3.2 Minor Exorcisms

The minor exorcisms are so named to distinguish them from the exorcisms which occur during the celebration of the scrutinies during the time of illumination and purification (cf. 5.3.1). Neither type of prayer implies that a person is possessed by the devil (Henderson 1988:28). They simply recognise that conversion is not complete and that struggles may be going on in the lives of the catechumens which inhibit their full response to Christ. The rite itself clarifies the meaning of these exorcisms:

They draw the attention of the catechumens to the real nature of Christian life, the struggle between flesh and spirit, the importance of self-denial for reaching the blessedness of God's kingdom, and the unending need for God's help (RCIA 90).

The eleven prayers of exorcism contained in the rite give expression to the need for the catechumens to become aware of the mixed motivation of every human action. An example of the prayers used in the celebration of the minor exorcisms will bear this out:

O God,  
Creator and Savior of all,  
in your love you have formed these your servants;  
in your mercy you have called them and received them.  
Probe their hearts today

and watch over them as they look forward to the coming of your Son.

Keep them in your providence  
and complete in them the plan of your love.

Through their loyalty to Christ  
may they be counted among his disciples on earth  
and be acknowledged by him in heaven.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen (RCIA 90E).

Here we find nothing that suggests possession by the devil; only the reality that the motivation of one's heart must always be examined to see if one's motivations are to express "Loyalty to Christ." Foley has pointed out two principles in using these prayers for the minor exorcisms so that they do not become routine, but using them often enough so as to convey their ritual import:

First, numerous rituals are proper to the catechumenal journey: anointings, blessings, celebrations of the word, etc. The breadth of this repertory must be respected and explored. The presumption is that the more effective the ritual language of the entire catechumenate is, the more effective the minor exorcisms will be. Second, the minor exorcisms challenge catechumens by addressing the difficulties of conversion with strong penitential overtones (Foley 1992:33).

The language of these prayers is a language of choice. In saying yes to Christ the catechumens are saying no to evil. Christian conversion, as represented in these prayers of exorcism, deals with ultimate questions and demonstrates the uncompromising nature of that choice which stems from the revelation of God in the person of Christ (Duggan 1983:145). This has been confirmed in the research done by Finn, who has noted that in the early church the process of conversion was understood as a battle and that the purpose of the catechumenate was to reform the catechumens. He wrote:

Formation rather than information was its thrust ("resocialization," as the social scientist might call it). For the early Christian was persuaded that conduct mirrored conviction...This formative task was assigned to exorcism, because the obstacle to conversion was a literally terrifying field of forces -- physical, psychological, and spiritual (Finn 1992a:5).

Driver offers this insight into what Finn has called resocialisation, but names it transformation:

The business of religions and their rituals, then, is to effect transformations, not only of persons' individual subjectivities but also transformations of society and the natural world. In a religious perspective, the personal, societal, and physical realms are not isolated from each other but participate together in a single field of divine power (Driver 1991:172).

This approach to conversion regards exorcism as a necessary part of preparation for baptism. Finn (1992a:6) commented that exorcisms aimed at exciting a healthy fear and an abhorrence of the very thought of evil in the catechumens. They maintained a realistic view of the battles that take place in the human heart when choosing to do good.

Foley also has suggested that the minor exorcisms are especially appropriate in time of discernment, recognition of sin, personal struggle or even tension within the catechumenal community (Foley 1992:34). These prayers may be used in the context of a catechetical session or in a celebration of the word of God, or if a special need arises in the life of one of the catechumens (RCIA 92). By using the minor exorcisms well:

We affirm that conversion is not attained by human intelligence but achieved through divine wisdom. The church teaches that, more than anywhere else, this divine wisdom becomes present to the community through its worship. By enacting the rites with integrity and imagination, we let the Spirit that brought the church into being guide those who long to be a part of that church (Foley 1992:37).

To this a caution might be added. Driver (1991:173), using insights from van Genep, pointed out that if the power of ritual to effect change is doubted then religion becomes metaphysics and transformation becomes the work of the intellect and technology. Commenting on the consequences of such doubt Driver continued:

That is a dangerous situation because it masks two truths that are best known through the practice of ritual: first, that the agencies affecting human destiny, whether they be human or

divine aspects of nature or some combination of these, are of a personal character and should be addressed performatively; and second, that communal life without such performance becomes a mockery of itself, drained little by little of the experience of *communitas* and the recognition of the human as human (Driver 1991:173).

The significance of Driver's insights should not be underestimated. He affirmed the transcendent dimension of life and insisted on the power of the performative nature of ritual. Driver (1991:176) maintained that the repetitive pattern of ritual is not its most distinctive feature, but "the performance of direct address to the powers being confronted or invoked." Furthermore he stated that:

The persons who perform a ritual are inserting their own present actions, their own subjectivity and interactions with others, into a holistic understanding of the world. They aim at a transformation of the world, or some part of it, through the work that they do; not as detached manipulators or objectified things that behave according to invariant rules, but as free agents actively impinging upon other free agents in a spirited world (Driver 1991:175).

Driver's insights are a reminder that we do not live in a one-dimensional world. Christians, because of faith, live in the present world while rehearsing life in the kingdom. He affirms the power of ritual to transform the world because it is action of the highest order while also navigating transition for the performers of ritual. The transition is from everyday society into liminality and re-entry into society. Ritual is a generating source of social change and structure (Driver 1991:189).

Missiologists need to pay close attention to these insights about ritual because the ritual process serves to create the kind of oneness and sense of identity that can be sustained and shaped by Christianity. Furthermore ritual opens up new vistas about the fundamental values, myths, ethos and world view of a culture. It is at this level that Christianity must dialogue with culture for true inculturation to take place. Such a hermeneutic would be useful for moves across cultural boundaries and would help various cultures to see Christianity as a vital way of life (Schreier 1994:18).

Two other rites are closely connected with the celebration of the exorcisms: the blessing and anointing of the catechumens. These rites, like the

exorcisms, are performed by a priest or deacon. These rites allow for a catechist who is appointed by the bishop to also preside at these prayers (RCIA 91). This makes possible the celebration of the various rites even if a priest cannot be present.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Blessings and Anointings

Prayers of blessing and anointings are usually used in the context of a celebration of the word of God. They can also be joined to the minor exorcisms.

Of the blessings the rite says:

The blessings of the catechumens are a sign of God's love and of the Church's tender care. They are bestowed on the catechumens so that, even though they do not as yet have the grace of the sacraments, they may still receive from the Church courage, joy, and peace as they proceed along the difficult journey they have begun (RCIA 95).

This becomes evident when one examines the nine prayers of blessing which the rite provides. The language is strongly positive and reassuring.

God of power,  
look upon these your servants  
as they deepen their understanding of the Gospel.  
Grant that they may come to know and love you  
and always heed your will  
with receptive minds and generous hearts.  
Teach them through this time of preparation  
and enfold them within your Church,  
so that they may share your holy mysteries  
both on earth and in heaven.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen (RCIA 97C).

The prescriptive language of the prayer is given added strength by the gesture of the presider who lays hands on each catechumen individually. When prayed within the context of the Sunday eucharist these prayers may replace the dismissal (RCIA 97). This gesture conveys the power of God as well as the church's role in

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<sup>10</sup> In many rural dioceses of the Catholic Church priests minister to several faith communities. Opening up this ministry to catechists is not only a practical solution when priests are not available, but also gives expression to the various ministries open to the laity in the church.

initiating new members into the body of Christ. These prayers offer an insight into the church's understanding of conversion:

Conversion is not seen as a change from a state of being totally without God's loving presence to one of suddenly enjoying his favor. It is a gradual movement which is supported and fostered by the Father's love, mediated in the prayer of the Church, and constantly accessible to the candidates who recognize his guiding hand at work (Duggan 1983:147).

Gestures which express this perspective on conversion help to personalise and concretise what the church desires for the catechumens. One such gesture is that of anointing. The use of oil within the process of Christian initiation dates from the second or third centuries (Finn 1992a:19).

Blessed by the bishop these oils signify the universal charisms of the church for healing, consecration, (chrism), and faith building (oil of the catechumens) (McNally 1990:896).

The oil of catechumens is used for these anointings. Anointings which are done in connection with exorcism express the church's care for the catechumens. Empeureur has pointed out that the gesture of anointing performed by the church can be a powerful means to convey the Christ's care for the catechumens:

When a generous amount of oil is used and rubbed in, it can be recognized as the manifestation of the care of Christ...Oil is a protective ointment and so can easily symbolize the church's protection for her progeny (Empeureur 1990:51-52).

This kind of sacred sign calls attention to God's presence in one's life. As is the case with all liturgical rites, the catechumens need to be prepared for them so that they can benefit from them. The RCIA directs that:

Care is to be taken that the catechumens understand the significance of the anointing with oil. The anointing with oil symbolizes their need for God's help and strength so that, undeterred by the bonds of the past and overcoming the opposition of the devil, they will forthrightly take the step of professing their faith and will hold fast to it unflinchingly throughout their lives (RCIA 99).

From this article it is evident that anointing can be joined to the minor exorcisms with very positive effects since both aim at strengthening the catechumens in difficult moments, assuring them of God's love and the church's care for them.

These various rituals help the catechumens to identify their faith experiences as well as the obstacles they face in order to grow in faith. Within the context of ritual the catechumens find the support of the community and of the Lord readily available to them as they come face-to-face with the mystery of Christ dying and rising in their lives. The rituals of exorcism, blessing and anointing have grown out of the scriptures in which Jesus heals, blesses and exorcises. As catechumens grow in their love for the word of God they will find that the power of the word is released through these ritual actions. They will fill the catechumens with this same power that will eventually lead them to the waters of the font and the bread and wine of the eucharistic table (Austin 1988b:24). These rituals are an oasis on the journey of faith begun at the Rite of Acceptance.

#### 4.4 Summary

The Lutheran pastor, Frank Senn (1993:55), has said that: "Mission does not begin with the church; it originates in the redemptive purpose of the triune God." The whole of the catechumenate is devoted to aiding the catechumens as they become aware of God's redemptive purpose for them and for the entire world. Through the scriptures and rituals of the church God's plan is gradually made known to them in the midst of the community (RCIA 4). As the catechumens experience the love which the Lord has for them they also become aware of the love God has for all people. They also learn a method of mission which is grounded in the very life of Christ. What is celebrated in the liturgy becomes a lived reality. "That which is sacramentally present in the cultic act is to be the pattern of the whole of life" (Senn 1993:66).

The life and mission of Jesus is put before the eyes of the catechumens through the scriptures proclaimed in the Sunday assembly and through the celebration of liturgical rites that seek to form the catechumens in the pattern of Christ's dying and rising. This pattern takes concrete form through participation in the apostolic mission of the community (RCIA 75.4). The catechumenate is a

school for learning how to be on mission. There is no question as to whether or not one is sent, that is simply apparent from the whole process of initiation which leads women and men in the way of transformation into Christ, the first missionary.

Liturgical catechesis which uses the lectionary as its sourcebook cannot but be "missionary by its very nature" because the word proclaimed in the midst of the community of faith is a missionary word, it is Christ sent by the Father to make him known and the kingdom present (RM 13). As catechumens are formed in the image of that word they are undergoing a process by which they are prepared to be sent out. It is for this purpose that RCIA 75.4 directs that catechumens work actively with other members of the community to spread the gospel and build up the church. Both the kingdom and the church are important.

One may not separate the Kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both...Hence the Church's special connection with the Kingdom of God and of Christ, which she has "the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all peoples" (RM 18).

The RCIA envisions that through the initiation process the catechumens are being prepared to take up the mission of the church. They are formed for mission by the word of God, but also through the rituals and symbols that the church uses within the liturgy. The RCIA does not work like some magic formula to create a sense of mission within the catechumens. It only offers the possibility for such growth. The catechumens' decision to ask to share in the faith of the church has led them to the beginning of a life long journey of conversion. They gradually can come to share the ecclesial vision of mission which is born out of their experience of God's love in their lives and in the life of the faith community.

The Church is called, first, to proclaim the word and in sacrament the definitive arrival of the kingdom in Jesus of Nazareth; second, to offer itself as a test-case or sign of its own proclamation, to be a people transformed by the Spirit into a community of faith, hope, love, freedom and truthfulness; and third, to enable and facilitate the coming of the reign of God through service with the community of faith and in the world at large (McBrien 1981:14).

This is the same pattern that emerges in the formation of the catechumens. The word is proclaimed to them and they come to know Jesus and the values of the kingdom. They do this in the context of a community which is striving to model that kingdom and is itself formed by God's word and the church's liturgical rituals. The conversion journey becomes for the catechumens a root metaphor<sup>11</sup> of the whole of Christian life. Their experience of liminality prepares them for a life of mission in which they will constantly be crossing boundaries so as to make the Christ Event known to all peoples

Mission is participation in the Event which stands on the boundary line between the life of this age and the life of the age to come (Orchard 1964: 45).

An experience of *communitas* which V. Turner (1969:96-97) defines as "an essential and generic human bond" opens the catechumens to the possibility of experiencing this sense of bonding with all peoples. As a person forms bonds with others the witness of their lives has the possibility of leading people to the Lord while also helping them to grow and develop as persons of faith. Turner's notion of *communitas* is akin to what is meant by the well-known Zulu proverb, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means, *A person is a person with (through) others*. Taken from a faith perspective this might mean that in sharing life with others one becomes the person God created one to be and is enabled to share the deepest values of one's life. In this context one can better bear witness to Christ.

The rituals of the minor exorcisms help the catechumens to begin the practice of examining the motives for the choices they make in life. They learn that only with God's help are they able to remain faithful to their commitments. The minor exorcisms also help the catechumens to face themselves as they really are: earthen vessels. This is especially important because the mission of Jesus was carried out not through overbearing power, but through the power of humble service (Senn 1993:44). It is their liturgical experience that forms them in this

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<sup>11</sup> This term is used in the Turnerian sense of a dominant symbol which pervades a whole process or culture. Its meaning is highly constant and consistent (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:245). Root metaphors are events, ideas, or persons which a culture employs an analogical tool to discover meaning in a world of ambiguity and conflict (Worgul 1990:1105).

kenotic paradigm of mission. The liturgy also keeps the paradigm before their minds and hearts through the proclamation of the word and its rites. Evangelization and worship are interdependent (von Allmen 1965:56).

To anoint someone is to touch them with a substance to bring about some effect (Empereur 1990:49). In the anointings that take place during the catechumenate the catechumens give credence to Empereur's definition of anointing. Through these prayers they experience the exorcism of obstacles to faith and are, at the same time, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit so that they can continue their catechumenal journey. Since it is the Spirit who directs the mission of the church (RM 24) the anointings sensitise the catechumens to the action of the Spirit and hence, better enable them to respond to the Spirit's call to mission. This call is reiterated in the weekly liturgies during which catechumens are present and experience how all the members of the community are strengthened for mission.

In its origins, then, mission is seen as a community commitment, a responsibility of the local Church, which needs "missionaries" in order to push forward towards new frontiers (RM 27).

Hopefully, the liminal experience which the catechumens have during the initiation process can serve to ready them to "pitch their tents" at the edges of the next new frontier whether it be in their same village or town or among peoples of other cultures. In the ideal environment the initiation process has the means for forming Catholics in a profound sense of mission. In the next chapter which deals with the Period of Illumination and Purification this conviction will be further refined.

Within a ritual context catechumens experience separation from a familiar style of life and enter a state of liminality in which they are called to deepen their conversion to Christ and grow in faith. They become liminars because though they have been welcomed by the church, they are not yet full members. We also demonstrated that in crossing the boundary of entry into the community of faith, symbolised by the act of crossing the threshold of the church in order to become a catechumen a person's world view begins to change because of the change in

social status. The catechumen is no longer an "outsider" even though he/she is not a full member.

I then explored the four ways in which catechesis is envisioned within the RCIA. We focused on the use of the lectionary as the sourcebook for catechesis because through the weekly reading the whole mystery of Christ is revealed. We noted that this manner of catechesis is far superior to the use of catechisms because the RCIA does not view initiation as a process of transmission of information about Christ to the catechumens. Instead it envisions the catechumens being called to conversion to Christ through the readings as proclaimed from the lectionary.

I endeavoured to demonstrate how the symbol of the journey is itself a symbol of mission and how the whole process of initiation awakens in the catechumens a sense of mission. My conviction is that the missionary must of necessity be able to live in a sustained state of liminality if he/she is to announce the reign of God with integrity. It is the betwixt and between nature of the liminal state that is so akin to the life of one who is intent on sharing in the mission of Christ. For the missionary is one who is at home everywhere while at the same time being at home nowhere, but is always ready to invite others to be companions on the journey. To be missionary is not so much going to another country, but being sent to participate in the mission of the Trinity to announce the coming of the kingdom in word and deed wherever one finds oneself.

As the RCIA process begins to unfold during the catechumenate some missiological issues are beginning to emerge. If the concern of missiologists is to offer the community theologies of mission which contribute to the unity and diversity of the church then they will have to pay attention to both the cultural and religious rituals of various peoples. They might look for the commonalties in the various rites of birth, death, marriage, initiation, and belonging and then see how these are or are not related to Christian rituals. Knowledge of rituals and their meaning would also aid the missiologist's appreciation and understanding of cultures especially in relationship to identity formation.

The relationship between ritual and evangelisation might also be explored by the missiological community. If Christian mission is waning in South Africa, perhaps it is because missiologists have not challenged missionaries to be more

attentive to the need for ritual in peoples' lives. Missiological reflection on this area of mission could serve the whole church.

The example of the Mossi people's inculturation of the Rite of Acceptance raises further questions about how the other rituals of the RCIA might be inculturated. If missiologists were able to gather information about the rituals of initiation of the various cultural groups in South Africa they could contribute to the development of a South African Rite of Christian Initiation that makes the use of the best knowledge available about ritual, myth and symbol. These are just a few of the issues missiologists might pursue; others will be raised in chapter eight.

In the following chapter I will describe the next stage of the initiation process. I will demonstrate how the Rite of Election reflects the church's theology of election and relate it to mission. The focus will then move to the rites which are included in this stage of the initiation process because they utilise scripture readings which depict Jesus engaged in mission and can have a formative effect on the candidates for initiation. Lastly, I will probe the liturgical rites and scriptural texts to find out how they convey a sense of mission.

## Chapter Five

### The Period of Enlightenment

*...When they are chosen who are set apart to receive baptism let their life be examined whether they lived piously as catechumens, whether they honored the widows, whether they visited the sick, whether they have fulfilled every good work. If those who bring them bear witness to them that they have done thus, then let them hear the gospel. Moreover, from that day they are chosen, let a hand be upon them and let them be exorcized daily.*

*--Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*

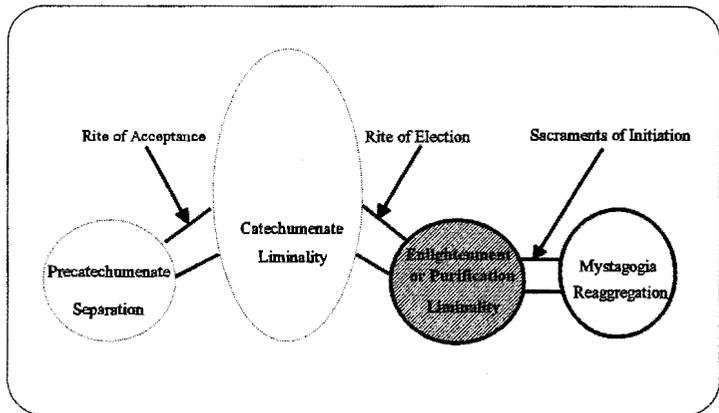


Figure 5. Four stages and three liturgical thresholds of the RCIA with the Period of Enlightenment highlighted as the focus of this chapter.

#### 5.0 The Purpose of the Chapter

In this chapter I examine the Period of Enlightenment and its attending liturgical rituals. In the second and third centuries the proximate preparation for baptism lasted from two days to a week. No one could enter this period of preparation "without having been called by God and chosen by the church" (Dujarier 1979a:94). Those who were accepted for preparation were called chosen ones, the elect (*electi*) or those who are being enlightened (*illumimandi*) (Bradshaw 1990:602; Jeffrey 1990:1149), hence the name given to this period of preparation. It was not until the fourth century when Christianity was recognised as legitimate and many more people desired to enter the catechumenate that the

church found it necessary to lengthen the period of preparation to seven weeks (Dujarier 1979a:96; Yarnold 1971:13).

I examine the rituals of this part of the RCIA to establish how the rites reflect the church's theology of election and to understand by what means the church offers enlightenment to the catechumens as they become the elect. We will pay special attention to the Rite of Election and the Scrutinies<sup>1</sup> because they embody the purpose and meaning of this stage of the initiation process.

We will also see how the RCIA at this stage reflects Turner's understanding of rites of passage. We will consider the importance of myth in identity formation as we begin to see how the root metaphor of the Christian faith leads not only to conversion, but to discipleship for mission. If Christians are to incarnate the gospel they must be familiar with its meaning and central figure, Jesus Christ. Since South Africans have stories of pain from the apartheid era or from present day violence, Schreier's (1992) concept of "redeeming narrative" will challenge us to see these stories in the light of Christ's own story. Pamela Jackson's (1993) commentaries on the scripture readings for the various rites of the catechumenate will also deepen our understanding of how the church uses scripture texts and ritual actions to shape the identity of the catechumens as well as the baptised during the Lenten season. During this stage of the initiation process the people seeking initiation into the church continue to live in a state of liminality which is sustained by the rites belonging to this stage.

The Period of Enlightenment begins with the celebration of the Rite of Election and ends with the proximate preparation for the sacraments of initiation. It coincides with the Lenten season of the liturgical year. It is meant to be a time

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 5.3.1. "The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect" (RCIA 141). They are celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. After the homily, the elect with their sponsors are invited to come forward into the sanctuary. The elect kneel while the whole community prays silently for them. Then prayers of intercession are offered for the elect. The presider then prays the prayer of exorcism and lays hands on the elect. Then the presider prays another prayer for the elect which is directly related to the Gospel passage that was proclaimed in the liturgy of the Word. The elect are then dismissed from the assembly. RCIA 143 explains the purpose of the scrutinies: "From the first to the final scrutiny the elect should progress in their perception of sin and their desire for salvation."

The original purpose of the scrutinies did not include any effort to verify the quality of religious instruction, but rather to provide a ritual means whereby the candidate for baptism could scrutinise himself/herself. The candidate was to penetrate his/her own heart to be assured of the mysterious action of God who called him/her. The scrutinies were to provide a progressive liberation from any domination by sin (Dujarier 1979a:116). It is out of this perspective that the scrutinies were restored to the initiation process.

of more intense preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. The rite describes it in this way:

This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance. This period is intended as well to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior (RCIA 139).

This part of the initiation process historically was the first to take shape. From the second and third centuries until the disintegration of the catechumenate the Lenten season was a special time in the preparation of catechumens. Since the restoration of the catechumenate as mandated by Vatican II (SC 64) Lent is once again regarded not only as having a penitential theme, but also a baptismal one.

### 5.1 A Description of the Rite of Election

The Rite of Election marks the crossing of the second threshold in a person's initiation journey. For catechumens it means crossing still another boundary toward full membership in the Catholic community of faith. I do not mean to suggest that this happens all of a sudden when the Rite of Election is celebrated. The boundaries of the RCIA reinforce the change in identity which is happening gradually in the lives of the catechumens.

As a catechumen moves through the initiation process he/she, if the process is carried out with integrity, would be experiencing a greater sense of belonging to the church community. As a catechumen grows in his/her understanding of the scriptures and the liturgy his/her level of participation is enriched with greater understanding. This is a very human process which entails forming relationships in the parish, sharing life with others and reaching out to society and making a contribution to the work of transforming the world by living a Christian life.

The Rite of Election is most appropriately celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent at the cathedral of the diocese with the bishop presiding.

The election, marked with a rite of such solemnity, is the focal point of the Church's concern for the catechumens. Admission to election therefore belongs to the bishop...(RCIA 121).

Dunning has commented on the significance of the bishop presiding at this rite as well as the representation of the various parishes in the diocese:

The rite celebrated with the bishop brings the candidate into union with the universal Church represented in his person. Often the presence of other candidates from a wide spectrum of urban, rural, suburban and different communities in the diocese also expands vision beyond narrow parish boundaries. In turn, the bishop supports and ratifies the efforts of local churches to proclaim the Good News (Dunning 1981:85).

The Rite of Election exposes the catechumens to the wider church and provides them with a celebration during which they see that God is calling many more people to follow him within the Roman Catholic Church<sup>2</sup>. The presence of the bishop is a strong sign of the church's official ratification of them as candidates for the sacraments of initiation. This celebration links individual parishes to one another in the diocese and to the bishop, the diocese's chief pastoral leader.

#### **5.1.1 Discernment before Election**

One of the optional rites of this stage in the process of initiation is the Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election. In the articles which offer an explanation of this rite a further connection is made between the local parish and the diocesan celebration of election:

As the focal point of the Church's concern for the catechumens, admission to election belongs to the bishop who is usually its presiding celebrant. It is within the parish community however, that the preliminary judgment is made concerning the catechumens' state of formation and progress (RCIA 107).

This text puts the responsibility for assessing the catechumens' readiness to enter into the more intense preparation which characterises the Period of Enlightenment in the realm of the parish. Robert Duggan, in reporting on his experience working with parish catechumenate teams, has pointed out that parish teams are reluctant to implement the directives of the RCIA which call for assessing the religious

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<sup>2</sup> During the years 1990-1993 the number of parishes participating in the Rite of Election in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg rose from 12 to 26. Though this is more than 100% increase in participation this represents only one-fourth of the total number of parishes in existence at that time.

experience of other people (Duggan 1995:3). Pastorally, this is a significant problem. Without such assessment the parish community cannot have an insight into the maturity and authenticity of the conversion of those who are participating in the initiation process. If this is such a difficult and sensitive aspect of the RCIA should it be ignored? Or might it be better to try to come to some understanding about why the rite calls for this kind of assessment? Does the rite offer the parish some criteria for making such an assessment? Duggan suggests that the problem is not that the rite calls for an assessment of the catechumens' progress, but that parishes do not understand the nature of such an assessment. He sees it in terms of discernment:

In our Roman Catholic tradition, discernment has very positive connotation of the community (or an individual) being led by the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit. Rather than associating discernment with a pejorative, juridical stance, we have always associated it with the welcomed help of a trusted spiritual guide or with the harmony and peaceful consensus that emerges from a community that has given itself over deeply to God in prayer (Duggan 1995:5).

Duggan's insights are significant. The parish faith community is not about casting judgement on persons. They are called by the rite to engage in a process of discernment in a context of faith using the criteria that are stated in the rite. These criteria deserve our attention because they emphasise what the church considers important in terms of Christian identity.

We find the criteria in no.75 which deals with catechesis during the catechumenate and so gives us the signs of maturity which should be seen in the life of the catechumens. These are: a profound desire to participate in the mystery of salvation (RCIA 75.1), to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, to focus their hope on Christ, to be motivated by faith, to love their neighbour and practice self-renunciation (RCIA 75.2). No.75.3 singles out participation in the church's liturgical rites and no.75.4 focuses on the catechumens' willingness to "work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith." The objective criteria of no. 75 help to alleviate the fear on the part of the catechumenate team about "judging" the religious experience of the catechumens. These criteria are

observable and are not dependent on individual personalities. They have to do with Christian identity formation. They are simply meant to give an indication of the developing world view and ethos of the catechumen.

In the directives which are part of the rite informing a parish about what needs to be done before the rite of election is celebrated we find these criteria:

Before the rite of election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. With deliberate will and an enlightened faith they must have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church, a resolve they will express publicly in the actual celebration (RCIA 120).

The discernment called for in this set of criteria requires that the catechumens and members of the catechumenate staff have formed mature and authentic Christian relationships in which they have continually built up a level of trust that enables and fosters the discernment mandated by the rite (Cf. Chapter 7 in which we look at the role of the church, the local parish and in individual Christian in relationship to the question of nation building). When no. 120 is implemented the discernment becomes more than a rubric governing a liturgical ritual.<sup>3</sup> Ferrone says it more strongly:

Discernment -- that critical component without which the rite is considered a sham, "mere formality" -- is, in the final analysis, a method of the church coming to a good decision about each candidate. The bishop as head of the local church presides over this judgment and is responsible for it in fact. That this discernment goes on outside of and prior to this ritual does not diminish its centrality to what happens in the rite. The godparents<sup>4</sup> ministry, then as now, is very important for this

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<sup>3</sup> Rubrics are ceremonial directions printed at the beginning of ritual books and in the course of the text. The word originated from the fact that in medieval books they were written in red (Lat. *ruber*), to distinguish them from the text of the services (Cross 1958:1187).

<sup>4</sup> Besides sponsors who are given to the catechumens by the parish, the catechumens may each select their own godparent. "Godparents are persons chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest" (RCIA 11) They should normally be Catholics. The rite further directs that these persons have qualities that will foster growth in faith in the life of the catechumen. Ideally, they are able to stay in relationship with the catechumen throughout his/her whole life (RCIA 11). ATE 57 does not allow a person who is not a Catholic to act as a godparent for a Catholic. The document does say that if for reasons of friendship or blood ties the candidate chooses a person who is not a Catholic he/she can act as a godparent provided that there is also a Catholic godparent for the candidate. Within this study we continue to use the word *sponsor* bearing in mind that the rite allows for both sponsors and godparents.

transition and for the period following election as well (Ferrone 1994:17).

The discernment that takes place has paramount importance in the rite because it endows the rite with a sense of integrity and also because of the historical precedent set for this practice in the early church (Dujarier 1979a:94-95). In the early church testimony was given by the sponsors of the catechumens as the text used at the beginning of the chapter reflects. These criteria form the rules of discernment which are spiritual and moral, basic characteristics of the Christian life (Ferrone 1994:14). They are not unduly subtle or complicated. They are dispositions about which the sponsors are to give testimony. In the present rite they also are the criteria by which the sponsors give testimony in the midst of the parish community and in the presence of the bishop at the Rite of Election (RCIA 112). The kind of discernment which is mandated by the RCIA takes place in a context of faith.

What is being discerned is not whether a person is good or bad, much less whether they are worthy or not to take the next step. Rather, the community is asking God to help them see whether *this* person at *this* particular point in time is ready to move on to *this* next step (Duggan 1995:5).

In this kind of process the catechumens and the community come before God in a spirit of humility to ask for an outpouring of his Spirit so that they are open to his guidance and direction. RCIA 76 cautions that nothing about the initiation process can be "settled a priori." It is assumed that growth takes time and that the readiness of the catechumens cannot be hurried. The rite itself confirms this thought:

The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough -- several years if necessary -- for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong. By their formation in the entire Christian life and a sufficiently prolonged probation the catechumens are properly initiated into the mysteries of salvation and the practice of an evangelical way of life. By means of sacred rites celebrated at successive time they are led into the life of faith, worship, and charity belonging to the people of God (RCIA 76).

This developmental view of growth recognises that change happens gradually in a person's life. Faith development is a lifetime process rather than a predetermined programme.<sup>5</sup>

The discernment that must go on before the Rite of Sending of the Catechumens makes the rite credible and adds weight to the meaning of the initiation process. After the presentation of the catechumens to the parish priest he questions the sponsors about the readiness of the catechumens. At that time they give testimony in front of the entire assembly. The priest then addresses the catechumens and invites them to sign the Book of the Elect.<sup>6</sup> The Rite of Sending continues with intercessions for the catechumens, a prayer over them and the dismissal. Form A of the dismissal brings together the celebration which the catechumens will participate in with the bishop, the scrutinies and Easter:

My dear friends, you are about to set out on the road that leads to the glory of Easter. Christ will be your way, your truth, and your life. In his name we send you forth from this community to celebrate with the bishop the Lord's choice of you to be numbered among his elect. Until we meet again for the scrutinies, walk always in his peace (RCIA 116).

## 5.1.2 The Rite of Election

### 5.1.2.1 *The Liturgy of the Word*

The Rite of Election is celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent in the cathedral with the bishop or his delegate presiding. The celebration takes the form of the Liturgy of the Word. The scriptures used are those of Cycle A<sup>7</sup> of the Lectionary (Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Psalm 50(51); Romans 5:12-19; and Matthew

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<sup>5</sup> Fowler (1984:48-76) deals with the seven stages of faith development described by the author. For another heuristic study on adult religious development cf. Whitehead & Whitehead: (1982:51-61). These authors make use of the insights of Turner and relate them to adult religious crisis.

<sup>6</sup> Every parish is to have a copy of The Book of the Elect. This book contains the names of those persons who have been deemed ready for immediate and more intense preparation for the reception of the sacraments of initiation. This book is brought to the Rite of Election during which the bishop signs the book as a sign of ratification of the election of those people whose names are contained in The Book of the Elect.

<sup>7</sup> The Cycle A readings are used for the Rite of Election and whenever a parish has catechumens no matter what cycle is being followed during the rest of the year. The Cycle A readings are especially important on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent when the Scrutinies are celebrated.

4:1-11). After the scriptures are proclaimed the bishop gives a homily. The rite gives this guideline about the homily:

This should be suited to the actual situation and should address not just the catechumens but the entire community of the faithful, so that all will be encouraged to give good example and to accompany the elect along the path of the paschal mystery (RCIA 129).

Our intention here is not to give a commentary on the readings, but simply to point out the context these readings and the bishop's homily set for the celebration of the Rite of Election. The reading from the Hebrew scriptures recalls the goodness and beauty of the creation of man and woman and their capitulation to the temptation by the serpent and the origin of sin. The sin was one of disobedience. This is the sad story of primordial evil and its catastrophic consequences for all of humankind (Ferrone 1984:54). The Psalm 50(51), the classical penitential psalm, is the assembly's response to the word of God just proclaimed. It typifies the truly penitent person's stance before God.

The reading from Romans recalls the origins of sin in the world and the liberation from sin which is the Christian's through faith in Christ who is "elected" by God to bring about his reign throughout the earth. This is not a question of humankind wanting salvation but of *needing* it. The gospel for the First Sunday of Lent is the story of the temptation of Jesus in the desert. This reading stands in contrast to the first reading from Genesis. In that reading we find that Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation. In the Gospel we see that Jesus made another response to temptation. He dismissed the devil and did not fall prey to temptation. Jesus' triumph over temptation is meant to fill the assembly with hope as they enter the Lenten Season. The bishop's homily needs to weave together the threads of these readings in terms of election and the call to ongoing conversion. In this way the catechumen's call is clarified and the continuing challenge to *metanoia* is again issued to the assembly. The homily needs to stress the divine initiative in election and the elects' call to mission because they have been chosen by God.

Election does not take place in a safe environment, as a kind of badge of special honor placed on a few lucky, chosen ones among others who are merely not so well favored. Election is

about what God is doing in answer to a desperate situation brought on by sin in all its forms. Election is about the salvation brought about by Christ in a way that is cosmic, communal and -- not least of all --personal. Election is about a God who leans toward humanity in spite of everything, a God whose love will not let us go (Ferrone 1994:54-55).

Election is celebrated with this conviction: that our gracious God calls anyone he will to be chosen for eternal life which will be given to them in the sacraments of initiation. So central is this concept of election that it could be considered one of the root metaphors of Christianity because it is value-laden and gives expression to the Christian world view (Luzbetak 1988:269).

After the homily the catechumens are presented to the bishop. The bishop then asks the sponsors to give testimony concerning the catechumens. Ferrone has noted that:

The testimony of the godparents (sponsors) is the one element with the deepest roots in the tradition...It is tremendously important as a statement of God's action in their lives and is the basis of the transition from the catechumenate period to the Lenten period of purification and enlightenment. It is also the vital connecting link of the rite with the process of conversion that takes place through catechesis, community life and so on (Ferrone 1994:20).

This kind of speaking on behalf of another is not only a liturgical action, but a deeply African custom (Parrinder 1981:79-82). Giving testimony for another is a proof of relationship. It demonstrates one's commitment to another.

After testimony is given through ritual questioning the assembly is asked if they are willing to support and pray for the catechumens. Then the bishop addresses the catechumens and asks them if they wish to enter fully into the life of the church. When they confirm that they are ready the bishop instructs the assembly to offer their names for enrolment. The catechumens are then called by name and come forward.

Though this can be done in a variety of ways,<sup>8</sup> in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg the director of the catechumenate or the chairperson of the Parish

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<sup>8</sup> If numbers are small the names of the catechumens can be inscribed in The Book of the Elect in the presence of the bishop. If there are a great many catechumens the names can simply be called out and The Book of the Elect simply presented to the bishop for his signature. Ferrone

Pastoral Council call out the names of the catechumens with the words: "The parish of St. N... presents the following people for election..." One by one the different parishes call out the names of the catechumens until the bishop is surrounded by those being proposed for election.

Election celebrates the catechumens' response to God, authenticates their personal desire for initiation, calls each by name to the Easter sacraments and turns their personal response into a public act signed and sealed by the church, the community of the Christian lives coming-to-be (Bouley 1988:32).

The bishop then formally calls the catechumens to election and reminds them that they need to continue their journey to "reach the fullness of truth" (RCIA 133). Following this the bishop calls upon the sponsors to continue to support the elect "through loving care and example" (RCIA 133). The elect and their sponsors then move back to their places in the assembly.

#### *5.1.2.2 Election as Affirmation*

Ferrone, with deep insight, has cautioned that election should not be confused with the psychological concept of affirmation:

It (election) is not based on any intrinsic merits of the one elected...The goal of election is not the realization of the identity of the group, but the achievement of God's will for the world. It does not inevitably lead to the building up of confidence in one's self; rather, it leads to the building up of confidence in God. It is an entirely theocentric concept...For all these reasons, it would be a serious reduction of the theological concept of election to attempt to assimilate it into the psychological concept of affirmation (Ferrone 1994:45-46).

The temptation to equate election with affirmation is a substantial one, especially since the majority of the membership of the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa is made up of the oppressed people of this country (de Gruchy 1995a:91).

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(1984:82-83) argues against the bishop signing the book since it is not a contract, but a ceremonial and record book and because it gives too much importance to the bishop. In this author's opinion it lends importance to this stage in the initiation process and in the experience of the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg during 1990-1993 it gave the elect a sense of support by the larger church.

Election includes the idea of affirmation, but cannot be reduced only to this psychological concept. Election implies challenge and judgement and God's choice is made in light of his plan of salvation. Election has been defined as:

The act of choice whereby God picks an individual or group out of a larger company for a purpose or destiny of his own appointment ( Packer 1988:314).

Election is then a sign of affirmation, but affirmation does not exhaust the concept of election. It is a sign of God's unconditional love, a love that endures no matter what the circumstances of one's life may bring. The Whiteheads (1982) have written about affirmation in the context of the process of human maturation. Their insights can serve us well.

Christianity proclaims that the real basis of one's worth lies beyond one's accomplishments, even beyond good works. Ultimately it is God's love that grounds human dignity and the mature sense of self-worth. God does not love me because I am good; rather, I am able to be good because God loves me. And God's love is unconditioned. It is both unmerited and unmeritable. It does not *depend* on what I do or what I am; it constitutes these (Whitehead & Whitehead 1982: 206).

Divine election is the source of self-worth and affirmation but goes much deeper. It contains a theology of how God, in his mysterious love, chooses individuals and groups to further his reign on earth. Election also encompasses a call to conversion, moral obligations, service and mission. It means that those who are chosen are called to bear the image of God (Packer 1988:317). Such a call by God is both an affirmation and a challenge because one's life takes on an eschatological dimension. Election is also related to the promise of eternal glory (2 Tim 2:10) and the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:1-2). The elect trust in God's promises and live as God's "holy and beloved" ones (Colossians 3:12) (Ferrone 1994:48). It is this future dimension that imbues life with faith perspective and is the ultimate goal of mission.

### 5.1.2.3 *Election and Mission*

The rich theology inherent in the concept of election necessitates catechesis about the meaning of election. All members of the church need to understand that election has to do with the accomplishment of God's will here on earth. Why he chooses people is entirely a matter of his largesse and mercy, not anything merited by individuals. All are called for the sake of mission (cf. 5.2).

The rite continues with prayers of intercession for the elect, their catechists, sponsors, families and their parish communities. The intercessions are brought to a conclusion with a prayer over the elect and then the assembly is dismissed. The rite is appropriately concluded with a hymn that has the theme of mission or an assurance of the Lord's presence.

With the celebration of this rite the catechumens continue their initiation journey through the liminality stage of this rite of passage, but with a change in status. They have crossed another threshold which was marked by the Rite of Election and have become the elect. The grace of conversion (cf. 3.4) has led them to deeper faith, a sense of *communitas*<sup>9</sup> and mission. They are still undergoing interior transformation (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:249), but they have also moved closer to full membership because of their change in status. Once the catechumens become the elect there is greater certainty of moving toward the reception of the sacraments of initiation. This "processual form of ritual" is what characterises rites of passage in Turnerian thought (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:249).

*Communitas* also continues to develop among the catechumenate group of sponsors and the elect. The Turners described this experience in the following way:

It is a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship. The distinction between structure and *communitas* is not the same as that between secular and sacred; *communitas* is an essential and generic human bond (Turner, V. & Turner, E. 1978:250).

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<sup>9</sup> V. Turner distinguishes *communitas* from community. He sees the latter as structured, rational and predictable. The former is purely spontaneous and self-generating. *Communitas* springs up among people in the liminal state. Bonds are formed which would not ordinarily occur because of divisions and distinctions in society (Turner, V. 1969:139; Turner, V. 1974:202).

Within the context of the RCIA *communitas* is more than a human bond. It is a bond being built up among people in Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this liminal situation the elect take cognisance of themselves and find that a new world view is taking shape for them which continues to challenge them (Turner, V. 1972a:400).

#### 5.1.2.4. *Implementation of the RCIA*

On the pastoral level the implementation of this stage of the RCIA has met with various responses. In the Coronationville parish the Lenten period of election is now treated as an especially reflective time. In a session arranged to evaluate the implementation of the RCIA in the parish and to provide some input for members of the parish RCIA team those present came to some new insights into how to improve their implementation of the RCIA.<sup>10</sup> Up until 1995 the catechumens had not gone through an entire liturgical year as catechumens, but had been accepted as catechumens after Easter one year and received the sacraments of initiation the following Easter. Now after reflecting on the meaning of the stages and liturgical thresholds St. Anthony's parish RCIA team resolved to:

- a) implement the dismissal rite;
- b) make the Lenten season a more intense time of preparation for the Elect with a retreat-like character;
- c) lengthen the whole RCIA process to cover an entire liturgical year, including the time from Advent to Pentecost of the following year and;
- d) be more diligent about sponsor formation.

The RCIA team took these resolutions with a view to more serious formation of new members in the community. Their parish priest, Fr. Terry Barnard, remarked that he could see how important the RCIA was for parish life and the continual renewal of the parish because it was rooted in the scripture and the liturgy. Fr. Barnard's support for the RCIA is an important element in the implementation of this process of initiation in the parish.

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<sup>10</sup> This meeting was held on 14 March 1995. The author was asked to give some initial in-put on the stages of the RCIA. Insights that were articulated by the team members are those used in the text.

Mr. Dick Descroizilles, RCIA director for the Maryvale parish, remarked that difficulties arose in the implementation of the RCIA because of the transfer of priests.<sup>11</sup> In 1993 a new priest was assigned to the parish who knew nothing about the RCIA and was, at first, against the process. Mr. Descroizilles convinced him to talk to people who had been initiated through the RCIA process. Their experience convinced him. The parish has implemented the dismissal rite (cf. 4.1) and catechumens look forward to the opportunity they have for sharing more deeply about the Sunday scriptures. Though the parish does not have an RCIA team Mr. Descroizilles works with the parish deacon and sponsors who are sometimes people who were once catechumens. They see acting as sponsors as sharing in the mission of the church, he said.

Though the parish must still grapple with the question of implementing the period of mystagogia Mr. Descroizilles is hopeful because they again have a new parish priest who has had previous pastoral experience with the RCIA and wants it implemented in the parish. Perhaps the most telling insight that emerged from the interview with Mr. Descroizilles was this comment:

Once a parish has implemented the RCIA, no one can kill it. Even if a new priest comes, once the parish has taken ownership of the process, they will not let it die (Descroizilles Interview, 5/8/95).

Mrs. Marie Therese Leboa of the Diepkloof parish has noted that the diocesan celebration of the Rite of Election is a high point in the initiation process.<sup>12</sup> She stressed that especially in the years before the 1994 national, democratic elections people in the townships felt that when they met the bishop and were accepted by him they felt they had a contribution to make to the church and the world. Mrs. Leboa also said that coming to the cathedral with the bishop gave the elect a new sense of belonging to the whole Catholic Church. This was confirmed in the questionnaire answered by Mrs. Iris Majanelwa<sup>13</sup> of the Kagiso

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<sup>11</sup> Mr. Descroizilles' comments were made on 5 August 1995 in an interview about the RCIA and in a questionnaire dating from November, 1993. In this questionnaire I attempted to get some basic information about the implementation of the RCIA. Cf. Appendix One for the questionnaire.

<sup>12</sup> Comments from Mrs. Leboa were taken from the November, 1993 questionnaire and a subsequent interview in March, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Majanelwa's comments have been taken from the November, 1993 questionnaire

parish who observed that participating in the Rite of Election gave the elect a new sense of seriousness about their call to follow Christ in the Catholic church.

The action of God, realized by the Church, is the election. In effect, by this rite of decisive call the Church declares that those who are "chosen by God" may proceed to the sacraments. She makes manifest those whom God calls gratuitously to his life. And this is why, where possible, it is preferred that the bishop himself, or his delegate, preside at the celebration of this stage (Dujarier 1979a:99).

The bishop, as the shepherd and pastor of the local church, is a symbol of the unity of the diocese under his leadership. His presidency at this rite strengthens the level of seriousness with which the church views election.

Mrs. Majanelwa also said that when the parish first started the RCIA they did not take seriously the discernment aspect of the process. They would have between sixty-eight and seventy-five inquirers and all went on to sacramental initiation. Mrs. Majanelwa now stresses that discernment is one of the most important elements in the initiation process.<sup>14</sup> She also noted that the elect take seriously their responsibility for mission and share in the parish's apostolic outreach. The Kagiso parish has tried to instil a sense of mission in their catechumens and elect by acquainting them with the various activities of the parish to reach out, especially in their neighbourhood.

In the four parishes studied the RCIA has been implemented with different levels of commitment. All of these parishes have implemented it to a degree. It was not until the Coronationville parish took time to evaluate their present practice that it became obvious that they must work to implement the RCIA as fully as possible if they are going to let its vision of church shape their parish life. The RCIA team members noted that new members are slowly realising that being chosen by God requires that they participate in his saving mission toward the world.<sup>15</sup>

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and a subsequent interview with her in October, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> At the celebration of the Rite of Election on 5 March 1995 the Kagiso Parish had thirty-seven catechumens. The drop in number from previous years is the result of better discernment and more careful formation.

<sup>15</sup> This insight came out in an evaluation session which took place on 14 March 1995 at which the parish priest, the catechumenate team and the author were present.

## 5.2 The Theology of Election

The concept of election has deep historical and theological roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Election is deeply connected with the identity of Israel as the chosen people, but the concept, in its most radical form, did not exist at an early period. Scholars like von Rad maintain that:

A thoroughgoing belief in election paradoxically presupposes a universalistic view of history. It was only the Israel which had learned to look at herself from outside, and for whom her own existence among the nations had become a problem, that was in a position to talk about election (von Rad 1962:178).

Election reflects God's love for Israel, but it also falls upon particular persons and places as in the case of Abraham and David (McKenzie 1965:227). Election became for both the basis of divine judgement. Each one of these men was elected by God for a mission. Ferrone has shown that the prophetic writings and the psalms contain an especially rich theology of election:

Elect individuals who appear in the prophetic literature, such as the prophets and the "suffering servant," enhance our understanding of election...The doxological dimensions of election are only fully appreciated by having recourse to the psalms. The fact that Israel relates to "the electing God" in prayer and praise, in thanksgiving and petition, tells us something important about election without which our understanding would be incomplete (Ferrone 1994:40).

Election in the Hebrew scriptures happens for two reasons: worship and mission. It is a summons to obedience. Israel is chosen to praise and thank God for his mighty deeds and for a mission to the nations. Psalms 146-150 are all exhortations to join in the praise of God. In regard to election for mission McKenzie notes that:

Election for mission appears clearly in the servant of Yahweh. The servant is chosen to have the spirit of Yahweh, to be a covenant of the people and a light of nations, to enlighten the blind and release prisoners and ultimately to bring deliverance by suffering (McKenzie 1965:228).

By all human standards Israel's election is astounding. It was not by reason of its power or skill that Israel was chosen by God, but only for his purposes and glory (Kaufmann 1960:299).

Jesus is presented in the New Testament as inheriting and epitomising the election of the chosen people of Israel. He is presented as the one in whom the grace of election reaches perfection. This is especially clear in the gospel used on the First Sunday of Lent (cf. 5.1.2). Jesus' refusal to consent to the temptations of Satan<sup>16</sup> demonstrate his radical "yes" that he made to the Father in response to his election (Ferrone 1994:50). The New Testament also shows that Jesus embodies and fulfils the Hebrew understanding of election. Jesus is identified with the line of David and he is recognised in the tradition of the suffering servant (McKenzie 1965:228). Jesus is singled out for divine favour, but also for the scandal of the cross to which his mission led him. The divine favour revealed at his baptism and transfiguration opened the way for the divine favour to be manifested in him on the cross. Only those called to faith, those elected by God could see the divine favour in the lowliness of his life and in the scandal of the cross. The divine favour hidden in weakness is characteristic of the elect in the Bible because in weakness God's gracious mercy is more clearly revealed (2 Cor.12:9). McKenzie has observed that:

Election in the New Testament as in the Old Testament imposes responsibility upon the elect and the consciousness of mission which appears in the servant of Yahweh is fully explicit (McKenzie 1965:228).

It was the post-resurrection church that strengthened the connection between election and mission. The apostolic community lived with a sense of the reign of God that engaged them in an eschatological mission. Jesus chose the twelve and sent them out. The initiative for election and mission came from the Lord. Jesus manifested the divine initiative in his selection of the twelve. He called them out of the world in order to go about the whole world on mission (Ferrone 1994:47).

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<sup>16</sup> A transpersonal being embodying evil is a controversial concept in certain theological circles. The document, ChristianFaith and Demonology (= CFD) gives the teaching of the church in regard to Satan. CFD III provides the reader with the New Testament teaching on Satan.

The apostles' mission was the means used by God to give birth to the church through the Holy Spirit.

God's election not only is bestowed freely on unworthy people, it effects the reversals characteristic of the gospel of the reign of God: The weak and foolish of the world are chosen to shame the strong and wise (1Cor.1:27-28), and God chose the poor (James 2:5). The people of the church addressed in 1 Peter "in these last days" are called "the elect" (1Pet. 1:2;2:9) and also the "people of God," which is the standard Old Testament usage for the chosen people (Ferrone 1994:48).

The whole Christian community is the subject of election and this is very clearly portrayed in 1 Peter. This letter is replete with allusions to Christian baptism and some scholars maintain that a large part of the letter has been taken from an early Christian baptismal liturgy (Dalton 1989:907; Senior 1980:71-72). Baptism and mission are linked together in the early church and their union is rediscovered in the RCIA's theology of election. It was God's election that constituted the self-awareness of Jesus. Jesus instructed his disciples that they had not chosen him, but that he had chosen them (Jn. 15:16). Their election was for the sake of mission. The apostles were chosen so that they would proclaim the Good News of God's reign (Parker 1979:221). The church carries on the ministry of election for the sake of mission and catechesis must support this ministry:

Only a church turned outward in mission can initiate new members into such an outward-directed vision...While the universal significance of God's action in electing the chosen people is implicit in the Old Testament texts concerning election, it must be admitted that Judaism rarely gave evidence of such a missionary emphasis. It was Christianity that picked up and brought forward the connection between election and mission in its passion to preach the gospel to all nations (Ferrone 1994:52).

Catechesis must exhibit a great sensitivity to the necessity of living out faith in Christ in the midst of the world. It is in the marketplace that we must live out our faith and give witness of our love of God and neighbour:

This is where the sharpness of the cutting edge can be felt: in the mission, in the willingness, however clumsy or tentative, to

be the means by which God's love abounds in the world  
(Ferrone 1994:53)

The elect are a sign of God's enduring care for the world. They are the means by which God continues to make himself known in the world. God has chosen them for the sake of this mission. Election then is always election for mission.

McKenzie made this same point when commenting on the Servant Songs (Is 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12):<sup>17</sup>

Election in the New Testament as in the Old Testament imposes responsibility upon the elect; and the consciousness of mission which appears in the servant of Yahweh is fully explicit in the New Testament (McKenzie 1965:228).

Election, understood in this way, means that one is called to share in the *missio Dei*,<sup>18</sup> the mission of God. The kingdom is the focus of the *missio Dei*, the cosmos marks its boundaries, but it is always unfolded in a local context among specific people.

### 5.3 The Rituals of the Period of Enlightenment

After the celebration of election two types of rituals are celebrated in the Lenten season. These are the scrutinies and the presentations. The scrutinies help the catechumens to confront whatever keeps the transforming love of God from liberating what is tainted by evil within their lives. They also focus attention on responding to the Lord out of a growing sense of awareness of his deep love active in the lives of the catechumens (Morris 1989:111). The presentations are public acts of instruction. The ancient Latin term for the presentations is *traditiones*, which literally means, "handings over" or traditions. The two "traditions" that the church hands over to the elect are the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The rite assumes that these two fundamental elements of the church's life have been dealt

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<sup>17</sup> Mc Kenzie (1965:791) has indicated that some biblical critics include Is 42:5-7 and 50:10-11 among the Servant Song texts.

<sup>18</sup> Saayman (1995:188-189) discusses the problems surrounding this term. Nevertheless it is used here to indicate that mission is fundamentally the mission of the triune God and that God is the subject of Christian mission. The mission of the Trinity always takes place within a given historical context and so the praxis of mission takes on new contours in each situation and time.

with on various occasions during the catechumenate. These rites convey the importance of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer to Christian faith.

Though this is a period of preparation it has a retreat-like character in which catechesis should take a more reflective form. Days of reflection and prayer services designed with periods of silent prayer in them might help the catechumens to reflect more deeply on the choice they are making and the call to conversion issued to them by God. The church also makes use of several traditional elements to help the elect continue their discernment. Lewinski notes that:

The lectionary and sacramentary are the guides for the Lenten journey. Fasting and abstaining involve the whole person. Works of charity and almsgiving remedy spiritual narcissism that can so easily entrap us. Penitential acts and prayers are humble admissions that we have already sinned (Lewinski 1983:25).

The whole season of Lent focuses on the ongoing process of conversion in which the entire assembly is called to participate. The elect are a special sign to the assembly of the challenge to redefine their lives in terms of the gospel because they are publicly engaged in that very process. God's call to conversion is always operative in the church, but the question that is always before us, both baptised and elect, is whether we are open to the redemptive possibilities of this "favourable time" (2 Cor. 6:2). During the Lenten season the elect and the baptised are being formed more intensely through the liturgy. Their participation in the church's rituals serves as a powerful means for their formation as the people of God.

Ritual is a key factor in identity formation in any culture. The identity of the elect has been undergoing changes and challenges through their participation in the RCIA. The liturgical texts, the ritual actions, and the scripture readings for each Sunday of Lent all contribute to the work of identity formation. Ritual, and in our case, liturgical ritual, because it is performative, does its work in three ways: 1) it enacts and evokes meaning; 2) it brings the community's root metaphor into the present and transmits it to those participating in it; and 3) it renews *communitas* by recreating an experience of liminality.

Ritual performance integrates the thoughts and the actions of the liturgy (Bell 1992:32) into one whole. V. Turner (1974:43) postulated that social dramas

take place within ritual and that they have a paradigmatic function which allows "outsiders" or observers to gain an insight into the life of another culture or community (Bell 1992:41). Worgul (1989:41) contends that ritual is the home of a culture's root metaphors. In this home they come alive, grow and deepen in meaning. Ritual's repetitive character sustains the root metaphor's growth while its adaptive quality allows the community to express the meaning of the root metaphor in creative ways (Ostdiek 1993:48).

In this creative context a person's identity is forged in a new way. He/she sees himself/herself in the context of the community's identity as the chosen of God, sinful yet forgiven. As the sacred text is proclaimed it is fused with the ritual action and becomes a transforming event (Flanagan 1991:282). The sacred text is addressed to an infinite range of hearers and will still be able to bear the weight of a variety of meanings. Like the scriptures, liturgy:

...Operates with the assumption that deeper meaning will be read into the form of the rite, so that its domain properties can be extracted, received and understood. These tacit, yet open and mysterious qualities permit an almost endless replay, similar to the way that a book can be endlessly re-read, especially if it is ambiguous and resonates with an infinity of meanings (Flanagan 1991:282).

This capacity for an infinity of meanings is one of liturgy's greatest strengths. It has this capacity because it employs symbols and symbolic gestures that are traditional, archaic, or primal to convey meaning. For this reason Worgul (1984:148) asserts that "ritual is intrinsically hermeneutical." It is a means for interpreting life situations because it brings them into contact with the root metaphors that sustain a community.

Missiologists, intent on developing theologies of mission which are contextual (Can there be any other?), need to probe the liturgical and cultural rituals of peoples to discover in them the myriad expressions of God's action in their lives. This is a necessary avenue of exploration for a deep understanding of peoples' cultures, values, sense of identity and world view. Contemporary missiological questions will not be framed in the context of universal truths, a

concern of Botha et al. (1994:23), but will be posed from the perspective of the most fundamental values of a culture.

Furthermore with a sense of reverence and mystery for the work of God in each culture those formed by the liturgy will engage in mission in a way that is marked by humility before the awesomeness of God's work among all the peoples of the earth. The liminality which is engendered by liturgical ritual and which facilitates an experience of *communitas* then becomes a paradigm for the model of mission the elect and all the baptised are formed in. It is this model that moves mission beyond preaching to extending an invitation to people to join the community of believers which is the church. For as Bosch put it in his comments on Matthew's Gospel:

No mission is imaginable that does not lead to peoples' incorporation into the church. The disciple follows the master, but he never follows him alone; he is part of the fellowship, the body, or he is not disciple (Bosch 1984a:25).

Discipleship is always a response to an invitation. The scrutinies which the church celebrates during Lent bring to light and give to the elect new vision and life as they endeavour to respond to the call of the Lord in their lives.

### 5.3.1 The Scrutinies

The scrutinies which are celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent are ritual celebrations of intercession for and exorcism of the elect which take place during the Period of Enlightenment. They have a spiritual purpose:

The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all (RCIA 141).

Unfortunately the word *scrutiny* has negative connotations in English. It implies suspicion and searching for minutiae or prying into a person's private life.

Henderson endeavours to provide us with a more balanced understanding of the scrutinies.

Certainly the scrutinies are for the purpose of searching and further conversion. However, they are primarily for self-searching and self-examination on the part of the elect themselves, though pastors, catechists and sponsors might help in this discernment. Furthermore, the whole assembly should benefit from the scrutinies as well...The forcefulness with which the scrutinies depict the old life is not to condemn individual elect, but to make the contrast between old and new vivid and strong. They are intended to reinforce in the elect their desire to undertake Christian conversion and their realization that they are in great need of God's grace to do so -- indeed totally dependent on God (Henderson 1988:33-34).

Within the context of these insights the scrutinies take on meaning and value. They are integral to the initiation process. We begin to appreciate that the church puts every means it has at the disposal of the elect to aid them in their conversion journey.

Duffy has pointed out that there are two distinctive features about the scrutinies.

First, they are celebrated on Sunday in the presence of the larger Christian community, in contrast to the exorcisms of the catechumenal period. Second, these exorcisms are framed by some of the oldest choices for gospel readings that we know of in series A of the Roman lectionary (Duffy 1984:122).

These features reveal something about the importance that the church places on the scrutinies. The exorcisms form the heart of the scrutinies and since they are celebrated on Sunday it seems that the church is emphasising the importance of the community's presence and prayer for the elect. The church takes seriously the threat of evil to the expansion of God's reign on earth. The scrutinies take a very realistic view of the human heart which can be tempted to do evil. They recognise that those called by Christ are engaged in a struggle to "throw off everything that belongs to the darkness and equip themselves for the light" (Rom. 13:12). The choices that the elect make can increase the grace of conversion or diminish it. The scrutinies seek to strengthen all that is good within the elect and help them to

see clearly their weaknesses. Winkler helped to put the scrutinies in their historical context when she wrote that:

In the writings of Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and above all Cyril of Jerusalem, it is obvious that the confrontation with demonic powers becomes one of the main issues in the homilies they addressed to the candidates for baptism. The preparation as a whole is viewed as a drama-like battle with Satan. It did not take long before this battle was also reflected in the shaping of the ritual. The drama of warfare with the demons begins with the enrollment of the baptismal candidate and culminates in the daily exorcism during his preparation...The ritualistic expression of the warfare being waged between the catechumen and Satan is reflected in these exorcisms (Winkler 1978:39-40).

In a ritual form the warfare to which Winkler refers is enacted. It addresses one of the most fundamental issues of human existence, namely, the place of evil in human life. By celebrating the scrutinies in the midst of the assembly ritual functions to clarify the meaning of following Christ and being a member of his body:

Ritual challenges the individual and community to interiorize or appropriate the foundational meaning of the community. The stimulation of the imagination through symbols and symbolic behaviors empowers it to critically grasp where individuals or the community at large have failed to make their own and live out the meaning which makes them who they are...Ritual does not allow its participants merely to play act. Ritual demands that role become autobiography (Worgul 1990:1104).

Conversion, as was pointed out in section 4.4, is one of the root metaphors<sup>19</sup> of Christian life which finds expression in the ritual celebration of the scrutinies. Conversion is a root metaphor in Christianity because it is intrinsically linked to the mission of Jesus and his call to repentance (Mk. 1:15). The radical conversion called for by Jesus enacted in the rituals of the RCIA makes for the radical transformation of the human person within the community of believers. Worgul (1989:40) pointed out that root metaphors have enormous power to "effect insight, metamorphosis, and transformation." Speaking of root metaphors he continued:

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<sup>19</sup> Other root metaphors that are expressed within the rituals of the RCIA are the paschal mystery, election, discipleship, mission, covenant, initiation, and journey. These all find expression within the sacramental rites of the church.

They establish perimeters within which members of a culture interpret their experiences, conduct their lives, and evaluate their decisions. In delineating perimeters of meaning, root metaphors foster group identity and develop a cultural "world view" (Worgul 1989:41).

The scrutinies become the means through which the elect can express the struggle which accompanies any authentic conversion. They are the medium by which the church, during the Lenten season, helps to clarify issues of identity for the elect. The scrutinies help to make clear the boundaries of Christian life while shaping the world view of the elect in terms of gospel values and principles. As the elect are prepared for the scrutinies they need to keep before their minds and hearts the message of the scripture readings from the liturgy of the First Sunday of Lent. Through those readings the elect were brought face-to-face with the woundedness of humanity (Gen. 2:7-9; 3:1-7) and their own brokenness. In the light of the tragedy of the story of the Garden of Paradise the church offered to the elect Psalm 51 as the most appropriate response. Patristic scholar, Jackson, reflects that:

...The Church now teaches her Lenten prayer par excellence to the catechumens; she has only led them into conviction for sin to enable them to cry with her for mercy. They are reassured to hear that despite their perfidy God is still true to Himself. His love is steadfast, His mercy abundant...He can blot out transgression. He upholds His People, gives and even restores the salvation that brings joy, and it is He who makes it possible for His People to praise Him (Jackson 1993:29).

The elect discover that their journey is the journey of all humanity. It is the church's journey and they have learned the secret that she is sinful and yet redeemed by God.

The second reading, Romans 5:12-19 reminded the elect that what happened in the Garden, marked all of humankind. The breach of trust was so great that it has resounded throughout all successive generations (Jackson 1993:31). Recovering that trust has been a key element in their initiation journey. They know that obedience is only rendered when one trusts.

The gospel, Matthew 4:1-11, took them to the desert where they learned the treachery of the Deceiver (Jackson 1993:33). Again Jackson has provided us

with an insight into the meaning of this passage from Matthew in light of the catechumenal journey:

The catechumens have, of course, long since learned to conquer temptation to obvious evil; in their final training period they must learn the more advanced skill of defeating temptation to apparent good not willed by God. What is at stake for them in this contest is precisely what was at stake for their first parents: whom they accept as center of the universe and arbiter of good and evil. Their ultimate allegiance must not be even to "what is good" but to the God who determines what is good...They must wrestle with this consuming desire to instruct God on how to run the cosmos with themselves at the center; they must put it to death and learn to want what God wants, and base their lives on that (Jackson 1993:34).

The elect began their Lenten journey with the above three scripture passages setting the pace and revealing the long road ahead. Besides hearing these texts proclaimed in the assembly they also heard their names called out in the cathedral church as they were presented for election. Their sponsors gave testimony to their readiness to continue the journey. They accepted the challenge put before them by the bishop. The assembly offered their prayers and support. This weaving of word and action, silence and symbol, prayer and song is the context for understanding the scrutinies. It is within the context of the experience of the Rite of Election that the scrutinies take on meaning.

The scrutinies make the elect aware that human motivation needs to be tested and that conversion needs to be seen as an ongoing reality in their lives. As they begin to participate in the mission of Christ these insights will be tested in contexts which will help to integrate them more fully in the lives of the elect.

#### *5.3.1.1 The Structure of the Scrutinies*

Each of the three scrutinies has the same ritual form:

Readings  
Homily  
Invitation to Silent Prayer  
Intercessions for the Elect  
Exorcism  
Dismissal

The context for each one is shaped by the gospel readings for the particular Sunday, but there is a larger context into which all of them fit. There is a progressive development which manifests itself over the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent.

The first scrutiny, using the story of the Samaritan woman, was meant to highlight particularly the reality of sin in its *individual* dimension. The second scrutiny, by means of the story of the man born blind, focuses on *social* sin. Using the powerful images of religious leaders who are blinded to the Christ and play on the fear and indifference of the man's parents, the story evokes the tragic impact of a community turned away from the light of truth. The third scrutiny, by means of the Lazarus story, focuses on sin and evil in its most radical dimensions: the hopelessness of those whose sin is unto death and whose only hope is the One who is the resurrection and the life (Duggan 1988a:44).

Here we have holistic presentation of the pervasiveness of sin and our need to confront it in every area of our lives. The prayers used in the scrutinies all allude to this fact. The community prays for and with the elect as they struggle alongside them to respond to the liberation from sin offered to them by Christ through the church.

The homily follows the readings from scripture and should ideally explain the meaning of the scrutiny in the light of the Lenten liturgy and the spiritual journey of the elect (RCIA 151). The elect are called forward with their sponsors. They are asked to either kneel down or simply bow their heads. In light of the strength of the readings it would seem that the gesture of kneeling would be more powerful and consistent with the whole nature of the rite. Then follows an ample period of silent prayer to ponder the readings and to pray for the elect.

After the period of silent prayer, the rite directs that the presider invite the elect and the assembly to stand for the intercessions. Ritually it would be better to have the elect remain kneeling so that there is a heightened sense of the assembly *praying over* its brothers and sisters who are continuing on their Lenten journey (Duggan 1988a:49). When the intercessions are prayed, sponsors stand with their right hand on the shoulder of the elect. Each week two sets of intercessions are

offered in the rite. Pastorally each parish would need to decide which set is better suited to their circumstances.

The prayer of exorcism is then prayed by the presider with hands raised in the *orans* position<sup>20</sup>. He then lays hands on each of the elect. Duggan makes this observation:

The hands are put directly on the head of the elect, not held over the head. And the touch is prolonged for some time while the presider prays silently for each individual in turn. This is again a time when silence seems preferable to "filler" music. Another pastoral adaptation of many communities is to have godparents (and others) come forward to join in the laying on of hands. The silent procession of those who touch and pray for their brothers and sisters is a moving sign of the whole church at prayer, not just the presider. It is also a mechanism which creates the sort of bonding between persons that lasts a lifetime (Duggan 1988a:50).

If what we said about liturgical catechesis happening through the rites themselves (cf. 4.2.1.2) is true then the power of silent prayer and touch convey in a very powerful non-verbal way the support of the community in prayer and the healing that is offered by the Lord to the elect.

The rite suggests that an appropriate song be sung (RCIA 54). If the exorcisms have been done with care and in an unhurried manner then music might be an appropriate way to express the sentiments of joy, praise, and/or thanksgiving. Some strong musical selection which the assembly can sing would give the community an opportunity to express their joy without losing the seriousness of the ritual just celebrated. The elect are then dismissed and the eucharistic liturgy is celebrated.

All of these elements are present in the rites for the three scrutinies. A word still needs to be said about the gospels that are proclaimed on each of these Sundays.

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<sup>20</sup> Cope (1986:437-440) discusses postures used in liturgical prayer. He describes the *orans* posture as standing with arms extended to the sides of the body with palms turned upward. In Roman Catholic liturgy this posture is assumed when praying an oration, the Lord's Prayer, and the eucharistic prayer.

5.3.1.2 *The Gospel Texts for the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent and the Scrutinies: A Question of Interpretation*

All three gospels used for the celebration of the scrutinies are from the Gospel of John, but the interpretation of these pericopes is problematic. Exegetes can be divided into two main groups: those who favour an anti-sacramental interpretation and those who hold an ultra-sacramental view (Brown 1977:225 Suggit 1993:15). Each of these groups has subgroupings to which we will make reference. Biblical exegetes are divided in their opinions about the sacramentality of John's gospel. Raymond Brown has summarised the positions. Of the antisacramentalists he cited Bultmann as a leading voice:

Those scholars who see a minimal sacramental interest in John have based their case on literary criticism. Bultmann finds in John three clearly sacramental passages: 3:5 with its reference to water, 6:51b-58, and 19:34-35 (passages referring respectively to baptism, Eucharist, and to both sacraments together). For Bultmann, John basically ignores the sacraments and serves as a corrective to that tendency in the early Church which would see the sacraments as a means of salvation. The three sacramental passages are additions made by the ecclesiastical redactor, a censor postulated by Bultmann, who made corrections in the Gospel to conform it to the Synoptic tradition and Church usage (Brown 1977:226).

Representing a more moderate position are Schweizer and Lohse. These scholars had doubts about Bultmann's conclusions and rejected his anti-sacramentalism, in favour of a non-sacramental interpretation. Brown believes that they understood that the evangelist had another purpose which might be summarised in the following way:

The Evangelist's interest was centered on *martyria*: he wished to emphasize contact through witness with Jesus, and this main purpose did not call for any sacramental stress (Brown 1977:227).

Those holding a sacramental view are best represented by the scholarship of Oscar Cullmann of the Protestants and Bruce Vawter of the Catholic tradition. As a Protestant, Cullmann confines the sacramental references to baptism and eucharist. Vawter's view would include at least marriage and the sacrament of the sick

(Brown 1977:228-229). Schnackenburg simply notes the differences that exist among the scholars in regard to John's gospel:

Since John sees the saving power of Christ as present in the faith and life of Christians, one also expects some comment on the sacraments which the other N. T. writings show to have played an important part in the primitive Church. But the question is highly controversial with regard to John. The answers range from the assertion of an anti-sacramental tendency (R. Bultmann) to the view that the whole presentation, with its many symbolical allusions, makes the Christian liturgy show through with its fundamental sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist (O. Cullmann) (Schnackenburg 1982:160).

The fullest treatment of the sacramental symbolism in John has been given to us by Paul Niewalda. He asserts that a different exegetical approach is necessary (Niewalda 1958:163). Niewalda shows that there is evidence of some symbolism in all the earliest Christian sources: liturgy, church art and the Fathers. He believes that this witnesses to the use of fixed symbols for the sacraments. Niewalda holds that sacramental symbolism would have been recognised by all of John's readers or hearers since John was a person of his times and the use of symbolism was a then current literary style. This led him to believe that sacramental symbolism is a key for understanding John's Gospel (Niewalda 1958:164-169). Suggit holds that this awareness of the Gospel's contextual setting is necessary in any interpretation of the evangelist's work. Commenting on the work of Niewalda, Suggit made this point:

Although we need to recognize the danger of claiming to discover a single key to unlock the secrets of the fourth gospel, it is reasonable to hold that its *Sitz im Leben* is to be found in the worshipping life of the early church...(Suggit 1993:32).

Suggit then concluded that:

...If we take the gospel as whole in the form in which it has been received into the canon, then eucharistic and baptismal references at any rate in some place seem inevitable. In fact, the so-called ecclesiastical redactions would seem to show that some early readers of the gospel recognized the allusions and wished to make them plain (Suggit 1993:164)

Despite the differing views of biblical scholars the church, nevertheless, within the context of the Lenten scrutinies, maintains that the liturgy gives the Gospel of John a sacramental interpretation. This question is central for developing a Roman Catholic understanding of these Gospel pericopes. Liturgy, as *theologia prima*, is the church's means for interpreting the scriptures (cf. 1.0). This will be made clearer in our description of the rites for the sacraments of initiation in the next chapter.<sup>21</sup>

### 5.3.1.3 *The Gospels Texts for the Scrutinies: Their Liturgical Use*

The celebration of the scrutinies continues the catechesis begun in the catechumenate in full view of the assembly. In Word and in ritual the elect now experience the healing and liberating touch of Christ. Kavanagh relates this to some basic understandings that were shared by the members of the early church.

*Catechesis* was understood to be not about education but about conversion. *Conversion* was perceived to be not about doctrinal formulations so much as about coming to faith as a way of living together in Jesus Christ...(Kavanagh1978:120).

The scrutinies are catechesis at its best. They differ from other forms of catechesis because of the solemnity that is embodied in them. In the celebration of these rites the elect come closer to the heart of the church's mission to initiate new members. In order to do this the three great pericopes of Lent are used: the Samaritan woman, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus. Dunning (1993:305) has pointed out that all three stories summarise the Johannine vision of baptism. The stories use images to move from thirst to refreshing drink in the form of living water, from darkness to light and from death to life. Dujarier noted the reason for their placement on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent:

The three scrutinies are celebrated successively in order that the candidates may progress in the understanding of sin and in the desire for salvation. In order to realize this twofold purpose, the catechumens are instructed gradually in the mystery of sin, from which the whole world and each person desires to be redeemed, and thus be saved from its present and future effects. They also fill their minds with the meaning of

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<sup>21</sup> CCC 1229-1245 link the symbolism of the Gospels with the rites for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

Christ the Redeemer. He is the living water (Samaritan woman), light (the man born blind), and the resurrection and life (raising of Lazarus) (Dujarier 1979a:125).

Together these three selections from the Gospel of John form the church's teaching about the process of coming to faith and life in Christ (Duffy 1984:122).

5.3.1.3.1 The Gospel Reading for the First Scrutiny: John 4:5-42

On the first Sunday of Lent the church proclaims the story of the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:5-42) one of the great conversion stories of the Christian scriptures.

Dunning has observed that in this story :

The universal journey of faith is compressed into the space of moments, as the woman challenges, probes, questions and finally yields to the presence of the Holy One...Her radical conversion is portrayed in terms that invite the hearer into a similar process. Conversion, in this perspective, is coming to know and accept Jesus the Christ -- personally, deeply, totally (Dunning 1988:47).

In the story of the Samaritan woman coming to faith we can detect some important elements of the missionary enterprise. On the surface the story seems like it might be a doomed encounter considering all the ethnic, religious and gender differences (Craddock et al. 1992:166) between Jesus and the woman, but the story turns out quite differently. The conversation between Jesus and the woman becomes an odyssey of conversion and mission. The story is filled with double meanings. Jesus and woman talked about water, but each out of a different context. She was thinking about Jacob and he, about eternal life. As the conversation deepens so does her faith. She believed because Jesus demonstrated that he had supernatural knowledge.

But in the Johannine church, believing Jesus has special powers is not sufficient, for she has not yet "seen his glory"; that is, seen him as the revelation of God. At this point, the woman, apparently uncomfortable, tries to be evasive by introducing tensions between Jewish and Samaritan religions (vv.20-24). It is an old ploy: When on the spot begin an argument. The maneuver failed, the woman expresses a hope in a coming Messiah and Jesus responds, "I am" (vv 25-26)...At any rate, there is no clear indication of the degree or shape of the

woman's faith...She may not have arrived at a full faith in Jesus as son of God, but she witnessed to the extent of her faith (Craddock et al. 1992: 166).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the story is that the woman became a missionary when her faith was not yet mature for she asked her neighbours: 'Could this be the Christ?' (Jn. 4:29). Perhaps we are called to mission not because our faith is strong, but because mission strengthens faith. Had the Samaritan woman waited until her faith was fully mature, the remarkable end of the story might not have occurred and mission would have been thwarted (Craddock et al. 1992:167).

Though the story of the Samaritan woman could be used in other contexts it clearly has initiation overtones. It seems especially appropriate in the context of our study because this woman who comes to belief in Christ also becomes a missionary to others. She intuitively grasps the responsibility she has for making Christ known.

The woman's coming to faith, her turning from her immoral life, her telling others of Jesus, and their believing in him because of her all are symbolic of the process of conversion and initiation into the church at baptism. The thirst for God that the catechumen experiences is slaked only through Jesus (Irwin 1990b:115).

Irwin has connected conversion and mission and related both of them to baptism. The elect who experience the scrutinies also have a thirst for the living water only Christ provides. Their apostolic involvement already makes them missionary. In baptism their thirst will be quenched and their missionary zeal will be strengthened through their union with Christ and their membership in his body, the church. The call to belong to Christ is a call to be missionary and proclaim what God has done for us (Armellini 1992:90).

Another message that is inherent in this story is that of ecumenism. In the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman they came face to face with social barriers, one being that of their religious backgrounds. Jesus reached out to the woman in love so that she might be drawn to the truth about herself and about his identity as the messiah. Their encounter brought faith and faith brought communion.

John Paul II, (in *Ut Unum Sint = UUS*), made a similar point:

A valuable result of the contacts between Christians and of the theological dialogue in which they engage is the growth of communion. Both contacts and dialogue have made Christians aware of the elements of faith which they have in common. This has served to consolidate further their commitment to full unity (UUS 49).

This concern for ecumenism is essential because division obscures Christian witness and more importantly because full life in Christ is meant for all people.

Jungnitz has said it in this way:

The liberation from death which Jesus bestows through baptism is not meant to benefit the individual alone. In the gospel pericope he is speaking to a woman who stands outside the religious and national order of Israel to which he himself belongs. Thus it is made clear that the water Jesus offers is not intended only for a limited group. The liberation from the limit which death sets for our normal life span is at the same time a liberation from social barriers....We should remember too that even within our Christian world we have to overcome many religious and confessional barriers through ecumenical thought and action, thus following the example of Christ, who regarded himself as united with the Samaritan woman by a common faith in Yahweh, even though he was separated from her by the different form which the testimony of faith took in each case (Jungnitz 1991:53-54).

Authentic conversion is ongoing. The church recognises the progressive nature of growth in faith. The action of the Holy Spirit keeps helping to deepen our awareness of our own sinfulness and God's unconditional love. This love always leads to a deepening of faith and greater clarity of vision because we are coming into the light of Christ.

#### 5.3.1.3.2 The Gospel Reading for the Second Scrutiny: John 9:1-41

The second scrutiny is celebrated on the fourth Sunday of Lent. The Gospel reading which informs the rite of the scrutiny is that of the man born blind (Jn. 9:1-41). The image that dominates this dramatic narrative of the Gospel is that of light. The gospel ideally should be proclaimed by a few readers to maintain

its dramatic effect. The sequence of events unfolds in the dialogues that take place between Jesus and the disciples, the conversation among the townspeople, and then with the man himself. Tension heightens in the conversations between the Pharisees and the man and eventually he is thrown out. Jesus heard what happened to him and sought him out. The healed man then confessed faith in him as the messiah. The story closes on a sad note because the religious authorities have overheard the confession of faith and Jesus' words about his mission to give sight to those who are blind and bring judgement on those who chose to remain in darkness. Craddock et al maintain that the meaning of this passage is that:

The healing has made it clear: light comes to those who recognize that life is blindness without Christ; darkness comes to those who without Christ claim to see (Craddock 1992:173).

This story has several indirect references to baptism. We are dealing with a new birth into the light since the man was born blind. It presents conversion through water and anointing and the result is illumination (Doohan 1988:163). The man born blind is the story of every elect and in fact, every member of the church before meeting Christ (Armellini 1992:93). Every action in the healing segment of the story is about purification and enlightenment.

Jesus' use of material things (saliva and clay) to bring about healing emphasises the importance of these material elements as signs of God's power (Irwin 1990b:157). As in the story of the Samaritan woman, we find that the blind beggar is a man with a mission. His very blindness is so that the "Works of God might be revealed in him" (Jn. 9:3). His unquestionable physical disability of blindness places him in a position of receptivity to the gift of light: both physical and spiritual (Barnhart 1993:113). After Jesus put paste over his eyes he is told to: "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam" (Jn. 9:7). Commenting on the actions of the smearing of the clay and the washing in the pools Suggit noted that:

The clay is smeared on the man's eyes because the whole incident is in the context of Jesus as the bringer of light. In order to be recreated people have to have their eyes opened to see the meaning of life and to find it in Jesus...The baptismal allusion is continued and made more explicit by the command to go and wash in the pool of Siloam...Not only does the

command to wash recall baptismal imagery, but the name of the pool, Siloam, is carefully explained as meaning "he who has been sent" (Suggit 1993:88-89).

Barnhart concurs with Suggit's point about the baptismal imagery:

The man born blind, after many years of darkness, experiences through Jesus' word the first day of creation, the original dawn, the light born out of darkness...Jesus sends the blind man to the pool of Siloam. Each episode...has been carefully related to baptism (Barnhart 1993:113).

Barnhart's insight into the text about the first day of creation is an important one. Just as God moulded humanity from the moist earth in the creation narrative in Genesis, Jesus, by using the earth moistened with his own spittle makes a new creation of this handicapped man. St. Augustine believed this action symbolised the making of a catechumen (Suggit 1993:89). Indeed, the process of initiation begins the moulding of a new creation!

The Gospel story also suggests a change of identity in the blind man. After being healed his neighbours are not able to recognise him. Finally, after hearing their speculation about his identity he himself declares, "I am the one" (Jn. 9:9). He identified himself in the syllables reserved to God himself (Barnhart 1993:114). This beggar has received more than his sight, he knows who he is because he has received the light of the one who healed him. He knows himself in a new way. His identity has undergone a transformation (cf. 4.2.1.3). Barnhart expresses this insight into the blind man's experience and its link to baptism:

...He is everyone, but with a physical blindness which expresses interior blindness. When he receives his physical sight, he receives some degree of participation in the original light, the uncreated light, the *I Am* (9:9). Sight, light, and being are here inseparable, as in the *baptismal* experience. The man once blind possesses this unitive light before he has a name for it, and it is this light that is the source of his iron confidence. The light itself is shadowed by no hesitation, no doubt, and it is in him. The light is its own witness (Barnhart 1993:118).

The blind man's experience, like that of the elect as they experience the scrutines, is that of a progressive deepening of understanding. Gradually the elect come to comprehend what they are asking of the church when they make their request to be

baptised. The scrutinies help to bring them light and in that light they begin to view the rest of their lives. This is conveyed in the prayer of exorcism prayed over the elect for the second scrutiny:

Father of mercy,  
you led the man born blind  
to the kingdom of light  
through the gift of faith in your Son.  
Free these elect  
from the false values that surround and blind them.  
Set them firmly in your truth,  
children of the light for ever.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord (RCIA 168A).

Suggit made a further point in connection with the blind man's healing and his confession of faith with baptism and John's view of the celebration of the sacraments :

Baptism, like the restoration of the blind man's sight, is due to an act of God: but its significance and value is appreciated only by those who have put their faith in Christ and who persevere as his disciples..By writing in the way he (John) does, he is continually reminding his readers that their cultic acts are not empty signs but expressions of God's redemptive love in Christ and occasions for the expression or confirmation of their faith in, and union with, him (Suggit 1993:93)

The story of the man born blind presents a paradigm of Christian growth and mission (Ellebracht 1983:63). Growth comes slowly and gradually. The experience of mission is one of self-emptying. It has nothing to do with a success rate. It is carried out in adversity and disappointments. Christians become engaged in mission for the transformation of the world and so that God becomes known to a greater number of people. The meaning of this Gospel passage which needs to be conveyed to the elect is that the essential movement of meaning which John conveys leads not to the darkness of causality but forward into the light of the new creation (Barnhart 1993:120). Duggan (1988:57), in his commentary on this gospel text, has urged his readers not to forget that transformation in Christ makes one a witness to the faith:

The apostolic dimension of the conversion experience is an essential one, and here it creates a horizon that extends beyond the candidates' sacramental initiation and into the rest of their lives (Duggan 1988:57).

The second scrutiny already anticipates the movement from the Lenten struggle to the joyous mood of the Easter triumph of Christ and with him all who believe in him.

#### 5.3.1.3.3 The Gospel Reading for the Third Scrutiny: John 11:1-45

The fifth Sunday of Lent marks a climax in the intense preparation of the elect for the Easter sacraments. In the gospel the elect get a glimpse of the new life which they are seeking. Mark Searle has observed that:

The story of Lazarus is the story of his encounter with Christ and his experience of the power of God to give life to the dead. For the elect, the ancient story is about to be re-enacted: they are to see themselves in Lazarus and to find Christ summoning them to life through the mediation of his body, which is the church (Searle 1988:62).

The elect are called to find themselves in this story of new life. This is a story of hope in the face of the pain of death. Jungnitz conjectures about the choice of Lazarus to reveal Jesus' power in the face of death:

Once again we are told that our liberation by Jesus from the bonds of death requires our cooperation. The gospel of John tells us in moving words that Lazarus had been a friend of Jesus. The depth of human feeling involved in this relationship becomes clear when we see Jesus angered by his death and then weeping for him. The choice of Lazarus to serve as sign of Jesus' power over death was probably due to the fact that he had been Jesus' friend (Jungnitz 1991:57).

For the elect as well as the whole community, the message, it seems, is that our own victory over death is also linked to our friendship with Christ. The story of the raising of Lazarus informs the third scrutiny and completes the trilogy of Johannine texts which aid the elect on their journey of conversion. Lazarus' story becomes the story of the elect and indeed all the members of the assembly. We are all reminded of the reality that apart from Christ there is only death for the world.

Jesus in speaking to Martha revealed that only in him is there eternal life (Irwin 1990:206) when he said:

I am the resurrection.  
Anyone who believes in me,  
even though that person dies, will live,  
and whoever lives and believes in me  
will never die. Do you believe this (Jn. 11:25-26)?

Jesus' question to Martha at the end of verse twenty-six is one that each of the elect will need to ask himself/herself. For the elect it is a question that brings their faith to the fore. This is the ultimate test. Lazarus' sickness is not to end in death, but to show of God's power and glory. Belief, however, is essential (McPolin 1979:161).

The story of Lazarus comes to a dramatic climax when the Jesus cries out: "Lazarus, come out" (Jn. 11:43)! and once Lazarus comes out Jesus orders the others to: "Unbind him, let him go free" (Jn. 11:44)!

The captivity, the confinement and heteronomy of the *old order* -- of law and death and fear-- is ended. When Jesus brings back Lazarus into the ordinary light of day on this fifth day of the new creation, he symbolically enacts the bringing of humanity, of the "first Adam," through the door of death into the life of this new creation, a participation in the life of God. It is this sign of life which precipitates the decision of the chief priests and Pharisees to kills Jesus. They feared the loss of their holy place, the temple, and their nation. Indeed, a new temple and a new nation are to be born through Jesus' death...The *basilikos*, the Egyptians, all the Gentiles, are gathered into this *one* flock, into this one shepherd who is the new, unitive temple of God (Barnhart 1993:159-160).

The freedom from death is what the church asks for the elect in the prayer of the third scrutiny:

Lord Jesus,  
by raising Lazarus from the dead  
you showed that you came that we might have life  
and have it more abundantly.  
Free from the grasp of death  
those who await your life-giving sacraments  
and deliver them from the spirit of corruption.

Through your Spirit, who gives life,  
fill them with faith, hope and charity,  
that they may live with you always  
in the glory of your resurrection,  
for you are Lord for ever and ever (RCIA 175A).

The catechesis of this Sunday bring the catechumens to the climax of their instruction. The day of their baptism will be the day of their resurrection (Armellini 1992:101). The new life they experience in baptism will continue to grow as they participate in the table-community at eucharist. It will be a life for mission to the whole world so that all people will be invited to share in this abundant life. The scrutinies make it clear that the only way to participate in Christ's mission is to be initiated into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as Lazarus was raised and unbound so that he could go free, so the church asks that the elect might experience a taste of this freedom of new life. If they cooperate with the work of the Spirit they will understand the words of the Easter Proclamation, sung yearly at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night:

This is the night when Christians everywhere, washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement, are restored to grace and grow together in holiness (Exsultet).

#### *5.4 The Relationship between Myth and Ritual*

In this description of the scrutinies I highlighted the fact that they work for the transformation of the person. The celebration of the scrutinies only makes sense if the Gospel pericopes of the Samaritan woman, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus are proclaimed in their liturgical context. This raises the larger question of the relationship between myth and ritual.

Eliade (1961:95) described myth as relating sacred history. From his perspective as an historian of religion he maintained that:

One becomes truly a man only by conforming to the teaching of the myths, that is by imitating the gods (Eliade 1961:100).

In the context of the liturgy the proclamation of the scriptures makes present the myths of Christianity. The three Gospel texts used in connection with the

scrutinies incarnates three aspects of the Christian myth surrounding baptism. These are enacted in the ritual of the scrutinies. These symbolic actions convey God's saving presence, *ritus significando causant* (Ostdiek 1993:45). The rites bring about what they signify. This is not to say that the rites work are magical formulae. A community of faith must take care that the ritual celebration expresses the community's faith, *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

Ritual and myth are partners in evoking meaning for the participants in the ritual action (Grimes 1993:20). Myth is the community's act of remembering its origins. As it remembers its celebrates and it does so in the context of ritual in which all the senses come into play. Rituals are always holistic because they speak to the whole person (Luzbetak 1988:268).

Though the Christian myth remains the same for each local church the rituals that house that myth may vary, indeed must vary if the work of inculturation will go on. Within the Roman Catholic Church the rites are shared by the universal church, but the rituals of those rites are meant to be creatively inculturated so that they are "owned" by the people celebrating them.

Myth and ritual are far from static. They are dynamic means which the church uses to energise the baptised and the elect alike. The scrutinies incorporate both myth and ritual to bring healing and courage to the elect as they journey toward the sacraments of initiation.

### 5.5 The Preparation Rites of Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is a day reserved for the proximate preparation for the rites that will be celebrated that evening at the Easter Vigil. Two rites are celebrated during the day with the elect: the Recitation of the Creed and the Ephphetha rite. These rites are preferably celebrated in the context of a liturgy of the Word and with members of the parish present. Both of these rites can be celebrated together. An outline of the rite consists of the following elements:

- Song and Greeting
- Scripture Reading (Mt. 16:13-17 or Jn. 6:35, 63-71 are suggested).
- Homily
- Ephphetha Rite
- Prayer Before the Recitation of the Creed

Recitation  
Blessing and Dismissal

During the third week of Lent the elect would have been gathered to be presented with the Creed, hence the handing back on Holy Saturday as a sign of their readiness for baptism. Christian creeds have their origins in the early baptismal rituals. They began as affirmations to questions pertaining to questions of belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was only later that creeds took a declarative form (Bezañcon et al. 1992 1-12). It is the Nicene Creed that is used within Roman Catholic liturgy, a practice that has its roots in fifth century Antioch. Downey, in reflecting on the Creed has pointed out that:

The Christian creed is at once a doxology that acclaims the glory of God, and a confession of praise and thanksgiving for what God has done in Christ Jesus. Through this public recitation in the eucharistic liturgy and its use in the rites of baptism, the creed expresses identity with the Christian community and a willingness to live a way of life motivated by the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit (Downey 1990:303).

During the fifth week of Lent the elect would also have been presented with the Lord's Prayer within the context of a special rite in which Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer is proclaimed. They will "hand back" the Lord's Prayer as they together pray it with the community for the first time during the communion rite at the Easter Vigil (RCIA 149). Lacugna has noted that:

Tertullian, a third-century Latin theologian, considered the Lord's Prayer the "brief summary of the whole gospel" (*breviarium totius evangelii*), containing the essentials of the teaching of Jesus and the model of prayer for all Christians. A long tradition of theological and spiritual writings used the elements of the Lord's Prayer to schematize and recapitulate the main elements of the Christian life. The Greek Fathers in particular linked the Lord's Prayer with the view of Christian life as an ascent into the presence of God through union with Christ and transformation by the Spirit into the perfect image of God (Lacugna 1992:93).

The Creed is not recited during the Easter Vigil because of the celebration of the baptism which includes the Trinitarian statement of faith. The renewal of baptismal promises by the assembly is said in the context of the preparation rites.

Aidan Kavanagh has provided us with the historical context for the Presentations:

The ancient Latin term for presentations is *traditiones*, which means "handings over," "traditions." This clarifies the rather ambiguous English word presentations, which may suggest to some that it is the catechumens who are being "presented" to the church.... The Latin word suggests that it is not someone who is being presented socially to someone else but that something is being given or passed along (Kavanagh 1992:36).

The RCIA itself gives the reason for the solemn presentation of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed:

...With the catechumenal formation of the elect completed, the Church lovingly entrusts to them the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the ancient texts that have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church's faith and prayer. These texts are presented in order to enlighten the elect. The Creed, as it recalls the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race, suffuses the vision of the elect with the sure light of faith. The Lord's Prayer fills them with a deeper realization of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father, especially in the midst of the eucharistic assembly (RCIA.147).

Kavanagh is quick to point out that pastorally this means more than handing the elect beautifully printed copies of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.

The very term *traditio*, which renders the Greek word *paradosis* often used by St. Paul is a verbal noun that means primarily to teach. *Paradosis* and *traditio* name the content and the act by which a body of teaching is transmitted in whole or in part from teachers to the taught (Kavanagh 1988a:37).

These documents are not merely ancient texts, but treasured signs of the church's faith and prayer. Yarnold (1971:12) has pointed out that in the early church these texts had to be learned by heart because to take them down in writing would risk betrayal of the secret. This ritual celebration is preceded by catechesis centring on

each of the texts. Each phrase would have been the context of a catechetical session in which the elect would have been asked to ponder the texts and then share their reflection with the catechumenate group. In the early church the bishop or his deputy was responsible for teaching the Creed phrase by phrase (Yarnold 1971:12). Augustine was sympathetic to the nervousness of the elect as they learned the Creed:

Today week you will have to repeat what you have learned today. Your godparents are responsible for teaching you...No one need be nervous and so fail to repeat the words. Do not worry, I am your father, I do not carry a strap or a cane like a schoolmaster (Yarnold 1971:13).

Learning the Creed was not an intellectual exercise, but a matter of interiorising the faith of the church. Today it is the same. The Creed is a recapitulation of the Trinitarian faith and the Lord's Prayer a summation of how his brothers and sisters may approach the Father (Kavanagh 1992:38). Both these texts come alive in the context of the liturgical life of the church into which the elect have been and will be initiated.

The Ephphetha rite dates back to the early baptismal rites celebrated at Rome and Milan. It is a rite that is not given much attention today, but nevertheless is included in the preparation rites for Holy Saturday. As the Ephphetha prayer is prayed the elect come before the presider and he signs them on the lips and ears. The words of the prayer embody its significance:

Ephphetha: that is, be opened<sup>22</sup>,  
that you may profess the faith you hear,  
to the praise and glory of God (RCIA 199).

No commentary is given for this simple and direct rite. The explanatory article though, is pertinent in light of our study:

By the power of its symbolism the ephphetha rite, or rite of opening the ears and mouth, impresses on the elect their need of grace in order that they may hear the word of God and profess it for their salvation (RCIA 197).

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<sup>22</sup> The scriptural basis for this rite is Mk 7:34.

This rite connects the act of hearing the word and professing it with one's life. It is significant that this rite is celebrated just before the elect will become fully initiated into the church. In this way they are reminded that what they hear and experience must find expression in their lives.

### **5.5.1 The Work of Inculturation**

The rituals of the Period of Enlightenment as I have described them here follow the RCIA as it was promulgated for use by the universal church. The rite expects that local churches will inculturate it. In several places throughout the rite it manifests a sensitivity to cultural differences.

Individual parishes might explore how the Rite of Sending of the Catechumens to the Rite of Election could be inculturated. Black parishes could incorporate traditional rituals for sending people off on journeys. Testimony could be given in African tribal style. It is not my place to articulate the "how" of the inculturation. All I would do is to encourage black Catholics to take seriously the rituals of the RCIA and wherever possible to inculturate them.

During my years as the Director of the Office of Worship in the Catholic Diocese (1987-1993) the Rite of Election was celebrated with many elements that are characteristic of African celebrations: processions, singing and ululating, colour, movement, and a warm sense of belonging. Since the Rite of Election is best celebrated at a diocesan level it was always multi-lingual and an effort was made to make it intercultural. These were but small efforts, but ones that were then used in some parishes to inculturate the RCIA and other rites of the church.

### **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has been devoted to the Period of Enlightenment which coincides with the season of Lent. It is a time of intense preparation and soul-searching for the elect.

I began by considering the need for discernment before catechumens move to the next threshold in the initiation process. The spiritual nature of discernment and the necessity of a discernment process in Christian formation was then

considered. I then moved to a description of the Rite of Election, the ritual threshold which catechumens cross to become the elect.

The Rite of Election stands out in the initiation process because it is the only rite celebrated at the diocesan level with the bishop presiding. I showed that in the simple format of the liturgy of the Word, a key element is the testimony of the sponsors in the dialogue with the bishop. I then examined the experience of the this celebration in the practice of initiation in four different parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg. I related this ritual experience to V. Turner's understanding of *communitas* which continues to take shape during this stage of liminality.

A theology of election from Old Testament times through the early church was then developed. I demonstrated how election is always the work of God and always for mission. It is always directed toward the kingdom. I stressed the importance of good catechesis for a healthy understanding of election for the catechumens before they celebrate the ritual.

The third section was devoted to an examination of the rites which are celebrated during the Period of Enlightenment. This section is the heart of the chapter. The celebration of the three scrutinies was looked at in detail because of the importance of the three biblical pericopes which form their foundation. These scriptural texts and the ritual for the celebration of the scrutinies not only help to purify the elect of anything that might inhibit their response to Christ, they also aid in their formation for mission. This became evident in our interpretation of the texts.

In this context I took up two issues: the power of ritual and then, in connection with the scrutinies, the relationship between myth and ritual. These issues were considered because they have important implications for missiologists as they engage in theologising on the nature of Christian mission. The dynamic power of ritual stems from its ability to bring people in contact with the root metaphors of their faith and/or culture. When missiologists are sensitive to the symbols and meanings communicated through ritual they will have opened another window of understanding of culture so that the Christian message can be communicated in ways that touch the deepest aspects of peoples' lives. Then faith

can be inculturated in a way that respects cultural values and opens a way for the Gospel to transform that very culture.

Myth finds a home in ritual. In the scrutinies the sacred text of the Gospel stories of the Samaritan woman, the man born blind and Lazarus provided the myth which shaped the ritual celebration of the scrutinies. Both are necessary to convey the church's message of healing and strength.

The Lenten season is the church's time of renewal when the radical conversion envisioned by RM is the central concern of the whole church. In parishes where the elect are preparing for the sacraments of initiation the call to conversion and mission becomes a living reality embodied in them and in the whole community. This is no more evident than in the Gospel texts around which the scrutinies take shape. Perhaps these passages more than any other element of the Period of Enlightenment form the elect for mission.

The Samaritan woman, the man born blind and Lazarus all became missionaries after they were gifted with the truth, the light and the new life that Jesus offered to them. The elect are led through a catechetical and ritual process whereby they also are brought to a new awareness of who they are in relationship with Christ. The call to conversion is deepened and with it a sense of mission.

The celebration of the scrutinies not only serve to prepare the elect for initiation into true and authentic life in Christ, but also to share in his mission. Once the Samaritan woman experienced the freedom of the truth she hurried to tell her neighbours. When the blind man's sight was restored he immediately told others. Jesus was good news for them and they wanted to share their liberation. Their freedom in Christ moved them to mission.

Throughout the season of Lent the elect gradually have learned the ways of Christian mission. These have been awakened in them through the example of the parish members who are actively engaged in mission through work with homeless people, in parish soup kitchens, in overnight shelters, through visiting the sick. The elect also learn the ways of mission through their participation in the liturgy and their reflection on the scriptures individually and communally. As they grow in faith, they grow in a sense of mission. RM connects growth in faith with a sense of mission. Always the need is for ongoing conversion:

The evangelizing activity of the Christian community, first in its own locality, and then elsewhere as part of the Church's universal mission, is the clearest sign of a mature faith. A radical conversion in thinking is required in order to become missionary and this holds true both for individuals and entire communities (RM 49).

As the elect were prayed over by the assembly during the scrutinies they were invited to experience liberation for mission. As the community supported the elect during this time of testing they experienced what it means to be called to be church for one another and for all others. This support is manifested in prayer, in sharing, in reaching out together in mission to all people but especially to the poor, the homeless and those in need. With members of the parish they seek to alleviate the suffering of people in need, but also they seek to engage in evangelisation. The elect are gradually led to re-evaluate their lives in light of their continually growing relationship with Christ and their experience of mission:

To continue Jesus' mission faithfully, we must commit ourselves to a wholehearted search for him who has first reached out to us (Bernardin 1989:27).

This wholehearted search is what the Period of Enlightenment is about. The elect and the church-at-large seek him more intensely during the Lenten season.

Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter. For the Lenten liturgy disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens through the several stages of Christian initiation; the faithful, through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar = GNLV 27).

Mission is not simply the prerogative of activist minded Christians. It is not a choice, but an imperative of baptism. It is the responsibility of every Christian. This is the entire purpose of the RCIA: to form people to engage in mission and to provide them with a vision of mission rooted in the scriptures and in the liturgy of the church. It is a vision which will allow new Christians to cross whatever borders they come to in carrying out the mission of Christ.

Throughout the catechumenate and during the Period of Enlightenment the elect have had an experience of liminality which has facilitated new relationships and a sense of *communitas* (cf. 5.1.2). This experience has hopefully provided the elect with an experience which they know facilitates mission.

The elect, ideally, are discovering in all these relationships the one relationship that is at the centre of their lives: the relationship with Christ. When that begins to happen the call to mission also happens; for one cannot really know Christ and not share his concern for the world. There is no guarantee that the elect will hear the call to share in the mission of Christ. The rite does not work without the cooperation of the participants and they must be called to faith and conversion (SC 9) so that they can benefit from the celebration of the rites within the RCIA and be formed for mission.

As the Body of Christ, we continue his mission when we share in his own life, death, and resurrection, that is, when we proclaim the Word, praise God, and work for the transformation of the world (Bernardin 1989:27).

Within the text of the RCIA one finds those elements which can facilitate formation for mission no text or process can achieve this on its own. Only in union with the Risen Christ and with the power of the Holy Spirit can this human process of initiation make disciples of those who are to become part of Christ's Body (SC 6).

Finally I looked briefly at the rites which are celebrated as part of the proximate preparation for the sacraments of initiation. These rites of the presentation and handing back of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and the Ephphetha Rite have ancient roots in the church's practice of initiation. They are directly related to belief and prayer and so are important to the initiation process.

In the next chapter I will consider the celebration of the sacraments of initiation and the theology that informs those rituals. I will focus on how ritual affects identity formation and the power of ritual can form people for mission.

## Chapter Six

### *The Sacraments of Initiation*

*As members of the living Christ, all the faithful have been incorporated into Him and made like unto Him through baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. Hence all are duty-bound to cooperate in the expansion and growth of His Body, so that they can bring it to fullness as swiftly as possible (Eph. 4:13).*

*--Ad Gentes, 36*

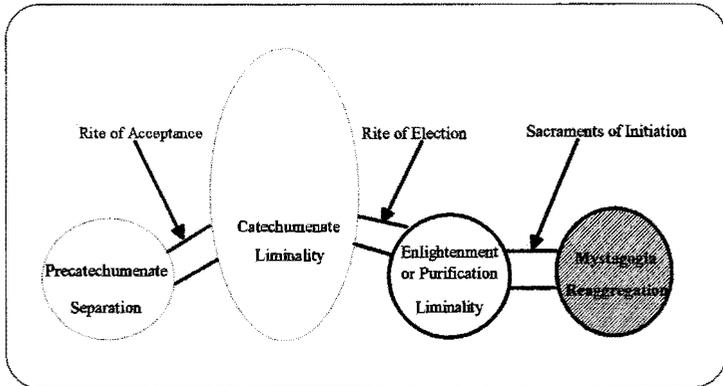


Figure 6. Four stages and three liturgical thresholds of the RCIA with the period of mystagogia highlighted.

#### 6.0 The Purpose of the Chapter

The culmination of the initiation process takes place at the Easter Vigil when the elect receive the sacraments of initiation and become full members of the church. I shall begin this chapter with an examination of the structure of the Easter Vigil. This is the vigil which tradition tells us was called "the Mother of all vigils" (Ellebracht 1983:114) by Augustine. The Holy Saturday Night Vigil is of great importance because it forms the context for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

The Easter Vigil is the church's finest use of ritual. The vigil includes the use of symbols and myth to celebrate in ritual the community's central root metaphor, the dying and rising of Christ (Luzbetak 1988:269). Eliade (1961:176)

argued convincingly for the paradigmatic quality of the Christian ritual of initiation because of its use of archaic symbols which he maintains have the power to alter their meaning in various life situations. I shall also discuss how this ritual celebration serves to reinforce and deepen the neophytes' sense of identity, world view, and ethos as they listen again to the Christian myth of salvation from creation to the resurrection of Christ and cross the final boundary to full membership in the church. Schreiter (1985; 1992; 1994) and Worgul (1976; 1984; 1989) provide us with insights which deepen our understanding of Christian ritual and its significance for formation for mission.

With the Easter Vigil as our liturgical context for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation I will consider the theology of each of the three sacraments and discover therein a theology of mission rooted in the celebration of these rites. Then I will move on to a look at the meaning of mystagogia and conclude with some observations about how this stage in the initiation process contributes to formation for mission of the newly initiated.

### 6.1 The Easter Vigil

This night of vigil crowns the Roman Catholic liturgical year. Its development is related to the formalisation of Lent as a season dedicated to the immediate preparation of candidates for baptism. For those who wandered away from the church this season is an opportunity for their return through prayer and penance. "This night is the most sacred and solemn feast of the liturgical year" (Irwin 1991:60).

The celebration has four parts: the service of light, the liturgy of the word, the liturgy of baptism and the liturgy of the eucharist. It also takes place at night. The *Roman Missal*, following the calendar for the liturgical year, gives the following directive:

The entire celebration of the Easter Vigil takes place at night. It should not begin before nightfall; it should end before daybreak on Sunday (Roman Missal = RomM, Easter Vigil, 3).

That the vigil begins in darkness is significant. It is a long period of darkness and of waiting. It is a time in which the long ages of darkness before Christ are remembered.

The darkness is our bond with the deeds of liberation by which Jews and Christians were created and delivered to freedom and life (Huck 1992:122).

These sentiments will be experienced in the blessing of the fire, the lighting of the candle, but especially in the nine readings prescribed for this night. Yet we begin in darkness. Eliade (1958:xiv) noted that in the primitive societies that he studied in Australia initiation often begins in darkness. The darkness is an image of "precosmogonic Chaos" (Eliade 1958:xiv). For Christians that darkness was ended with the resurrection of Christ. For the candidates for baptism it signifies their own experience of darkness apart from Christ.

Those engaged in mission must not only have a profound appreciation for the symbolic value of darkness, but also for the light which Christ is both for individuals and for cultures as "the definitive self-revelation of God" (RM 5).

## 6.1.1 The Service of Light

### 6.1.1.1 *The Blessing of the Fire*

The elect and the baptised gather around a fire which has been prepared in advance. The rubrics call for "a large fire." Since the Triduum<sup>1</sup> began on Holy Thursday evening the church has given itself to fasting and prayer. This is a time of anticipation for the community as much as for the elect. The church is looking for the light of the resurrection in the midst of darkness.

Every gesture we make says that we are -- and because of the wonderful multiplicity of these gestures, we begin to sense just how unimaginably grand this resurrection of Christ, ourselves, all creation is (Huck 1992:133).

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<sup>1</sup> From the Latin, literally *The Three Days*. These extend from the celebration of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday night until the liturgical hour of Evening Prayer, or Vespers on Easter Sunday. These days are the most sacred ones of the liturgical year.

The fire itself should summon the assembly to gather in its light. The 1988 *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Lent and the Easter Triduum (CirL)* reminds us of the tone and pace of this part of the celebration:

The first part of the Vigil consists of actions and gestures that should be carried out at a measured pace and with such gravity that, with the help of introductory comments and the liturgical prayers, the faithful will correctly grasp the meaning of the rites (CirL 82).

The document is concerned with the ritual and symbols used on this night. The mystery which we celebrate is a passage from darkness to light and it is our own mystery that we are celebrating (Ellebracht 1983:112) for we are in Christ and share in his passage.

The service begins with the fire burning and with some words of introduction given by the presider. The RomM directs that his words should be a reminder of why we gather on this night. There is a text given in the rite, but the presider, as long as he is faithful to the meaning of this night may, speaks his own words, but the text given is strong and direct:

Dear friends in Christ,  
on this most holy night,  
when our Lord Jesus Christ passed from death to life,  
the Church invites her children throughout the world  
to come together in vigil and prayer.  
This is the passover of the Lord:  
if we honor the memory of his death and resurrection  
by hearing his word and celebrating his mysteries,  
then we may be confident  
that we shall share his victory over death  
and live with him for ever in God.

For the elect and those of the assembly who have journeyed with them throughout the whole initiation process there has been a build-up to this night as each one anticipates sharing in Christ's victory over death. After these introductory words and a moment of silent prayer, the presider blesses the fire using this prayer:

Make this new fire + holy, and inflame us with new hope.  
Purify our minds by this Easter celebration  
and bring us one day to the feast of eternal light.

The presider lights the candle from the new fire and the procession to the church begins. A threefold pitch gradation in the chant accompanying the procession builds a sense of awe and excitement. Like the people at the Red Sea the assembly is led by this column of light (Ellebracht 1983:113). The candles of all are lighted and this is followed by the singing of the Exsultet.

#### 6.1.1.2 *The Exsultet*

The Exsultet is a hymn of praise and petition so that the candle might give light to the community during this nocturnal vigil.

The hymn of praise covers the entire content of the Easter Vigil, from the night of the Passover lamb in Egypt via the night at the Sea of Reeds and the night of baptism in which the redeemer has saved us, down to the final night when Christ returns as the Morning Star that ushers in our everlasting day. The community celebrates this night by reading of God's mercy in the scriptures, singing of it, and calling upon the Lord to come (Berger 1991:42).

The Exsultet is the final element in the service of light and so it stands out as the climax of the first part of the vigil (Huck 1992:139). Berger cautions that despite the beauty of this hymn of praise it must be remembered that it is part of the introductory rites of the vigil and it must be treated as such. It does not have the same prominence as the other parts of the liturgy for this night (Berger 1991:42).

Huck puts the singing of the Exsultet in perspective within the context of the vigil and the whole Easter season:

It is a victory song, a wedding song of God and humanity, earth and heaven. It is theology in its purest form, the song the church longs to sing. From the naming and acclamation of the night's deeds (as in "dispels all evil" and the list that follows) it is clear that the church understands this night to be sacramental. This text has many words and sentences that could well be heard again and be spoken about in the preaching of Eastertime (Huck 1992:140).

Just a portion of the Exsultet will substantiate Huck's insights:

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!  
Exult, all creation around God's throne!  
Jesus Christ, our King, is risen!  
Sound the trumpet of salvation!

Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor,  
radiant in the brightness of your King!  
Christ has conquered! Glory fills you!  
Darkness vanishes for ever!

Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory!  
The risen Savior shines upon you!  
Let this place resound with joy,  
echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

This is our passover feast,  
when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain,  
whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers.  
This is the night when Christians everywhere,  
washed clean of sin  
and freed from all defilement,  
are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.

This is the night when Jesus Christ  
broke the chains of death  
and rose triumphant from the grave.

Most blessed of all nights, chosen by God  
to see Christ rising from the dead!

Of this night scripture says:  
"The night will be as clear as day;  
it will become my light, my joy."

The power of this holy night  
dispels all evil, washes guilt away,  
restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy;  
it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles  
earthly pride.

Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth  
and humankind is reconciled with God!

May the Morning Star which never sets find this flame still  
burning:

Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the  
dead,  
and shed his peaceful light on all humankind,  
your Son who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

These stanzas from the Exsultet give us a sense of a vision of life in Christ and his mission to the whole world. Allusions to baptism and the eucharist run throughout the text. The light of Christ fills us with glory and joy. The whole earth is transformed by the resurrection. No created thing is outside the grace of this night. Christians everywhere pray that this light might enlighten and brighten all humanity. This is our passover feast. With Christ we are invited to make this passover to new life with all of creation. This is the language of liminality and *communitas*. V. Turner believed that in situations where liminality and *communitas* happen there is also the potential to change one's world view and adopt a more cosmic perspective. He wrote:

Major liminal situations are occasions on which, so to speak a society takes cognizance of itself, where...members of that society may obtain an approximation, however limited, to a global view of man's place in the cosmos (Turner, V. 1972a:400).

The Easter Vigil is a major liminal situation and it is an annual opportunity for the Christian community to take cognizance of its life in Christ. In a night filled with the symbolism of darkness, light, water, oil, fragrance, touch, movement, bread, wine, eating and drinking the assembly is reminded of the importance of these symbols in communicating the church's theology. Through participation in these rites the assembly enters into a dialogue with these primordial symbols that goes deeper than one carried on with words. In this dialogue "Mother Church" sets before her members the rich fare of her most lavish feast, the Easter Vigil. Liturgical catechesis at its finest is carried out within ritual and with symbols:

Such symbols, visual and auditory, operate culturally as mnemonics, or as communications engineers would no doubt have it, as "storage bins" of information, not about pragmatic techniques, but about cosmologies, values and cultural axioms, whereby a society's "deep knowledge" is transmitted from one generation to another (Turner, V. 1972a:399).

With the "Amen" to the Exsultet resounding throughout the worshipping community the service of light is ended. The light of Christ's resurrection informs our understanding of the liturgy of the Word that is to follow. All the scripture texts are proclaimed in the light of Christ risen and glorious. In this way the new light proclaimed in the Exsultet helps to shape the community's understanding of each reading from the scriptures.

The Exsultet is perhaps ritual language at its best. Worgul pointed out four characteristics of ritual language which seem to be especially applicable to the Exsultet. He wrote:

Ritual language is descriptive. It is a narrative which exegetes ritual action. Ritual language is heuristic: it arouses interest and evokes discovery. Ritual language is prescriptive: it binds the ritual community to the meaning expressed in the ritual. Moreover, ritual language is performative: it requires praxis (Worgul 1984:145).

The Exsultet, in a poetic way stirs the community to faith by recalling the power of the resurrection. It also stirs them to mission, by proclaiming so powerfully the meaning of life in Christ for the whole church and all of humanity. The reconciliation between humanity and God in Christ is something all people have the right to know and experience. That cannot happen unless the assembly acts on what it experiences in the liturgy. Both liturgy and mission are concerned with praxis.

### 6.1.2 The Liturgy of the Word

RomM calls the liturgy of the Word "the most fundamental element of the Easter Vigil." The nine readings given in the lectionary for the vigil now continue to feed the assembly with rich fare, but this time it is the Word proclaimed in the midst of the community that nourishes the assembly.

The nine scripture readings in our Lectionary are not play-by-play accounts of every occasion when God's people allowed God to be God for them..But these texts provide us with sufficient proclamation to enable us to enter into the movement of salvation history and to experience the continuity

and growth of our covenant relationships (Ellebracht 1983:115-116).

My intention is not to give a complete commentary on the readings, but rather to give the reader an idea of the readings used during the Easter Vigil and how they might relate to the experience of the catechumens who are now about to be initiated into the body of Christ.

#### *6.1.2.1 The Readings from the Books of Genesis and Exodus*

The liturgy of the Word begins with the story of creation from Genesis (1:1-2:2). It reveals the creative love of God at work in the whole of the cosmos. This story takes us back to the origins of creation and God's crowning achievement: the creation of humankind. As the assembly remembers the origins of creation and its own origins myth works to mould and shape its identity. Genesis puts the members of the community in touch with its fundamental myth and builds up its identity as creatures who were meant to be at home with the rest of creation. To forget our relationship with the universe would spell disaster for ourselves and the planet. For as Schreier (1992:38) reminds us, "loss of memory is loss of identity." For the catechumens this reading can signal a reminder that they are on their way to becoming a new creation, created in goodness and love.

The second reading, also from Genesis (22:1-18), is the story of Abraham and Isaac. Nocent (1977b:117) has noted that this story has the power to invite the catechumens to unconditional faith in the Lord. He wrote:

On that kind of faith will depend the vital renewal through the sacrament that they are about to receive and that will bring them the sacramental gift of faith. The faith they already have is what has brought them to baptism, yet it is baptism that will instill in them a faith that is the work of the Spirit (Nocent 1977b:117).

Unconditional faith leads to unconditional obedience to the Lord. The example that the church puts before us is that of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice Isaac in order to be obedient to God.

The ritual for this vigil makes obligatory the proclamation of the third reading which is from Exodus 14:15-15:1. In this story of the crossing of the sea we have a type of baptism. The reading from the Letter to the Romans 6:3-11, is the only New Testament reading other than the gospel and it is also required because in it Paul wrote about baptism. Both of these readings have to do with liberation. Ambrose, commenting on the Exodus reading for the new initiated wrote:

Now since you are celebrating the holy Pasch, you should know, brethren, what the Pasch is. Pasch means, *the crossing-over*; and so the Festival is called by this name. For it was on this day that the Children of Israel crossed over out of Egypt, and the Son of God crossed over from this world to His Father. What gain is it to celebrate the Pasch unless you imitate Him Whom you worship; that is unless you cross over from Egypt, that is, from the darkness of evildoing to the light of virtue and from the love of this world to the love of your heavenly home? (Ambrose of Milan, *The Sunday of Resurrection*).

Ambrose related the crossing of the sea and Christ's own passover to the experience of the neophytes. His final question also connects liturgy and life. He did not see baptism simply as a ritual, but as an initiation into a way of life modelled on Christ's own.

The great Eastern Father, Gregory of Nazianzen, also preached on the meaning of the Pasch. He offered this insight to his listeners.

This Pasch, this great and venerable Feast, is by the Hebrews called in their language Phaska; and it is evident the word means *passing-over*. Historically recalling their flight from Egypt to the Land of Canaan. But if we consider the word in a spiritual sense it refers to our progress and ascent from lower things to higher, and to the land of promise. And we find that what often happens in many places in Scripture, that certain words change from being obscure and become clearer in meaning, and from being harsh become refined, has taken place here (Gregory of Nazianzen, *On the Holy Pasch*).

Gregory's insights into the Exodus reading is an example of the kind of mystagogia that took place in the early centuries of the church's life. He related the crossing of

the sea to the spiritual progress that the neophytes made in their whole initiation journey. He also taught them how to read the scriptures and understand the words used in their differing contexts.

Another Eastern Father and Patriarch of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, provided his local church with an understanding of baptism that echoes the teaching of Romans on baptism. He explained baptism in light of the experience of the newly initiated who were baptised the night before in his homily on *The Fruit's of Christ's Resurrection*:

By this resurrection we rose when we were baptized; as these here who yesterday were found worthy of baptism; the dear lambs! The day before yesterday Christ was crucified; but as night passed he rose again today. And they on the day before yesterday were still held fast by sin; but together with Him they have risen. He died in the body, and in the body He rose again. They died through sin, and they have risen again, delivered from sin (John Chrysostom, *The Fruits of Christ's Resurrection*).

Chrysostom highlighted the new life given to the newly initiated through baptism and the liberation from sin which they can claim in Christ. The link between the Exodus reading and the one from Romans stresses liberation and the Fathers simply help the newly initiated interpret what they have experienced.

#### 6.1.2.2 *The Readings from the Prophets*

Four readings from the prophets follow: two from Isaiah, and one each from Baruch and Ezekiel. These readings are replete with feminine images of God's love and tenderness for the chosen people. There are also strong masculine images of God as husband, ruler, fury and strength, but tonight the images of God's responsiveness to the plight of his people comes through in compassion and care.

Isaiah 54:5-14 would have us reflect on texts like: "In everlasting love I have taken pity on you..." (v.8) and "My faithful love will never leave you..." (v.10). In the following reading from Isaiah 55:1-11 the life-giving quality of God's love comes through:

Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty; though you have no money, come...Listen carefully to me, and you will have

good things to eat and rich food to enjoy. Pay attention, come to me; listen, and you will live (Is. 55:1, 3).

Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4 gives the image of God as wisdom. The prophet gives this advice: "In her radiance make your way to light; do not yield your glory to another" (Bar 4:2). Through the prophet Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28 the church hears words which capture the meaning of this night for the assembly, but especially those to be baptised:

I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your filth and of all your foul idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you...(Ez. 26:25-27).

Here are the feminine images of water, cleansing, heart, spirit. All of these have to do with baptism. The first two images reflect the actual act of baptism and the latter two, its effects. These are also related to the whole conversion process which has happened gradually in the lives of the neophytes and signify both death and new life.

#### 6.1.2.3 *Singing of the Gloria and the New Testament Readings*

At this point in the liturgy the *Gloria* is sung. Liturgists differ about its placement in the liturgy for this night (Huck 1992:145). Yet Irwin (1991:73) urged the singing of the *Gloria* at this point because this familiar text can hold a special meaning for those who are to be baptised. In light of the readings from the Hebrew scriptures all of which reveal God's constant and unconditional love for humankind despite countless infidelities these words of the *Gloria* seem to hold a paschal character:

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
    have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
    receive our prayer (*Gloria*).

Though God has invited all of us to intimacy with him, we experience estrangement from him because of our sins. The liturgy relates the action of Christ in the paschal mystery with our present situation as we sing: "You who take away the sin of the world" we proclaim Christ as *the* saviour of the world. Those who are about to be baptised are a sign that this is the reality to which their initiation gives witness to the community.

After the *Gloria*, the community listens to the reading from Romans 6:3-11. This is the other obligatory reading for the liturgy of the vigil. We spoke about it above in connection with the reading from Exodus. It is rich in the symbolism of the baptismal waters as a tomb in which a person is buried in order to rise to new life (Irwin 1991:72). The water symbolism then conveys not only life, but also death. To enter the waters of the font is to bring death to one's past existence (Gomez 1982a:258).

These same ideas are echoed in SC in which we are told that through baptism women and men are "plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ" (SC 6). This same paragraph speaks of baptism as a death which leads to the formation of people as true adorers of the Father. This is the new life baptism makes possible.

The proclamation of the gospel is preceded by the Alleluia. It is intoned by the presider or the cantor and sung three times, each on a higher tone. It is the Easter Alleluia sung in the context of Psalm 118. This is the only time during the liturgical year that the Alleluia is sung in this way. There is no gospel procession as on other feasts or Sundays. The assembly simply stands alert and rejoicing in the sound of the Alleluia which has been absent from the liturgy since the beginning of Lent (Huck 1992:145). Commenting on the use of the Alleluia, Huck cites these words of Augustine which give a sense of how he understood the union of earth and heaven in the liturgy:

O blessed Alleluia of heaven! No more anguish, no more adversity. No more enemy. No more love of destruction. Up above, praise to God, and here below, praise to God. Praise mingled with fear here, but without disturbance above. Here chant in hope, there, in possession; here it is Alleluia *en route*, there it is Alleluia on arriving home (in Huck 1992:146).

The alleluia is the chant of the redeemed, pilgrim people, a people on a journey of conversion and faith that will continue to be sung upon our arrival in the kingdom. Joy at receiving the saving word can be shown ritually by a procession with the lectionary or book of the gospels or perhaps a dance, especially on this night "when heaven is wedded to earth."

The gospel prescribed for this night is taken from one of the synoptic gospels depending on the particular church year cycle<sup>2</sup> being celebrated. The text is an account of the resurrection. Again the church places before the minds and hearts of believers the object of the community's faith: the risen Christ. Nocent has pointed out that:

The important thing is that we should conform our lives to that of the risen Christ, in or that, having died with him, we may also rise with him. That is the real goal of the faith of those who are preparing for baptism and will shortly receive the sacramental faith that saves. Such too, is the real goal of the faith of all Christians...(Nocent 1977b:126).

The homily brings the liturgy of the Word to a conclusion. On this night, the homilist, through lectionary catechesis (cf. 4.2.1.1.), needs to relate the message of the readings to the meaning of Christian initiation. In each of the synoptic gospel accounts the angel (angels in Luke's account) shared the news of the resurrection of Christ with Mary Magdalene and the other women. In Matthew and Luke they are sent on mission to share this news with the apostles. These accounts of the resurrection bring together the themes of resurrection, faith and new life. The three might be woven together in the homily for this night. Ellebracht reflecting on the Easter Vigil has observed that:

We have been experiencing the real presence of Christ in the Liturgy of the Word, where we listened to the history of salvation unfold. We have also noted the gradual development of God's saving action during the forty days' journey to this holy night. The assembled community sense that it has arrived at another high point in celebration when it turns its attention toward the baptismal font (Ellebracht 1983:134).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. LMin 93-96, 99, 100. The lectionary of readings is arranged according to a three year cycle: A=Matthew, B=Mark, and C= Luke. John's gospel is read during other Sundays of the Easter season and on some of the Sundays of the Advent and Christmas seasons.

The service of light and the liturgy of the word have prepared the elect and the entire assembly for the liturgy of baptism. The Catholic world view and identity is shaped and given meaning by the liturgy of this night. This liturgy, filled with symbols, readings, and actions done in faith, forms within a person the memory of their Christian origins, their identity in Christ. Kavanagh sees this as the great task of local churches:

(There) is the need for individuals and local churches to have the strongest possible sense of their own Catholic identity, an identity not rooted primarily in their ethnic past or even in the religious rhythms of family and school, *but an identity rooted in the living memory of their own baptism into Christ and his Church* (Kavanagh 1978:276).

It is the work of the church to keep that memory alive through the liturgy, evangelisation and mission. In all that the church does, but especially through the liturgy, believers must be reminded of their dignity in Christ as members of his body. People become members of Christ's body through participation in his dying and rising as they enter the waters of the baptismal font. Those waters are a source of life for all who enter them and emerge from them in faith.

The liturgy of the word on this night brings the assembly in touch with the myth that is the basis for all that they do this night and all that informs their belief. The assembly is led through the story of salvation from the cosmic beginnings of all of life to the new life made possible by the resurrection.

Hearing the sacred myth proclaimed prepares the assembly for what they will enact in the succeeding parts of the ritual (Southall 1972:73). Friedl linked myth and ritual in this way:

If myth is the "why" of religious life, then *ritual* is the "how" by which those concepts are put into practice (Friedl 1981:255).

Since all the scripture readings used within the Easter Vigil have some bearing on the Christian understanding of baptism Friedl's insight into the relationship between myth and ritual is credible.

Luzbetak (1988:267) has noted that one of the characteristics of myth is that it is never a story produced by an individual, but it is an account "derived from

supernatural powers." In faith the community gathered for the Easter Vigil listens to the nine scripture texts, not as stories of the past, but as their story understood in the light of Christ's resurrection. It is Christ's light that brought out order and meaning of all of life and brought those who believe out of the chaos of darkness.

The myth proclaimed in the liturgy of the word embodies the community's root metaphors and calls the assembly to remember in faith the meaning of their lives in Christ (Luzbetak 1988:269). For the candidates for baptism the scripture readings are their story in a special way. Like the Israelites crossing the Red Sea they will cross the last boundary to full membership and full participation into the life of the church when they enter the waters of baptism.

### **6.1.3 The Liturgy of Baptism**

Jesus is the sacrament of God and the church is the sacrament of the baptised one, Jesus. The church is then a sacrament of his presence in the world. It carries on the reconciling, justifying and saving work of Christ through its sacramental ministry (Osborne 1987:89). This is apparent most especially in the Easter Vigil. Raya (1993:68) compares Christian initiation to a symphony which through the three sacraments of initiation leads people to share life with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The rites of baptism, confirmation and eucharist are sacramental ritualisations of all that has been done and proclaimed in the first two parts of the liturgy of the Easter Vigil:

All that is symbolized by the light of Christ being carried in procession in the darkness of night and in the recounting of God's intervention in history for his chosen ones is ratified and accomplished anew for those who present themselves for initiation and full ecclesial communion. What has been used as the mainstay of instruction to catechumens during Lent, the Word of God (notably on Sundays with the scrutines) is summarized here and made the foundation for the sacramental liturgy of initiation. The symbols of light and water, which are so central to this liturgy in practice and in appreciating the depth of what is taking place have been emphasized already during Lent (Irwin 1991:59).

In a very real sense what was done during Lent to support the seeds of faith that have taken root in the hearts of the elect bears fruit on this night. Now is the formal moment of initiation, but throughout this whole celebration the church has spoken about the meaning of this night through the symbols of the light service and the readings of the liturgy of the Word.

The practice of baptising the elect during the Easter Vigil developed gradually until the fourth century when it became a permanent part of the liturgy (Berger 1991:43). In the present rite the liturgy of baptism begins with the presentation of the candidates. Each candidate is called by name and with his/her sponsor approaches the font. The image of the elect and their sponsors moving with the ministers to the font is a visual summary of their whole journey. The elect are becoming part of a pilgrim people on the move with a sense of mission. The presider invites the whole assembly to pray for the candidates. After some moments a cantor or the choir begins the litany of the saints.

#### *6.1.3.1 The Litany of the Saints*

The work of initiation that is done tonight by the church is not something done apart from a tradition of faith. That faith has been embodied in all those members of the church who have sought to walk faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus.

Here the present church invokes and calls upon all who have gone before us in the faith to be present to us and to intercede for us as we celebrate the sacraments of initiation. These models of faith are concrete examples of the kind of faith we are called to and of the faith that we share in as members of the same church (Irwin 1991:75).

The use of the litany of the saints reflects the Roman Catholic teaching about the cult of the saints. The veneration of the saints is a distinctive part of Roman Catholic piety (Irwin 1991:75). From one generation to the next the church puts before the community of faith examples of women and men who have followed Christ with single-minded devotion. The saints are people who have given witness by their lives to the "cost of discipleship." They are a veritable panoply of striking illustrations of people who let the power of God triumph over the weakness in their

lives and shine through them to enlighten the world. These are people who have taken mission seriously in a range of cultural contexts. They are transparent witnesses pointing to the new creation in Christ (Madigan 1993:850). The saints reflect the diversity of those called to holiness.

The teaching about the Communion of Saints<sup>3</sup> resounds in the teaching of chapter five of LG from Vatican II on the universal call to holiness. In this chapter on the call to holiness the Council Fathers remind us that this holiness is manifested in diverse ways.

Now, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested as it ought to be, through those fruits of grace that the Spirit produces in the faithful. It is expressed in multiple ways by those individuals who, in their walk of life, strive for the perfection of charity, and thereby help others to grow (LG 39).

It is to this holiness that is a gift of the Holy Spirit that the candidates for initiation have been called. It is to this call to holiness that the saints give witness. The rite suggests that the patron saints of the candidates and the parish patron saint might be added (RCIA 221). In cultures like many of those in South Africa, the singing of the litany of the saints may also be connected with respect and veneration of ancestors, in this case ancestors in the faith.

#### *6.1.3.2 The Blessing of the Water*

With the ministers, the elect and their sponsors taking their places near the font the presider begins the prayer for the blessing of the water.

The blessing of the water has, like the Exsultet, the nature of a eucharistic prayer: God is thanked and praised over this water...(Huck 1992:148).

This prayer is best chanted. In this prayer water is portrayed through six different images: as a source of life, the great flood, the waters of the Jordan, the blood and water which came out of Christ's pierced side, and the water for baptism

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. (Madigan 1993:846-850) for an historical review of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the Saints. Madigan traces the development of the church's understanding of the role of the saints in Catholic life from the first century to the present.

which was to be used when the disciples were sent out to teach all nations and baptise them in the name of the Trinity.

Then the presider calls upon the Father to send the Holy Spirit to come upon the water to give it the grace of the Son. The prayer concludes with an allusion to Romans 6 (Irwin 1991:77).

We ask you, Father, with your Son  
to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of this font.  
May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism  
rise also with him to newness of life. (RCIA 222).

In the blessing of the baptismal water at the Easter Vigil, the church praises God because the water he has made is a rich symbol of the grace given to us in baptism (Searle 1990b:16). After a study of the prayer for the blessing of the baptismal water Ellebracht pointed out that it proclaims "the wonderful deeds that reveal those aspects of the Christ Mystery that baptism celebrates" (Ellebracht 1983:137).

#### 6.1.3.3 *The Renunciation of Evil, the Profession of Faith and Baptism*

Finally, to make their preparation for initiation complete the elect make their renunciation of sin and profession of faith.

In these dialogues with the presider in the presence of the assembled community the elect do what Jesus did when he renounced Satan's temptation (First Sunday of Lent) and they fulfill what was done at the scrutinies in the period of purification and enlightenment (Irwin 1991:77).

These renunciations of evil bring the elect to the moment of final decision: To belong to Christ or not. The same dynamic that the elect experienced in the scrutiny of the First Sunday of Lent is experienced here. The renunciation of evil and the pledge of fidelity to Christ in the profession of faith form one liturgical action. Both are necessary. The memory of Jesus' encounter with Satan in the desert should give the elect courage as they reject him publicly in the midst of the assembly and take their place among the believers who have chosen to align themselves with Christ. Schmemmann has written most powerfully about this choice:

The first act of the Christian life is a renunciation, a challenge. No one can be Christ's until he has, first, faced evil, and then, become ready to *fight* it. How far is this spirit from the way in which we often proclaim, or to us a more modern term "sell" Christianity today. Is it not usually presented as a comfort, help, release from tensions, a reasonable investment of time, energy and money?...How could we then speak of *fight* when the very set-up of our churches must, by definition, convey the idea of softness, comfort, peace (Schmemmann 1974:86)?

This rite is powerfully done when the presider stands before each of the elect and directs the questions to each one. Emphasis here is placed on the individual faced with a choice which will direct the orientation of the rest of his or her life. It is a test reminiscent of the ordeals which mark all initiation rites (Eliade 1958:21-40). The purpose of these ordeals is to demonstrate the strength and determination of the initiates (Eliade 1958:38). For the candidates for baptism they are a way of expressing their resolve to follow Christ. What matters now is not what went before in the lives of the elect. The choice before them must be made now:

Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom  
of God's children?

Do you reject the glamor of evil  
and refuse to be mastered by sin?

Do you reject Satan,  
father of sin and prince of darkness?

The questions are ancient ones. Whole ways of living, acting, deciding and understanding are rejected, are cast away (Huck 1992:150). Faith though is ultimately a positive choice and this is seen in the threefold profession of faith.

The profession of faith is made in a dialogue manner. To each of the questions the candidate answers, "I do." Then the candidate is baptised immediately after the profession of faith. The parallelism of the profession of faith and the trinitarian formula of baptism is apparent: because a person believes he/she is admitted to the font:

N., do you believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our  
Lord,  
who was crucified, died, and was buried,  
rose from the dead,  
and is now seated at the right hand of the  
Father?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church, the communion of  
saints,  
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection  
of the body,  
and life everlasting?

Nocent (1977b:132) has pointed out that in the early church the profession of faith was linked with the action of baptising. Originally, the candidates were in the font when the questions of the profession of faith were asked of them. As they answered each question the candidates were immersed in the waters of the font. The general practice of the early church was to immerse the candidate three times, only the Eunomian heretics baptised with one immersion (Yarnold 1971:25).

As St. Paul saw, immersion signifies not only washing, but also the burial of the old man which must come before the new birth. With this symbolism in mind, Ambrose points out that the font is tomb-shaped. Theodore regards the candidate's gesture of bending his body beneath the surface as a sign of humble acceptance (Yarnold 1971:26).

Again Eliade's research has proved helpful for an understanding of the universal nature of initiatory symbolism. He has shown that both birth and death are themes which are active in initiation rites (Eliade 1958:59). For Christians immersion into the waters of baptism also symbolises both death and birth. There is a radical change in status from one who was dead to one who is a new creation.

Though trinitarian baptism is unrepeatable the death to self implied in the action of immersion is not a one time event. Sacramental initiation is the climax of the process of initiation, but it is not an end in itself. Baptism illustrates the pattern of Christian life: a continuous process of dying and rising which extends throughout the whole of Christian life (Senn 1993:66).

After each baptism the assembly sings an acclamation or the alleluia can be sung in an embellished form. Each newly baptised is helped from the font and is wrapped in a towel with the help of his/her sponsor.

Some objections are raised about immersion especially when numbers are large. This is the case at the Diepkloof and Kagiso parishes where sometimes as many as fifty are baptised. Several questions need to be asked. Why is immersion so important? Why go through the inconvenience of baptism by immersion? We know this is only symbolic. Are people being adequately prepared for baptism? Do they understand the moral and social responsibilities related to baptism? Are some people being baptised because their intended spouse is a Catholic? These questions continue to challenge the integrity of the catechumenate and baptism specifically. Mrs. Majanelwa of Kagiso cited these concerns as some of the most difficult in the implementation of the RCIA in the Kagiso parish.

As parishes continue to struggle with the questions surrounding the pastoral practice in regard to baptism in parishes they begin to see the deeper meaning of immersion and its implications for Christian life. Kavanagh gives this justification for baptism by immersion. It is consistent with our view that symbols and ritual are essential to a healthy understanding of the sacraments.

While one obviously could wash without bathing as one could eat without dining, both acts took on vastly enriched social and personal importance as they were ritualized, being freighted with more than merely utilitarian meaning in the process (Kavanagh 1978:28-29).

Gomez reflects on the scriptural teaching of Paul on baptism which makes clear the symbolism of immersion. It becomes apparent that Paul is theologising out of his experience of the rite.

Theologising on the symbolism of immersion, Paul's of "Baptism into Christ's death" (Rom. 6:3); "into the tomb" meant that Baptism is a participation in the Paschal mystery of death and resurrection...Now the bath is not only "burial" but also "resurrection with Christ" (Gomez 1982a:257).

The theology of baptism is rich and full. Rooted in the rite we find that the church teaches us that baptism is about washing, cleansing, burial and rebirth. It is essentially about all these, but all of these lead to one reality: entry into the life of the Trinity through configuration to the paschal mystery of Christ (CCC 1239). This is more than a legal relationship; it is a personal relationship with the persons of the Trinity which is expressed ritually through initiation. It is not a magical rite, but the formalisation of a relationship which began with the conversion (cf. 3.4.1). Those who have been baptised must cooperate with the new life within them in order to build the relationship with the Trinity. The credibility of baptism depends not only on the matter and form of the ritual celebration, but also upon the openness of the newly baptised to be transparent vessels of the divine life which seeks to be manifested in them (Searle 1990b:22).

Following baptism the rite calls for the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation followed by the Eucharist. This sequence of baptism-confirmation-eucharist is regarded as intrinsic to the initiation process and its intelligibility for catechetical purposes (Kavanagh 1972:273). The RCIA restored the ancient church's practice of "making Christians." Lutheran liturgist and pastor Frank Senn commenting on the movement of the Roman Catholic process of initiation wrote:

At this point we turn from the christological basis of mission to the pneumatological, for it is the Spirit who empowers and equips the church for mission by bestowing on its members those gifts which are needed for its tasks (Senn 1993:70).

This movement becomes apparent in the rite when the sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated. The gift of the Spirit conferred on the church at Pentecost is given to the newly baptised through confirmation.

#### **6.1.4 The Sacrament of Confirmation**

##### *6.1.4.1 The Laying on of Hands*

The celebration of confirmation begins with the laying on of hands and the sealing of the newly baptised with chrism.

After calling on the Holy Spirit as the sevenfold Gift of the Father, the president of the assembly lays hands on and anoints the neophytes with perfumed oil. The words "be sealed" with the Gift of the Holy Spirit reveal the meaning of this gesture and make it abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit is the proto-symbolizer who directs the entire process of initiation (Ellebracht 1983:140-141).

In this action there is that clear movement from a christological to a pneumatological focus in the rite of initiation which Senn pointed out above. Baptism and Confirmation were for centuries considered to be a "double sacrament" (CCC 1290). Baptism makes a person a member of the church and confers the new life of grace, and by the laying on of hands the church gives the gift of the Spirit as a prophetic force enabling the person to bear witness to Christ (March 1960:284). In this way the grace of the Pentecost event is perpetuated through the ages in the church (CCC 1288).

#### *6.1.4.2 Anointing with Chrism*

After the imposition of hands the candidates for confirmation are anointed with chrism. Anointing is a symbolic action rich in biblical and ancient symbolism. It is a sign of an abundance of joy, strengthening, consecration, healing, limbering, and making radiant (CCC 1293). It was this sense of making radiant that becomes so apparent in the rite as the newly confirmed stand almost aglow as they are signed with the chrism.

Very early, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil (chrism) was added to the laying on of hands. This anointing highlights the name "Christian," which God "anointed with the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1289).

The conferring of confirmation to the newly baptised restores the ancient order to the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, eucharist. Kavanagh affirms the union between baptism and confirmation:

(The) earliest liturgical evidence links confirmation so intimately with baptism that confirmation as a wholly independent sacrament is difficult if not impossible to discern. In this evidence confirmation appears more as a solemn

conclusion of the baptismal synaxis, and at the same time as the formal public reception of the initiate into the eucharistic assembly -- through the presidential action of the community's chief liturgical minister, the bishop. Confirmation thus appears as a transition-event that hinges baptism...into public eucharist (Kavanagh 1972:273).<sup>4</sup>

This evidence contradicts the practice of the Western church. Now in the twentieth century with a resurgence of theological and historical research the whole question of whether or not confirmation is a separate sacrament has reappeared (Marsh 1960:259).

#### 6.1.4.3 *A Problem of Praxis*

Confirmation has a long and complicated history dating back from the fifth century in the theology of Faustus of Riez (Marsh 1960:261). Our purpose here is not to review that history, but simply to alert the reader to the problems inherent in that history for theology. Kavanagh, perhaps states the problem best:

The Roman Rite thus finds itself affirming in practice two initiatory theories and polities that have successively held sway in its history: the first is antique and paschal, meant to consecrate and initiate a Christian wholly; the second is medieval and socio-personal in emphasis, stressing "growth" on all fronts (*ad robur*). The first presupposes the presence of catechumens in local churches together with the evangelical and catechetical structures necessary to prepare them for baptism. The second presupposes a sustained Catholic birthrate and functioning forms of religious education...The two project rather different models of the Church as well, the second being a "Christendom model" currently wracked with enervating problems that arise not from the hostility of the modern state so much as from its massive indifference. The first projected model, on the contrary, does not presuppose the state at all: it was, in fact, developed historically not only without recourse to state benevolence but often in opposition to its pretensions (Kavanagh 1978: 196-197).

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<sup>4</sup> In this text Kavanagh is giving evidence which supports the restoration of the baptism-confirmation-eucharist order for the sacraments of initiation. For further insights into the question of the placement of confirmation in the order of the sacraments of initiation in light of the sacrament's history in the West cf. Marsh: 1960 and Turner, P. 1993.

This long passage is quoted because Kavanagh puts the problem bluntly before us. The church cannot continue to maintain two separate orders for the sacraments of initiation.<sup>5</sup> Paul Turner, who has perhaps written one of the most thorough studies on confirmation, clarifies the theology of confirmation:

In other words, confirmation in the model of adult initiation does not celebrate that one has become "more completely" like Christ though a more faithful living of the Gospel; rather, it celebrates the continuing ritual of initiation begun with baptism, soon to reach its perfection in eucharist, but now experiencing a "strengthening" or a "sealing" through the symbols of confirmation (Turner, P. 1993:11).

Despite the problem of the order of the sacraments of initiation the church has always believed that:

By Confirmation Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he filled, so that their lives may give off "the aroma of Christ" (CCC 1294).

The sealing with chrism signifies not only that the Christian belongs to Christ, but is sealed for mission. Those confirmed are more "strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ" (LG 11).

Missiologists need to probe the meaning of these sacramental rites as they develop theologies of mission that can inspire Christian witness. They also need to root their theology in the meaning of this ritual action because then what they theologise about will have an experiential component in the liturgical celebration. This will reinforce the responsibility each Christian has for mission.

#### 6.1.4.4 *Reception of the White Garment*

The next rite finds its biblical roots in Col. 3:1-11. After each candidate has received a lighted candle from his/ her sponsor he/she is given a white garment<sup>6</sup> in which to be clothed. This garment symbolises new life. Paul used the image of

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<sup>5</sup> At present the order for celebrating the sacraments of initiation for adults is baptism, confirmation and eucharist. For adolescents it is baptism, eucharist, and confirmation. Cf. Turner, P. 1993:12.

<sup>6</sup> RCIA 229 indicates that another colour garment that conforms to local custom may also be used.

being clothed to convey the change that is to take place in the attitudes and behaviour of the Christian community. Each one is to take off the "old clothing" of his/her past life and be clothed with new life in Christ (Boismard 1964:218-219; Stevick 1973:13). Ellebracht offers this explanation:

The white garment, becomes the "robe of glory" meant to help the neophytes keep the Christian meaning of human life actively before their minds and hearts (Ellebracht 1983:140).

When the newly initiated receive the garment the sponsors leave with the candidates to help them get dressed. In the meantime the assembly renews its baptismal promises. The community is also sprinkled with the newly blessed Easter water that serves as a reminder of their own baptism.

#### *6.1.4.5 Reception of the Lighted Candle*

Returning to the rite itself, the next element in the rite is the reception of a lighted candle by the newly initiated. The sponsors are invited to come to the Easter candle and light a candle which he/she gives to the newly baptised. Then addressing the newly baptised the presider says:

You have been enlightened by Christ.  
Walk always as children of the light  
and keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts.  
When the Lord comes, may you go out to meet him  
with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

Unlike fire which can destroy, the flame of the candle symbolises the enabling light of faith which does not destroy persons, but rather illuminates them so that they give a more visible witness to Christ (Ellebracht 1983:140). It is a creative light that nurtures growth in the newly initiated.

The neophytes return to the assembly for the prayers of intercession. This is the first time they may join the church in its work of interceding for the needs of the world. All during the initiation process they had been dismissed after the homily; tonight they are indeed part of the praying church.

The baptized were to be the voice reminding God of the poor and the church and the troubles of the world. It was practically

a job description. So this first time to join in our intercession is not a minor moment in the initiation; its strength will depend entirely on how well the church intercedes Sunday by Sunday and day by day (Huck 1992:156).

All candles are extinguished as the altar table is prepared for the liturgy of the eucharist. The newly initiated take their places in the midst of the community of believers to once again celebrate and make present the paschal mystery in the liturgy of the eucharist.

#### 6.1.5 The Liturgy of the Eucharist

On this night the eucharist is the climax of the church's work of initiating new members (Nocent 1977b:145). Historically this was *the* eucharist of the Triduum (Huck 1992:156). In the early centuries of the church the paschal fast was kept from the beginning of the Triduum on Holy Thursday night until the eucharist of the Easter Vigil (Talley 1986:30).

Raya, reflecting the tradition of the Eastern rites of the Catholic Church, has expressed the interior dimension of the celebration of baptism and the other sacraments of initiation:

In Baptism Christians enter into an intimate relationship with God the Father and they become his special children; in Chrismation they surrender to the movement of the life of God the Holy Spirit, and they become his living temples; in the Eucharist they accept the personal revelation of God the Son who became man, and a Eucharist with whom they become one body and one spirit. In being thus initiated to the triune God Christians believe also they become members of the Church whose head is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. This is the symphony that God plays in our life and which we shall never tire singing along with him (Raya 1993:69).

The symphony now continues with the third movement, the celebration of the eucharist. The RCIA suggests that the newly baptised and their sponsors take part in the procession with the gifts (RCIA 241). Again, this is the first time they would have been present for this rite. Aside from this directive the rite itself points out that there are special inserts which refer to the newly baptised which can be used with Eucharistic Prayers I, II, and III (RCIA 242). A final note states that

before giving the invitation to receive holy communion the presider should remind the newly initiated of the pre-eminence of the eucharist as the climax of initiation (RCIA 243).

This presupposes that during the period of enlightenment there has been catechesis about the Mass. The vital connection between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the eucharist would need to have been made; the intrinsic unity between the entire eucharistic prayer and the communion rite is essential and would have need to have been made and the meaning of eucharist as thanksgiving would also have to have a place in the liturgical catechesis preceding this night. Only in this way could the rite's directive be accomplished.

#### 6.1.5.1 *The Communion Rite*

The Mass continues as usual. After the Great Amen whereby the assembly gives its assent to the eucharistic prayer the community prays the Lord's Prayer. For the newly baptised this prayer is a summary of the church's prayer: praise, thanksgiving, and a new sense of identity as son or daughter of God the Father and brother or sister of the members of the assembly. This new sense of identity will impact directly on the neophytes sense of mission. Just as a vision of Christian life and mission are being communicated through signs and symbols in the liturgy, the Christian messenger will also be a sign, a bearer of a message about life in Christ (Schreier 1985:49). The messenger continues to be shaped by his/her participation in the eucharist. As the communion rite unfolds the neophytes will come forward to receive the eucharist, the food of the paschal church which enables all its members to be pilgrim missionaries (Thekkekarottu 1993:20-21).

After praying the Lord's Prayer together the sign of peace is given. It is a sign of our unity. The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (=GIRM) gives this directive concerning this ritual action:

Before they share in the same bread, the people express their love for one another and beg for peace and unity in the church and with all humankind. The form of this rite is left to the conference of bishops to decide in accord with the customs and mentality of the people (GIRM 56).

This directive presents both the meaning behind the sign of peace and it also shows pastoral sensitivity to the cultural difference of people in the church. Luzbetak (1988:48) reminds us that missiological anthropology admits that each culture is sacred, but does not hold to any type of absoluteness for cultures. As a human institution culture must of necessity be highly adaptive (Luzbetak 1988:160), but without losing its foundational values. Though the church wants to be sensitive to the cultural norms which govern the sense of touch it also wants to be faithful to the place of the sign of peace in Christian liturgy. This sign, more than others in the liturgy, challenges our belief in the presence of the risen Christ in all the members of the assembly.

The fraction rite follows the sign of peace. At this time the presider and ministers break the bread and prepare the cups for communion. When they are prepared the invitation to come to the table is given.

At the celebration of the Easter Vigil the newly initiated are the first to receive the body and blood of the Lord. The eucharist is the culminating act in the sacramental sequence of Christian initiation. N. Mitchell has stated that:

Having been plunged into the waters and sealed with the Spirit's gifts, neophytes are led to the table where the community of believers becomes the visible presence of God's grace, becomes food and drink for the world's life (Mitchell, N. 1994:110).

Initiation into the Christian community finds its culmination in participation in the eucharist. This participation, in turn, nourishes the entire community for mission. It establishes the church's identity and shapes its mission (Mitchell 1994:110).

#### *6.1.5.2 The Eucharist and Mission*

In the eucharist there are two complementary movements: one of ascension, the other of return. In the first movement there is the action of offering. This in itself is mission because the church makes the offering of Christ to the Father on behalf of all human beings and all creation (Eucharistic Prayer II = EP II). The second movement, that of return, occurs after receiving communion when the community is sent out as witness in the world (Thekkekarottu 1993:22). As

the community participates in the liturgy it learns both these movements. As it celebrates the liturgy weekly, it learns to make these movements more gracefully so that its choreography allows it to become more and more inclusive of different peoples and cultures in its procession to the table of the Lord.

At this table we put aside every world separation based on culture, class, or other differences. Baptized, we no longer admit to distinction based on age or sex or race or wealth. This communion is why all prejudice, all racism, all sexism, all deference to wealth and power must be banished from our parishes, our homes, and our lives. This communion is why we will not call enemies those who are human beings like ourselves. This communion is why we will not commit the world's resources to an escalating arms race while the poor die. We cannot. Not when we have feasted here on the "body broken" and "blood poured out: for the life of the world (Bernardin 1984:18).

This is precisely why we come to the table to eat and drink. We do so because only at this table can we find the strength as well as the vision needed to transform the world. When we celebrate the eucharist or any liturgical rite we are not simply carrying out an antiquated set of rubrics. We are engaging in mission at the deepest level for as we celebrate the liturgy of the church we are transformed into church (SC 14).

The eucharist is not simply something the church does from time to time -- one act among many others; it constitutes the church, creates it, actualizes it, brings it into being...In the eucharist, the church becomes what it celebrates: the visible, tangible, permanent presence of God's saving grace poured out in and for the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is why the eucharist is, at one and the same time, "the sacrament of the most radical and real presence of the Lord and the fullest actualization of the essence of the church...(Mitchell, N. 1994:108).

The celebration of the mystery of the eucharist enables the church to carry out the mission of Christ in the world. No church without eucharist, no mission without church, no church without mission for the life of the world.

The Easter Vigil ends with the usual dismissal rites except that the triple alleluia is added. As the community is dismissed and mandated to go out into the world in the peace of Christ the sound of the alleluia once again resounds to accompany them on mission. The people of God were gathered in order to be scattered for the work of mission.

#### 6.1.5.3 *Learning from Ritual*

The Easter Vigil is perhaps the richest of the Roman Catholic Church's liturgies in terms of good ritual. By good ritual I mean that it has the appropriate structure, a sensitive use of symbols, and creates the time and space to weave a pattern of access to the Holy (Seubert 1989:492). In Turnerian terms this kind of ritual allows room for movement, passage, and mobility (Turner, V. 1969:107). In good ritual one has the sense of being a traveller, of being on pilgrimage. In the Easter Vigil there is the obvious movement from outside to inside the church, the ritual flow of the liturgy from the service of light to the liturgy of the word, from the liturgy of baptism to the liturgy of the eucharist.

At another level there is the journey from darkness to light, from death to life, from the periphery of the community to its very centre around the table of the Lord. In the midst of the community's journey there is also the journey of the elect as they cross through the waters of baptism they cross the boundaries marked out by death to new life. As neophytes they still experience liminality though their status has changed: they are now full members. The *communitas* that developed among them while they were still catechumens comes to a new fulfilment. This *communitas* is now rooted in the paschal mystery in which they share through their initiation. *Communitas* is now transformed. It is deepened by being rooted in Christ. In this liturgical setting the ritual travellers or liminars are able to touch the mysteries of life more deeply. V. Turner, has said it this way:

In such situations as the liminal period of major *rites de passage* the passenger and crew are, under ritual exigency, to contemplate for a while the mysteries that confront all men, the difficulties that peculiarly beset their own society, their personal problems and the way in which their own wisest predecessors have sought to order, explain away, cloak or mask these mysteries and difficulties (Turner, V. 1972a:402).

This is never more true than in the liturgy, especially the liturgy of the Easter Vigil where one comes in contact with the primordial symbols of the cosmos, the ancient stories of salvation and the central mystery of the Christian faith: the paschal mystery. Seubert (1989:495) has very insightfully pointed out that this is only possible in the space and time created by ritual. He argues that though space and time are usually understood as external qualities:

Space and time can also be considered internal qualities or capacities of the human person...Space as an internal quality is the human capacity of letting some reality be present for us. It is our ability of inner expanse and is a fundamental element of the human person's capacity of spirit...Time is the ability to allow that which has taken place to perdure within the space being exercised toward a particular presence...Subjective time is our ability to let a presence endure for us throughout and beyond the closure of the momentary (Seubert 1989:497; 501).

Ritual, when it functions well, creates this time and space for the community and for individuals. It does its work through its structure, the pace at which it is celebrated, its use of words, gestures, symbols, movement, silence, music, colour, sound, and smell. This is why good ritual is never obvious; never direct. Ritual should always open us to mystery. In focusing on mystery we do not seek to escape from personal or societal difficulties, but we do gain perspective because we gain vision. In the case of Christian ritual, as we are transformed by the mystery of Christ we begin to see the difficulties of life with faith vision. We learn to take a kingdom perspective from the vantage point of faith. From the perspective of the social sciences V. Turner has noted that:

In myth and ritual an individual undergoing passage may learn the total pattern of social relations involved in his transition and how it changes...The neophytes may learn what Levi-Strauss calls the "sensory codes" underlying the details of myth and ritual...The medium here "is the message," and the medium is non-verbal, though often meticulously "structured" (Turner, V. 1972a:400).

In the context of the liturgy the whole assembly is undergoing passage. Liturgy creates the space and time in which liminality functions. The environment is created in which the assembly can be opened to the presence of God. The liturgy,

as it unfolds in time and space, allows the community to not only become aware of the presence of God, but more importantly, to delight in God's presence. Seubert has also pointed out that:

Death or any sort of non-existence can be defined in terms of a lack of presence. And this occurs quite often where our capacities for space and time are not recognized in their importance for our survival and flourishing -- whether in the liturgical way or any other sphere of our lives (Seubert 1989:502).

Perhaps the most vital question of Christian initiation then must be posed in terms of whether or not all that is done in the initiation process opens for people a pattern of access from the core of their being to the very presence of God. This, I believe is crucial, because only when there is a pattern of access to the presence of the transcendent God will there be real conversion, continued growth and a sense of mission. Only when a person learns to be open to the presence of God will he/she be able to enter into a relationship with the Lord. The initial seeds of this relationship can be sown in the initiation process and be celebrated in the sacraments of initiation, but ultimately a person must grow in his/her capacity to grant the Lord space in his/her life. Without this relationship there can be no growing awareness and experience of the divine presence in the person; this experience has a direct bearing on how one engages in mission. If one does not know Christ personally and intimately how can one share in his mission?

As liminal experiences the celebration of the sacraments of initiation weave a pattern of access for the participants to the presence of God. They awaken, celebrate and sustain a vision of the kingdom which informs the neophytes' understanding of mission. Far from being an exercise of power, mission becomes the responsibility of those who have an experience of liberation in Christ. The ritual form becomes a tabernacle for the enactment of an alternative mode of being in the world (Driver 1991:208). The sacraments of initiation become the threshold through which the elect become members of the faith community charged with carrying out the mission of Christ.

## 6.2 The Relationship between Liturgy and Life

The experience of the Easter Vigil sustained by the weekly eucharistic assembly that is formed by the Word and nourished by the eucharist.

Eucharist leads not to the world's rejection but to the world's recovery. It is not merely idle theological rhetoric, then, to say that the three sacraments of Christian initiation ...enable us to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world (Mitchell, N. 1994:112).

In the weekly experience of the eucharist the community enters an experience of liminality where the social distinctions of society cease to exist. The only differences among the members of the assembly are those of roles of service: the ministers of hospitality, the auxiliary ministers of the eucharist, the altar servers, the proclaimers, the choir, the presider. These forms of ministry exist in and for the assembly. All the members of the assembly are addressed as brothers and sisters, all equal before the Lord. Their baptismal identity as members of the body of Christ is reinforced through the liturgy.

Gutiérrez (1973) would disagree. Arguing out his experience of a sharply divided church in Latin America he noted what he felt was a problem in the celebration of the eucharist. He wrote:

Participation in the Eucharist, for example, as it is celebrated today, appears to many to be an action which, for want of the support of an authentic community, becomes an exercise in make-believe (Gutiérrez 1973:137).

From what we have discovered about ritual's power to give expression to the root metaphors of a culture and that the "irruption of the sacred narrated in myth is what establishes the world as a reality" (Eliade 1961:97) we would have to conclude that the problem is not with the liturgical celebration of the eucharist, but the participants' understanding of what is being celebrated. Ritual can only do its work if it is allowed to do so. It loses its power if symbols, myth, language, or gestures are trivialised or minimalised. Participants need to have undergone a conversion to be able to benefit from the transforming power of the liturgy. That

there are so many nominal Catholics in the church without any commitment to discipleship and mission is perhaps the strongest argument for the RCIA.

We fully agree with Gutiérrez's observation that for too long Christians separated worship from love of neighbour (Gutiérrez 1973:264) and that for worship to be more than external ceremony it must be linked to relationships in society, relationships based on justice. Where we differ is in our analysis of the problem.

We would argue that liturgical ritual is the reality and the relationships of injustice are, to use Gutiérrez's phrase, the "make-believe". The reality is our common identity as brothers and sisters in Christ which the liturgical ritual helps us to enact and helps to sustain. The illusion that is created by society is that we are estranged, different, that we have reason to be fearful of one another. The liturgy proclaims our oneness in Christ and that we are made for service to, not exploitation, of one another. The basic problem it seems, is that generations of Christians have received the sacraments, but have not been evangelised. They have not been called to conversion.

Through the use of myth, symbols and gestures ritual does its work of shaping our identity as Christians, by communicating to us the deepest values of Christianity. In this way week after week the members of the assembly, in the celebration of the liturgy, are called to ongoing conversion and transformation of who they are in Christ in light of the Gospel.

Wadell (1991:166) offers these insights into the question before us:

The Eucharist can play a vital role in this transformation because when the Word is received and freed in us it works a radical perceptual change...By taking in the Christ who comes to us in bread and wine our whole orientation to reality ought to be altered. If we are open to the Christ we consume we will begin to read the world through his eyes. No longer clinging to fantasy, we are nudged closer to the point of view of God. Everything starts to look different to us because it is no longer seen through the falsifying lens of fantasy; rather, it is all seen through the one we say is the light of the world (Wadell 1991:166)

This is not "make-believe". It is the only true reality. Our ability to take in that reality may need to be honed, but the reality of Christ as the source of humanity's oneness remains true.

What Christians do weekly in the liturgy is pause to remember the basis of their identity. They deliberately heed the summons to come to the table of the Lord so that they can focus their world view, look within themselves at their dispositions and feelings so the motivation for how they live and what they do becomes apparent because nothing is more powerful than the ritual they enact (Worgul 1984:149).

Perhaps the challenge for all Christians is to give themselves to the task of deepening their understanding of ritual so that it can be free to do its work in their lives. In discussing culture Erikson observed what might be equally true for the church when ritual is forgotten:

When a culture loses the gift of imparting values by meaning ritualization, the result is neurosis, social disorder, chaos and conflict (Erikson 1966:337).

The ritual life of the assembly is therefore of paramount importance. Nathan Mitchell argues that:

Myth and ritual are the symbolic deeds which embody values, ensure their authoritative transmission, and so enable societies to survive. If the ritual process fails in culture or church - social disintegration is the result (Mitchell, N. 1995:122).

In his discussion on the power of ritual Geertz (1980:123-135) asserted that ritual not only has power, "it is power; it acts and it actuates." It is the power of the community or culture to enact its deepest values and its real identity.

The sacraments of initiation celebrated at the Easter Vigil ritualises the identity of the neophytes as those who are one in Christ. The initiation process of the RCIA has recovered the early church's wisdom and its process for "making Christians."

It takes seriously the arduous task of honing the embryonic faith of those who seek "the living God" by channelling it into a

community of faith where it may be given articulation and engaged in a life of service and witness (Senn 1993:137).

The weekly Sunday celebration of the eucharist continues the formation for mission begun in the catechumenate. Mission grows out of the liturgical experience. The celebration of the eucharist shapes a vision of mission within the hearts and minds of believers that is forged out of an understanding of Jesus' mission. It is not a simply a collection of individuals offering up private prayers for their own needs. It is not what is popularly called the "Jesus and me attitude." The celebration of the eucharist is, of its nature, a communal prayer. It is what N. Mitchell (1994:131) calls "a company of strangers"<sup>7</sup> who, through their participation in the liturgy, and by reason of their baptism, have become the body of Christ. All this has its beginning in the celebration of the eucharist that completes the sacraments of initiation. N. Mitchell concludes:

So the eucharistic community arises not from the ideology of intimacy, nor from the rejection of public life, nor from middle-class values of "joining" and "participation in approved groups," but from the company of strangers, from the recognition that we are all "outside the camp," "that we have here no lasting city," that we are all "aliens, pilgrims and sojourners." The eucharist that completes the sacraments of Christian initiation is neither a family meal nor a graduation dinner. It is not a point of arrival, but a point of departure, not a "settling in" but a "setting out," not a homecoming but a pilgrimage (Mitchell, N. 1994:131-132)

The eucharist is then food for the journey. The weekly gathering of Christians around the table of the word and the table of the eucharist is how the church carries out the mandate received from Jesus. In the liturgy the lessons of the Christian tradition are expressed in the most powerful way imaginable. It is the liturgy that makes the church's tradition continue to be a living and dynamic reality.

Schreier (1985:106) has pointed out that tradition prepares the young of a society to participate in a culture as adults. The rituals of initiation of the Christian community functions in much the same way. It prepares new members to

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<sup>7</sup> N. Mitchell borrowed this phrase from Palmer (1981). Palmer argued that closeness and intimacy should not be used as the criteria for all meaningful relationships. Relationships in the church should not judged in terms of family, but rather in terms of the kingdom. The church is not a private, family gathering, but a public reality which exists for the kingdom.

participate in the Christian community through reflection on the scriptures, their experience of initiation and a greater share in the mission of the community.

Though these rituals can be modified by the human cultures in which the church has been planted in terms of inculturation the kernel of the meaning remains constant, though its expression is of necessity different. Some principles by which rituals can be evaluated can serve to enrich our understanding of how ritual, myth and symbols do their work.

### 6.3 Principles of Ritual

The healthy use of symbols and ritual is imperative. Ritual theorist, Ronald Grimes (1993: 25-35) articulated eight principles for healthy ritual. First, the principle of ritual pedagogy: the form of the ritual itself is what shapes people's basic attitudes (Grimes 1993:25). Those who seek to create new rituals need to be attentive to the very pattern and process they are creating. If a traditional ritual is used they will need to be respectful of its basic structure.

Secondly, the principle of embodied criticism (Grimes 1993:26). Ritual is not meant to lull, but to awaken. It is to foster a sense of mystery and identity. It therefore needs to also embody self-critical texts and actions. Penitential and confessional rites and challenging myths have the power to evoke new life. Eliade (1958:xiii) maintains that every new beginning leads human beings to reflect on ultimate beginnings and endings.

The third principle is that of attunement. Grimes defined attunement as:

...Any way of cultivating an attitude of bodily responsiveness and attentiveness that minimize one's sense of separation from the objects of contemplation and undermines sole dependence on symbolization and referentiality (Grimes 1993:26-27).

This places the responsibility on participants to come to the celebration of a ritual with a certain readiness. Participants must be able to enter into the ritual "with a minimum of verbalisation and a maximum of "following" (Grimes 1993:27). The ritual itself must be allowed to speak without the intrusion of verbal explanations. If this is going to be possible participants will need to be "attuned" to the mystery being celebrated and this will require an attitude of letting go of all that would

distract one from in-depth participation and prevent one from entering into the ritual action.

The fourth principle is that of gestural ordinariness (Grimes 1993:27). He explained:

If attunement gives ritualizing its mysterious quality, the principle of bodily -- gestural and postural -- ordinariness gives it its basic grounding, its root. Appropriate sources of symbols for us in ritualizing are those elemental to ordinary life...(Grimes 1993:27).

Grimes' insights are a strong reminder that symbols are culturally conditioned. By way of example, Uzkwu (1995:73) has pointed that the rhythm of the dance is central in African ritual because "it puts one in tune with the original rhythm of the universe." To more cerebral Westerners this might not be the case. For Catholics the ritual action of bowing or genuflecting before the tabernacle is a sign that they acknowledge the presence of Christ under the form of bread in the tabernacle. The light burning closed to the tabernacle signals that presence. What is a symbol of ordinary life differs according to how one has been conditioned to understand that symbol.

Fifthly, Grimes (1993:28) has articulated the principle of the body/culture dialectic. All ritual is an embodiment of values, myth, ethos and world view. Seubert insists that:

Rituals...are determined by an internal necessity and must be precise embodiments of what will allow human beings to move into the desired center of meaning and presence (Seubert 1989:491).

The ways in which ritual embodies the root metaphors of a community or culture must be in ways that are comprehensible to people, but also have the power to draw them into the mystery being celebrated. Ritual calls for the use of material things in which symbolic value has been invested. Bread, wine, water, oil, incense, vesture, art, music are all essential to Christian ritual, but there is more. There are gestures, postures, movements, speech all of which embody or disembody the meaning intended by the ritual. Seubert contends that:

We most often -- and especially in a liturgical realm -- do not relate to our bodies properly, nor do we attend to the function of bounding which they perform for us. Seldom do we consciously take them up into the production of meaning that we want ourselves to be for others and allow others to be for us. As a result, that production of meaning becomes dulled in its expression and stunted in its effect -- for no meaning is disembodied (Seubert 1989:499).

Gestures, postures and movements are significant means of communication. Seubert (1989:500) maintains that the use of the body in these ways weaves what he calls "a pattern of access" not only to meaning, but also to the others in the assembly and to God.

The sixth principle is that of the momentary community (Grimes 1993:29). This is in fact V. Turner's concept of *communitas* which is generated in a state of liminality. Grimes agrees that *communitas* always needs its opposite social structure to act as the ground in which those who have experienced liminality live out the values which they have learned through ritual. In this way the social structure itself is liberated (Turner, V. 1972b:485). He contends that in liminality culture is built, and for our purposes, the church is built at its most profound level.

In this no-place and no-time that resists classification itself, the major classifications and categories of the culture emerge within the integuments of myth, symbol and ritual (Turner, V. 1972b:486).

*Communitas* of its nature is temporary. It must be recreated, renewed and refreshed through repeated experiences of ritual. If it is not renewed it will inevitably become distorted or die.

Grimes' (1993:29) seventh principle is that of performance-dependence. Ritual is meant to be enacted. There are no spectators in ritual. Ritual is meant to be done by the ritual subjects. In Christian ritual the subject is the assembly even when certain parts of the ritual action is done by or to an individual or group. Not everyone who participates in the Easter Vigil is baptised, but in baptising some persons the members of the assembly are reminded of the meaning of their own baptism. The participants are drawn into the ritual action because it gives expression to the root metaphor of their faith: the paschal mystery.

The final principle of healthy ritual is that of ritual inventability (Grimes 1993:30). Though ritual does not thrive on constant innovation, rituals do undergo transformation. They must if they are to continue to exercise a formative influence on those who participate in them. This was the point of the liturgical reform of Vatican II. For this reason the Council Fathers observed that change was necessary because:

With the passage of time, however, certain features have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals<sup>8</sup> that have made their nature and purpose less clear to the people of today; hence some changes have become necessary as adaptations to the needs of our own times (SC 62).

This directive led to the revision of all the church's ritual celebrations of the sacraments. The church understood that if ritual was going to be able to communicate a deeper meaning to people it had to be transformed.

The purpose of the sacraments is to make people holy, to build up the Body of Christ, and finally to give worship to God; but being signs they also have a teaching function. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it... They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them disposed the faithful most effectively to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God rightly and to practice charity (SC 59).

This article points out the power of the liturgical rituals for the celebration of the sacraments. The following paragraph continues with a caution that it is "of the highest importance that the faithful should understand the sacramental signs" (SC 59). This is true of all ritual. A graduation is a ritual that is layered with meaning comprehensible to primarily those of the academic community. They understand the meaning of the ritual. Those people who had for years struggled for liberation from apartheid in this country grasped as no others could the significance of Nelson Mandela being inaugurated as the first democratically President of South Africa.

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<sup>8</sup> Sacramentals are sacred signs by which spiritual effects are signified and are obtained by the intercession of the Church (CIC 1166). They are material signs eg. holy water, a crucifix, blessed wedding rings, etc.

Rituals then can be created and transformed, but they must always open up root metaphors of the community because root metaphors have the ability to reach out to people and draw them into the mystery of the community's life.

Ritual's repetition sustains and reinforces the root metaphor. This return, over and over again, to the metaphor is a testimony to the metaphor's vital ability to address new experiences and maintain its potency for meaning (Worgul 1989:41).

These eight principles make for a healthy use of ritual. They allow a community access to its deepest myth while opening the way for new expressions of that very myth. These two movements are necessary so that each community might make its own the rituals it inherits from past generations and pass on with integrity its ritual patterns to those who are yet to join them.

The Turners (1978:244) maintain that ritual "holds the generating source of culture and structure." Kavanagh rightly maintains that the celebration of the paschal mystery is the foundation of church's life and mission to the world:

The paschal mystery of Jesus Christ dying and rising still among his faithful ones at Easter in baptism is what gives the Church its radical cohesion and mission, putting it at the center of a world made new. That world is a paschal world, and baptism in its fullness is the compound process of act and reflection by which one enters such a world, leaving behind an obsolete world where death is Lord (Kavanagh 1978:162-163).

Within this sacramental world view the church's mission is constantly being articulated in word and in symbol. It is the experience of liminality which allows the Christian to move beyond the boundaries of culture. The "us and them," mentality has no place in the world view shaped by the Christian message. The Christian community is not exclusive, but inclusive. That is not to say that there are no boundaries. Those who have been initiated have experienced the boundaries which are part of the RCIA process: of being catechumens, but not yet full members; of being the elect, and not yet being admitted to eat at the table of the Lord. These are not boundaries keeping people out of the Christian community, but thresholds which mark the stages of their entry into the community. They are the ritual thresholds through which they pass on their journey of incorporation.

There are no longer "ourselves" and the "barbarians" (Schreiter 1985:63). If identity is structured in terms of group membership and world view (Schreiter 1985:66) then the sacraments of initiation are of inestimable value in shaping Christian identity. Schreiter noted that:

It is our symbol-making activities that give us the capacity to construct those senses of safety and selfhood...These meanings give our lives definition, a sense of sameness that reassures us of who we are and how we fit into things (Schreiter 1992:31-32).

The celebration of the sacraments of initiation not only ritualise membership in the Christian community and provide a world view shaped by the scriptures and the best of the tradition<sup>9</sup> of the church as expressed in her liturgical rites, they also form people for mission in a way didactic presentation never can.

The process of initiation extends beyond the celebration of the sacraments to the period of deepening which is called *mystagogia*. During this time the newly initiated are engaged in post-baptismal catechesis, an ancient part of the initiation process, which was already fully developed by the fourth century (Cunningham 1988:21).

#### 6.4 *Mystagogia*

Easter is the season of *mystagogy*. During the fifty days of the Easter season the church continues to instruct the newly initiated using the rites that were celebrated at the Easter Vigil and the scripture readings for each Sunday. The neophytes gradually come to deepen their understanding of their experience of initiation and mission during the Easter season. Baerwald has helped to clarify the distinction between pre-baptismal and post-baptismal catechesis.

The pre-baptismal catecheses are concerned with communicating the central truths of the early Christian faith, creation, sin, and redemption, grounded in the understanding that the events of the OT prefigure those of the NT, and characterized by strong emphasis on ethical teaching. By

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<sup>9</sup> Schreiter (1985:107-108) named four essential elements of tradition to carry out its function within culture. These four: credibility, intelligibility, authority, and affirmation and renewal, can also be applied to the tradition of the church. My judgement is that they are present in the rites which make up the initiation process.

contrast, the post-baptismal catecheses are rarely didactic. Their content, tenor and style is marked by rhetorical ornamentation and theological splendor...The patristic mystagogues are given to images, metaphors and stories that reveal the significance and deeper meaning of the baptismal symbols (Baerwald 1990:883).

This post-baptismal catechesis was dependent on the experience of initiation. It was regarded as impossible to discuss these mysteries with the elect before they had been initiated (Lewinski 1988:83). During the catechumenate basic elements of the faith were taught, but after initiation the mysteries of the faith as experienced in the liturgical rites were probed for their deepest meaning. The architects of the initiation process felt that it would have been impossible to discourse about such a deep and intense experience if people had not had the experience (Kavanagh 1978:143).

Mazza, in his study of mystagogy, describes the content and methodology of a mystagogical discourse:

First of all, the preacher asserts the value or power of the sacrament and reminds the faithful of it by brief allusions. He then has recourse to Scripture in order to explain why the sacrament possesses this value and power. In typology, recourse is had to the Old Testament because there the preacher finds figures of the sacramental event. A correct theology of the sacrament is developed by explaining the saving power of these figures...Once the Old Testament has explained the value of the Church's sacraments, typology passes on to the New Testament. It brings before the listener the events that show how Christ can be the agent and executor (or truth) of the salvation that was prefigured in the Old Testament and is now celebrated by the Church -- Such is mystagogical theology (Mazza 1989:135).

The great mystagogues like John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, Augustine, and Theodore of Mopsuestia used this same method of instruction. They explained the event or experience in terms of sacramentality. They were teaching the faithful to see their experience as well as their daily lives with the eyes of faith (Mazza 1989:142-143). These mystagogical sessions were a preparation for sacramental living (Cunningham 1988:22). In giving these lectures to the faithful and the newly initiated the mystagogues were forming the community to

support the experience of the new members. For the faithful these lectures were a means for keeping the memory of their own initiation in mind.

The mystagogical form of instruction may seem foreign and out of place to twentieth century people so familiar with form criticism of the scriptures and critical methods of textual studies. Yet if we are attentive to the deeper meaning of experience then this method challenges contemporary Christians to look with faith rather than a speculative mind at the scriptures and their experience of the liturgy in which they partake. This is a more contemplative approach to the scriptures in which women and men are asked to "savour" their experience of the Word of God proclaimed in the liturgy and relate it to their lives. The newly initiated share their experience with the members of their sponsors and other members of the catechetical team to begin to see how their personal story is meshed into the story of the church.

During the time of mystagogy the newly initiated are still in a liminal state since they have not been fully aggregated in terms of responsibility for the life of the community and its mission. Mystagogical catechesis is an effective means for facilitating the continued growth of the neophytes because it makes use of the symbols and rituals which have become familiar to these new members through the initiation process. Mystagogy trains them to open themselves more and more to the deeper meaning of the scriptures and the liturgy so that they create within themselves a dwelling-place for God.

During the fifty days until Pentecost the church engages in mystagogical catechesis the neophytes stand back from their experience and look with awe at the great deeds God has done within history, the community and in themselves. It gives them reason to grow as people of praise (Morris 1989:134-135). Cunningham (1988:23) articulated the principle at work in mystagogy as: "Only that which has been experientially lived can be the subject of spiritual discourse." This principle is the very basis of liturgical catechesis: we learn from our experience. Faith is the constituent element in the entire process because it allows a person to come to know God and to know himself/herself in relationship to God.

During this time all the tools provided during the initiation process for healthy identity formation as a Christian are further refined, especially in terms of

scripture and liturgy. As their liturgical experience is examined in the light of the scriptures the faith dimension is enhanced. They come to realise that they will always be learners before the sacred text of God's Word (Whitehead & Whitehead 1984:53). They also learn that though the rituals they have celebrated are reminders of death and dying, they are about divinely inspired freedom. The liturgical rituals are about a costly discipleship which liberates one from bondage and leads to freedom. They are rites of passage in the most profound sense (Driver 1991:202).

Segundo (1974:38) sees a direct relationship between the sacraments and the church's mission. He maintains, and we would agree with him, that outside of the community of faith and its commitment in history to mission the sacraments have a diminished meaning (Segundo 1974:61). The sacraments strengthen the community for mission. They not only point to something transcendent; they actualise the transcendent presence of God in the midst of the gathered community (Driver 1991:206) for worship of the community and to provide a vision of the reign of God.

This approach to Christian formation requires the conviction that ritual has a power beyond words. This is not a conviction that finds wide recognition among Catholic clergy and laity. Yet this is a conviction that dates back to the church in antiquity in the *lex orandi, lex credendi* principle. It was reiterated in SC 14 which I quoted in the opening chapter. It bears repetition because it sums up the church's sense of certainty about the power of the liturgy for genuine catechesis: "It (the liturgy) is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (SC 14). Without such a conviction about the liturgy there can be no liturgical missiology to enrich the church's sense of mission.

### 6.5 Summary

In this chapter my focus has been the sacraments of initiation. I have looked at them in the context of the Easter Vigil. This is the climax of the initiation process and is considered the holiest feast of the liturgical year. Each part of the vigil has significance for the sense of mission which has been growing in the candidates.

In the service of light I emphasised the blessing of the fire and the Easter candle because of the symbolism of light. For those who were making this initiation journey the movement from darkness to light is a powerful symbol of their own experience of being enlightened by Christ and being called to conversion. There is an experience of death and new birth that is constituent of all initiation rites. This is the same light which they have seen burning in the members of their local community of faith. It is also the light they hope will inflame many more people so that together they may be united with them in mission.

Next I considered the scripture readings which make up the liturgy of the Word. Here the liturgy stressed the myth of the Christian community and discovered in it not the story of past events, but the story of the present day community of faith. These readings outline the story of salvation history. This selection of readings is meant to provide a scriptural context for the initiation of the elect. The Exodus reading and the reading from Romans are a form of immediate preparation for the elect before they enter the waters of the font. The liberation prefigured in the Exodus is that which is offered to the elect through their dying and rising with Christ in baptism. It is the willingness to die and rise with Christ that enables them to share in his mission. Finally in the gospel account of the resurrection the assembly finds assurance for their faith in the victory of Christ over death.

The trinitarian life which the newly initiated share in by reason of baptism brings them into unity with all believers (von Allmen 1969:56). After baptism the neophytes were sealed with the Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation to be prophetic witnesses to Christ by the power of the Spirit (Marsh 1960:292).

The concluding part of the liturgy of the Easter Vigil is the celebration of the eucharist in which the newly initiated participate for the first time since they began their journey of initiation. Through their participation in this eucharist they become full members of the church. They share fully in the redemptive life of the risen Christ by this sharing in his saving work. Küng has pointed out that the eucharist gives believers a perspective of the past, of the present and of the future:

The perspective of the past: The Lord's Supper is a meal of *recollection* and *thanksgiving*. In the Lord's Supper the community always looks back to something that has happened.

The Lord's Supper itself...is a proclamation of the death of Jesus... but this death which is proclaimed is always seen as the death of the risen Lord. The Lord's Supper as celebrated after Easter was never a meal of mourning, it was a meal of joy. The perspective of the present: The Lord's Supper is a meal of fellowship and of the covenant...This covenant is revealed in the fellowship of those who share the meal, not with the one who is dead and gone, but with the one who is alive and present..The perspective of the future: The Lord's Supper is an anticipation of the eschatological meal of the Messiah. In the Lord's Supper the community looks towards the future (Küng 1968:217).

All three of these perspectives are important for our thesis because it is the risen Christ who worshipped in the liturgy and we proclaim the risen Christ in mission. It is the risen Christ who is transforming the world and preparing it for his coming in glory. Our work in mission is to share in those preparations.

The Lord's Supper is a deep and intimate communion with the glorified Lord. It is this relationship with him that leads the new members of the community and those who have been baptised for many years to move outwards toward the world in mission. Here in the eucharist they draw strength for service to the world.

The next section focused on *mystagogia*. This is a problematic part of the RCIA. It is problematic because twentieth century people do not usually approach the scriptures or participate in the liturgy looking for the typology of the texts and rites as the Fathers of the Church did. Nevertheless, *mystagogia* is an important stage in the initiation process because it helps to introduce people to the deeper aspects of Christian life and prayer. It awakens in them an awareness of their own religious experience while uncovering the symbol-rich liturgical life of the Catholic Church.

Throughout I dwell on the aspect of formation for mission as experienced in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. We stressed the formative power of the rites and readings of the Easter Vigil for shaping the identity of a person and communicating a vision of mission rooted in the mission of the Trinity. We emphasised the fact that the weekly Sunday eucharist empowers people for mission. Though worship and mission are not the same they have a common concern: the proclamation of Christ. Liturgy and mission have a synergistic

relationship and we need to explore this relationship because it affects the Christian community's witness to the world.

Writing with a profound sense of both liturgy and mission Senn has perhaps summarised the formation for mission in the RCIA which has reached a climax in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation:

We do not prepare for mission by worshipping, and we do not turn worship into an evangelistic tool. Rather, worship is the occasion for God and his people to encounter one another, by means of God's sacramental gifts and his people's sacrificial response. We should not ask how is our worship to be related to our mission, but how is the worship in which God participated related to his mission. If worship is, in fact, a part of God's mission, then there is no separation of worship and mission from God's Side. Then from our side our worship is a way of participating in the mission of God, just as our witness is (Senn 1993:88).

Worship and mission can be found in the same well of Christian life. They issue from the same source: the very life of the Trinity. The following chapter will be devoted to the question of the mission of the church in society. I will develop a theology of mission based on the experience of the RCIA and explore how it might affect the church and mission in South Africa. I shall show how the RCIA can be a positive factor in shaping a prophetic community dedicated to worship and mission. My emphasis will be not so much on specific tasks of the church in relationship to the world, those will have to depend on the talents of the members of the church, but I will rather focus on the motivation which shapes a faith community's world view so that they are open to the challenge of mission in South Africa.

## *Chapter Seven*

### *The RCIA in the Church in South Africa*

*Christians themselves are the strongest argument against Christianity: Christians who are not Christian. Christians themselves are the strongest argument for Christianity: Christians who live a Christian life.*

*--Hans Küng*

#### *7.0 The Purpose of the Chapter*

In the previous four chapters I have described the RCIA process by which a person is enabled to grow in a sense of Christian identity and mission. In this chapter I will consider the possibilities for how the RCIA, with its emphasis on identity formation and mission, might affect the church's mission in South Africa. I will suggest a role that the church might play in nation-building during this time of social transition. I will draw together the threads of the preceding chapters and hopefully will be able to weave them together to offer some insight into how the RCIA can affect the church's role in the post-apartheid South Africa.

I maintain that the church is called to be an alternative community (cf. 7.1.2) which gives a prophetic witness by taking a counter-cultural stance in society. I will argue that the RCIA is one of the best ways to prepare people for life in such a community because it engenders in them a healthy sense of identity and a concern for the world. The RCIA is not just another ecclesiocentric programme, it is a way of being church in the world. I will propose a plan for how to begin the work of inculturating the RCIA and I will also make some suggestions about mission and the RCIA in South Africa.

#### *7.1 Being Church for the World: Mission and Memory*

With the celebration of the sacraments of initiation the elect became full members of the church. The whole initiation process happened gradually, in the midst of the community (RCIA 4). The newly initiated experienced the support and friendship that is possible in a community of faith as well as the challenge of extending that community to become "a company of strangers" (cf. 6.2). Mission,

up until this point, has been mainly the community's action toward and on behalf of those preparing for initiation. The candidates for initiation were exposed to the various forms of mission and ministry in the community, but with initiation comes the responsibility to make a decisive choice of how they might become involved in mission. If the catechumenate team has done its work the newly initiated person has only to choose from among several avenues of service. This outreach is not an "optional extra" in the initiation process. It is the very reason why people are initiated into the church: for the sake of mission.

Mission though is more than individual outreach, it is the *raison d'être* of the community (AG 2). Mission is the life of the community. The RCIA process is not simply concerned about the spiritual growth and development of Catholics, it is concerned about empowering people to engage in mission. It is concerned about being an alternative community in the world and for the world. With its emphasis on shaping identity, or perhaps more correctly, reshaping identity, it fills people with the confidence they need to "be of service to the world" (Jones 1995:347).

Botha et al. defined mission as:

That activist streak in the church's life that refuses to accept the world as it is and keeps on trying to change it, prodding it on towards God's final reign of justice and peace (Botha et al. 1994:21).

I accept this understanding of mission, but see it as more than an "activist streak." It is the necessary outcome of the church being in touch with its foundational myth. It is intrinsic to the church's life. Mission was the paradigm of Jesus' life. Jesus was sent by the Father to reveal the Father to the world (RM 5) and inaugurate the kingdom through his public ministry and definitively, through his resurrection (RM 16). The church carries on this mission through the Holy Spirit who is "the principal agent for the accomplishment of this work in the human spirit and in the history of the world" (RM 21).

The church can only engage in mission if it is, in the words of Robert Bellah et al. (1985:152), a "community of memory." By this phrase Bellah et al. mean a community that does not forget the story of its past. These stories from the past comprise the community's myth. Bellah et al. have pointed out that:

They carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspiration for ourselves and those closest to us with the aspirations of a larger whole and see our own efforts as being, in part, contributions to a common good (Bellah et al. 1985:153).

The community's story strengthens identity and has the power to call the community to spiritual and moral transformation (Jones 1995:349). Jones has noted that:

Individuals acquire their social identities by participating in comprehensive, unified structures of meaning. Only by encountering a determinate (historically manifested) intersubjectivity, the specific ways in which members of a group intend or mean one another, is individual consciousness shaped by the larger social world of meaning (Jones 1995:352).

In the Christian context of determinate intersubjectivity the conviction is that the community, the church, is called into being by God. The church does not create itself or transform itself. This is all the work of God. Becoming open to God's presence is the work of the church and liturgy plays a significant part in this endeavour. Liturgy consists of formative communal rites which draw the individual into the life of the community. The celebration of liturgical rites shapes the world view and ethos out of which a person views reality.

Participation in ritual fosters group bonding, solidarity, and common performance. It is a statement of commonality, union, shared vision, basic rights, and radical equality (Worgul 1989:42).

Ritual promotes a healthy sense of identity as an individual and as a member of a community. In the church this arises out of the experience of baptism which represents both death and new birth and is sustained through participation in the eucharist (Jones 1995:355). The eucharist is the church's central rite of ritual liminality which provides a weekly experience of *communitas* for the entire assembly as a reminder of how they have promised to live at the time of their baptism.

This dramatic re-enactment of Jesus' last supper not only communicates the specific intentions that structure Christian life, but also conveys "an ethical ideal that Christians are in turn expected to embody in their lives" (Jones 1995:355).

Jones (1995:352-353) maintains that worship conveys an alternative vision of life in three ways: 1) by retelling the Christian story through the proclamation of scripture and the homily; 2) by restructuring individual and corporate consciousness through ritual enactments which provide the basis for a new world of meaning; and 3) by reinforcing Christian meaning through the celebration of the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. These three ways establish the matrix of Christian identity formation. As the Christian community participates in worship it experiences redemptive transformation (Jones 1995:358). As the church remembers the mighty deeds of God as presented through the church year it grows in the gift of hope in the promises God has made. This hope spurs the community on in mission.

The mission of the church and its sense of identity are both kept alive by myth and ritual. The community's world of meaning is informed and in turn informs the community's outreach to the world. The mission is to proclaim and embody the good news (Jones 1995:359). To the extent that the church is anchored in faith, the liturgy sustains and transmits Christian identity and a sense of responsibility for carrying on the mission of Christ.

#### **7.1.1 Can the Church Contribute to Nation-building?**

As I have argued throughout, the formation of the Christian person is of necessity directed outward to the world. In spite of this conviction on the part of the church, a question needs to be asked about the relationship between the church and the government. Does the church have a responsibility towards the government in the work of nation-building?

Charles Colson, former special counsel to President Nixon of the United States, writing out of his experience at the highest levels of government, believes that political solutions are not sufficient to meet the problems facing any government today:

But never has man seemed less able to devise political strategies to produce order and harmony among people. The more powerful the institution appears, the more impotent it is...Belfast, Beirut, Central America,...and more than forty other places like them are but open sores on the body politic, they remind us that even in this age of technological wonders, modern governments have devised nothing to cure the unbridled passion of man (Colson 1990:577).

Sheena Duncan (1995:149), long-time activist and courageous opponent of apartheid, stated that " the prophetic voice of the churches has never been more needed as South Africa enters its new democratic era with such high hopes."

The church's task, of course, is not to take over the running of society. In the 1971 synod document, *Convenientes ex universo* (=CU), the Catholic Bishops clearly stated that:

Of itself it does not belong to the Church, insofar as she is a religious and hierarchical community, to offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world. Her mission involves defending and promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person (CU 2.8).

The church's task is to be true to the message of Christ. If it does this it will be able to "inject something of his inspiration, values and hope into the present difficulties, struggles and conflicts" (TAC = Theological Advisory Commission of the SACBC 1985:209). Individual Christians also have the responsibility to use their gifts and talents for the building up of society.

Christians ought to fulfill their temporal obligations with fidelity and competence. They should act as a leaven in the world, in their family, professional, social, cultural and political life...In this way they testify to the power of the Holy Spirit through their action in the service of men in those things which are decisive for the existence and the future of humanity (CU 2.9).

Solidarity with people who are suffering from the injustices inflicted upon them by repressive governments, and/or because of poverty, ignorance or sickness is a constitutive element of the church's mission in the world.

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation (CU 6).

Church leadership in South Africa should encourage such involvement because "salvation is integral, it concerns not only the spirit but the body and world as well, since these too are called to the Reign of God" (Boff 1991:3-4). The qualities for leadership would surely have emerged during the RCIA process. Catechists and sponsors as well as the parish priest would need to encourage and indeed model a concern for the transformation of society for the catechumens. Within the initiation process the catechumens should ideally be led to see the connection between the rites celebrated in church, the Word of God proclaimed to the assembly and nation-building.

Though the church has always been involved in works of the temporal order:

She reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual function and refuses to substitute for the preaching of the kingdom of God a proclamation of liberation of the merely human order. She declares that the advocacy of liberation would not be complete or perfect if she failed to preach salvation in Jesus Christ (EN 34).

This has been and will continue to be the primary mission of the church even though she engages in ministries that help the human family in every social context. For the church, liturgy is an important means for building up a spirit of community and a sense of justice among members of the human family. Despite the use of exclusive language CU once again has made this point clearly and with relevance to this study:

The liturgy...which is the heart of the Church's life, can greatly serve education for justice. For it is a thanksgiving to the Father in Christ, which through its communitarian form places before our eyes the bonds of our brotherhood and again and again reminds us of the Church's mission...The preparation for baptism is the beginning of the formation of the Christian conscience. The practice of penance should emphasize the social dimension of sin and of the sacrament. Finally, the

Eucharist forms the community and places it at the service of men (CU 3.20).

Wherever the church is she seeks to be of service to the human community through education, medical care, social work, skills training, and in various ways other ways it builds up the indigenous people of every country. These are works of justice and charity in which the church's primary mission is carried out.

The central mission of the Church is "the same yesterday and today and forever." Christians are called to proclaim and embody the good news of what God has done and is doing for us in Jesus the Christ. We are called to provide an alternative vision of life that is defined more by our understanding of God's self-disclosure in Christ, as witnessed by scripture and tradition, than by the predominant assumptions of the culture or individual believer (Jones 1995:350).

The church is to be a prophetic sign which is radically different from the world. Bosch (1980:225) used two images to describe the community of the church to emphasise the prophetic nature of the church the stranger and the experimental garden. He argued that the church must be distinguishable from the world, otherwise it will lose its unique identity (Bosch 1980:224-225). The church maintains her distinctive identity and transmits it to succeeding generations "through the theological resources fundamental to corporate worship (Jones 1995:350). These resources allow her to keep her "stranger" status and exercise her counter-cultural function in the world. The "stranger" status helps to keep the church alert to possible situations of compromise. In regard to the question of re-evangelisation this "stranger" status must clearly align the church with the poor so that it can be an instrument of liberation rather than domination (Saayman 1995:4).

Commenting on the situation of the church in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, de Gruchy has pointed out that the church, when prophetic, must watch

carefully over the infant nation as it emerges from its swaddling clothes and begins to walk tall amongst the nations of our subcontinent and the world (de Gruchy 1995b:67-68).

This simply means that the church should be an agent of change in society and the guardian of truth, honesty and integrity. Certainly, one of church's tasks is, as Kritzing (1995:2) stated, to make "a difference to the world, at influencing or changing society in accordance with its religious ideals." Can making such a difference benefit the nation? Hauerwas & Willimon (1989:83) argue that indeed the church can make a contribution to the nation because it shows the world "a manner of life that the world can never achieve through social coercion and governmental action."

The church makes its most profound contribution not by its many modes of service, but by being what Bosch (1980:226) called an "alternative community." It is such a community when she is faithful to her identity as the people of God (LG 9). It is both the product of the mission of the Son of God and it is also the agent of the mission of the Son of God (Bosch 1980:224) as it "spreads abroad a living witness to Him" (LG 12).

### 7.1.2 The Alternative Community

The phrase "alternative community" played a central role in Bosch's ecclesiology. Bosch borrowed this term from the American Mennonite communities (Bosch 1982:8). He came to see connections between Anabaptism and his own understanding of Calvinism and found that in the United States these two traditions had a similar understanding of the relationship between the church and the world (Bosch 1982:8). It was through this contact that Bosch began to think of the church as a stranger in this world which would always be a prophetic minority and an eschatological community. Reviewing his developing understanding of the church as an alternative community Bosch wrote:

It is a "new creation," a fragment of the Kingdom in this world, God's "colony" in man's world. But precisely as such, the church is also God's "experimental garden" on earth, his bridge-head into the world. Therefore, what happens in the church has tremendous significance for society, admittedly not on a one-to-one basis at least in such a way that those who are members of the One Body cannot -- as citizens of society -- be and act in a way inconsistent with their life in the alternative community. They will not try to convert society into a theocracy. I have therefore never referred to the church as an

alternative *society*, but always to it as an alternative *community* within, yet different from, society at large. And so my thesis is: The church has tremendous significance for society precisely because it is as a uniquely separate community (Bosch 1982:2).

The church can exercise a liberating role in society because it is an alternative community. Its stance though should be indirect, allied with the powerless, truly kenotic (Nicol 1990:94). This sense of the church as an alternative community makes it distinct from the world and gives the world an alternative witness.

St. Francis of Assisi had such a kenotic community in mind: comprising persons who are voluntarily poor and servants of all. They deliberately made a choice to be uninvolved in any form of power-play. He would have his followers be persons of the beatitudes, thereby radiating the light of the Suffering Servant. His special concern was for the powerless, to be in solidarity with them out of the conviction that in making the weakness of the cross central God's power would be at work. Francis believed that environment, where one lived and worked, shaped one's consciousness and awareness of the needs of the world. He advocated staying in close proximity to poor people so that one would not become lost in illusions which could be created by wealth and power.

And they (the brothers and sisters) must rejoice when they live among people (who are considered to be) of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside (ER 9:2).

Francis gave no directions to his followers about engaging in structural change, but he did offer them a vision for living differently in the midst of society. V. Turner (1969:145) has pointed out that Francis wanted to set up the optimal conditions for an experience of sustained liminality so that *communitas* would be possible. In Francis' vision of an alternative community liminality plays a key role because it facilitates status reversal (what today might be called downward mobility) which was shaped by the scriptures and led to an attitude of service.

None of the brothers (sisters) should be administrators or managers in whatever places they are staying among others to serve or to work, nor should they be supervisors in the houses in which they serve; nor should they accept any office which

might generate scandal or be harmful to their souls (cf. Mt 8:36); instead, they should be the lesser ones and subject to all who are in the same house (ER 7:1-2).

Francis wanted the brothers and sisters to be free from what V. Turner (1972a:399) called "status incumbencies." Francis made a practical application of his vision of a kenotic community which he knew would shape the world view of his brothers and sisters. The motivation for such a lifestyle was the truth of our creaturehood before God (Admonitions of St. Francis =ADM 19) and a sense of gratitude for all God's gifts. Francis wrote: "All the brothers (and sisters) in this regard should not hold power or dominion, least of all among themselves" (ER 5:9). In this way nothing would obscure the glory of God. He had the conviction that all good came from God and belonged to him. Everything for Francis was a gift and before God all people were poor. For this reason he urged his followers to have a sense of appreciation for all God had given to them:

Let us refer all good to the most high and supreme lord God, and acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him for everything, He from Whom all good things come (ER 17:17).

Clare of Assisi, who has been called the most perfect follower of Francis, took this same stance of gratitude before God because she too, had adopted a kenotic way of life. In her Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague (=4 LAg) Clare counselled Agnes to engender this sense of gratitude through prayer. Clare believed that prayer brought intimacy with the Lord and intimacy brought gratitude:

Let yourself be inflamed more strongly with the fervor of charity. As you further contemplate His ineffable delights, eternal riches and honors, and sigh for them in the great desire and love of your heart, may you cry out: Draw me after you, we will run in the fragrance of your perfumes, O heavenly Spouse! I will run and not tire, until You bring me into the wine-cellar, until Your left hand is under my head and Your right hand will embrace me happily, and You will kiss me with the happiest kiss of Your mouth (4LAg 27-32).

Both Francis and Clare founded alternative communities. They knew that fidelity to the vision of such kenotic communities required union with the Lord in prayer.

This kind of prayer had to be cultivated. All members of the community would have to be persons of prayer so that they might give witness to God's love for the world (cf. 1.2.1).

The need for the church to be such an alternative community is apparent in every age. It is no less a need in contemporary times:

The challenge facing today's Christians is not the necessity to translate Christian convictions into a modern idiom, but rather to form a community, a colony of resident aliens which is so shaped by our convictions that no one even has to ask what we mean by our confessing belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:170-171).

Yoder (1972:141-161) believed that this alternative vision of community operates on two levels. One level has to do with personal relationships within the church and the other has to do with the relationship of the church to the structures of society, which though still fallen, are under the promise of redemption (Rom 16:20). God's people are called to relate to the structures of society in the confidence of Christ's Lordship over them, and in the assurance of his ultimate and final defeat of their continuing presence in the world. In this sense, the church acts as a witness to the reign of Christ over the structures through which the powers of evil continue to work. So the task of the church is not to defeat evil, but to witness to the defeat that has already taken place and will be consummated in the eschaton (Webber 1986:277).

Such a witness brings the church into the arena of economic and social questions. Simply because the transition from a minority ruled government to a democratic government has been made does not mean that life is better for those who have been suffering under the apartheid system in South Africa. The church, as Saayman (1995b:8) has asserted, needs to present the gospel so that it can be "rediscovered as an *empowering*, not a *subduing* gospel."

Bosch (1991a:388) wrote that "the church exists only as an organic and integral part of the human community." Does this mean that he had rejected the concept of the church as an alternative community? I think not. Even though Bosch, in his later writings, especially *Transforming Mission* (1991a), jettisoned the phrase "alternative community" to describe the church I do not think he

rejected the ecclesiology which is foundation for this concept. In fact, in *Transforming Mission*, he wrote that "the church has to remain identifiably different from the world, else it will cease to be able to minister to it" (Bosch 1991a:388). This understanding of the church, I would argue, is at the very heart of the church's identity as an alternative community. The church does not separate itself from human society, but rather immerses itself in it and shares the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties" (GS 1) of people of every age. While being passionately committed to all of humanity she exists in the world as prophetic presence scrutinising the signs of the times in light of the Gospel (GS 4). The church as an alternative community does not seek to hide or escape from the rest of society, but rather to function as an instrument facilitating the coming of the reign of God in its fullness in the midst of the human community.

### 7.1.3 An Objection to the Alternative Community

Balcomb (1993:186) has dismissed the alternative community as totally ineffective because in his mind during 1980-1990 the church struck an "eventual compromise with apartheid." He says that this concept of the alternative community belongs to the larger category of what he calls "third way theology." He defined it in this manner:

The "third way"...denoted a form of "Christian political action" that was offered as an alternative to "a violent and repressive peace" on the one hand and "destructive revolution" on the other...The third way offered a transcendent solution to the problem by asserting that its advocates were "not influenced by a...political agenda", had an "ideological freedom which does not project any particular economic or political solution for South Africa", and had "no purpose...either to preserve the status quo or enhance revolutionary objectives" (Balcomb 1993:63).

His main objection is to the supposed neutrality of the "Third Way." Klaus Nürnberger, writing in the Foreword of Balcomb's book, suggested that Balcomb was simply raising a relevant question:

With some legitimacy Balcomb could ask the question: are you on the side of the blacks in their struggle for liberation or are

you on the side of the oppressive white regime (Balcomb 1993: intro.)?

I would say that the lines of the question are drawn along too sharp a distinction. In situations of social upheaval things are rarely as clear cut as framed in the question that Nürnberger would have Balcomb raise. Though it true that there can be no neutrality on issues of the ethical magnitude of apartheid (Boff 1989:5); I think that Balcomb misunderstood the position of the NIR (=National Initiative for Reconciliation) and the theologians who support it.

Balcomb was especially hard on the concept of the alternative community espoused by Bosch. He accused Bosch of siding with the oppressor:

Thus while Bosch repudiated neutrality by saying that the Church should be 'intensely interested' in the affairs of this life he clearly warned that this interest should go further than the announcing of 'Christian principles'. In actual fact...this effectively meant neutrality which in turn meant siding with the powerful (Balcomb 1993:188).

Balcomb's quarrel with the alternative community, which he calls "Bosch's model," is that in his mind it favours the uniqueness or distinctiveness rather than the prophetic function.

It could be argued that the essential problem with Bosch's model, and indeed with the third way model, generally, is that it is more concerned about enhancing the uniqueness of the church than emphasizing the church's prophetic function in society. The notion of prophetic relevance is coopted in the interests of ecclesiastical distinctiveness. In other words in the third way paradigm to be prophetic meant to be distinctive (Balcomb 1993:189).

This is a startling criticism inasmuch as the uniqueness or distinctiveness of the alternative community is precisely what allows it to take a prophetic stance. Balcomb himself admitted that:

The church's distinctiveness, in other words, is seen precisely where it touches the world and offers an alternative value system to that of the world's (Balcomb 1993:68).

Bosch himself wrote that:

The church must remain critical of all solutions. She stands neither to the left nor to the right. She is on the move. She is at home nowhere (Bosch 1977:19).

Balcomb interpreted this as neutrality. We would argue that it is not neutrality, but a clear definite choice on the part of the church to move as a pilgrim through society, owing no allegiance to any human institution.

Nicol (1990) clarified Bosch's position:

Bosch does not defend White power domination, but is working against it by the methods that seem best to him. The idea of the alternative community was partly meant as an attack on apartheid, and seen as such by the Nationalists. Now that dominant ideology moves closer to "third way" ideas such as reconciliation, Bosch remains in the opposition and moves closer to taking sides against the main injustice (Nicol 1990:96).

Perhaps Balcomb has misunderstood Bosch because he misses what Nicol (1990:96) calls Bosch's "inclusive theology" and the "dialectical character" of Bosch's thinking. Ultimately, Bosch has a kenotic theology based on the mystery of the cross which leads one to show "a heart full of compassion towards all people" (Nicol 1990:97).<sup>1</sup>

Bosch clarified his own stance on the relationship between the church and society. He explained that since the first advent of Christ we live in the "last days" so that there is a tension between the already and not yet. And since this is the case:

...Anybody who believes that one day God will wipe away all tears cannot acquiesce in tears and sorrow now, anybody who knows that one day swords will be turned into plough-shares and former enemies become friends, cannot but work for peace and reconciliation now. Precisely our faith in the Coming Kingdom leads to our involvement in the world here and now (Bosch 1982:9).

Thus Bosch's position is different from those who despair of the world and look only to the coming kingdom and it also differs from the position of those who give up any hope of a coming kingdom and try to build utopia here and now. He wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Nicol (1990) offers a comparison between the theologies of David Bosch and Albert Nolan in which he names the cross as the hermeneutical key for understanding Bosch's theology.

In my understanding, therefore, we have to work consistently at the renewal of the church --the alternative community -- and precisely in that way at the renewal of society. It is for this reason that so much of what I have written in recent years in fact concentrates on the church. It is not a concentration on the church merely for the sake of the church but, rather, for the sake of the world (Bosch 1982:9).

Balcomb has objected to the concept of the alternative community because he believes that in its underlying theology there is:

The impulse of withdrawal from political process rather than engagement in them, the penchant for defining Christian responsibility in transcendent rather than immanent terms (Balcomb 1993:207).

We would argue that in the underlying theology of the alternative community the prophetic stance is rooted in a realistic hope because of the promise of the inevitability of the coming of the kingdom in its fullness.

In between cynicism and sentimentality, Christianity calls for penitent submission to the judgment of God; in between apathy and fanaticism, a determination to seek out and do God's will (Tinder 1989:11).

The church does not set herself apart from society, but lives differently within society. Society is the context in which the church exercises her prophetic function. Pityana sees the presence of the church in society as vital:

The Church...is an integral party of civil society. She engages in the struggle as an expression of her mission imperative. Her mission is rooted in faith and directed at proclaiming the good news, defending the rights of the poor, empowering them in struggle and giving a moral basis to that struggle (Pityana 1995:183).

The church as an alternative community then does not seek neutrality, but concrete involvement in the world because it seeks to be a "permanent challenge to the world and to its values" (Bosch 1982:9). The church offers to the world another style of living that is motivated by the values of the Gospel.

The most creative social strategy we have to offer is the church. Here we show the world a manner of life the world can never achieve through social coercion or governmental action. We serve the world by showing it something that it is not (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:83).

### 7.2 Meeting the Challenge of Being an Alternative Community

Unfortunately the church has not been and is not always faithful to its mission to the world. It sometimes does not act out of its identity as the universal sacrament of salvation (LG 48). Church history is filled with sad stories of the church compromising her identity and obscuring her prophetic function. Perhaps the first instance was the acceptance of Theodosius' proclamation of Christianity as the state religion in 380 (Comby 1985:75). This was a mixed blessing.

Since the church was no longer persecuted, people also entered the church for varied motives because it brought them status (Comby 1985:77). The prophetic nature of Christianity was diminished. Monasticism was an effort to regain the prophetic function as men and women sought to live the Christian life in a different way. The "liturgy was the place where the faithful were given nourishment which helped them cope with the vicissitudes of life" (Bosch 1991:212) and the monks and nuns made it a priority in their lives as the *opus Dei* (Comby 1985:86).

One has only to recall the schism of 1054, the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Avignon Papacy, the Renaissance popes, the scandal of indulgences, collaboration with colonial powers, -- the list could go on -- and yet all of these did not and do not eradicate the church's prophetic function in the world because Jesus has entrusted his prophetic mission to the church (RM 21). The church is, in the words of Rahner, "a church of sinners." This fact does not alter the truth of who she is as the instrument of salvation.

...The Church is meant to be the manifestation of God's grace and holiness in the world; she is meant to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. But sinners in the Church make of this figure an expression of the evil of their heart, they make of it a 'den of thieves'. This frightful truth remains, however much it must also be said that sin and holiness in the image of the Church do

not have the same relationship to her inner 'truth' (Rahner 1982:264-265).

The sin of the church is our sin, for we are the church. Rahner suggests that the church should not come to terms with the sin of the church too easily because it will keep us striving to be true to our identity (Rahner 1982:267). For Rahner the church is "our Mother," whose holiness is nothing she claims as her own, but is "a miracle of God" (Rahner 1982:268). Rahner uses the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) as the image of the church of sinners. He imagines the church being brought before the Scribes and the Pharisees and she cannot deny her sins. When all the church's accusers are gone the Lord is left alone with the woman to whom he speaks. Rahner concluded his essay on the church of sinners in this way:

And at the end the Lord will be alone with the woman. And then he will stand erect and look upon this prostitute, his bride, and ask her, 'Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?' And she will answer with inexpressible repentance and humility, 'No one, Lord.' and she will be astonished and almost dismayed that no one has done so. But the Lord will come close to her and say, 'Then neither shall I condemn you.' He will kiss her forehead and murmur, 'My bride, holy Church' (Rahner 1982:269).

Rahner's reflection on the church of sinners reminds us of the great dignity of the church, but also its frailty. It is our dignity and frailty. The concern we must have is that we strengthen that dignity and live accordingly. This is the ever-present challenge before the church. With Bosch (1982:9) I would assert that the church will be able to respond to the need for renewal of society to the extent that it is attentive to its own need for renewal.

Recognition of the church's failure to be an alternative community in the world raises the question of the quality of Christian formation. We would argue that because formation, for the most part, has been intellectual formation apart from the call to conversion, most members of the church do not see themselves as called to play a prophetic role in the world. When formation is not holistic the church forgets its identity. It also forgets the ways at its disposal to cultivate a healthy sense of identity: ritual, myth, and the use of symbols all of which are found in the RCIA.

The RCIA has the potential to form people to be members of a church which consciously and decisively chooses to be an alternative community in the world. As South Africa engages in the work of nation-building, the church needs to be a prophetic presence calling to liberation in Christ.

### 7.2.1 The RCIA and the Formation of the Alternative Community

The RCIA does four things to jog the memory of the church as to the nature of its identity: 1) The gospel is proclaimed to the catechumens in a way that brings them to see their lives in the light of the story of Jesus. They are called to initial conversion in a way that "born Catholics" never were. Even Catholics who joined the church in pre-Vatican II days were not evangelised in this way. The RCIA's method of evangelisation is modelled on the experience of the early Christian community.

Early Christians, interestingly, began not with creedal speculation about the metaphysics of the Incarnation -- that is, Christology abstracted from the Gospel accounts. They began with stories about Jesus...We cannot know Jesus without following Jesus. Engagement with Jesus, as the misconceptions of his first disciples show, is necessary to understand Jesus. In a sense, we follow Jesus before we know Jesus. Furthermore, we know Jesus before we know ourselves...By telling these stories, we come to see the significance and coherence of our lives as a gift, as something not of our own heroic creation, but as something that must be told to us, something we would not have known without the community of faith (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:55).

The story that must be told to us is the community's fundamental myth. For the church this means immersion into the paschal mystery of Christ as it is told and retold in the church's worship and in all its forms of catechesis. Catechumens come to know the person of Jesus before they come to know the teaching of the church, its creed, and its doctrine. They come to know Jesus and as they do they come to know themselves in a new way. Their identity changes. If their sense of identity does not change then questions must be raised about the quality of conversion. This is why pastoral practices which rush the initiation process or worst, ignore the RCIA and simply revert to the priest and convert class programme must be

stopped. This kind of pastoral practice eventually works for the demise of the prophetic quality of the church as an alternative community in society.

Clearly the church has failed to communicate to the people of South Africa the story of Jesus in a way that challenges their sense of identity. At this time of social transition we see that the effects of the former government's policy of separate development has had a more lasting effect on people than the story the church attempted to proclaim. Ethnic and political identity seem stronger than baptismal identity conferred through the church's ministry. Differences rather than commonalities are stressed to the detriment of the common good.

Perhaps part of the failure is due to the fact that the liturgy's power to communicate the story of Jesus to people has not been inculturated. The rites of the church have to be owned by people before they can have the power to transform their lives. They must be able to recognise something of their deepest selves in them as Christians and as South Africans. For this to happen there has to be serious efforts made at inculturation.

In an earlier study (Karecki 1990) I dealt with the question of liturgical inculturation. In that work I based myself on the efforts at inculturation made by the Poor Clare Sisters<sup>2</sup> in Lilongwe, Malawi and my experience of celebrating the liturgical seasons with them. I also proposed a plan of action to facilitate the work of inculturation. In section (7.2.2) I will propose a process for inculturating the RCIA.

2) Conversion is seen as an ongoing process. Any true response to the gospel requires conversion on the part of the hearer. The RCIA restores conversion to its place as an intrinsic part of Christian life. Before the person of Jesus no one is exempt from conversion. The heart is always in need of purification so that a person can make choices that reflect Gospel values and principles. The RCIA offers a holistic vision of catechesis as liturgical, doctrinal, moral and apostolic. It does this so that no part of a person's life escapes the searching light of the gospel. In South Africa, because of apartheid, catechumens

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<sup>2</sup> The Poor Clares were founded by St. Clare of Assisi in 1212. They are the contemplative branch of the Franciscan family. They are also known as the Second Order of St. Francis.

must be led to examine their attitudes to people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Racists attitudes are incompatible with genuine conversion to Christ.

The catechesis of the RCIA works to shape the world view and ethos of the catechumen's life. Here again the community's myth plays a pivotal role in the formation process. Searle distinguishes the Catholic use of the scriptures within the community of faith from the Protestant perspective. They are not at odds; they are simply different approaches to the use and interpretation of scripture:

Unlike the Protestant principle which makes the Bible primarily a personal source of encounter with God and allows each individual to read and interpret it in his or her own fashion, the Catholic principle is that the Bible belongs to the church and is to be read and interpreted by the community of faith. Only within the living faith community can the Bible itself come alive as the word of God (Searle 1987b:18).

Within the context of the community gathered around the Word the transformation of the catechumen's identity, world view, ethos and sense of meaning takes shape. In a holistic way the catechumen is called to conversion which he/she experiences not as a once-for-all event, but a continuing process that extends beyond the time of initiation.

In South Africa the Bible has been used to justify oppression and the maintenance of the status quo. The Word was misinterpreted and instead of being a liberating word it became a word to subjugate people to the will of the white minority and maintain the status quo (TAC 1985:39).

In the RCIA the Word of God proclaimed in the midst of the assembly and reflected on in the context of the catechumenal community becomes the impetus for conversion, not complacency. The lectionary is proclamation for the "purpose of deepening faith and renewing life" (Dooley 1988:13).

The assembly comes into being through the word. John Shea says it more poetically:

To tell a story of God is to create a world, adopt an attitude, suggest a behavior. But stories are first; we are second. We are born into a community of stories and storytellers. In interpreting our traditional stories of God we find out who we are and what we must do (Shea 1978:9).

When the community ignores God's story it distorts its own. It creates its own story apart from God's. This happens when we seek to interpret history to fit the myth we have created apart from the Christian myth. This is especially evident in the way mission history often ignores its link to colonialism. Saayman has pointed out that:

...Whether consciously or unconsciously, whether willingly or unwillingly, "the missionaries became pioneers of western imperialistic expansion (Bosch 1991:304). Livingstone's three C's<sup>3</sup>, undoubtedly inspired by sincere Christian and humanitarian concerns, therefore eventually led to a coalition between God and Mammon. In this process, unfortunately, missionaries became at best ineffectual protesters,...at worst co-opted ambassadors to rationalise and justify the process of conquest-in-order-to-profit (cf. Pakenham 1991:585-601) (Saayman 1994:13).

Remembering our history as it really was will bring us into the light of liberating truth. Without a commitment to truth we will forever be captives of what Schreier (1992:34) has called "the narrative of the lie." People of colour in South Africa will need to have a place in which to tell their stories and people who will listen to their stories with reverence and compassion. Villa - Vicencio has reflected on the importance of stories as part of the reconciliation process:

Stories that reveal the sacredness of life, that point to events that have hurt and healed, given life and death, are not easy stories to tell. Reconciliation cannot be forced. True stories are rarely told to strangers (Villa-Vicencio 1995:115)

When the church loses its memory it is no longer able to identify itself as a sign of God's presence to the world because its story is not interwoven with his. It cannot be an alternative community with a mission to the world. The RCIA helps people to reinterpret their stories in the light of God's story. It moves people from an individualistic interpretation of God's story to one that leads to an understanding of the story of God and his people. The RCIA also helps communities face both their "sin history" and their "graced history." This is what Schreier (1992:38)

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<sup>3</sup> Commerce, Christianity, and Civilization, Cf. Pakenham (1991:xvi)

calls the reconstruction of memory. It is precisely what is needed here in South Africa. Every person and group remembers selectively according to how their world view and the myth of their community has been shaped. If reconciliation is going to become a reality then we must work at reconstruction of memory even though it is itself a painful process.

The reconstruction of memory, however, is not simply a retrieval of memory. That old memory becomes so associated with violence that it becomes too painful to evoke. What must be done to overcome this suffering is to disengage the older memory from those acts of violence....The tentacles of the lie burrow deep into memory, however, and extracting them does damage to the weave of memory. For that reason memory must be reconstructed. It will never be quite the same; it will bear the scars of its history. But it can be so reconstructed (Schreiter 1992:38-39).

Schreiter (1992:39) concluded that in the process of remembering the church "offers a memory that can serve as a framework to rebuild the shattered one we have." The larger Christian myth is filled with stories of reconciliation, healing and restoration and can serve as an instrument for not only drawing out stories of pain, but also healing them.

3) New relationships in a community of faith are formed in the context of the RCIA. V. Turner's theory of liminality contains within it the idea of *communitas*. As we noted previously (cf. 1.3) liminality engenders a sense of *communitas* in which relationships are formed in a spontaneous and unmediated way. The *communitas* which happens during the RCIA process takes place in a community of faith. Identity is shaped through the interaction within the faith community. Catechumens and baptised alike are able to loosen the "grip on everything which intensifies our differences and acknowledge our primal common humanity" (Lopresti 1987:5). Through the baptismal bath and the sealing by the spirit a new set of relationships is set in place. Crossing the final boundary of initiation the newly baptised is grafted into the Body of Christ, as a son or daughter, as brother or sister they relate as part to the whole community and to the world as an agent of transformation. The urgency of this transformation needs to be communicated to catechumens and the baptised alike. This work of

transformation is not only a political necessity, but a religious and moral one based on the Christian gospel. The RCIA could be a vehicle for the initiation of new members into the church and the re-evangelisation of the baptised.

In their ritual dying and rising to new life and new identity the newly initiated become part of the pilgrimage community of the church as it gathers around the table of the Lord to participate in the mystery of Christ's own dying and rising. Their participation is necessary if they are to witness to the power of the resurrection to the world. Their acceptance around this table seals their membership in the faith community. It must be remembered that membership in the Christian community is not about warmth and intimacy (Dunning 1989a:205), but about "koinonia which supports the outer life of diakonia and mission" (Dunning 1989a:204). There is no larger mentality here; nor is there any sense of the church being co-extensive with the state (Meyer 1974:43). There is always the danger of service turning into domination and if the church seeks acceptance by the state the reward will be power without moral credibility.

The liturgical ritual of the church gives meaning and purpose to one's life. That meaning is always mediated through symbols which aim at leading the participant into sharing the paschal mystery of Christ. When liturgical rituals are celebrated haphazardly they are robbed of their power. They need to be celebrated with care and reverence so that the symbolic meanings they embody can speak to those who celebrate them. Liturgical rituals can inform the struggle for justice in South Africa and give it a faith dimension. Hughes maintains that:

Liturgy and justice have an intrinsic relationship to one another precisely because liturgy places us before the Just One to whom we say "Amen." We need not change the liturgy in order to highlight themes of justice. We need simply to celebrate the liturgy with genuine participation and allow the Just One gradually to work a transformation in us (Hughes 1991:51).

Liturgy always communicates through mystery (Huck 1989:60-62; Luzbetak 1988:382; Wainwright 1980:427). The mystery of Christ, the Just One always calls us to live justly, to follow in his footsteps. Symbols can be a means for people to be drawn into the mystery of Christian life. Symbols, as defined by

Arbuckle (1982a:203; cf.1.4.2.3), are windows opening up people to mystery, to the transcendent not in order to escape painful life-situations, but so that they might be opened to seeing their lives in terms of faith. Rubber bullets, chains, or candles encircled with barbed wire were used in many liturgies during the years of the struggle against apartheid and they did express the very real pain of people, but were they windows opening up to the transcendent? These objects, I think, could more accurately, be called *signs* rather than symbols. Signs, Arbuckle (1982a:203) contends are "univocal, unambiguous and conventional." Signs make direct statements, symbols suggest. Signs speak in declarative sentences while symbols evoke meaning.

The liturgy does not declare a specific political or social action. For the liturgy does not address contemporary events directly (LMIn 7). It does its work through the use of ritual, myth and symbol. Hughes again has said it well:

Liturgy is not logical explanation, nor can its end be reduced to a political or ethical "goal" -- a series of "shoulds" or "oughts." Theme liturgy, whether it be "right to life" or "peace" or "disarmament" or whatever, makes of the liturgy an exposition of ideas. But surely there are other more appropriate forums for such discussion. We do not celebrate the liturgy in order to think about ideas, however worthy, but to place ourselves in contact with the person and work of Jesus Christ and to submit to Christ' redemptive action in our lives. Liturgy is less a matter of the head than of the heart, an experience less of formation than of transformation, *if* we let God have God's way with us (Hughes 1991:45-46).

Whatever symbols are used they need to lead people to deeper faith and invite them to experience the redemptive action of Christ in their lives.

Ultimately God leaves the Christian community free to respond. God never forces. he only waits for our response to him and to the suffering. This is not an easy truth to accept. We would want everyone to see the social dimensions of Christian life and the transformation as a constituent element of their baptismal commitment, but the reality is that we cannot force this perspective on anyone. We can only witness to it ourselves and make that witness compelling.

After years of presenting various themes before the Lord and the assembly the challenge now is to let the RCIA teach us anew the power of ritual and symbol. We must let the liturgy do its transforming work. This of course presupposes that people 1) understand what liturgy is and what we do in liturgy; and 2) that it is inculturated. In the first place people need to realise that liturgy is about the worship of God and facilitate our growth in holiness (SC 59). It has no other ends. It is worthy of our participation and care for its preparation simply because it is in the liturgy that the assembly is most true to its identity as the people of God. Secondly, the liturgy must be inculturated. Symbols, gestures, language, and movement all must "speak" in ways which are intelligible to the assembly. I will come back to this in section 7.4. It is not that the liturgy does not have the power to transform us; it does, but we must recapture the myth which informs that ritual so that we come to realise the radical nature of our call to be a eucharistic people (SC 47).

4) The RCIA celebrates the life of the community in Christ. The community, through its participation in the eucharist, touches the root metaphor that shapes its identity as a people. We are brought to the sources of faith so that we remember who we are as a people. With the contemporary stress on individualism (Bellah et al. 1985:143) there is a tendency to forget our communal identity as the people of God (LG 9). This sense of individuals is not only a phenomenon characteristic of the Western societies, but is also something that African societies are also facing. Parrinder (1981:146) observed that "unchecked individualism, self-seeking, corruption and materialism are the great enemies of modern Africa." Mosala (1986:95-98) lamented the encroachment of Western means of production and all the attitudes and values that accompany such Westernisation on Africa because the effect is that "our imagination is narrowed by a kind of presupposition that the individual precedes the community" (Lopresti 1987:3). When this happens we lapse into forgetfulness and refuse to "re-member" with others. It is not enough to feel guilty (Kritzinger 1991:115-116), there must be confession of sin against the members of the community and reparations made.

I would argue that the greatest sin of apartheid is that it denied the human dignity of Black people. In Schreier's terms it was a narrative of the lie which

taught that human beings do not have equal dignity. That view militates against the formation of community. That apartheid was able to flourish over the centuries until it was framed in law is an indictment against the church for not being an alternative community. It also points to the fact that Christians need to be re-evangelised (Bosch 1991b:126-130; Kritzinger 1991:107-108; Saayman 1995:3-5). In RM John Paul II described three situations in which the church must carry on the work of evangelisation: where Christ and the Gospel are not known, in situations where the church's normal pastoral care can be carried out, and:

in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a 'new evangelization' or a 're-evangelisation' (RM 33).

This call for re-evangelisation challenges the very identity of Christians, Black and White. Only if Christians come to a deeper sense of their identity as brothers and sisters in Christ will they be able to address the questions of justice and integrity facing South Africa. How to do this? My argument remains: formation of new members that is rooted in the church's liturgy and re-evangelisation of baptised members so that they understand the demands of justice presented in the scriptures and act on them.

Kritzinger (1991:108-110) has made some very provocative and insightful observations about the exploitation of domestic workers as one area where Christians would need to be re-evangelised. He presents six possible areas which white Christian families would need to face if they would change exploitative relationships with domestic workers (Kritzinger 1991:109-110). His suggestions would certainly bring the element of justice into the relationship, but I do not think he goes far enough. I would ask the questions: Why is it that domestic workers are needed in white households? What does it do to able-bodied white youth to have middle-aged or older Black people catering for their every need? Why cannot the family themselves take care of house cleaning and gardening? If a family cannot take care of its own property perhaps this suggests that their plot is too

large. Is this not also related to the question of redistribution of land? These are questions of justice that every Christian family needs to grapple with, not because it is politically correct, but because of who they are as members of the body of Christ.

This question is related to an understanding of the eucharist which not only sees Christ present in the bread and wine, but also present in other human beings. Participation in the eucharist should lead one to have respect for the presence of Christ in others. It is a question of identity and of membership in the Body of Christ. The issue of having domestic workers also raises questions about how bonds are formed within the Christian community. How can the equality proclaimed in the liturgy be realised as long as some of members are made to feel inferior to others. This calls into question Christian teaching about the dignity of the human person and the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The church needs to address the question of domestic workers and all the others hinging on it: education opportunities for Black people, employment benefits, the relationship of the domestic worker to his/her own family, especially if they are living with a white family in order to work for them. This is only one area of re-evangelisation. Kritzinger (1991) and Saayman (1995) have pointed out other specific areas.

My purpose here is simply to illustrate that what we do in the liturgy is not unrelated to how we live. Liturgy, as nothing else, has the power to form us for mission with a sense of justice. Can there be any other kind? It is a justice that is rooted in the scriptures and celebrated in the liturgy. I am reminded of a hymn *What is this Place*, which can be used in the celebration of the Dedication of a Church or for Sunday liturgy. The third verse of the hymn sums up how I understand the relationship between liturgy as preparing participants to make a response to the world.

And we accept bread at this table,  
Broken and shared, a living sign.  
Here in this world, dying and living,  
We are each other's bread and wine.  
This is the place where we can receive  
What we need to increase:  
God's justice and God's peace (Worship 709).

The justice which we need to work for as part of mission is "God's justice and God's peace." The liturgy does not lull the assembly into a sense of its own righteousness, but rather reminds the assembly of who they are before God and with one another. Liturgy is not an ecclesiocentric action, but an action undertaken for the good of the world. This is nowhere made clearer than in the Easter Vigil.

The celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil is the church's yearly reminder of the need to remember its identity. The fire, light, readings, water bath, anointing with chrism, eating of one bread and the drinking from one cup remind us of our corporate identity. Weekly as the eucharist is celebrated we are rescued from our forgetfulness and called to remember again and again our dignity as God' people. If we do not remember we will become alienated from ourselves.

In South Africa the alienation has been long and reinforced. In forgetting the unity which God intends for his people we drew the lines of separation and had them promulgated as law. In our acts of forgetfulness we denied not only the dignity of others, but our own as well. The church participated in the forgetfulness and the separation. The common memory of our unity in Christ needs to be reappropriated. The ritual celebrations of the RCIA can help us remember. They can remind us of our common story and reinforced its meaning through symbols, gestures and movement.

The RCIA's main objective is to call catechumens and baptised alike to respond to the grace of conversion so that the church might be an alternative community welcoming all, challenging all and serving all in the spirit of Christ. In order to do this the rituals must be inculturated.

### **7.2.2 Inculturating the RCIA**

The RCIA makes use of symbols which have the ability to speak to many cultures because they are basic human symbols: the cross, water, wine, oil, touch, bread. Nevertheless the need for inculturation is ever present because as the church takes root among various peoples it can be enriched by the gifts of their

cultures and because inculturation is the way faith in Christ is incarnated in the lives of people.

Luzbetak (1988:70) names the local people as the "primary agents of inculturation." They are the "insiders" in the culture. Missionaries need to do whatever is possible to facilitate the process. They need to put their expertise at the service of the local church. From my experience as the Director of the Office of Worship in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg (1987-1993) and as the person responsible for the implementation of the RCIA I would suggest the following possible process for the inculturation of the RCIA. This is a process which could be carried out at the diocesan or regional levels. It would need clear lines of responsibility for it to work.

#### *A Possible Process for Inculturation of the RCIA in South Africa*

1. An initial meeting is called by the local bishop to convene representatives of parishes that are implementing the RCIA. The purpose of the meeting would be to listen to the experience of the parishes and to judge how well the rite is understood and implemented. The bishop would need to make use of people in the diocese who have knowledge of the liturgy and those who understand the cultures of the people of the parishes implementing the RCIA. Some input would need to be given about the ritual process and the role of myth and symbol in ritual.

2. At that meeting task groups would be formed to work on the various rituals of the RCIA. Each group would be responsible for preparing a draft version of one of the rituals. They would be given the necessary resources for carrying out their task and a definite timeline. A decision would have to be made about how the various cultures in a diocese would be reflected in the rituals. This question would have to be settled before any specific work could be done. A co-ordinator of the project would convene the next meeting and the task groups would be responsible to give regular progress reports to the co-ordinator.

3. At a second meeting each task group would come with the material they drafted. This would be presented and discussed. Their next project would be to produce a second draft and as many as would be needed to create a rite that

respects the initiation process in the RCIA and cultural values and practices. Intervening meetings would be scheduled as necessary.

4. When drafts of the rituals would be ready to be finalised another meeting would be called at which the bishop would be present. If the rituals were ready to be approved for experimental use the bishop would designate certain parishes to implement the inculturated rites.

5. After they had been implemented for at least three to five years an evaluation meeting would be scheduled at which time the bishop and the representatives from the parishes would again listen to the experience of the implementation. If these rituals would be judged as valuable cultural expressions of the RCIA rituals they would be prepared to be submitted to the SACBC and to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome. A small group would be appointed to put them together in a ritual book.

6. The SACBC would need to prepare the necessary documentation for this process of approval from the Roman congregation. In this way the universal church is enriched by the gifts of the local churches.

Local people would need to draw on the expertise of liturgists, cultural anthropologists, ritual theorists, missiologists, scriptural scholars, musical composers and artists. A diocesan liturgical department could facilitate contact between local parishes and those who might help them.

All the while this process is going on it is taken for granted that liturgical education is taking place so that knowledgeable choices can be made about inculturating the rituals of the RCIA. The inculturation of the RCIA would prove to be very challenging in urban dioceses where there is a great mixture of cultures, but having a local rite that reflects such cultural diversity would in itself be a unifying element in the church and society.

This proposal is not the last word on the process of inculturation. It is, if anything, a first whisper. Inculturation is talked about on every level of church life, but there is need to take it beyond the talking stage and make it a reality. In order for it to work the process would need to be well organised and the bishop would need to exert strong leadership and support for this effort. Inculturation would

affect how the church related to the world. How the church understands the kingdom is also a factor in shaping its way of relating to the world.

### 7.3 The Church and the Kingdom

In his encyclical letter RM, Pope John Paul II rejected an anthropocentric notion of the kingdom in which the needs of the human community are the only focus of mission (RM 17). From this perspective:

What counts are programs and struggles for liberation which are socio-economic, political and even cultural, but within a horizon that is closed to the transcendent (RM 17).

The pope is not denying the importance of such programmes, but he is concerned that they miss the more profound dimensions of human life. "Such a view," he maintains, "easily translates into one more ideology of purely earthly progress" (RM 17).

John Paul II also rejected concepts of the kingdom that put it at odds with the church. These conceptions hold that the church should be totally concerned about bearing witness to and serving the kingdom without any thought for her inner life. The pontiff, reflecting on how such a conception of the kingdom views the mission of the church, wrote:

The Church's task is described as though it had to proceed in two directions: on the one hand promoting such 'values of the Kingdom' as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc., while on the other hand fostering dialogue between peoples, cultures, and religions, so that through a mutual enrichment they might help the world to be renewed and to journey ever closer towards the Kingdom (RM 17).

This concept is rejected by the Holy Father because he believes "it undervalues the church" (RM 17) and because this is not the vision of the kingdom gained from revelation (RM 18). Ultimately he rejects all conceptions of the kingdom because:

The Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but is before all else a *person* with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God (RM 18).

Furthermore, John Paul II holds that the kingdom cannot be separated from Christ's body, the church. The church and the kingdom are indissolubly linked in a unique and special relationship. "It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument" (RM 18). The kingdom and the church are related and the church promotes the kingdom in terms of her mission in the world.

With this perspective it is clear that the pope is reiterating the teaching of Vatican II where the Council Fathers stated that:

Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order; the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction, and vigor to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God. In fact, the Church is able, indeed it is obliged, if times and circumstances require it, to initiate action for the benefit of men, especially of those in need, like the works of mercy and similar undertakings (GS = Gaudium et Spes 42).

It is clear that the church is at the service of the kingdom, but that the priority remains calling people to conversion. This should not be taken to mean that the pope is advocating some either-or situation in which calling to conversion can only be done in one way. The church has been and is involved in numerous activities which are related to conversion and which serve the needs of the human family. John Paul II said this clearly in RM:

The Church contributes to mankind's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children (RM 20).

The church gains clarity about her mission through the liturgy in which the Word of God is proclaimed and the presence of Christ is celebrated in the eucharist. The church celebrating the mysteries of Christ and reflecting those mysteries to the world is the most powerful witness that the church can give. It is when she is most truly herself (Lawler & Shanahan 1993:497).

#### 7.4 The School of the Liturgy

The church's witness to the world has been linked to her worship by von Allmen. He has pointed out that people can only discover the meaning of their lives through the celebration of worship (von Allmen 1965:62-63). A transformation is at work and is "actualized and accomplished by worship" (von Allmen 1965:115).

Furthermore, the church learns her prophetic vocation in and through the celebration of the liturgy.

To say 'glory be to God' is a protest against the powers and the powerful who imagine that they can fulfill the longings of humanity; it is...to remind them...that the days of their pride are ended, that Jesus has stripped them and publicly made of them an example, triumphing over them in the cross (Col 2:15) (von Allmen 1965:64).

Von Allmen (1965:64) saw the celebration of the liturgy as a political action because it reminds the state that it cannot claim absolute trust and obedience from its citizens. Only God alone can claim that right. In the celebration of the liturgy priority is accorded to giving glory to God alone and preparing people for participation in his mission. As the Word is proclaimed and the eucharist celebrated, Christ's body -- the church -- is being formed into his holy people. This is a pilgrim people, "genuinely but imperfectly holy" (LG 48), constantly summoned by Christ "to that continual reformation of which she always has needed, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth" (UR = Unitatis Redintegratio 6). Liturgy is the "school" in which the "faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (SC 14). In this school people learn how to meet the challenges of life in the world with faith. This faith not only lives within the church, but shows itself in every aspect of life.

Our faith is not just a weekend obligation, a mystery to be celebrated around the altar on Sunday. It is a pervasive reality to be practiced every day in homes, offices, factories, schools and businesses...We cannot separate what we believe from how we act in the market place and the broader community (EJA 25).

The kind of faith that is a lived reality is strengthened and sustained by the liturgy. Capuchin liturgist, Edward Foley, commenting on the power of the liturgy, wrote:

The act of worship integrated with human life, therefore, has the potential to create the reality it signifies. Consequently, we are not only informed of our incorporation into the body of Christ but, through Christian initiation, we are in fact incorporated; we are not only assured that Christ is made present through the consecrated bread and but are ourselves transformed into his body and blood. Liturgy in this fuller sense is not simply information. Rather, it is formational and transformational (Foley 1991b:120).

Foley further clarifies that this is what is meant by liturgy being a "rehearsal" of the Christian life. He explains that liturgy provides a means whereby the assembly may have "a continual re-entry into and further appropriation of a rich an inexhaustible reality" (Foley 1991b:121). This ritual engagement with the truth is the arena in which the Christian assembly learns how to be church. Liturgy is not escape from the ills of society it is a school where Christians are taught how to respond to the needs of humanity.

The eucharist is the experience of learning to be of service to the world, *par excellence*. In the eucharist an assembly hungering for wisdom and compassion are fed. The world view of the community is enlarged so that the church can extend the relatedness that all people share in Christ and is celebrated in the eucharist (Warren 1989a:204). In a very public way the church commits itself to live in a way that reflects the values of the mystery it is gathered to celebrate. Liturgy is a "we" action. It is always a community response that enacts an all-embracing world view of life. The liturgical celebration affirms "the interconnectedness of gathered assembly and its interconnectedness with the world" (Keifer 1991:71). The liturgy is constantly working to pull us out of our private worlds and concerns to take on the concerns of the kingdom. It is rooted in the life of the world.

The Church's *liturgia* does not float free in some special world but is intimately and inextricably bound up with its *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diaconia*, and its quality is in every way affected by the quality of those functions (Keifer 1991:71).

Liturgy is the school in which its participants learn how to live in the world. It provides the assembly with a vision of mission that is rooted in the life of the Trinity, the mystery of Christ's dying and rising and the reconciliation of the world made possible through the gift of God's grace. To say "Amen" in the liturgy is both a political action and an act of faith that God can do infinitely more in world than we can ask or imagine. "The Church's worship...is the most splendid proof of love for the world" (von Allmen 1965:37). It is an act whereby we learn the ways of God's mission in the world, a mission of reconciliation.

### 7.5 The Challenge Before Us: Reconciliation

South Africa's fledgling democracy is still, after only a little more than a year, precariously poised between its torturous past and its unknown future. The struggle against apartheid went on for more than three hundred and forty years (Sebidi 1986:2) and cost the lives of thousands of people who were killed in that struggle and millions more whose lives were damaged because of the apartheid system. The story of apartheid is what Schreier (1992:34-36) calls a "narrative of the lie." The sustained violence of apartheid aimed at convincing people of the validity of the lie. To accept the lie as truth would have been to negate the very identity of the millions of Black South Africans.

The being of blacks therefore constituted non-somethingness. These stereotypes by the powerful became the cornerstone of oppression because the weaker and the poor were seen as a target to be conquered. These derogatory labels were part of the total onslaught on black humanity, religion, culture and values. They were to internalise foreign ways as quickly and as thoroughly as possible in order to survive (cf Tiéno 1991:295-302). All these, together with the concomitant seizure of their land by force, left the whole fabric of African community life destroyed. The logical consequence for many Africans was to accept the negative description of themselves by white people. White culture and values were raised to the level of universality and authenticity. As their culture and nationhood were destroyed they were forced to disown themselves and allow the white people to define them and tell them who they were, because they could not know themselves (Kgatla 1994:203).

It is obvious that apartheid was an attack on the very identity of Black people in South Africa. Though it is true that people of colour have suffered because of Western domination in other countries, in South Africa it had the force of law and was particularly brutal (Kgatla 1994:201).

Perhaps those members of the White minority who supported apartheid thought that they were protecting themselves and civilisation, but in the end their own humanity was diminished because they acted in a way that was less than "they were actually intended to be" by God (von Allmen 1965:70).

The oppressors have suffered a distortion in their humanity by becoming estranged from the oppressed as a result of the abuse of power and inhuman treatment of human beings. They have to become aware of the injustice and oppression of the past regime, and of the damage they suffered as human beings in supporting apartheid policies. Otherwise they will remain locked in a prison of racism, authoritarianism, intolerance and fear (Kritzinger, J.N.J. 1990:43-45).

Engaging in the struggle against the oppression of apartheid was the only way to preserve the integrity of Black peoples' own narrative (Schreiter 1992:34). The struggle, for many, became a "redeeming narrative."

It is only when we discover and embrace a redeeming narrative that we can be liberated from the lie's seductive and cunning power. Discovery and acceptance of a redeeming narrative is not an easy task, but it is a necessary one if we are to be delivered from the effects of violence upon our individual and collective psyches (Schreiter 1992:36).

The redeeming narrative then becomes a source of empowerment for those struggling against the narrative of the lie. Christianity offers a larger narrative to which can be connected the stories of all South Africans so that they might be refracted in the light of Christ to be seen in faith. Seeing the story of South Africa in the light of faith does not diminish the evil perpetrated against the majority of its citizens or the pain endured by so many people. Faith only leads perspective and a way of understanding the past that will make for reconciliation. The liturgy can help us in this task of understanding and reconciliation because:

Cult is the moment and place where on this earth men and world rediscover their original and their ultimate destiny, which is to glorify God. The cult is thus the sphere where men and the world can become once more and actually be what they are intended to be. It renders what all humanity and all creation ought to render, and it is what all humanity and creation ought to be (von Allmen 1965:70).

Rediscovering what we were actually created to be is a lifelong process. It is the process by which our Christian identity is formed. It means confronting the past so that reconciliation becomes possible.

### 7.5.1 What Does Reconciliation Mean?

To reconcile means "to bring together that which belongs together, but which is apart" (Donnelly 1987:39). In the Christian life God always initiates and carries through reconciliation and this is done by the death of Jesus Christ (Schreier 1992:43). In the Pauline corpus we find the Greek word, *katallassein* and its derivatives used by Paul to mean reconciliation. Barclay (1974:166-167) pointed out that in two instances Paul used an intensified form of the word. He used *apokatallassein* in Ephesians 2:16 to explain how Jesus Christ had reconciled Jews and Gentiles and both groups to God. In Colossians 1:21 Paul used this form of the word to tell how Jesus Christ reconciled the whole of creation and all of humanity to God.

There are some important aspects of reconciliation that are brought out by Paul that are useful for our study. First, Paul saw the main work of Christ as restoring the relationship between God and humankind. That relationship was broken by sin; it is now restored because of the death of Christ. Secondly, Paul, when speaking about reconciliation, always says that men and women are being reconciled to God not vice versa. God is always merciful and compassionate, people have to realise that they had to surrender before God's mercy. God is always turned towards humanity awaiting our return. Thirdly, for Paul the instrument of reconciliation is the cross. The mystery of Christ's death changed the hearts of people to be open to the love and mercy of God. Through sin humanity was hardened, closed off from the mercy of God. By his death on the cross Christ changed the hearts of his brothers and sisters. Finally, the ministry of

reconciliation now belongs to the church. The church must work untiringly for reconciliation between men and women and God and between all the members of humanity.

In Ephesians Paul speaks about making "one new humanity" out of the alienated groups. Reconciliation overcomes alienation to create peace and harmony and right relationships (Schreiter 1992:55). This does not mean that reconciliation is an easy process. Schreiter has pointed out that:

We are aware that the oppressor must come to a new place; there must be a turning away from evil ways; there must be repentance. But we often forget that the victim will be in a new place as well. Victims do not just rediscover their humanity; they discover their humanity in a new way. Part of their new way of being human is the astonishing care that victims can provide for their own oppressors, their uncanny ability to help not only other victims, but also their oppressors discover their humanity (Schreiter 1992:56).

In Colossians Paul reflects on reconciliation on the cosmic level. The whole of creation and humanity are meant to live in the harmony God intended from the time of creation. Whenever men and women are willing to be reconciled they share in that cosmic process. Schreiter (1992:59) maintains that to work for reconciliation is to "discover in a new way our own humanity." We are transformed in the process of reconciliation and this process becomes a way of life.

In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (=RP) John Paul II wrote of reconciliation in this way:

Some consider reconciliation as an impossible dream which ideally might become the lever for a true transformation of society. For others, it is to be gained by arduous efforts and therefore a goal to be reached through serious reflection and action. Whatever the case, the longing for sincere and consistent reconciliation is without a shadow of doubt a fundamental driving force in our society, reflecting an irrepressible desire for peace. And it is as strongly so as the factors of division, even though this is a paradox (RP 3).

The pope is reminding the church that efforts at reconciliation must go as deep as the cause of the division. Ultimately, true reconciliation is only possible as a gift

from God (RP 7). "Reconciliation between people is and can only be the fruit of the redemptive act of Christ" (RP 7). It is rooted in our experience of the paschal mystery. This does not mean that the church should be passively waiting for reconciliation to take place because the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to the church (RP 8).

The message of reconciliation has also been entrusted to the whole community of believers, to the whole fabric of the Church, that is to say, the task of doing everything possible to witness to reconciliation and to bring it about in the world (RP 8).

The church begins this ministry of reconciliation by being a reconciled church. The community of faith must be living proof of the grace of reconciliation. Members of the church must spend themselves to promote unity and peace among themselves so that they can witness to the reconciliation which has come as a result of the work of Christ's death (RP 9). The unity and peace experienced as the result of reconciliation is brought about by true conversion. This is precisely why the RCIA places such great importance on signs of conversion. Growth in every area of Christian life is dependent upon the depth of the conversion of the individual. This is why the RCIA is such a significant factor in the formation of people who are called to membership in a church aware of its prophetic function. South Africa is in need of such a church if healing and reconciliation are going to take place among all its people. The experience of God's healing mercy then informs one's whole life and the life of the church. It is out of this experience that the church carries on the ministry of reconciliation in society.

The Church, as a reconciled and reconciling community, cannot forget that at the source of her gift and mission of reconciliation is the initiative, full of compassionate love and mercy, of that God who is love and who out of love created human beings; and he created them so that they might live in friendship with him and in communion with one another (RP 10).

Fidelity to this mission is the test of the authenticity of the church's commitment to reconciliation. Participation in the eucharist, that memorial of Christ's suffering

and death draws the assembly into the work of reconciliation. The community's commitment to being an instrument of reconciliation among people is not simply rooted in political action or commitment to a cause. It is rooted in faith and sharing in the sacrificial action of Christ.

To interpret Jesus' life and death as 'sacrificial' is to say that it is a life and death that was lived out in such a complete self-giving that it opens up for us the way of communion with God and our neighbor in the midst of the brokenness of our lives and of our world (Crockett 1989: 260).

Clearly for Christians it is the sacrifice of Christ that makes possible reconciliation of humanity with God, and between members of the human family. The church is the sacrament, sign and means for reconciliation in the world because of the divine initiative revealed in the saving death of Christ.

RP suggests four general ways of bringing about reconciliation that can be done by all the members of the church. First there is prayer. Regular and sustained intercession for the people of the world, especially those in situations of conflict is the primary means for bringing about reconciliation. The second way is that of preaching. This means that the church openly confronts the causes of division and calls people to conversion. Thirdly there is pastoral action. This requires that the church lead back together those who are estranged and alienated from each other. Finally there is the need to give witness to reconciliation. The church must manifest in its life forgiveness and charity in its very life.

Different situations will call for different forms of response, but in every situation the church must show that it is motivated by the example of Jesus. This is not to adopt a naïve stance towards difficult and complex social situations; it is to take a faith stance which is rooted in the church's experience of reconciliation in Christ, especially in the eucharist.

The eucharist is a community meal. This in itself has social implications, especially when the community that share the meal comes together as the body of Christ. When the meal is celebrated in thanksgiving for the gifts of creation, the community that celebrates it cannot fail to seek justice for all God's creation. We know from scripture that the rule of God is a rule of righteousness and justice. We cannot celebrate the

eucharist, therefore, without translating our worship into discipleship. To celebrate the memorial of the Lord's death until he comes means to accept living under the sign of the cross in this world, identifying with the victims of a fallen creation, and seeking to bring about a transformation of those conditions in society that victimize others (Crockett 1989:262).

Schreier (1992:70-71) contends that if the church is going to be such an agent of transformation then it must develop a spirituality of reconciliation. In such a spirituality reconciliation is likened to healing which takes its own time, but can be fostered and cultivated (Schreier 1992:71). A spirituality of reconciliation, according to Schreier would have three basic attitudes: 1) Members of the church should cultivate an attitude of listening and waiting. The church must listen to the stories of those who have suffered under oppression and wait until a new narrative of truth can be constructed out of the lives of the victims of oppression. 2) Those engaged in a ministry of reconciliation must give attention and compassion to those who suffer. Attention and compassion generate empathy which in turn creates a climate of acceptance and trust. 3) There will need to be an attitude of openness to constructing a new society on new laws and new ways of relating. This newness will need to be rooted in justice so that reconciliation can become a reality. A spirituality of reconciliation will need to find support in the ordinary experience of Christian life if it is to survive the challenges of society. We then ask what are the resources that the church has at her disposal to enrich its mission to be an instrument of reconciliation in the world?

#### **7.5.2 Resources for a Mission of Reconciliation**

The inner life of the church energises it for mission. The church is a storehouse of treasures which need to be reappraised for their true value so that they can be utilised in its mission of reconciliation.

The first resource the church has at its disposal is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Since the time of Pentecost the church has been able to rely on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for guidance. "The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission" (RM 21). The Holy Spirit bestows light and strength on the human race and sows the seeds of the gospel among

people of every race and culture (RM 28). Ultimately it will be the Holy Spirit changing the hearts of people to be open to reconciliation.

The second resource that the church can rely on in its mission of reconciliation is the Word of God. *Dei verbum* 23 (= DV) calls the church "the Bride of the Incarnate Word." This image suggests the intimacy that exists between the Word and the church. The Word is the nourishment for the people of God. It gives direction for the life of the community. The Word of God is the source of the community's shared myth. This Word has the power to shape the world view of the community and challenge it to cross the boundaries of anger, fear and prejudice that obstruct the way to reconciliation. In the mission of reconciliation the Word can be healing, challenging and inspiring to the victims of oppression, the oppressors and the church as it facilitates the process of reconciliation.

The third resource that the church has to carry on its mission of reconciliation is that of the witness of the saints. Many of our ancestors in the faith lived in situations of oppression. The stories of the lives of these men and women can serve as narratives of hope for contemporary victims of oppression. They embodied the spirit of discipleship and hence offer the present day church the witness of their lives as guidance in the mission of reconciliation. Their stories are part of the collective memory of the church (SC 8).

In terms of our study the fourth resource is considered the most important in the work of reconciliation. Ritual can be the church's most powerful means for promoting reconciliation because it provides a context for it to happen in.

The eucharist is the central ritual of the church and because it celebrates humanity's reconciliation to God in and through Christ it is primary to the church's mission of reconciliation. In being gathered together by the Spirit the members of the community are called to live out the reality of their baptismal identity as brothers and sisters in Christ. They do not come as strangers or silent spectators, but as the assembly of God's people (SC 48). Liturgical ritual provides the community with the language and structures to bring people together.

The patterned behavior established in and through ritual activity address both equality/union and difference/distinction.

Participation in ritual fosters group bonding, solidarity, and common performance. It is a statement of commonality, union, shared vision, basic rights and radical equality (Worgul 1989:42).

Furthermore, in ritual participants can learn new behaviours in a non-threatening way. Informed by the Christian myth which reveals Jesus as the reconciler participants are formed to share in his mission. Jesus' dying and rising is presented and celebrated as the root metaphor of Christian life and hence reconciliation. Jesus, the innocent one, the just one, who suffered, but was not bound by death is the source of hope for all who die with him (Schreier 1992:76).

Only in ritual does the assembly have an opportunity to experience *communitas* anew: in the eucharist, but also in healing and anointing services, and communal celebrations of reconciliation. Ritual creates a context where reconciliation is possible because in celebrating the root metaphor which informs our life as God's people we are challenged to live up to our dignity in Christ. This, of necessity, will need to be manifested in the way people live. Catholics and all Christians need to adopt a standard of living that concentrates on needs instead of wants. They must have a simple life style. They need to be involved in redressing issues of injustice. So what I am advocating is not worship detached from life, but life shaped and transformed by the liturgy. Hauerwas & Willimon have advocated that the church as an alternative community take the Sermon on the Mount as its practical programme for Christian living in the world:

There is nothing private in the demands of the Sermon. It is very public, very social in that it depicts the public form by which the colony (the church) shall witness to the world that God really is busy redeeming humanity, reconciling the world to himself in Christ. All Christian ethical issues are therefore, social, political, communal issues (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:92).

The liturgy provides us with that communal context in which we can measure our individual and communal actions to see if they in truth reflect the Sermon on the Mount.

In South Africa the church needs to claim its inner resources with an ever-growing measure of confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to use it as a

minister of reconciliation. The hurt and pain of the apartheid era is deep. The church must be the venue where people are able to tell their stories of pain and struggle against the narrative of the lie. Forgiveness needs to be extended if reconciliation is going to be possible. To forgive the oppressor is nothing less than an act of faith. It is an action that restores one's human dignity. Difficult as it may be, this is the Christian imperative. Reconciliation is a slow process. It cannot happen overnight. The oppression lasted over a century and the wound left by it will take time to heal.

Reconciliation means confronting the past, acknowledging the wrongs and crimes committed, and making restitution in whichever way possible...But reconciliation also means overcoming enmity, the alienation, the foreignness between citizens, and the contradictions which impede and destroy peacemaking. This is indeed more than a political task or programme, and one where the churches will have a major role in the future. Reconciliation is about forgiving the past, and overcoming its evil with a common love for the future (Govender 1995:134-135).

The church, I would argue, can only be an agent of reconciliation and change if it is an alternative community, a community that makes liturgy a priority and struggles with the implications for what it celebrates in liturgy for a just way of living. The paschal mystery of Christ is not superfluous to political action or development work as the country struggles to shape its future. It needs to be central to any reconstruction and development in South Africa. The wounds inflicted by our history are so deep that only by sharing in the mystery of salvation will these wounds be healed and a new society be created, a society that knows that the pain of its history is not the determining factor of its future.

The church, as an alternative community must take a prophetic stance in facing the issues which threaten reconciliation and nation-building in South Africa. The problem is not that the churches have no vision, but that Christians have not undergone a sociopolitical conversion (cf. 3.4.2.2.4) in which they have been led to see that responding to Christ means accepting a moral standard and social responsibility.

One of the issues facing all South Africans and the churches is that of land redistribution. In the initiation process women and men would ideally have become sensitive to social and economic issues that affect the life of the Christian community and the whole country.

### 7.6 The Issue of Land

In September and October 1995 the national, Catholic, weekly newspaper, *The Southern Cross* carried articles which focused an ongoing debate between Minister of Parliament, Fr. Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, and Archbishop Wilfried Napier about the issue of land. They were joined in the debate by Bishop Michael Pascal Rowland.

In an interview with *The Southern Cross* Mkhathshwa said:

We (meaning the Catholic church) do have the resources, and we must reprioritise how we use all the property if we want to make a useful contribution to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (Bruyns 1995:1).

The interviewer noted that Mkhathshwa said that one study showed that the church in KwaZulu-Natal owned more than 7,000 hectares of land (Bruyns 1995:1).

Archbishop Napier argued that the church was redistributing its land and cited cases in the Mariannhill and Dundee Dioceses and the Archdiocese of Durban in which the church was working directly with landless people in redistributing land. The Diocese of Dundee, Archbishop Napier pointed out, was in the process of setting up a land trust in which land would be owned by the community (Bruyns 1995:1).

The land issue challenges the church to act with integrity towards people who were forcibly removed from their land. Saayman (1994:13) has reminded us of the well known fact that "individual land-ownership was quite foreign to Africans." Private ownership is a Western, capitalist concept.

It seems clear that in this process two totally different culture concepts about ownership of land clashed: the western concept, with ...the marketplace as its root metaphor; and the African concept, with its root metaphor of community/communality (Saayman 1994:15).

Botha et al. (1994:29) pointed out that "many black people have long identified the Bible as the medium of exchange that whites used to *purchase the land*." Kritzinger began his essay on a theology of land with the anecdote that is the foundation for the suspicion that some black people have of the Bible:

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us "let us pray." After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible (Kritzinger 1993:176).

The stories surrounding people and their land are clearly significant in South African's history. Land has to do with citizenship as well as ownership. It therefore has to do with identity and a sense of belonging (Kritzinger 1993:177). It also has to do with the issue of stewardship.

Stewardship is rooted in a Judaeo-Christian world view which has been shaped by the scriptures. "The land" is a deeply significant root metaphor for the Jewish people. It is related to God's providential care for them. God promised the Israelites a land that he himself would care for:

The country which you are about to enter and make you own is not like the country of Egypt from which you have come, where, having done your sowing, you had to water the seed by foot, as though in a vegetable garden. No, the country which you are about to enter and make you own is a country of hills and valleys watered by the rain of heaven. Yahweh your God looks after this country, the eyes of Yahweh your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end (Deut. 11:10-12).

The land which Yahweh gave to his people was indeed to be theirs, but they would need always to remember that it came to them as a gift. Brueggemann observed that:

Israel need not be anxious about the land. Yahweh is preoccupied with it on Israel's behalf...Israel lives under gift, not gift anticipated, but gift given. That is its new consciousness and nothing is more radical, especially to landed, empowered people, than to discover they are creatures of gift (Brueggemann 1977:51).

To see land as a gift of God rather than the spoils of conquest (Pakenham 1991:40-71) is a necessary attitude that must be cultivated among Christians in South Africa. Reception of a gift elicits gratitude, not hoarding. Ultimately the land and all creation belongs to God; we have it on loan. Again Francis of Assisi has something to teach us in this respect. He walked lightly through the world, holding on gently to the gifts of creation. His attitude was holistic. He saw himself in relationship to the created world and gave expression to his belief in the *Canticle of Brother Sun* (=CantSun, in Armstrong & Brady 1982:38-39) where he calls the elements of creation his brothers and sisters. There is Brother Sun, Sister Moon and Stars, Brother Fire, Sister Water, and our Sister, Mother Earth (CantSun). If white people in South Africa had such an attitude toward creation there might be an opportunity to frame a new Land Act based on principles of justice. The churches must lead the way in making a more equitable policy of land distribution and redistribution a reality.

Responding to the issue of land is only one area of mission in South Africa to which the church might call newly initiated members. Another form of mission might be to generate new, inculturated rituals which would challenge people to face critical issues of life in the new South Africa from a faith perspective. These rituals would need to be so constructed that they would bring healing and forgiveness to the people of this country. In other words, the RCIA has the power to stimulate the imagination of the church to develop other ritual celebrations as part of its mission of re-evangelisation and restitution. The prayers for the minor exorcisms (cf. 4.3.2) of the RCIA might be used in this connection. Having rediscovered the power of well-planned, Scripturally informed and inculturated ritual in the RCIA, the church could use this form of power to bring about reconciliation by being an alternative community devoted to worship and mission in the South African context.

### 7.7 Summary

In this chapter I have considered the church's mission in the world. I have shown how that mission grows out of the liturgy and is nourished by a repeated

experience of the church's ritual. I also showed how the RCIA functions in the life of the community, especially in identity formation.

Next a question was asked regarding the church's role in nation-building. I argued that though the church's primary function is to build up the kingdom through spiritual means it nevertheless contributes to the nation in a variety of ways. The church defends human dignity, offers service to the community through education, health care, social work and various other services, but its most important contribution is in being an alternative community.

The church as an alternative community performs a prophetic function in society. By not getting involved with the structures of power it allies itself with the powerless and voiceless in society. It then is able to give a kenotic witness to truth. I used the example of the early Franciscans as a community which made a voluntary choice to do away with status incumbencies for the sake of the kingdom.

I presented an objection to the alternative community raised by Balcomb (1993). After considering his objections I concluded that Balcomb has misunderstood the concept of alternative community because he argued that proponents of this concept stressed the uniqueness of the community rather than its prophetic function. This, we argued, missed the very basic point that only in maintaining its distinctive quality could the church be prophetic.

Then I looked at the challenge of being an alternative community. We outlined the church's past failures in this regard. I used the insights of Rahner (1982) to reflect on the church, as a church of sinners. This led us not to despair, but to greater gratitude for the mercy of God.

I also demonstrated how the RCIA is able to help form people to see life in the church as life in an alternative community that plays a prophetic role in shaping society in South Africa. I pointed out that because the RCIA leads people through a systematic reflection on the community's myth it has the power to facilitate their response to the call to conversion. It also supports a sustained effort at being prophetic because people establish a new set of relationships in the RCIA process based on each person's dignity in Christ. This radical equality and service orientation give a strong witness to the world. I stressed the need for inculturation

and proposed a possible plan of action to inculturate the RCIA in a South African context.

I then moved to a consideration about the relationship between the church and the kingdom. In that section I dwelt on the role the church plays in bringing about the kingdom in its fullness. We saw that the kingdom is not a concept, but a person, Jesus of Nazareth. The church's task is to reveal him and his teaching to the nations of the world.

In the next section I focused on the church's mission of reconciliation. I stressed this aspect of the church's mission because of the history we are working out of as a country and the challenges of building a new society. I stressed that reconciliation is a process which the church can facilitate because it has the resources for healing, challenging and inspiring people with a new vision for humanity. I maintain that the most powerful way to work for reconciliation is to be a community of reconciliation. This is a challenge which faces all Christian churches.

In the following section I reflected on how liturgy is a school which prepares the church for its mission in the world. I stressed the connection between liturgy and life. Liturgy, we said, prepares us to live in the world. It helps to shape our identity as brothers and sisters of Christ, people dedicated to the kingdom.

The land issue was then taken up as an example of how the Christian perspective on land ownership and care for the land needs to be brought to bear on the formulation of the government's land policy. This presents a special challenge for White South Africans and the church needs to take a leading role in calling them to a Christian vision for the use of and respect for the land.

In the concluding chapter I will evaluate the theoretical framework of our study. I will name some areas which could be the subject of further research for liturgical missiology.

## Chapter Eight

### Conclusion

*We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.*

—Archbishop Oscar Romero

#### 8.0 The Purpose of the Chapter

In the first chapter I said that the problem that would be addressed in this study is the neglect of liturgy by missiology. I argued for what I have called a *liturgical missiology*. I used the RCIA as an example of how liturgy can form people for participation in the mission of Christ and the church. I chose to use the insights of some cultural anthropologists and ritual theorists as tools for understanding what can happen to a person who enters into the liturgy through faith-filled participation. The role of ritual clearly emerged as one of the key factors in identity formation and formation for mission. Through these means I demonstrated that catechesis in the RCIA is not primarily informational, but transformational.

In my opening chapter I also said that in this final chapter I would evaluate the theoretical framework I used and identify further priorities for research in *liturgical missiology*. My purpose here is to fulfil those assertions. I am well aware that I have only opened up the possibility of doing missiology from within the context of liturgy. I realise too, that because of the interdisciplinary nature of missiology (Luzbetak 1988:14) it can be done out of various contexts, but my conviction remains. Since liturgy is *theologia prima par excellence* it needs to be a key source for doing missiology.

#### 8.1 Evaluating the Theoretical Framework

Kavanagh (1982:44) correctly stated that all liturgy is fundamentally rite. It is a complex of ritual actions, words, symbols, gestures and movements that bring a community (for liturgical ritual is essentially communal) in touch with the sources

of its identity as a people. It has a cohesive power which helps to bind people together as it builds a common tradition (Schreier 1985:118). It has the power to create group boundaries and to break them down. Ritual defines both exclusion and inclusion. Ritual, as I have pointed out, has been identified as "one of the central, sustaining, and pervasive components of social communities" (Worgul 1984:142). For this reason ritual must be taken seriously in missiology.

#### 8.1.1 Victor Turner's Contribution

I used V. Turner's (1969) theory of the ritual process as a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of conversion and formation for mission which are facilitated by the RCIA process. This analysis of the tripartite process of separation, liminality and reaggregation provided me with insights into the cultural and social phenomena associated with rites of passage. Most helpful was his description of liminality and the change in social status out of which *communitas* arises. This theory of anti-structure versus social structure provided me with a key to understand how identity formation takes place in the liminal state.

Through his research into the ritual patterns of the Ndembu of Zambia, V. Turner (1972a:407-408) found that liminality gives rise to spontaneous forms of *communitas* in which myth has a formative effect and helps to shape a community's world view or vision of life. Unfortunately he did not specifically study liminality in a religious ritual context. In fact, he eventually turned from interest in religious ritual to the arts which he saw as the inheritors of the ritual dimensions of life in modern society (Driver 1991:231). This only points to the need for cultural anthropologists, missiologists and liturgists to devote themselves to research into religious rituals. This is a necessary area of research if missiologists are going to gain insights into how ritual is related to myth and world view and how they in turn affect one's understanding of mission.

V. Turner's theory about the rites of passage helped me to understand and apply that theory to the RCIA. It provided me with valuable insights into some very human aspects of the initiation process. Too many born Catholics do not appreciate the pain that catechumens may experience in making the choice to respond to the grace of conversion by joining the Catholic church. They are not acquainted with the research of cultural anthropologists into group boundaries and

identity formation and rites of passage. Nor is there knowledge of how to apply such research to liturgical ritual. This is probably due to the fact that in the past cultural anthropologists concentrated "on 'exotic' cultures with vastly differing rituals and religions. The rituals on their own doorsteps have been overlooked" (Stringer 1989:503).

As valuable as V. Turner's insights were to this study I also had to utilise the research of another cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), and ritual theorists Bell (1992), Driver (1991) and Grimes (1993). These contributors were able to enrich V. Turner's theory regarding rites of passage. V. Turner's work alone can provide a framework for studying rites of passage, but I found that the ritual theories of Bell, Driver and Grimes gave me principles by which to understand how ritual works and its importance as an instrument for communicating meaning, world view, values, boundaries, and identity.

#### **8.1.2 Geertz, Bell, Driver, and Grimes**

In trying to understand ritual Geertz used a phrase borrowed from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description" (Geertz 1973:6-7) to name what he considers as a fundamental component in any study of culture. By this phrase Geertz meant that the researcher would have to develop a participant's perspective, rather than that of an "accidental tourist" (Ostdiek 1993:41) toward the ritual being celebrated. From the position of an "insider" the researcher might achieve a "thick description" of a specific ritual. Geertz believes that it is only from this perspective that one can begin to understand and analyse the enactment of a ritual. The interpretation given to the ritual enactment might then lead the researcher to draw together some conclusions about a specific ritual that might be applicable to a general theory.

Schreier (1985:54) has pointed out that Geertz's primary interest lies in the semiotics of culture. My own interest in Geertz is in his stress on the importance of the use of metaphor. As I have pointed out above (cf. 5.3.1) the RCIA gives expression to some of the fundamental root metaphors of Christianity. Since ritual gives expression to root metaphors missiologists might want to be concerned about religious rituals to find out how root metaphors of Christianity find expression in ritual celebrations. Interest in religious rituals is vital because the deepest values of a culture are expressed in them (Luzbetak 1988:269).

Furthermore, evangelisation might be carried out more effectively through ritual since symbols and symbolic action engage the whole person unlike solely verbal presentations that tend to be more cerebral (Luzbetak 1988:385). Missiologists would also need to study how ritual acts as a vehicle for the communication of the Christian myth and therefore as a means of effective evangelisation.

The ritual theorists Bell, Driver, and Grimes all have enriched my understanding of ritual as performative. They expressed what the Roman Catholic Church has taught for centuries, namely that the liturgy does what is intended by the doing of it. It has, in anthropological terms, performative power. Driver (1991:215) stressed that even though ritual must be rooted in the past "its performative quality constitutes the immediacy of its power in the present." Luzbetak (1988:382) cautioned that when contextualisation becomes too explicit a sense of mystery is lessened and the "motivation associated with the mysterious" is stifled. Rituals can then become trite, too obvious. It is in this area that Grimes' principles for healthy ritual (cf. 6.3) could prove helpful to those who are creating rituals today.

The ritual theorists have made us aware that ritual needs certain conditions if it is to do its work. In other words the power of ritual can be diminished by those who perform it. Ritual needs space, time, and proper rhythm. Ritual needs a space that gives priority to the ritual subjects (the assembly) and that allows for some movement. Participants need to be able to experience "the synchronic interaction of feeling, thought, and bodily movement in their concrete unity" (Driver 1991:84). Ritual needs liminal time (Driver 1991:214). This means that the time must be suited to the ritual action. It should be neither too long nor too short. People need time to be engaged in the ritual process and for this to happen, if we take V. Turner's tripartite model seriously, they need to experience some separation before liminality can give rise to *communitas*.

Ritual also has a rhythm which must be respected. To be engaged in ritualising is serious work, work marked by ritual play and freedom. Ritual's rhythm is imposed by its order and this order frees one from the uncertainty of measureless spontaneity. If the ritual subjects are going to experience separation, liminality, and reaggregation then the rhythm of ritual must be kept. Ritual calls

participants out of themselves to enter into mystery, myth, and symbol. Participants need to have what Bell (1992:107) calls a "practical mastery" of ritual. If one understands that ritual works through symbol, repetition, myth, and prescriptive language then one begins to value the experience of ritual.

Grimes (1993:19-22) made an important observation about the role of symbols in ritual. He argued that symbols in ritual cannot be defined simply by functional or semantic theories. For Grimes, symbols do not only refer to some other reality or meaning, they also evoke meaning. They evoke meaning, he says, because they "focalize attention and evoke memory; they do not leave us with religious ideas or political statements that constitute their meaning" (Grimes 1993:20-21). They lead participants beyond the superficial to look deeply at their lives.

Symbols leave ritual participants free to discover their meaning. They convey not explicit knowledge, but tacit knowledge which Grimes (1993:21) calls "preconscious, implicit and embodied." If Grimes (1993:22) is correct in saying that ritual is "play, performance and practice," then liturgical ritual invites participants to begin to practice, to rehearse what it means to be people of the kingdom through the enactment of symbolic actions that call them *to remember* who they are as God's people. It is in this sense that ritual functions as "the memory of a faith community" (Luzbetak 1988:383).

This raises an important question about the role of symbol and myth in identity formation. What effect can "forgetting" what we have been called to be as a Christian people have on our response to the world, on our call to be church, on our responsibility for mission, on our very identity? How might "remembering" through myth and symbol in a ritual context shape who we are as a people? Missiologists need to grapple with these questions because of their implications for how mission is carried out. They would need to have at least some sense of the role of ritual in identity formation and mission to begin to understand how this is carried out especially in liturgical ritual.

Missiologists are challenged by the insights of ritual theorists to develop models of mission that are rooted in a healthy understanding of ritual and symbol. They might explore the relationship between ancient symbols used in Christian

liturgy and the cultural symbols of people in various contexts to see how they influence one another. They would then need to assess the extent to which people live out of a given symbol system. This would give an indication of how deeply the Christian myth and its attendant symbols and rituals have taken root among people.

Shorter (1988:35) maintained that there can be a symbiosis of different symbol systems. I would agree, but missiologists would need to study how this symbiosis occurs and to what extent Christianity affects the symbol system of a given culture. In South Africa it would seem important for missiologists to explore symbols of repentance and reconciliation in the various cultural groups and perhaps work with liturgists to create rituals of penance and reconciliation as a means of healing the nation. This would root reconciliation in the ritual life of people and bring it to a deeper level that moves beyond mere political initiatives at reconciliation.

The theoretical framework which I chose proved to be helpful for my study. It forced me to reflect on the anthropological dimensions of a Catholic liturgical rite and analyse the RCIA to see how these dimensions are operative in the initiation process. These reinforced what I had intuitively learned from my own experience of the liturgy. The insights of the social scientists noted above helped me to uncover the missiological issues which emerge from the implementation of the RCIA. The anthropological approaches to ritual opened me to possible areas for missiological study and research. They also confirmed my insight that missiology needs to be done out of a liturgical context. Still there are dangers in this approach.

In emphasising the importance of ritual in understanding and celebrating liturgy in a way that empowers people for mission a community might become so concerned about *how* a ritual is celebrated that they can forget *who* they are celebrating in Christian ritual. They can fall into a contemporary form of rubricism which also can obscure the power of the ritual. Liturgy would then be reduced to performance instead of being performative.

Another possible danger to a concentration on ritual is that a community can become inward looking -- ecclesiocentric -- instead of being turned outward towards the world. When this happens mission suffers. Liturgy and mission should

exist in a synergistic relationship so that new life and energy are constantly being infused into the church's liturgy and mission. Without such a synergistic relationship liturgy could become meaningless ritualism and mission could become simply humanitarian activism.

As missiologists explore the correlation between the experience of liturgical ritual and mission these seminal insights hopefully will bear fruit. The challenge is for missiologists from the Roman Catholic tradition as well as those of other faith traditions to revisit the liturgy as source of faith and mission.

## 8.2 Research Priorities for Liturgical Missiology

Besides the missiological issues surrounding ritual there are still other issues which have emerged in the course of this study. I now want to name these issues so that missiologists might use them as a springboard for further exploration into the relationship that exists between liturgy and missiology. I believe that they could have profound implications for how the church engages in mission.

### **8.2.1 Inculturation**

In the post-synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (=EIA), John Paul II drew attention to the fact that on several occasions during the Synod for Africa (1994) the question of inculturation was raised. He noted that it is "a requirement for evangelization" (EIA 59). The pope also clearly pointed out the two dimensions of inculturation as understood within the Catholic Church:

Inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity" and, on the other, "the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures" (EIA 59).

In the same article the pope pointed out that inculturation is an "urgent priority" (EIA 59). This seems to signal a change in the pope's thinking about inculturation and is evidence that he is listening to other members of the church whom he meets as he travels around the world. In RM he took a more cautious approach when he described inculturation as "a slow journey, which accompanies the whole of missionary life" (RM 52).

Inculturation is clearly vital to the church's life. It is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation and linked to the paschal mystery. The document singles out the kenotic element of the paschal mystery as the way that Christ and his disciples are to encounter cultures. The pope also noted that inculturation is the work of the Holy Spirit. John Paul II wrote:

Thanks to the outpouring and action of the Spirit, who draws gifts and talents into unity, all the peoples of the earth when they enter the Church live a new Pentecost, profess in their own tongue the one faith in Jesus, and proclaim marvels that the Lord has done for them. The Spirit, who on the natural level is the true source of wisdom of peoples, leads the Church with a supernatural light into knowledge of the whole truth. In her turn the Church takes on the values of different cultures, becoming the "sponsa ornata monilibus suis," "the bride who adorns herself with her jewels" (cf. Is. 61:10) (EIA 61).

The point being made is that inculturation is a reciprocal process in which the church and cultures are changed. Both benefit in the process because both are led to deeper life in Christ. This happens through evangelisation and inculturation.

Drawing on the discussions of the synod the pope has stated that the purpose of evangelisation is "transforming humanity from within and making it new" (EIA 55). The work of evangelisation, John Paul asserted, is to bring the hearer to conversion and to baptism so that there can be a "complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith." (EIA 73). The pope's conviction is that if evangelisation is to truly lead people to Christ then the witness of the Christian community must be genuine and rooted in the Gospel (EIA 77). He framed the challenge of inculturation in terms of how fully and deeply members of the church have appropriated Gospel values as their own.

The challenge of inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values (EIA 78).

The challenge means that the peoples of Africa need to be equipped to evaluate the values inherent in their various cultures and that they maintain a countercultural stance toward their cultures based on Gospel values. There is also

a need for the church to help its members judge the value and integrity of their witness. The church, as Kritzinger (1988:281-294) so powerfully demonstrated, must help people confront and destroy the "idols" they have erected which compromise their Christian witness.<sup>1</sup> Driver saw ritual as the ground out of which moral integrity springs:

A ritual is moral territory, sometimes secular, sometimes religious, that has been staked out. Ritual marks the boundary at which wilderness, moral desert, or profane life stop (Driver 1991:47).

Ritual sets moral limits. It reminds participants of their identity and dignity. It also puts before them the demands of the Christian myth. That Christians do not live up to their identity and dignity suggests that the myth has not been proclaimed and ritualised in the liturgy in a way that confronts the shadows of their lives so that they can truly be an alternative community.

Unfortunately liturgy is only mentioned as one of the areas of Catholic life that needs to be inculturated (EIA 62). John Paul II did not single out the liturgy as the means at the church's disposal for supporting the continued growth of people in faith. The pope laid stress on mission and then baptism as the culmination of the process of evangelisation, but he failed to make mention of how life in the community of faith is sustained through participation in the liturgy. This is surprising because in the CCC there is an appreciation for the importance of the liturgy and how it does its work through signs and symbols:

A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ (CCC 1145).

If the pedagogy used by God is expressed in signs and symbols then it would seem that if God wants to communicate with his people he would continue to make

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kritzinger (1988: 281-294) for a fuller discussion of the "idols" created by white South Africans. His treatment of this topic illustrates the need for ongoing conversion and re-evangelisation of the church in South Africa. In RM 58 John Paul II emphasised a similar point when he wrote that the church's mission "consists essentially in offering people not to 'have more' but to 'be more,' by awakening their consciences through the Gospel."

himself known in this way. Inculturation of the faith and of the liturgy would then indeed need to be done in terms of cultural symbols. Again the CCC makes an important point in this regard:

The great religions of mankind witness, often impressively, to this cosmic and symbolic meaning of religious rites. The liturgy of the Church presupposes, integrates and sanctifies elements from creation and human culture, conferring on them the dignity of signs of grace, of the new creation in Jesus Christ (CCC 1149).

If inculturation is going to be more than a fascinating concept that is discussed in the halls of universities or pastoral centres then missiologists will need to articulate the relationship that exists between mission, liturgy and inculturation and how this relationship lies at the very heart of the identity of the church. In EIA the pope did not offer any insights into how an inculturated liturgy might form people for mission. Yet it seems obvious that only when the liturgy is inculturated will it have the power to form people to participate in the mission of Christ.

Though I have used EIA as the foundation for my reflections on inculturation I in no way mean to suggest that inculturation is the sole responsibility of the local churches on the African continent. The faith must be inculturated everywhere, and it must always be in dialogue with human cultures.

### 8.2.2 Ecclesiology

The restoration of the catechumenate, liturgist Ralph Keifer (1974:402) observed, was indeed "a revolution quite without precedent" in the Catholic Church.

The RCIA, like LG, enunciated a vision of the church that starts not with the hierarchy, but with the community of faith, the baptised members of the assembly. The RCIA places the responsibility of initiation squarely in the hands of the community.

The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an

example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously (RCIA 4).

At the celebration of the Easter Vigil each year the people of God ritualise their mission of initiation. Hughes has said it more poetically:

With every Amen that we utter in the stillness of an Easter night, we forge relationships, we declare ecclesial identity, we embrace a mission. Our Amens are not just words of assent to what has been said or done, they are promises we have to keep (Hughes 1994:3).

In embracing the mission of initiation the church confirms its identity and is "carrying out its apostolic mission" (RCIA 41). It is keeping its promises. The RCIA embodies all the models of the church developed by Dulles (1974) to describe the nature of the church, but the predominant model of the church that finds expression in the RCIA is that of a community. In the introduction to the rite the role of the community is mentioned no less than seven times.<sup>2</sup> Yet this rite of the institutional church celebrates the church as sacrament, herald and servant. All these models of the church find expression in the RCIA.

Vatican II linked the church's identity as the people of God with mission by stating unequivocally that "the church is missionary by its very nature (AG 2). The church is meant to be directed outward, existing for the sake of the world. This is what is communicated about the church through the celebration of the Easter Vigil which is the church's ritual of initiation *par excellence*. In fact, Kavanagh (1978:135) maintains that not to celebrate baptism in this paschal context is to diminish the faithful's sense of identity as the church and its mission to the world. He also argued strongly that:

Here the Church's mission is constantly being set at the most fundamental level. Here the obligations to service and the limits on power and authority are established for all ministries within the Church, ordained or not. Initiation defines simultaneously both the Christian and the Church, and the definition is unsubordinated to any other except the gospel itself, no matter from what source other definitions may originate (Kavanagh 1978:145).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. RCIA 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 25, and 35.

I would insist along with Kavanagh that it is baptism that gives us a paschal ecclesiology. Rooted in their baptismal identity the members of the church are drawn into an experience of unity that takes them beyond ethnic, racial, national, or cultural unity, to a unity established in baptism. As baptised members of the church who meet weekly around the table of the Lord they "remember" their identity as the ones who have been plunged into the waters of baptism and have died with Christ and now live in him and his church. They are drawn into unity "in Christ." The whole initiation process is the paradigm for living as a Christian with a sense of mission to the world (Kavanagh 1978:162).

The RCIA not only addresses the question of the ministry of the community, but also the other ministries to which the community calls individuals to service. These ministries include the traditional roles of priest, catechist and sponsor, but have also been extended to include people responsible for liturgy preparation, spiritual direction, and ministry outreach. This list is not exhaustive. Depending on the size of the parish and the number of catechumens there may be an RCIA co-ordinator and other ministries connected with the ministry of initiation. Individual members of the parish also give witness to the catechumens by the way they live their Christian lives.

The ecclesiology of the RCIA places responsibility for initiation and mission on the local church. It is rooted in the liturgical life of the church and has a definite baptismal character. This vision of church reflects the teaching of Vatican II in which the church is defined as the people of God. The work of initiation establishes "a symbiotic growth between the community being established and the community already established" (Worgul 1976:168). In other words it is generative of new life and a spirit of renewal that befits a "pilgrim people" (LG 48).

The challenge for missiologists is to probe the implications of this ecclesiology because it is both baptismal and missionary and thus basic to the church's very identity. They would then have a vehicle for developing a theology of mission in which the relationship between liturgy and mission would be made explicit.

A second research priority for liturgical missiology in this regard would be that of examining how participation in worship affects the way in which religious

communities<sup>3</sup> engage in mission. Researchers might also study how liturgy reflects ecclesiology and the formation of the community's world view and sense of identity. Finally, uncovering a community's root metaphors to see how they are expressed in their liturgy and how they shape that community's model of mission would not only be an interesting study, but it would provide the church with valuable information which would challenge all faith traditions to look seriously at the role of ritual in their faith life.

### 8.2.3 Ecumenism

In the concluding chapter of Senn's (1993:149) book on liturgy and evangelism he pointed out that by the fourth century the church developed a "highly articulated ritual process" for initiation. In the Roman Catholic Church that ritual process is embodied in the RCIA. Senn, though a Lutheran, considers the RCIA the best example of a church's concern about the initiation of new members (1993:137). He gave it such high praise because:

It takes seriously the arduous task of honing the embryonic faith of those who seek "the living God" by channeling it into a community of faith where it may be given articulation and engaged in a life of service and witness (Senn 1993:137).

All the Christian churches, through the WCC, have been challenged to take seriously the ministry of initiation and its ritual celebration. The WCC's document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (=BEM)<sup>4</sup> prepared by its Faith and Order Commission, urged churches to be sensitive to the use of symbols and symbolic actions. In regard to the use of symbolic gestures to manifest the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism the document states:

As was the case in the early centuries, the gift of the Spirit in baptism may be signified in additional ways; for example, by the sign of the laying on of hands, and by anointing or chrismation. The very sign of the cross recalls the promised gift of the Holy Spirit who is the instalment and pledge of what is yet to come when God has fully redeemed those whom he has made his

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term "religious communities" not in the usual way it is understood by Roman Catholics, but in the way it was used by Kritzingner (1995:7) as "concrete religious groups."

<sup>4</sup> BEM is also sometimes referred to as the Lima document.

own (Eph 1:13-14). The recovery of such vivid signs may be expected to enrich the liturgy (BEM 19).

The crafters of BEM exhibit a care and concern about widening the ritual experience of liturgical participants through the use of symbols. The last sentence of the BEM article expresses a much needed conviction if the power of the liturgy is going to be unshackled from the chains of minimalism, the unwarranted fear of the use of symbols and a cerebral approach to liturgical celebrations. When this happens the churches will find that their liturgy is enriched and they will have discovered that:

Symbols mediate between experience and reality, between subjective and the objective, and between the cognitive and the affective. Through them human experience is brought to expression and so to discovery...Because symbol systems grow and develop, their use needs to be regarded critically. They do not dispense one from thought, but give rise to it and demand it (Power 1984:172).

Any fear of the use of ritual and symbol will hopefully be displaced by the positive experience of coming in closer contact with the mysteries of faith in the liturgy.

Spinks (1995) has been critical of some of the efforts made by various churches<sup>5</sup> to revise their rites of baptism. In regard to the anointing with chrism at baptism he said that "it is highly questionable as to whether any can be viewed as making the sign 'vivid' " (Spinks 1995:313-314). He contended that the nearest to such a description is the rite of the Roman Catholics. Most texts, he pointed out, make gestures and other signs optional. In this matter he judged that the *Alternative Service Book* of the Church of England was the worst. He was critical because the rite made even the sign of the cross after the renunciations before baptism optional! He considered this a mistake because the sign of the cross brings the candidate into direct contact with the central mystery of the Christian faith.

Stookey (1995:290) who studied the rites of baptism from the Lutherans Methodists, and Episcopalians concluded that these three churches take a cautious approach to the use of symbols. The Methodists, coming from a less developed

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<sup>5</sup> Spinks (1995:312) evaluated the baptismal liturgies of the following churches: Roman Catholic, Church of England, Church of Ireland, the Episcopal Church in the USA, the Methodist Church in Great Britain, United Reformed Church, Church of Scotland, Reformed Church of Scotland, Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod.

liturgical tradition, are the most cautious. Their rite, Spinks (1995:290) has pointed out, insists that oil, new garments, and candles are secondary to the waters of the font. As true as this is it ignores the fact that human beings need symbols to convey faith and to express faith.

Thurian and Wainwright (1983) collected the liturgical texts and rituals for baptism and the eucharist from various churches to demonstrate that there is some measure of ecumenical convergence in how these rites are celebrated. Their work is a direct result of the BEM document. Thurian and Wainwright have thus provided the Christian churches with some initial rites which need to be studied and taken seriously. Continued work needs to be done at the ecumenical level to make churches aware of the great value that ritual, symbol, and myth play a major role in identity formation and faith development, and I would argue, a sense of mission.

Liturgical missiology could be a field of ecumenical co-operation where efforts are made at scholarly research which supports the need for a healthy ritual life as a part of every church. Liturgical missiologists might draw on the work of the cultural anthropologists and make the necessary application of these theories to both liturgy and strategies for mission. Scholars from various Christian traditions might also take specific rites of their respective churches and demonstrate how these rites have implications for mission.

The catechumenate belongs to all the Christian churches. It stands as a witness to church unity before it was shattered. It challenges every church to critically examine its practice of initiation to see if it reflects the best of the ancient church's initiation rites. I am convinced that if as churches we attended to the work of initiation we would form people with a profound sense of mission. Research into this area, I think, would challenge liturgical missiologists for many years to come.

### 8.3 Towards a Missiology Rooted in the Liturgy

Liturgy, because it is embodied in ritual, is enacted in the realm of the symbolic. Christian liturgy, at its deepest level, is a response to the divine initiative

to communicate with the people God has chosen as his own. A people chosen to be a light to the nations (LG 1).

Mission is the church's outreach to the world. It is the reason for the church's existence. Mission is the church saying to all people: "Open the doors to Christ" (RM 3)! Liturgy informs and shapes mission because it celebrates the mystery of Christ which the church proclaims to the nations.

The purpose of this entire study was to demonstrate the neglect of liturgy by missiology and the need for both liturgy and mission to become partners in the proclamation of the kingdom. We can no longer afford to see liturgy as simply being concerned with the inner life of the church while mission is concerned about the church's life in the world. Both liturgy and mission are intrinsic to the very life of the church. I have used the RCIA as an example of how liturgy can be instrumental in forming people in a sense of mission because catechesis in the RCIA is a holistic process which is rooted in the scriptures, the liturgy and the missionary nature of the church. Every rite of the church might be examined for this same potential to form people for mission.

For me, this whole study has been more than an academic endeavour. It has been an opportunity for me to concretely and systematically analyse what I have experienced and what I have known intuitively since my first experience of the formative power of the liturgy. My sense of the call to mission was born out of my experience of the liturgy. For this reason I conclude this study with the words of Aidan Kavanagh who, reflecting on the purpose of the RCIA, articulated the purpose of the whole of the church's liturgy:

Its purpose is to generate a People shot through with a style worthy of the gospel, with a finely disciplined humility before God's grace in Christ -- a Spirited People irresistible in the splendid catholicity of its human and divine scope, unconquerable in the fulfillment of its mission in the world (Kavanagh 1978: 201).

*Appendix One*

**Questionnaire on the Implementation of the RCIA**

November, 1993

Name of Parish \_\_\_\_\_

Please state the number of catechumens and candidate that have participated in the RCIA in your parish.

Catechumens: 1989-90 \_\_\_\_\_ 1990-91 \_\_\_\_\_ 1991-92 \_\_\_\_\_ 1992-93 \_\_\_\_\_

Candidates: 1989-90 \_\_\_\_\_ 1990-91 \_\_\_\_\_ 1991-92 \_\_\_\_\_ 1992-93 \_\_\_\_\_

Do you celebrate the Rite of Acceptance at the regular Sunday Mass? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you celebrate the minor rites of exorcism and blessing? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you celebrate the Rite of Sending Catechumens/Candidates to the Cathedral for the Rite of Election? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If not, do you celebrate the Rite of Election in the parish? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you celebrate the scrutinies? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you involve the catechumens/candidates in apostolic mission? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you use the dismissal after the homily on Sundays? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you baptise by immersion? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Are you serious about mystagogia? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Are any of the former catechumens now sponsors? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do the newly initiated become involved in parish life? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Is Holy Saturday morning kept as a day of retreat for the catechumens/candidates?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Any other comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please use the back side of this paper to indicate if you notice any increased sense of mission on the part of the newly initiated as they have experienced the RCIA.

## *Appendix Two*

### *Interview Questions about the Implementation of the RCIA*

October, 1994

Name of Parish \_\_\_\_\_

1. Over the years, have you made any changes in how you initiate new members? If so, what were they?
2. Have the numbers remained stable over the years 1989-1993?
3. What is your greatest difficulty in implementing the RCIA?
4. Do you see any difference in the attitudes of the newly initiated from those of the parish-at-large?
5. What would say are the strengths of the RCIA?
6. What do you see as weaknesses of the RCIA?
7. Have you reconsidered using the dismissal of the catechumens during the liturgy?
8. Has any effort been made at inculturating the RCIA in your parish?

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