

# Unit Five: Initiation

## 1. The Context of Vatican II

The ancient pattern of Christian Initiation disintegrated with results that lasted until the Council:

New Testament                      Mid-20th Cent

Proclamation	-----	
Conversion	-----	
Water & Spirit	Water	} Instruction
Integration	penance	
	communion	
	anointing (integration?)	

Notes:

1. The catechumenate preparatory to Baptism ceased.
2. Formation in and through worship was replaced by religious instruction
3. Initiation, originally in two paschal phases (baptism-confirmation: eucharist) has become four sacraments loosely based on personality development, knit together by religious instruction
4. (Complete) initiation of infants delayed until the 'age of discretion'  
i.e. the church gave up the practice of initiating infants

### **Background to the 2nd Vatican Council:**

(a combination of scholarship and pastoral experience)

1. De-institutionalisation of the church
2. Debates on infant baptism (largely protestant)
3. Advance in patristic studies (pre-Augustine)
4. Restoration of the Paschal Vigil

## 2. The Reforms of Vatican II

(Source documents; Liturgy Constitution (SC); Constitution on the Church (LG); Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (AG); Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (PO); Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops (CD))

### **The 'norm' of initiation**

The notion of 'Christian Initiation';

1. Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist are 'the sacraments of Christian Initiation (P02 §4, AG14 §2) They form 'a whole' (SC71)
2. The catechumenate is part of Christian Initiation (AG14); to be restored (SC64).

### **The Council's norm:**

Solemn sacramental initiation, especially at the Paschal Vigil, preceded by a catechumenate of lengthy duration; i.e. initiation includes formation

*The Catholic Church has recovered the ancient pattern:*

- proclamation of the Gospel
- Conversion as a response

- *the bath of the new covenant and outpouring of the Spirit*
- *life of engagement in the community*

*This implies:*

*Candidates must be capable of personal 'change of heart' (metanoia)*

### **3. The RCIA**

The governing form is the full version:

#### **PART ONE**

Initiation is a gradual process of steps and stages (RCIA 6) that takes place within the community of the faithful (RCIA 4). The community has a duty and responsibility (RCIA 9). Since a person's growth in faith cannot be determined a priori, (RCIA 20), the liturgical order is flexible (RCIA 5)

- *steps lead to periods of enquiry and growth*
- *periods prepare for steps (RCIA, p.14)*

*Note: important to study the stages and steps through which faith grows and is celebrated in ritual; especially the use of symbol in ritual.*

*See; Peter Ball, **Adult Believing**. London, Mowbray, 1988*

#### **PART TWO**

Adapted schemes for particular pastoral circumstances, especially:

- Initiation of children of catechetical age
- Rites for those already baptised (whether Catholic or not)  
(possible development/adaptation of rites for those already baptised)

#### **Critical issues**

- *RCIA is a set of rites to do with initiation. Hence the emphasis on evangelisation, conversion, formation in faith*
- *RCIA is worship*
- *not a programme, not a course*

#### **Pastoral issues for the parish:**

- *Formation in faith*
- *Ministry and service*

### **4. Rite of Baptism of Children**

- Chief issues to be addressed:

1. Who is the rite for?
2. Preparation
3. Postbaptismal formation

- Implications of the RCIA?

- Critical pastoral issues:

delay or refusal; parents 'non satis credentes' (of insufficient faith)

- Study of the rite: Outside/within Mass

### **5. Confirmation**

Chief issues to be addressed:

#### **1. The meaning of the sacrament**

*Apostolic Constitution and Introduction to the Rite*

*RCIA; CIGI; Code of Canon Law*

- *Confirmation is some kind of 'plus value' to Baptism; but this is nowhere*

*identified*

- *Baptism and Confirmation are ordered to Eucharist. Confirmation is not a reaffirmation of a previous baptism. It is not the ritualisation of a key moment or period in the human life cycle (viz. adolescence)*

## **2. Solutions to current pastoral problems**

*Any solution to the confirmation problem must express more clearly the proper relation of confirmation to the whole of Christian Initiation (SC7I) The appropriate age for candidates will then be clearer*

[For further study:

History of Initiation (especially Roman Church, and the process of disintegration (see above); Detailed study of RCIA]

## ***Documentation and Bibliography***

**Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults:** A Study Book. London: St Thomas More Centre, 1988

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