

# ANCIENT CATECHESIS: APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

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## I. About this workshop

### Some Sources:

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

Edward Yarnold, S.J., *Cyril of Jerusalem*. (London: Routledge, 2000)

Michel Dujarier, trans. by Edward J. Haasl, *A History of the Catechumenate*. (New York: Sadlier, 1979)

## II. Catechesis and the New Testament

Instances of *catecheo* (*κατηχεω*)

Luke 1.3-4

I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which **you have been instructed**. (*katechethas*)

Acts 18.24-25

Apollos was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. **He had been instructed** (*katechoumenos*) in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus...

Romans 2.17-18

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and determine what is best because **you are instructed** (*katechoumenos*) in the law...

I Corinthians 14.19

nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to **instruct** (*katecheso*) others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Galatians 6.6

**Those who are taught** (*ho katechoumenos*) the word must share in all good things with their **teacher**. (*to katechounti*)

*Jim Dunning takes the following passage “as a job description of catechesis for today’s Christian community and for catechists and homilists within that community.” (Echoing God’s Word, p.98)*

I John 1.1, 3

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands... We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

*Consider also:*

I Timothy 1. 3-5

...you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith. But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

### III. Hippolytus' *Apostolic Traditions*

See handouts which follow

### IV. Cyril of Jerusalem, with extracts from the *Procatechesis* (Prologue to the Catecheses)

1 Already, dear candidates for enlightenment, the scent of blessedness has come upon you; already you are gathering spiritual flowers to weave into heavenly crowns; already the perfume of the Holy Spirit has breathed over you. You are already outside the outer hall of the palace; I pray that the king may lead you inside. The blossom can now be seen on the trees; I pray that the fruit may follow. So far your enrolment has taken place; and your call to military service. We have had the bridesmaids' lamps, a yearning for the heavenly city, good intentions and the hope which accompanies them; for he who said 'for those who love God everything works together for good', does not lie. For God is a generous benefactor, but he waits for each one's decision....

5 Perhaps you have another reason for coming. Perhaps some man among you has come because he wants to win the approval of his girl-friend; the same can apply to women too. Perhaps a slave has wanted to please his master or someone has wanted to please a friend. I accept this as bait for my hook and let you in. You may have had the wrong reason for coming, but I have good hope that you will be saved. Perhaps you didn't know where you were going or recognize the net waiting to catch you. You have swum into the Church's net. Allow yourself to be caught; don't try to escape. Jesus is fishing for you, not to kill you but to give you life once you have been killed. For you have to die and rise again. You have heard the Apostle say: 'dead to sin, alive to righteousness'. Die to your sins and live to righteousness. Make today the first day of your life.

9 Be eager to attend the catechetical classes (*katecheseis*). Be earnest in submitting to the exorcisms. If you are blown upon and exorcised, the process brings you salvation. Imagine an unworked lump of gold that is adulterated and combined with a variety of other substances, like bronze, tin, iron and lead. We are trying to get pure gold. Can the impurities be removed from it without fire? In the same way, the soul can't be purified without exorcisms. They are sacred, for they have been taken from holy Scriptures. Your face is veiled to leave your mind at rest, to prevent a wandering gaze from making your heart wander too. Though your eyes are veiled, your ears are free to receive salvation....

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

12 When an instruction is given, if one of the catechumens ask you what the teachers have said, say nothing to the outsider. We are entrusting you with a mystery and the hope of the life to come. Keep the mystery safe for the One who will reward you....

13 Now that you have been enrolled you have become sons and daughters of the same mother. When you enter the church before the time of the exorcisms, you should only talk about things that are conducive to devotion. If one of you is missing, go to look for him. If you had been invited to a dinner-party, wouldn't you wait for your fellow-guest? If you had a brother, wouldn't you look for what was good for him? Don't gossip any more about unprofitable subjects, - 'What has happened in the city?' 'What has happened in the village?' 'What has the Emperor been doing?' 'What has the bishop been doing?' 'What has the priest been doing?' Fix your thoughts upwards; that is what your moment of opportunity requires. 'Be still and know that I am God.' If you see the Faithful taking part in the service in an off-hand way, they are safe, they know what they have received, they possess the grace. But you are still in the balance: are you to receive or not receive? Don't imitate those slack people. Try to experience a reverent awe.

16 The baptism which lies before you is a matter of great importance. For prisoners it means ransom; for sins forgiveness; the death of sin; new birth for the soul; a shining garment; a holy, indelible seal; a chariot to heaven; the food of paradise; the grant of royalty; the grace of adoption. Nevertheless a serpent is on the lookout for those who take this road; do not let him bite you and infect you with unbelief. He sees so many people being saved and 'seeks someone to devour.' You are approaching the Father of spirits, but you have to pass that serpent; how will you get past? Let your feet be shod in readiness with the gospel of peace, so that even if you are bitten, you will come to no harm....

17 Do not make your house of hay and straw and chaff, in case your handiwork burns down and we incur the loss. Make your work rather of gold and silver and precious stones. It is for me to say this, for you to undertake it, and for God to bring the work to completion. So let us tighten the sinews of our minds, tense our souls, prepare our hearts. For the prize we are running for is our soul; we have our hopes set on heavenly things. .... God has power even to give faith to the unbeliever, if only the unbeliever gives his heart. May he cancel the bond in force against you, grant you an amnesty for your past offences, plant you in the Church, enlist you in his army and put on you the 'armour of righteousness.' May he endow you with the heavenly realities of the new covenant and give you the indelible seal of the Holy Spirit for all eternity, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom is the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Subjects treated in the Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem**

(adapted from William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*)

### **I. Lenten Catecheses**

Procatechesis	Greeting, suspect motives, catechesis, daily exorcism, secrecy
1.	One baptism for the forgiveness of sins
2.	Repentance
3.	Meaning of baptism
4.	Ten Dogmas: God, Christ, virgin birth, cross, resurrection, ascension, judgment, Holy Spirit, human nature (soul, body, food, clothing, resurrection, baptism), Scripture
5.	Faith: Abraham, in Gospels, assent

- Receive the Creed*
6. Unity of God
  7. God the Father
  8. Omnipotent
  9. Creator
  10. One Lord Jesus Christ
  11. Only-begotten Son of God
  12. Made Flesh
  13. Crucified and buried
  14. Rose from dead, ascended
  15. Judge of living/dead, kingdom without end
  16. Spirit
  17. Spirit
  18. Church, resurrection of flesh, eternal life
- Hand back the Creed*

## II. Mystagogical Catecheses

1. Renunciation, profession
2. Immersion
3. Anointing
4. Body and Blood of Christ
5. Liturgy: kiss, dialogue, sanctus, epiclesis, Lord's Prayer (with a phrase by phrase commentary), communion

## V. Augustine of Hippo, with extracts from *De catechizandis rudibus* (On Catechizing Inquirers)

If someone wants to become a Christian in the hope of getting some benefit from people whom he thinks he could not otherwise please, or to escape from some injury, he really does not want to become a Christian so much as he wants to feign being one....If he has come with a counterfeit motive, desirous only of temporal advantages, or thinking to escape some loss, he will, of course, lie. (5.9)

You must derive your opening remarks from the very lie he tells. You must not do this, however, with the intent of unmasking his false pretense, as though sure of it; but if he says that he came with an intention that is really praiseworthy, whether he is speaking the truth or not, we should nevertheless so approve and praise the intention he says he came with, so as to make him take delight in actually being such as he desires to seem. (5.9)

If by chance the candidate answers that his becoming a Christian is the result of a warning or dread inspired from on high, he afford us a wonderful opportunity for opening our remarks on the theme of God's great care for us. We should direct his thoughts from the guidance of wonders or dreams of this kind to the more solid path and the more trustworthy oracles of the scriptures...He should not seek visible miracles but accustom himself to hope for those that are invisible and should receive warnings not when sleeping but when awake. (6.10)

Is it not common that when we show certain beautiful, spacious locales, in town or in the countryside, to those who have never seen them before, we—who have been in the habit of passing them by without any enjoyment—find our own delight renewed by their delight at the novelty of it all? How much more then ought we to rejoice when people now approach to study God himself...and how much more ought we to be renewed in their newness. (12.17)

For so great is the power of sympathy, that when people are affected by us as we speak and we by them as they learn, we dwell each in the other and thus both they, as it were, speak in us what they hear, while we, in some way, learn in them what we teach. (12.17)

## **VI. Applications for Today's Church?**

Handout A

## **The Catechumenate: Its Periods and Rites According to Hippolytus' Apostolic Traditions, c. 215 A.D.**

**Period One: Inquiry**  
and

*Entry Rite:*  
*Admission of a Catechumen*

§ 16 1. Those who come forward for the first time to hear the word shall first be brought to the teachers at the house before all the people come in. 2. And let them be examined as to the reason why they have come forward to the faith. And those who bring them shall bear witness for them whether they are able to hear. 3. Let their life and manner of living be enquired into, whether he is a slave or free. [Then follow regulations determining conditions for admittance.]

**Period Two:**  
**Catechumenate/Formation**

and

§ 17 1. Let a catechumen be instructed [or "hear the word"] for three years. 2. But if a man be earnest and persevere well in the matter, let him be received, because it is not the time that is judged, but the conduct. § 18 1. Each time the teacher finishes his instruction let the catechumens pray by themselves apart from the faithful. 3. But after the prayer is finished the catechumens shall not give the kiss of peace, for their kiss is not yet pure. § 19 1. After the prayer let the teacher lay hands upon them and dismiss them. Whether the teacher be an ecclesiastic or a layman let him do the same. 2. If anyone being a catechumen should be apprehended for the Name, let him not be anxious about undergoing martyrdom. For if he suffer violence and be put to death before baptism, he shall be justified having been baptized in his own blood.

*Proximate Rite:*  
*Enrollment of a Candidate for Baptism*

§ 20 1. And when they are chosen who are set apart to receive baptism let their life be examined, whether they lived piously while catechumens, whether they "honoured the widows," whether they visited the sick, whether they have fulfilled every good work. 2. If those who bring them bear witness to them that they have done thus, then let them hear the gospel. 3. Moreover, from the day they are chosen, let a hand be laid on them and let them be exorcized daily.

**Period Three:**  
**Final Preparation**

And when the day draws near on which they are to be baptized, let the bishop himself exorcize each one of them, that he may be certain that he is purified. 4. But if there is one who is not purified let him be put on one side because he did not hear the word of instruction with faith. For the strange spirit remained with him. 5. And let those who are to be baptized be instructed to wash and cleanse themselves on the fifth day of the week [i.e., Thursday]. 7. Those who are to receive baptism shall fast on the Preparation [Friday] and on the Sabbath

[Saturday]. And on the Sabbath the bishop shall assemble those who are to be baptized in one place, and shall bid them all to pray and bow the knee. 8. And laying his hand on them he shall exorcise every evil spirit to flee away from them and never to return to them henceforward. And when he has finished exorcizing, let him breathe on their face and seal their foreheads and ears and noses and then let him raise them up. 9. And they shall spend all the night in vigil, reading the scriptures to them and instructing them. 10. Moreover those who are to be baptized shall not bring any other vessel, save that which each will bring with him for the Eucharist. For it is right for every one to bring his oblation then.

***Initiation Rite: Baptism and Eucharist***

§ 21 1. And at the hour when the cock crows they shall first of all pray over the water. [Then follow details of the baptismal rite: renunciation, oil of exorcism, creed with three-fold baptism, oil of thanksgiving, joining assembly, bishop lays on a hand, prays, anoints, and gives kiss of peace, prayers, passing of peace, the Eucharist.]

**Period Four:  
Mystagogy/Integration**

§ 23 14. Yet if there is any other thing that ought to be told [the converts], let the bishop impart it to them privately after their baptism; let not unbelievers know it, until they are baptized: this is the white stone of which John said: "There is upon it a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth the stone."

## Handout B

### **The Catechumenate: Its Periods and Rites According to Cyril of Jerusalem, d. 387 A.D.**

#### **Period One: Inquiry**

*Entry Rite:  
Admission of a Catechumen*

- no mention of Cyril
- no indication this rite was performed

#### **Period Two: Catechumenate/Formation**

*Proximate Rite:  
Enrollment of a Candidate for Baptism*

- catechumens attended the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays and were dismissed before the Great Thanksgiving
- those desiring baptism turn in their names just before Lent
- On the first day of Lent, candidates brought in one-by-one with their “fathers” or “mothers.” Bishop examine whether the catechumen is “good-living,” etc. and records the names of those “above reproach.”
- on this day the Bishop delivers the Procatechesis in the presence of the faithful

#### **Period Three: Final Preparation**

*Initiation Rite: Baptism and Eucharist*

- *photizomenoi* (“candidates for enlightenment”) received daily catechesis, following the morning office, 3 hours a day for 7 weeks
- regular exorcisms, breathed upon to inspire sacred awe and drive away the devil
- taught the Creed by heart, kept secret up to this point
- near Lent’s end, they “hand back” (recite) the Creed to the Bishop
- at the Easter Vigil

#### **Period Four: Mystagogy/Integration**

- starting on Monday after Easter, the neophytes gather each day of the following week with the Bishop and the interested Faithful, meeting in the church, following the assembly
- Here the Bishop “explains everything which took place at baptism” and eucharist

## Handout C

### **The Catechumenate: Its Periods and Rites According to Augustine of Hippo, d. 430 A.D.**

#### **Period One: Inquiry**

- Evangelization: one-on-one (rarely preserved)
- Interrogation-basis for the First Catechesis
- First Catechesis: Introduction, Narrative, Exhortation

#### ***Entry Rite:***

#### ***Admission of a Catechumen***

- Signing the forehead with the sign of the cross;
- a taste of salt;
- possibly, laying on of hands

#### **Period Two:**

#### **Catechumenate/Formation**

- catechumens received no instruction apart from the baptized
- dismissal from the Liturgy, following the sermon

#### ***Proximate Rite:***

#### ***Enrollment of a Candidate for Baptism***

- no mention of a rite to mark enrollment for baptism

#### **Period Three:**

#### **Final Preparation**

- *competentes* (“petitioners”) given a strict ascetical regimen
- scrutiny, probably soon after enrollment
- a mix of private and public catechesis
- handing over the Creed, on Saturday, two weeks before Easter; Augustine recited the Creed and gave a phrase-by-phrase explanation
- handing back the Creed, on Saturday, eight days before Easter; each candidate tested reciting the Creed, then Augustine gave a second sermon
- same day, handing over the Lord’s Prayer, with a line-by-line sermon

#### ***Initiation Rite: Baptism and Eucharist***

- at the Easter Vigil

**Period Four:**  
**Mystagogy/Integration**

- Easter morning sermon, to the Assembly, but focused on neophytes
- his private catechesis on the Eucharist for the neophytes, delivered in the course of the Easter morning liturgy
- daily sermons of Easter Week, on the meaning of the resurrection
- celebration of the Octave, offering the newly baptized a final solemn exhortation