

History of the Initiation Process

Early Church

Small communities that took individuals into their company and introduced them to their way of life. Religious persecution prevailed and so a strong faith was demanded in the face of possible martyrdom.

100-200 AD

Initiation began to take on formal shape and requirements ~ the beginnings of a “catechumenate” as we know it. The conversion of Gentiles called for a more comprehensive formation in the Judeo-Christian tradition

Third-Fourth Century

Most developed structure (at least 3-year process). The Peace of Constantine in 315 AD made Christianity legal; now there were large numbers of candidates, but poor quality control. Although this was the time of the most developed structure, during this period there were a variety of models of initiation developed in the various local communities.

Fifth Century

Disintegration of the catechumenate occurred because large numbers of people were being baptized and the practice of infant became normative. In the West, Confirmation and Eucharist were separated from Baptism.

Twelfth Century

Catechumenate no longer existed. Elements of its transition into religious community formation and seminary training during the intervening centuries.

Sixteenth Century

Dominicans and Augustinians tried to counteract the mass baptisms. In 1538 an episcopal conference urged pastors to return to missionary principles of Alcuin and establish a catechumenate.

Twentieth Century

Revival of catechumenal structures in Africa and France. In France great problems arose because of the large numbers of non-practicing Catholics. In Africa, the White Fathers recognized the need to build the Church from the grass roots.

Vatican Council II

Called for reinstating the catechumenate.

Bishops' vote on restoration of the catechumenate:

Yes = 2,165; No = 9; Null = 1

Post-Vatican Council II

1966 – provisional ritual distributed

1969 – second draft distributed for experimentation

1972 – promulgation of the order of Christian initiation of adults by Pope Paul VI

1974 – provisional English translation available titled *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

1986 – U.S. Bishops approved U.S. additions of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and National Statutes and a National Plan of Implementation

1987 – Canadian Bishops published the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* for use in Canada.

1988 – September – U.S. Bishops mandate implementation of final English translation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Period	Name	Aim	Content	Time	Rites
Period of the Precatechumenate	Candidates	Awakening faith	Time to build trust, to share personal stories, questions; time to proclaim the message of salvation, foster initial conversation, introduce into parish life.	Unlimited	No specific rites suggested
<i>Celebration of the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and the Rite of Welcoming Baptized but Uncatechized Adults Who Seek to Complete Their Christian Initiation</i>					
Period of the Catechumenate	Catechumens (unbaptized) <i>Baptized Candidates*</i>	Deepening initial conversation and passing on Catholic tradition	Time to deepen faith/conversation within the living community through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • catechesis based on the liturgical year, the liturgy, and celebrations of the word • the life of the community • prayer and worship • introduction to the apostolic life 	One to a few years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • celebrations of the word • blessings • anointing • exorcisms • anticipatory rites: Presentations of Creed and Lord's Prayer • Rites of Sending to Election (USA adaptation)
<i>Celebration of the Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names and of the Call to Continuing Conversion of Candidates Who Are Preparing for Confirmation and/or Eucharist or Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church</i>					
Period of Purification and Enlightenment	Elect (unbaptized) <i>Baptized Candidates*</i>	Eliminate what is weak and sinful; affirm what is holy.	Time for recollection, Lenten retreat, final preparation for the celebration of the initiation sacraments	Lent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutinies • Presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer • Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday
<i>Celebrations of the Sacraments of Initiation (Easter Vigil) and of the Rite of Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church</i>					
Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy	Neophytes	Deepening experience of Paschal Mystery through Eucharist, Gospel, ministry, and mission	Deepening of sacramental life with emphasis on Gospel, Eucharist and mission	Paschal Time (Easter to Pentecost) and then until anniversary of initiation (US adaptation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunday Eucharists with the assembly • Gathering (preferably Eucharist) with the bishop

*If the baptized candidates are uncatechized, their formation period for the most part “corresponds to the one laid down for catechumens.” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* #402US/378CAN)

Glossary of Terms for Christian Initiation

- Advent*** A period of four weeks prior to Christmas. It has a twofold theme: preparing for the Second Coming of Christ, and preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.
- Candidate*** One who is already baptized in another Christian faith and who now is preparing to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. At the time of full reception, he or she will make a profession of faith, be confirmed, and receive Eucharist.
- In the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, “candidate” is also used for those participating in the precatechumenate (baptized and unbaptized).
- Catechumen*** One who is not baptized and is preparing for full initiation at the Easter Vigil through Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Catechumenate*** Second period of the order of Christian initiation of adults (see below) which involves intense preparation in word, worship, community life and apostolic works.
- Children*** The order of Christian initiation of adults adapted for children has as its foundation the adult rite. Adaptations of the rites have been developed for use with children of catechetical age (which usually means seven years and older).
- Cycle A, B, C*** The three year cycle of liturgical reading: Cycle A: Matthew; Cycle B: Mark; Cycle C: Luke. All three cycles incorporate John.
- Easter Season*** A period of seven weeks beginning with Easter Sunday and ending with the feast of Pentecost.
- Elect*** The name given to catechumens who celebrate the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent signifying their being chosen for the initiation sacraments.
- Evangelization*** The task of the Church during the precatechumenate which involves the inviting, the welcoming, the witness, the sharing of faith and the proclamation of the gospel to inquirers/candidates.
- Inquirers*** Those who participate in the precatechumenate of a parish. They are “inquiring” into Christianity in the Catholic Tradition.
- Lectionary*** The book used in liturgical celebrations that contains all the scripture readings of the liturgical year.
- Lent*** A six-week period extending from Ash Wednesday to sundown on Holy Thursday. It is a retreat time in preparation for the Easter Triduum.
- Liturgical Year*** The seasons and cycles of the Christian year. It is the instrument and means for leading God’s people along the way to the Lord. The readings introduce and invite us into the Paschal Mystery. It includes: Christmas Cycle (First Sunday of Advent through the Baptism of the Lord), Easter Cycle (Ash Wednesday through Pentecost) and Ordinary Time.
- Minor Rites*** Rites during the period of the catechumenate which include exorcisms, blessings, anointings.
- Mystagogy*** Final period of the order of Christian initiation of adults which is from Easter to Pentecost. The National Statutes (USA) also recommend an extended mystagogy for one year.
- National Statutes*** Particular law for the implementation of the order of Christian initiation of adults in the United States presented by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (NCCB)

- Neophyte** One who is initiated at the Easter Vigil. The term comes from the Greek word meaning new plant, as in a new sprout on the limb/branch.
- Ninety Days** Occasionally used to mean the combination of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment and the Period of Mystagogy which corresponds with Lent (40 days) and the Easter Season (50 days).
- Order of Christian Initiation of Adults** This is the official collection of rites of the Roman Catholic Church for initiation of adults (including children of catechetical age) and the reception of baptized candidates.
- Ordinary Time** Cycle within the liturgical year that is outside the liturgical seasons (i.e., Advent, Lent, Easter). This time provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of God's gift to us in Christ, our attitudes, our prayer life and our service to others.
- Precatechumenate** The first period of the order of Christian initiation of adults which is the initial introduction of an inquirer into the Christian way of life in the Catholic Tradition. It is also the period of evangelization on the part of the Church.
- Presentations** During the period of purification and enlightenment, the elect are presented with the Creed and the Lord's Prayer through special rites. Both presentations can be anticipated during the period of the catechumenate when it is more convenient.
- Purification and Enlightenment** This is the third period of the order of Christian initiation of adults which usually coincided with the Lenten season. It is the final period of preparation of initiation at the Easter Vigil.
- RCIA** Acronym for Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for use in scholarly references to identify the text paragraph. The term RCIA is discouraged for popular usage.
- Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults** English title of *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum*. The latest English-translation edition was published in 1985.
- Rite of... Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens**
 The bridge between the precatechumenate and the catechumenate for the unbaptized.
- Welcome** The bridge between the inquiry period and the period of pastoral formation that coincides with the catechumenate. It is for those already baptized.
- Election** Presided over by the bishop, the rite inaugurates the final period of preparation before initiation. It is the bridge between the catechumenate and purification and enlightenment.
- Call to Continuing Conversion**
 Coincides with election, but is the rite for the already baptized.
- Scrutiny** Three rites of exorcism for elect during Lent.
- Penitential Rite** Celebration for candidates, similar to rite of scrutiny.
- Sacraments of Initiation** Usually celebrated at the Easter Vigil; includes Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Sunday** The first day in the Christian liturgical week, the original feast day, the heart of the calendar, the basis and nucleus of the liturgical year.
- Triduum** The "three days" of the celebration of Easter which begins with sundown on Holy Thursday evening and ends with evening prayer on Easter Sunday evening. Includes the liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday.

***Sacraments of Initiation:
The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults***

The catechumenate process consists of various stages of experience, bridged by ritual celebrations. As an individual progresses in faith toward full initiation through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, he or she is supported by a sponsor (godparent), guided by catechists (both lay and ordained), and embraced by a community of believers. This process may extend over a period of years (generally 1-3), and requires the support of an entire parish family, not just a few folks on an RCIA team. This process is designed for all those who have reached "catechetical age" or "the age of reason" (usually considered to be about age 7), and so may include children and teenagers, as well as adults. The restoration of the catechumenate process connects us to our ancestors in the early Church and speaks to our ongoing need for conversion to the Gospel way of life. This revised rite is one of the outstanding legacies of the Second Vatican Council, since it holds forth a model of apprenticeship rather than instruction for initiation into the Catholic Christian community.

Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

Period of the Catechumenate

Celebrations of the Word of God (Liturgical Catechesis)

Minor Exorcisms, Blessings, and Anointings

Rite of Election

Period of Purification & Enlightenment

Scrutinies

Presentations (Creed, Lord's Prayer)

Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (Easter Vigil)

Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy

Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate

RCIA #36 It is a time of evangelization: faithfully and constantly the living God is proclaimed...

RCIA #38 ...a suitable explanation of the Gospel (see no.42).
...are to receive help and attention so that with a purified and clearer intention they may cooperate with God's grace.

RCIA #42 clearly defines what is supposed to occur during the period of the precatechumenate:

...the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root

...there must be evidence of the first faith...and an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and enter into a relationship with God in Christ

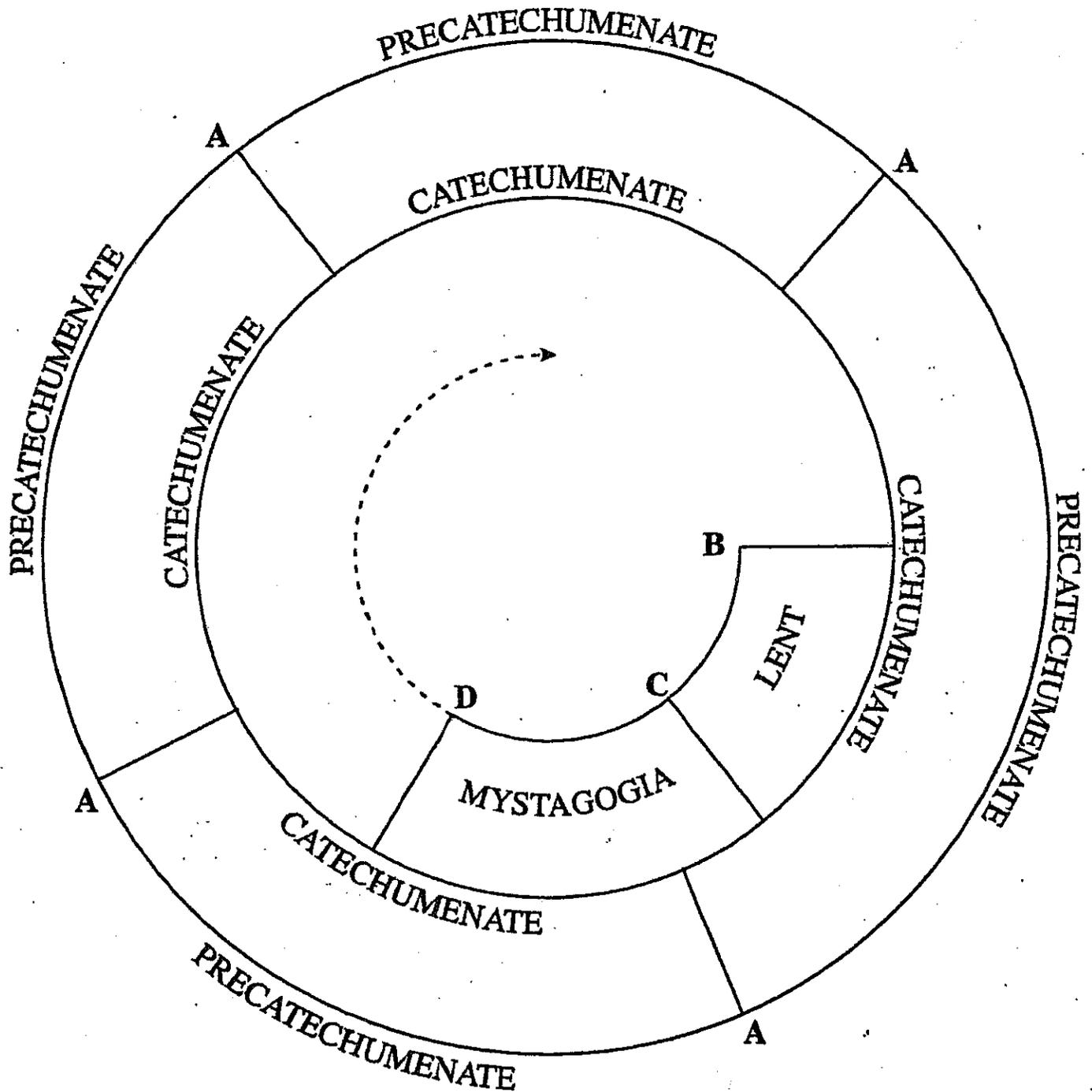
...evidence of the first stirrings of repentance

...a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer

...a sense of the Church

...some experience of the company and spirit of Christians

Taken from
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By Thomas H. Morris
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- A-RITE OF ACCEPTANCE
- B-RITE OF ELECTION
- C-EASTER SACRAMENTS
- D-PENTECOST