

Mystagogical Preaching

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Ambrose of Milan (d. 397):

You came into the baptistery, you saw the water, you saw the bishop, you saw the levite.¹ And if anyone should perhaps be thinking of asking: “Is that all?”, I say, indeed, it is all. There truly is all, where there is all innocence, all devotion, all grace, all sanctification. You saw all you could see with the eyes of the body, all that is open to human sight. You saw what is seen, but not what is done.²

The early church responded to the newly baptized’s seeing but not comprehending the meaning of the Christian sacraments with a type of preaching known as *mystagogy*. Stated simply, mystagogical preaching is sustained reflection on the church’s rites of initiation. It is *mystagogia*, preaching on the “mysteries” of the Christian faith. It is *preaching* in that it is scripturally based, takes place within a liturgical setting, is addressed exclusively to the Christian community--the baptized and the newly baptized, called *neophytes*, and has as its goal the formation of Christians rather than providing religious information to Christians. Mystagogical preaching is distinct from other types of preaching in that it draws the hearers into the mysteries, moving them to enter spiritually and intellectually into the rites in which they have previously participated but may have understood only in terms of sense-perception. Thus, the ultimate goal of this sustained reflection is to have a persuasive, enlightening, deepening effect on the hearers’ understanding of the church’s rites of initiation that leads them to live in the different, new dimension that is the Christian life.

Three Parts of Mystagogy:

1. Rite - Participate in the rite
2. Reflect - Reflect upon one’s own experience
 - a. **Liturgical Rite, Sacrament, or Symbol**
 - b. **Free associate to gather scriptural stories**
 - c. **Free associate to gather natural stories**
 - d. **Free associate to gather cultural stories**
 - e. **How are these stories like (type) or unlike (antitype) the Liturgical Symbol?**
3. Receive Information

Receive Information

- ▶ First, sacramental catechesis follows participation in the rites. Ambrose gives no instruction on Baptism, the

¹“Priest” is Ambrose’s normal term for the bishop; “presbyter” refers to the modern term “priest.” The “levite” is the deacon.

²*De sacramentis* 1.3.10 (SC 25bis.64).

Eucharist, and the Lord's Prayer until *after* his hearers have experienced these rites for the first time during their initiation at the Easter Vigil. Then his method of instruction is to draw upon his hearers' own experience. His sermons are organized as a journey through the rites of initiation, from entering the baptistry through the font to arrival at the altar for the celebration of the Easter eucharist. Along the way, Ambrose asks, "What did we do?" "What did you see?" "What did you say?" In answering these questions, Ambrose moves his hearers from images, words, and actions to their significance for Christian faith and their implications for Christian life. For today's church, conducting sacramental catechesis after participation in the rites would mean, for example, that first communion instruction occurs after first communion and premarital counseling becomes post-wedding reflection.

- ▶ Second, mystagogy is based on a solid understanding of the history, structure, and theology of worship and sacrament. For Ambrose, this history, structure, and theology is found in the Bible. Ambrose looks to the scriptures for both the meaning of the sacraments and the images that he uses to explain them. For this reason, Ambrose's instruction of candidates for baptism prior to their participation in the rites involved teaching the biblical narratives, the stories of faith. For today's church this means that, before we drill the doctrine of the real presence into people's heads, we teach them the story of the Lord's Supper. And when we search for an image to explain baptism, crossing the Red Sea is a better pick than making it to the Final Four. Yes, I'm sorry to say that I once heard a sermon in which we were told that, in baptism, God makes us bigger champions than the Duke basketball team.
- ▶ Third, in mystagogy, sermon preparation involves more prayer and reflection than traditional study. Preachers must not only understand what the church and its theologians teach about the sacraments. Preachers must understand what they themselves believe about the sacraments. In so doing they will have something real and important to say about the difference the sacraments make in their lives and in the lives of their people. And they will be able to say it concretely.
- ▶ Fourth, mystagogy is different from sacramental theology. Its logic is more associative than discursive, more poetic than philosophical. Mystagogy takes seriously the truth about mystery: mystery can be pointed to, hinted at, and even glimpsed, but it cannot be defined or exhausted. Thus, mystagogy piles up meanings rather than seeking clear definitions. For Ambrose baptism is tomb and womb, death and resurrection, absolution and new birth. Baptism heals, cleanses, washes away sins and cancels guilt. We're talking "both/and" rather than "either/or." In Paul Bradshaw's terms, mystagogues are lumpers rather than splitters.
- ▶ Fifth, mystagogy takes the listeners seriously. It invites *particular people* into a deeper experience, understanding, and appreciation of the *specific rites* in which they have participated. Ambrose describes the rites as they were celebrated in Milan and not according to some liturgist's vision. These rites were big and dramatic and overwhelming. They involved light and darkness, clothing and nudity, secrecy and revelation, water--lots of water--and oil, bread and wine. Ambrose spells out the implication of the mysteries for his hearers' real lives, most notably a church confronted by Arianism and a culture that was largely pagan. For the church today, we need rites that are worthy of celebrating the paschal mystery and we need to celebrate them worthily. And we need to know and be able to communicate what difference participating in these rites makes in real life. Simply put, to speak of baptism as a "saving flood" is inappropriate when it is administered by sprinkling droplets from a finger bowl and when we cannot concretely identify what these people need to be saved from.
- ▶ Sixth, the form of mystagogy is simple and the style of mystagogy is conversational. Ambrose calls it "milky speech." These sermons are intended for infants in the faith who cannot digest strong food but who develop from infancy by drinking a natural milk. Mystagogy is not the occasion for preachers to parade their theological sophistication or display their rhetorical brilliance.
- ▶ Finally, Ambrose was convinced that God acts in the rites of initiation to give faith and that, through mystagogical preaching, God leads the newly baptized to see their lives and the world with the eyes of faith; that is, to see beyond the temporal to the eternal, beyond the realities of this world to the reality of God's kingdom. Mystagogy demands that we understand faith not as intellectual assent but as choosing a way of life.

Mystagogy Bibliography

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Assumptions

- I. The Christian Church is first and foremost a worshipping community.
 - A. Ours is a church of Word and Sacrament. It is “the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel”¹
 - B. *The Use of the Means of Grace*, the ELCA’s statement on the practice of Word and Sacrament, declares that “the two principal parts of the liturgy of Holy Communion, the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacramental meal, are so intimately connected as to form one act of worship.”²
- II. Christian worship is God’s initiative and activity in human history and the world, as well as in our individual lives, before it is an activity of Christians or the church.³
 - A. I understand Christian worship as a *river*. As my friend Lester Ruth and I wrote in our book *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*, like a mighty river, “the life and history of Israel, the saving work of Jesus, and the mission of the early church as these events are proclaimed in Scripture [are] connected to one another and to the church’s worship . . . as the single, continuing story of God’s saving activity in Jesus Christ.”⁴
 - B. Some people find it more helpful to think of God’s single, continuing, saving activity as a *stone dropped in a pond*, rather than a mighty river.
 1. If we think of history as a pond, rather than a line that moves from beginning to end, the stone that God drops is the event of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Like a stone dropped in a pond, Christ sends ripple effects both forward and backward in time.
 2. The backward ripple effects are recorded in the Old Testament. This view of history is evident in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, for example, where Paul calls Israel passing through the sea “baptism” and declares that the rock from which they drank was Christ. The forward ripple effects are the church’s worship, where Christ continues to reconcile and save.
 - C. Whether we think of this perspective as a *river* or a *stone dropped in a pond*, worship is a place where God’s liberating grace is already present and active in words and actions.
 1. God speaks and acts in and through the ritual of Christian worship to save, reconcile, and recreate humanity and all creation.
 2. The judgment and mercy of God, proclaimed and enacted in worship, signify God’s ultimate judgment and mercy for the world.

- a. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann argues that the liturgy of the Eucharist is the church's journey or procession into the presence of Christ and the dimension of the reign of God where we "arrive at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world."⁵
- b. Like a river flowing to the sea, God's work of reconciliation, recorded in Scripture and accomplished in Christ, continues in the church's worship and through worship overflows into the world.

D. Worship is the location where *God* carries out God's mission.

- 1. Worship is the way God gathers people to witness to and participate in God's work of reconciling the world to God's own self. In and through worship, individuals and the community encounter, experience, and celebrate the God who is the source and goal of the rest of their lives.
- 2. The church proclaims God's reconciliation and shares in God's mission by living in the world in ways congruent with what it experiences God doing and enacting in worship.
- 3. In this way, God's people worshiping in the midst of the world enact and signify God's own mission for the life of the world. Worship and mission are God's single activity of reconciliation. God is the first and primary actor.
- 4. We might imagine the participation of the Christian and the congregation as stones carried along in the river of God's gracious work of salvation. While Christians and congregations can participate in, be indifferent to, resist, and even undermine God's saving activity in worship, they can neither achieve nor stop it. Like a mighty river, God's work of salvation, accomplished in Christ and continued and enacted in worship, will not be stopped until it reaches its destination, the fullness of the reign of God.

III. Worship is "primary theology" or *theologia prima* -- an experience of God rather than the church's reflection on its experience of God.

- A. This is distinct from the *theologia secunda* or "secondary theology," which constitutes formal or systematic theological reflection).⁶
- B. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* or "worship trumps theology"
- C. God's saving activity in scripture and God's saving activity in the Church are united by the Church's experience of Christ's presence in baptism and Eucharist.

1. Baptism changes who Christians are and scripture provides the language, description, and images that illuminate what that change looks like in the lives of believers. Receiving the Eucharist makes Christians different. Scripture gives the framework for how to live with this difference.
 2. At the same time, the life and experience of the Church determine what the scriptures mean. The sacraments are at the heart of the Church's life and experience; therefore, baptism and Eucharist provide the context for interpreting scripture. From this convergence of liturgy and Bible, of scripture and sacrament, we derive the images and metaphors and language for describing and encouraging the Christian life.
- IV. The early church reveals that evangelism, conversion, coming to faith, and becoming Christian "involves change not just of belief but also of belonging and behavior."⁷
- A. For fifteen hundred years, the church could count on the world to teach and support the Christian faith and way of life.
 1. "Church" was what Christians "did." And people were Christians for a lot of reasons unrelated to faith in Jesus Christ. There was government compulsion. Being Christian was the way to procure favor at court or to qualify for public office. People would lose customers if they didn't go to church. Besides, being Christian was simply what people were supposed to do.
 2. Faith was something people felt they needed to *know*, not because it necessarily related to their everyday lives but so they had a correct understanding of Christian doctrine. Our could be academic, speculative in its theology, and propositional because what the Church had to say was so highly valued that people were willing to work hard to hear us. Unfortunately, if we ever really lived in such a world, we don't live there anymore.
 - B. In a culture that is no longer Christian or in a culture that cannot be counted upon to form Christians and reinforce their faith, Christian formation encompasses ethics and solidarity as well as understanding.
 1. It's about more than right thinking or intellectual assent.
 2. Christian formation brings people to a personal relationship with Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It also brings them into and makes them part of the community that the world's Lord and Savior is gathering around himself.
 3. More than that, Christian formation teaches people how those who belong to Jesus go about living in the church and in the world.

4. The early church invites us to reexamine the balance of belief, belonging and behavior in the way we form Christians.
 5. The early church calls us to consider whether there is wisdom for our day in the notion that insight into truth comes out of practical engagement or that learning is a product of action. This view can be seen in some quarters where the church is coming to expect more of its members than a conventional religiosity that manifests itself in compliance with certain minimal regulations. The church is instead coming to expect of its members the capacity to undergo radical and lasting transformation. By the way, that's what people are looking for.
- V. We need to approach scripture and use what Pamela Jackson calls "the Patristic understanding and use of the Word proclaimed in the worshiping assembly as catalyst for conversion." ⁸
- A. The early church understood itself in biblical terms and saw itself as a continuation of God's saving work recorded in the Bible.⁹ It assumed that scripture and worship are connected by God's saving activity. The early church understands the life and history of Israel, the saving work of Jesus, and the mission of the early church as these events are proclaimed in scripture to be connected to one another and to the church's worship and mission as the single, continuing story of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ.
1. This approach to scripture may at first seem odd to us because we tend to read smaller units of scripture--pericopes, chapters and verses. However, when we recall the events recorded in the Bible, we see that they are all connected.
 - a. Wherever we look in the Bible, we find God bringing light out of darkness, life out of death, freedom out of slavery, and hope out of despair.
 - b. Or, put another way, the Bible tells how, again and again, God establishes a covenant with God's people, God's people break that covenant, God remains faithful and forgives, and the covenant is renewed.
 2. The early church helped people to see scripture as a whole, as the single story of God's saving activity in Christ, a story that continues in our day and will be brought to completion when Christ comes again.
- B. The hermeneutic key to this approach to the Bible is simple: Interpret scripture according to its application to Christian life and interpret the life of the Christian by its correspondence to scripture.

1. According to this manner of scriptural interpretation, the task is to lift up the connection or the continuing relationship, between scripture and the Christian life.
2. First, show how the various events recorded in the Bible are all united in the saving activity of Jesus Christ.
3. Second, show how this saving activity continues beyond scripture in the Christian life.

So What Happened? Baptism, Confirmation, and Communion in Church History¹⁰

- I. From the earliest days of the church's life there was a clear relationship between the Word read and preached, baptism, and Eucharist.
 - A. The Word was the creative voice of God proclaimed in the midst of the worshiping community.
 1. The Word called for repentance and change, which led to baptism.
 2. The Word called the faithful to become one in Christ in the sharing of bread and wine as Christ commanded his disciples.
 - B. From the beginning of the church we see that there was an order to the way the Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper were celebrated.
 1. We know from ancient sermons and writings that only the baptized were invited to eat the bread and drink from the cup.
 - a. During the weekly Sunday Eucharist, those preparing for baptism were dismissed after the sermon, with the blessing of the congregation, and given instruction in a Christian lifestyle.
 - b. Whether baptism was understood as forgiveness of sin, healing, being joined to Christ's death and resurrection, or rebirth, it served as an initiation rite, admitting believers into the community of Christ.
 - c. Their full incorporation into Christ's body was then celebrated by the whole congregation at the Lord's Table, where the newly baptized were invited to receive the bread and wine along with the rest of the church.
 2. By the third century, a relatively uniform practice of bringing persons from the hearing of the Word to baptism, and from the font to the Lord's Table for the Supper, was firmly established.
 - a. Even in the mid-second century, we can see the outlines of this pattern

of the sacraments in the ancient church.

- b. In his *First Apology*, which was a description of Christian practice to the emperor (155 C.E.), Justin Martyr reports that new Christians are examined concerning their creedal and ethical commitment; then they are brought by the faithful to water and are washed in the water in the name of the Trinity. The newly baptized are then led to the assembled community where prayer is offered for them, they are greeted with a holy kiss, and their initiation concludes with the Eucharist.
- c. At stake in this early pattern was an understanding of the process of conversion: what did it take for a nonbeliever to become a part of the Christian community?
 - (1) British scholar Alan Kreider answers, "In Christianity's early centuries, conversion involved changes in belief, belonging, and behavior—in the context of an experience of God."
 - (2) Being converted to a community's convictions involved "becoming the kind of person who belonged to that kind of community." And this meant that conversion in the ancient church was at least as much about changing one's loyalties and one's lifestyle as it was about changing one's creed.'
- d. By the third century, the process of making adult disciples followed a relatively uniform pattern with clearly marked stages.
 - (1) Stage I was an informal period of inquiry in which the unbaptized began attending worship. Those who found Christianity attractive approached the church's leaders to request instruction and, if approved, entered Stage 2.
 - (2) Formally enrolled as catechumens, they were regarded as members of the church and committed to a journey of conversion. This stage often focused on a reshaping of the converts' lifestyle.
 - (3) Stage 3 was the final intensive preparation period, the washing in water or the baptism itself, and the first reception of the Eucharist.
 - (a) Preparation in this stage often included imparting the Creed and the Lord's Prayer as a way of reflecting on Christian belief.
 - (b) While persons engaged in this process were always considered to be members of the church, once they were baptized, the catechumens experienced belonging as full members of the Christian community; now they could take part in the

community's prayers, the kiss of peace, and the Lord's Supper.

(4) Stage 4 was the post-baptismal teaching about the meaning of the sacramental initiation they had just completed.

3. In ancient Christianity, there was a unity of Word, font, and table. While there were some differences in the shape and duration of the initiatory process from one region to another, baptism and the Lord's Supper were linked as two parts of a single act of Christian initiation. The two sacraments of the church that we practice today were so closely related in the ancient church that Eucharist was understood as the one repeatable part of baptism.

II. After the Peace of Constantine (312 C.E.) the process of Christian initiation underwent significant change.

A. As Christianity became the established religion, belonging to the church became a compulsory step for all in society.

1. Since the way of life expected of baptized Christians was demanding, it became possible in the fourth century for people to become lifelong catechumens, spending their lives preparing for baptism as a way of becoming official members of the church, while remaining free from the burdens borne by baptized Christians.

2. The process of becoming Christian was tied to Easter, or alternately to Pentecost, the end of the great fifty days of Easter, and the rites of initiation were celebrated at those times by the bishop.

3. During this period, both the preparation process and the rites themselves expanded and became more elaborate.

a. Baptism was offered to those who demonstrated a life intent on following Christ.

b. In order to attract people to baptism and an authentic Christian faith, the process of Christian conversion developed into a rich, extended, and dramatic liturgical journey.

B. In the fourth and fifth centuries, this expanded pattern, called the catechumenate, commonly included:

1. Mentors and teachers led new Christians through a period of deepening commitment to Christ and belief in the Gospel, all the while coordinating their progress with special public worship services and spiritual disciplines.

2. The process began with a period of evangelization in which the inquirer had informal contact with Christians and the church. When candidates were judged to have attained a basic grounding in Christian teaching, the beginnings of faith and a commitment to a changed way of life, they were accepted into the catechumenate itself.
 - a. Enrollment for baptism
 - b. Welcome to Baptism (ELW)
3. The catechumenate, the second stage in the process, could last for several years during which candidates participated in spiritual formation and were instructed on how Christians behave. When those responsible for the catechumens' formation determined that their behavior had changed sufficiently, the catechumens could proceed to the third stage, known as the period of enlightenment.
4. The period of enlightenment usually coincided with Lent and was intended as a time of intense spiritual preparation for baptism at Easter..
 - a. The nature of instruction – Bible Stories, Creed, Lord's Prayer
 - b. exorcism
5. The highpoint of the process was baptism and first communion at Easter
 - a. renunciation of sin, evil, and the world, along with profession of allegiance to Christ
 - b. baptism
 - c. post-baptismal anointing
 - d. Eucharist.
6. In the days after Easter, the church held worship services at which there was special preaching for people who had experienced baptism and the Lord's Supper for the first time at the Easter Vigil and now needed guidance in understanding their experience. As part of this guidance and instruction, the church taught the newly baptized the Christian faith.
 - a. post-baptismal teaching about the meaning of the sacramental initiation they had just completed.
 - b. Meaning of Creed, Lord's Prayer, Sacraments using experience, Scripture story and image.

7. Today, the Mennonite, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic traditions have all developed catechumenate models as a way of integrating evangelism, formation, and worship.¹¹

C. "A Rite of Passage," Aidan Kavanaugh [Ask Jen to read this]

- III. In the fifth century, Augustine's doctrine of original sin, coupled with a high infant mortality rate, led to a dramatic increase in the practice of presenting infants for baptism, which in turn raised questions about the church's pattern of pre-baptismal instruction.
 - A. Many of our own questions, concerns, and practices of infant baptism can be traced to this time.
 - B. The post-baptismal anointing came to be identified as "confirmation." Baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist emerged as the principal parts of the initiation rites.
 - C. By the end of the fifth century, Christian initiation was still one process with three parts, but the seeds were sown for its eventual separation into three distinct rites.
- IV. As Christianity spread out from urban areas, bishops became less and less able to minister to country regions and local pastors undertook leadership of rural parishes.
 - A. In response to this new reality, the churches of Egypt and the East were determined to retain the unity of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist as three parts of one action. They have done so to the present day by allowing a presbyter (local pastor) to anoint immediately after baptism with oil previously blessed by the bishop. Thus candidates in the Eastern Orthodox churches, usually babies, are baptized, anointed, and communed on one occasion.
 - B. While the unified process of baptism, anointing, and Eucharist on a single occasion was held together at all costs in the East, the pattern in the West was a slow but irreversible division of the process of initiation into three occasions—baptism, confirmation, and first communion—often separated by years.
 1. The churches of the West were less concerned about the unity of the rites of initiation than were their Eastern neighbors and sought instead to preserve the central role of bishops in the initiation of new Christians. So in the West, only the bishop could perform the postbaptismal anointing.
 2. This meant that as Christianity spread, especially into the vast, tribal dioceses of northern Europe where visiting bishops were scarce, candidates for baptism were often unable to receive anointing (confirmation). Without

anointing, they could not receive communion.

3. And thus, more by accident than by design, the single process of becoming a Christian necessarily broke apart into three separate acts in the Western church.
- V. During the centuries of the medieval period, the three events were separated by an increasing number of years and celebrated with a diminishing sense of their theological interrelationship.
- A. In the twelfth century, the withholding of the cup from the laity made it difficult to commune newly baptized infants, who were too young to digest the bread. Baptized infants had to be confirmed before turning eight, but often children took their first communion at a younger age.
 - B. A thirteenth-century church council made confession mandatory before communion—proof that communion at the time of infant baptism had disappeared.
 - C. Beginning in the fourteenth century, councils and synods decreed that baptism should occur within eight days of birth, formalizing what had become established practice.
 1. The decree officially changed the theological and ritual connection between baptism and Christ's resurrection by detaching baptism from the festival of Easter/Pentecost.
 2. It also firmly established baptism as an infant rite that was celebrated privately outside of Sunday worship. The public role of the congregation as witness and mentoring community, a role that was significant in the ancient church, was discontinued and forgotten in the Middle Ages.
 - D. Practically speaking, the late medieval church was no longer engaging in baptismal preparation either. With the virtually universal practice of infant baptism firmly established, there could be no genuine instruction of infants.
 1. While many of the ritual steps of the ancient church's practice were retained, the extended catechumenal period of apprenticeship in Christian living could not be sustained.
 2. By the end of the medieval period, serious baptismal preparation had been abandoned, even as the ancient unified pattern for Christian initiation broke apart into the three distinct rites of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. These three were now both temporally distant and theologically separated from one another.

VI. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther was dedicated to the celebration of baptism (and Eucharist) in a manner that would be a sign of God's grace.

A. Luther inherited from the medieval church a temporal separation between baptism and Eucharist by typically eight years or more.

1. The medieval practice of baptism had become a form of urgent rescue, a rite of salvation generated, at least in the understanding of the Reformers, by the superstitious belief that magical water would save the fragile infant.
2. As long as the West limited confirmation to the ministry of bishops, it could not be considered necessary to salvation. Confirmation came to be thought of as augmenting the grace of baptism.
3. For the faithful lay person attending mass every Sunday and feast day, mass became more and more remote – East wall altar, Latin, secreta, removal of the chalice, private devotions, private mass.

B. Confirmation "was recast as a graduation exercise for those of sufficient maturity to know the catechism."¹²

1. Luther was quite explicit that he did not consider confirmation a sacrament.
 - a. He called confirmation "monkey business."¹³ Luther said that he saw no scriptural mandate for it, that it has "no divine promise connected" to it, nor does it save.
 - b. "It is sufficient to regard confirmation as a certain churchly rite or sacramental ceremony, similar to other ceremonies, such as the blessing of water and the like. For if every other creature is sanctified by the Word and by prayer [1 Tim 4:4-5], why should not man much rather be sanctified by the same means? Still, these things cannot be called sacraments of faith, because they have no divine promise connected with them, neither do they save; but the sacraments do save those who believe the divine promise."¹⁴
 - c. Luther was willing for the pastor to examine children and lay hands on them in confirmation.
2. The Augsburg Confession does not regard confirmation as one of the sacraments. Furthermore, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession notes that confirmation lacks the command of God and a clear promise of God's grace—both necessary components for a sacrament, according to the Apology.¹⁵
3. Confirmation provided a bridge between baptism and admission to the table,

assuring the pastor that parents had done their part in raising their children in the faith of their baptism and that the children were ready for to be admitted to the Lord's supper.

4. Lutheran reclaiming of confirmation¹⁶ includes
 - a. Catechetical instructions before admission to communion
 - b. Affirming baptismal vows to congregation, obedience, and discipline after a period of instruction
 - c. Conferring or stirring up of the Holy Spirit
 - d. Remembrance of baptism
 - e. Renewal of baptismal covenant
 - f. Proficiency in understanding the faith and Christian virtues

Reflections on a Faithful Practice of Christian Initiation

I. Goals

- A. Elevate the place of baptism in the life of the congregation.
- B. Eliminate "indiscriminate baptism" and engage in serious catechesis, both prebaptismal and postbaptismal. (UMG 19)
 1. Baptism is a gift and not a right.
 2. Raising children in the faith is the parents' primary responsibility; the church helps.
 3. Include congregational baptismal sponsors.
 4. What can we learn from the catechumenate?
 - a. Do away with rescue from imminent death – trust God to save.
 - b. Belonging, Behaving, Believing
 - c. Bible stories, Creed, Lord's Prayer
 - d. Inclusion in worship
 5. Baptism include postbaptismal anointing and hand-laying (confirmation).

- C. Baptized children cannot recall a time when they did not receive Holy Communion (UMG 37).
 - 1. Emphasis on post communion rather than first communion instruction

- D. Repeatedly affirm baptism in people's lives at significant life transitions (UMG 30).
 - 1. Always an unpacking of God's gift of baptism.
 - 2. Highlight baptismal connection and vocation to the transition.
 - 3. Confirmation one instance of affirmation.
 - a. Not salvific or necessary
 - b. What do we mean by "confirmation"? Can the congregation agree?
 - c. Unpacking God's gift of baptism requires people eager to hear and people willing to share, as opposed to people telling other people what they think those people need to know.
 - d. What is the best time in people's lives for confirmation? How long should instruction last?

¹Augsburg Confession, VII.

²Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 34.

³Craig A. Satterlee, *When God Speaks through Worship: Stories Congregations Live By* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2009), pp. 4-5..

⁴Craig A. Satterlee and Lester Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001), p. 17.

⁵Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), p. 27.

⁶Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 74ff.

⁷Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999) , p. xv.

⁸Pamela Jackson, *Journeybread for the Shadowlands: The Readings for the Rites of the Catechumenate, RCIA* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 1.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰Craig A. Satterlee and Thom Nelson, "Sacraments in History," *Invitation to Christ: A Guide to Sacramental Practices* (Louisville: Presbyterian Church (USA), 2006), pp. 29-38

¹¹Mennonite: Jane Hooper Peifer and John Stahl-Wert, *Welcome New Christians: A Guide for the Christian Initiation of Adults* (Newton, Kansas: Faith & Life Press, 1995 and Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1995), 81ff; Methodist: Daniel T. Benedict, Jr., *Come to the Waters: Baptism & Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers & Making Disciples* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 107-8; Lutheran: *Welcome to Christ: A Lutheran Introduction to the Catechumenate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 21; Episcopal: *The Catechumenal Process: Adult Initiation & Formation for Christian Life and Ministry* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990), 74-8.

¹²James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p. 111.

¹³LW 45:24.

¹⁴LW 36:92.

¹⁵BC 220.

¹⁶Craig A. Satterlee and Dennis L. Bushkofsky, *The Christian Life: Baptism and Life Passages, Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Volume 2, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), pp. 99-104.

A Method of Mystagogical Preaching

Craig A. Satterlee

I. Question Ambrose's Assumptions

- A. God's Presence and Activity in the Rites
- B. Church and Culture
- C. Explanation and Participation
- D. The Preacher: Steward of the Mysteries and Spiritual Guide
- E. The Patristic Approach to Scripture

II. Arrive at the Message

- A. Establish the "Text"
- B. Evaluate the Rites
- C. Interpret the Rites
 - 1. Begin with the Rites Themselves
 - 2. Turn to Scripture
 - 3. Use Several Tools of Interpretation
 - a. Typology
 - b. Allegory
 - c. Chains of Reasoning
 - d. Intent of the Text
 - e. Translation
 - f. Direct and Uncritical Transfer of the Text
 - 4. Pile Up Meanings
 - 5. Rely on the Church's Tradition
 - 6. Spell Out the Implication of Participating in the Rites

III. Craft the Homily

- A. The Structure of Mystagogy
- B. Enriching the Structure
 - 1. Language
 - 2. Description
 - 3. Illustration
 - 4. Incorporate the Texts of Liturgy and Scripture
 - 5. Tone

IV. Retrace the Journey

- A. The Preacher
- B. The Liturgical Context
- C. The Architectural Setting

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