

# Worship and Mission/Evangelism

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## Worship is not for the unbeliever, but for the believer.

Worship exists for the Church, and the Church exists for the world. Is worship, therefore, evangelistic? Is it *for* the unbeliever? This past November I was invited to do a day and a half lecture series at a Baptist seminary in Dallas. On the first day of my lectures, I stated, “Worship is not for the unbeliever, but for the



believer.” In the next morning’s Q&A, one of the senior professors pushed back on that comment. He mentioned that in his Baptist tradition, that perspective goes against one of their primary sensibilities, the importance of the altar call for conversion after the sermon. He said, “The high point of our services is to see people come forward to receive Jesus. You can’t do that if unbelievers aren’t present.” That’s a good question. Here is a rough equivalence of my response. “I stand by my statement that worship is for the believer, not the unbeliever. However, the Apostle Paul made it clear in his letters that there would be unbelievers present. Given that the early church was innately sacramental and celebrated the Eucharist weekly, and that Eucharist is only for believers, what did they do?”

## Baptismal Catechesis: Process Evangelism

From the second century, the Church established an evangelistic instructional and formational process called catechesis. Catechesis literally means oral instruction on every aspect of the Christian faith leading seekers and followers of Jesus to learn how to belong, behave and believe. Seekers, or inquirers, who wanted to know about the faith were invited to stay for the first part of worship, the Liturgy of the Word, but were dismissed with a kiss of peace and sent to be instructed on the faith, while the baptized stayed for the Eucharist. What did that catechetical instruction look like? The instruction was focused primarily on three topics: moral and ethical behavior, beliefs, and prayer. The unbaptized were first taught how Christians are to live morally and ethically in the world. This character formation was communal and intense. Then, when the unbaptized were ready to begin an intentional journey toward baptism, a journey that happened in the pre-Easter season of Lent, they “received” (orally) the Apostles Creed, which taught these

seekers how to believe. And they “received” the Lord’s Prayer, which taught them how to pray. Additionally, in the season of Lent, there were numerous moral scrutinies and prayers and exorcisms in preparation for baptism. The candidates for baptism, called the elect, were baptized at the Great Paschal Vigil, which started sometime after sundown on Holy Saturday, the day before the Great Paschal Feast of Easter. Before being baptized the elect had to recite from memory the creed and the Lord’s Prayer to the bishop. After baptism and chrismation (sealing or confirming with oil on the head) the newly baptized received their first Eucharist. For weeks following the Paschal Vigil, the newly baptized neophytes entered into a time of mystagogy, or instructions in the mysteries of the faith, beginning with a full explanation of the Eucharist.

Before being baptized the candidates were asked to renounce Satan and all his works and his empty promises. In some places in the East, this was a robust three-fold renunciation. Bob Webber recounts a student of his at Wheaton who became baptized in the Orthodox Church, taking on the name Pachomius. This was her baptismal renunciation:

*Bishop (facing West):* “Pachomius, do you renounce Satan and all his works and his empty promises?”

*Elect (facing East):* “I do.”

*Bishop (facing West, but closer and louder):* “Pachomius, do you renounce Satan and all his works and his empty promises?”

*Elect (facing East, louder):* “I do, I do.”

*Bishop (facing West, even closer and even louder):* “Pachomius, do you renounce Satan and all his works and his empty promises?”

*Elect (facing East, even louder):* “I do, I do, I do.”

*Bishop:* “Show me a sign!” The elect then turns and spits into the West.

Bob Webber exclaimed, “That’s a great way to end a relationship!” That’s what baptism is all about: ending one relationship and entering a new one, an eternal one, one that brings about true human flourishing.

That was my response to the senior fellow at the seminary in Dallas. The Church dealt with unbelievers in worship by developing baptismal catechesis. This is process evangelism, as opposed to crisis evangelism. It was a communal, relational, embodied, and comprehensive process of immersion in the basics of the faith and the Church, walking in life together to form Christian faith and character.

## **Robert Webber on the Importance of Catechesis.**

Bob Webber gave no fewer than three presidential addresses focused on the importance of catechesis. The first in June 2004 focused on the rituals of passage in the catechetical process, where Bob called for a much more robust communal commemoration of the Rite of the Catechumenate, the Rite of Election and the Rites of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). The second in January 2005 focused on the recovery of the Great Paschal Vigil. The third in June 2006 was titled, "Catechumenate across the Curriculum," where he again advocated for a recovery of the entire catechetical process as a primary key to worship renewal. That was his final talk at IWS. Here is a brief summary of the three talks. These are all archived on the website.

In his first talk, Bob Webber advocated for a recovery of seeing the church as a nurturing community. The image of the Church that was most powerfully and prevalently used by the early Church was the Church as a womb, or a mother. St. Cyprian stated that in the womb of the Church we are conceived, at her breasts we are nourished and by her spirit we are animated. As the Church lives into her mission, evangelism happens and seekers are drawn to the Church. Because of that, the Church needed to develop rituals of initiation. This led to the creation of a series of three liturgically based rituals that organized the four steps of Christian initiation. The culminating ritual was the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) at the Great Paschal Vigil. He went on to describe in some detail the three rituals of passage, especially the Paschal Vigil, to which he devoted one entire address. Bob started the third talk by expressing regret over not having a course at IWS in catechesis, especially given its importance in worship renewal since the earliest days of the Church. He gave some brief background to catechesis. There has been some resistance to catechesis in the Evangelical world from a perceived lack of rootedness in scripture. Putting aside the fact that this perspective shows a disregard for how the Church has always developed doctrines and rites out of her practices, traditions and understandings of the faith, it also disregards evidence from Acts 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16 and 18, references throughout the Pauline Epistles, and the entire book of 1 Peter (considered by many to be a baptismal catechesis book). The *Didache*, chapters 7 and 9, contain references to baptismal instruction. According to Hippolytus, by the early third century the Church had adopted an elaborate three-year catechetical process, which I will briefly describe later.

Bob Webber promoted the DWS 701 paper on catechesis by IWS alum Dr. Jim Dodge as a great example of a thoughtful overview of catechesis (also archived on

the website). In this paper, Jim compared the catecheses of St. Hippolytus from the early third century with that of St. Augustine from the late fourth century, and then compared them both to the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (or RCIA) in the Catholic Church. Bob upheld this paper as a solid case for catechetical recovery.

When he gave this address in June of 2006, Bob Webber was already sick with cancer. This was his last message to IWS—the importance of catechesis, and his regret, if you will, for not having catechesis in the curriculum.

The importance of the topic sent me on a search to learn as much as I could about both the why and the how of catechesis. I immersed myself in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, (RCIA), which is the most comprehensive year-long process in existence today that is rooted in the ancient Church’s practice. I attended the Rite of Election and saw 450 people coming into the Church. I attended three scrutinies in three different locations and attended the full Great Paschal Vigil in a parish where a number of elect were baptized. I read books on catechesis, as well as all of the RCIA rites. I re-read Bob Webber’s books *Ancient-Future Evangelism* and *Journey to Jesus*, which were his attempts to recover the catechesis process for the contemporary Church. Bob’s process was similar to the catechesis of St. Hippolytus and to RCIA.

### **The Why of Catechesis.**

First, the why of catechesis. Why did the early Church find it necessary to develop a catechetical process to accommodate the unbaptized? More to it, why should we consider it, let alone care about it? Why not just share the Four Spiritual Laws or the bridge diagram, get unbelievers saved, and then recruit them for the choir? Or better yet, if they play guitar, make them the worship leader—maybe even a deacon! Process evangelism is a much more relational, immersive and communal approach. It emphasizes radical relationships reflective of a radically relational Triune God. It involves intentional discipleship, formation over time into Christ-likeness. It has the intention of producing faithful disciples who can withstand the rigors of being Christ-followers in a secular age that promotes a culture of death.

I have already hinted at another reason for catechesis. Given that the early church was innately sacramental and celebrated the Eucharist weekly, and that Eucharist is only for believers, catechesis became a necessity. Let me unpack that just a bit. An “innate sacramentality” begins with the theological metaphysical perspective that God created the world freely from nothing. Therefore, everything that *is*, both in this world and in every universe or multiverse that exists, is *necessarily* insinuated

with the Creator. God is present to the created order, sustaining it and eternally continuing to create. The word “sacramental” means that God mysteriously participates in the created order as the created order mysteriously participates in God’s loving continuous creation.

This innate sacramentality of the early Church saw the Church as the mystical Body of Christ, the continuing incarnation of Christ in the world. Also, the Apostolic proclamations, or scriptures were seen as iconic of Christ, who is the Living Word of God himself.

The next level of sacramental participation is the participation of bread and wine in the reality of the body and blood of Christ. The Church has always been Eucharistic. From the very beginning, the weekly gatherings of the Church centered around the proclamation of the Apostle’s teaching and the celebration of the Eucharist—or, the Word spoken and heard, and the Word ingested and incarnated in the Church. The vast majority of global Christianity always has been Eucharistic, and continues to be so today. Well over 80% of global Christianity celebrates the Eucharist at their weekly Sunday gatherings. So, the vast majority of Christians historically and presently, have celebrated the Eucharist as the primary and privileged response to the Apostolic proclamation of God’s Word and, more to it, the privileged participation in heavenly worship. To think otherwise reveals a troubling historical amnesia and ecclesial obliviousness or confusion.

However, after the Reformation, many Protestant traditions do not celebrate weekly communion, particularly those following in the theological footsteps of Huldrych Zwingli. Perhaps this is due to its association with the overly juridical hierarchical churches or governmentally mandated churches. And, the rise of rationalism in modernity undermined the mystery of the Eucharist. Christians in the free church tradition have had to devise other ways to respond in thanksgiving to the Word. While that is understandable, I challenge you to reflect on this practice. When Jesus met with his disciples just before his arrest, trial and crucifixion, he left them with what? A book? An apologetic methodology? A teaching series? A disembodied thank you? No. He left them with a meal, a meal of remembrance, a meal of thanksgiving (or Eucharist), a meal of bread and wine that embodied, manifested, substantiated the very body and blood of Jesus Christ himself. See John chapter 6 for the details. Furthermore, when he ascended, Jesus left his disciples with this commission, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:18b-20, ESV). From the very

beginning, the Church has viewed this command to baptize as the sacramental doorway to life in Christ, the source and summit of which is the Eucharist.

Why is the Eucharist so important? In his sermon on 1 Cor. 10:17, Sermon 227, St. Augustine wrote this referring to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in bread and wine at Eucharist, “If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle [Paul] says, We, being many, are one loaf, one body.” As we partake of the Eucharistic bread, the Body of Christ broken for the life of the world, we become the ecclesial bread, the Church, the mystical Body of Christ broken for the life of the world. Through the Eucharist, Christ, the Living Word, constitutes the Church, sends the Church on mission, and then the Church regathers to celebrate the Eucharist, which again constitutes the Church! Paraphrasing Dr. Hans Boersma, this *koinonia*, or participation, is a means of grace that allows the created order, and particularly humankind, to reach its appointed end: eternal participation, eternal feasting, in the divine life itself through Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> There is nothing more important than that!<sup>2</sup>

This centrality of the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life embodies the Apostolic proclamation, and it has been embraced as the central act of worship by the vast majority of Christians everywhere and always. Furthermore, the *leitourgia*, or liturgy, of the Church is understood as our participation in the *leitourgia* of heaven revealed in the books of Hebrews and Revelation, the liturgy led by Jesus himself, the heavenly banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb slain for eternity. Heavenly worship is likewise a meal, an eternal feast of love and joy in the presence of the Triune God, a marriage feast between the Church and the glorified incarnate Son. **And baptism is the entrance to this meal.**

Here is a third “why” of catechesis: it successfully produces faithful disciples of Jesus. At the 1999 International Consultation on Discipleship, John Stott expressed concern about global evangelism, exclaiming that evangelicals have “experienced enormous statistical growth . . . without corresponding growth in discipleship.”<sup>3</sup> At that same consultation, Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo opined that “the church is one mile long, but only one inch deep.”<sup>4</sup> In a predominantly pagan world of the early

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011) p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Anamnesis* article from April 2019 for more details.

<sup>3</sup> David Neff, “Make Disciples, Not Just Converts,” *Christianity Today*, 25 October 1999, quoted in the following: Webber, Robert. “Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community.” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003) p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Church, and in the post-Christian neo-pagan world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many Christians have found themselves inept at leading others through the process of coming to full faith in Jesus Christ, resulting in shallow Christianity that is swayed by the changing currents of culture and incapable of telling the world its true story. A robust baptismal catechetical process goes a long way toward alleviating this problem. As liturgical theologian Aidan Kavanagh wrote, “Who does not know [baptismal] initiation does not know the Church. Who does not know the Church does not know the Lord. And who knows neither the Church nor the Lord does not know the world as God meant it to be from before always.”<sup>5</sup> He went on to state that the catechumenate “embraces the whole of the Church’s policy on who a Christian is and how he gets to be that way.”<sup>6</sup> THIS is what the world needs to know, but doesn’t know it needs to know! As the Eucharist forms the Church to be broken and poured out as Christ for the world, to tell the world its true story, so baptismal catechesis is the doorway to that Eucharistic narrative. Baptismal catechesis is a process of conversion involving the strong support of individual sponsors and church communities who walk and live beside the converts. In it the catechumens are taught the basics of the faith—how to live, how to believe and how to pray. It is rooted in the orthodox Trinitarian and Christological theology found in the creeds and in a solidly pastoral and communal approach to discipleship.

To review the “why” of catechesis, first, it is relational evangelism that is process oriented. Second, it gives seekers a way to come to the faith that leads to the Eucharist. Third, it successfully produces faithful disciples of Jesus.

### **The How of Catechesis.**

How should catechesis be carried out? These catechetical processes involve four periods with three rites of passage. (Refer to the chart at the end of this article.) The first period in the ancient process is called the inquiry, or the time of evangelization, where the seekers are invited to learn about the faith and consider following Jesus Christ. The length of time is indeterminate, depending upon the reception of the inquirer and the discernment of those walking with the inquirer. If an inquirer or seeker desires to become a baptized Christian, they go through the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumens, which Bob Webber called the Rite of Conversion. The unbaptized catechumens (who Bob named “hearers”)

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<sup>5</sup> Aidan Kavanagh, “Christian Initiation: Tactics and Strategy,” in *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

are welcomed to the first part of worship, the service of the Word, and then dismissed with prayer and blessing before the Eucharist, which is specifically only for baptized Christians. The catechumens meet together on a regular basis with their sponsors, usually at least weekly, and are instructed on how to live the Christian life, the basics of the faith, and how to pray and reach out in love to others. Biblical passages are read and explained, and the catechumens are prayed for and anointed and even exorcised from the influences of evil.

After at least a year of formation in the catechumenate, those who desire to become baptized are invited to go through the Rite of Election, which Bob called the Rite of Covenant. This Rite of Election is traditionally held on the first Sunday of Lent. In this Rite, their names are written in the Book of the Elect with the endorsement of their sponsors, and numerous prayers and blessings are given over the elect, as the candidates for baptism are called. Note the dialogical nature of this Rite: God calls, or elects, through the Church, and the elect respond by enrolling their names, with the endorsement of the Church.

The period following the Rite of Election is called the Period of Purification and Enlightenment (which Bob titled Spiritual Formation) and it lasts for the season of Lent, roughly six weeks. During this period, the elect (who Bob named “kneelers”) are symbolically given the Apostle’s Creed, the most basic summary of the Christian faith, and the Lord’s Prayer, the basic instruction from Jesus on how to pray. On this practice, Bob Webber wrote, “How do you deal with the temptation of evil? The answer given by the early Church is to memorize the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer and to repeat them both frequently as they become an inner armor of dependence upon God and a reminder of what the Christian believes.”<sup>7</sup> William Harmless wrote, “The creed gave the ‘what’ of right belief, while the Our Father gave the ‘to whom’ and ‘how’ of right praise.”<sup>8</sup> Ethical/moral formation continues as well, militating against a prevailing hegemonious culture of death.

During the entire catechumenal period, catechumens and elect are taught how to live, how to believe, and how to pray. But they are taught in the womb of a community of supporters including family, sponsors, and the local church, but most importantly, the witness of the great company of the Church triumphant and the Church militant.

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003) p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 281.



During Lent, the elect go through three scrutinies, when they are directed to examine their lives, repent and seek healing for weaknesses, defects and sins that hamper human flourishing. The scrutinies involve prayers of exorcism and prayers for strengthening and protection of their lives in Christ. They are focused historically on three stories from the Gospel of John that emphasize that Christ is the living water, the light of the world, and the source of resurrection life.

Toward the end of Lent, during the last three days of Holy Week titled the Sacred Paschal Triduum, the formation of the elect becomes quite intense. The Apostle's Creed and the Lord's Prayer are "handed back" through recitation from memory, and there are additional prayers and exorcisms made over the elect.

At the Great Paschal Vigil, the elect are presented for baptism and chrismation (or sealing with the oil of confirmation). I do not have the time here to fully discuss this most important celebration. There are many resources in the IWS library that detail the Paschal Vigil. But for now, here is a brief overview of the Vigil. The elect are first presented officially as candidates for baptism with the support of their sponsors and the entire congregation. Then they go through a final renunciation of Satan similar to what I described earlier, and an official confession of the faith in the Apostle's Creed, together with the entire congregation. Individually, the candidates for baptism are immersed three times in the name of the persons of the Trinity. Then they are clothed with a white baptismal gown, and they are given a lit candle, representing the light of Christ. Finally, the baptized are anointed with the confirming oil of chrismation, symbolizing the sealing of the gift of the Holy Spirit. After the baptism, the newly baptized, now called neophytes (which Bob titled "the faithful"), are invited to the Eucharist for the first time. In the great 50 days of the Easter season, the neophytes continue to meet for mystagogy, or deeper instruction in the faith centered on the Eucharist, but also including discernment of calling and gifting to mission.

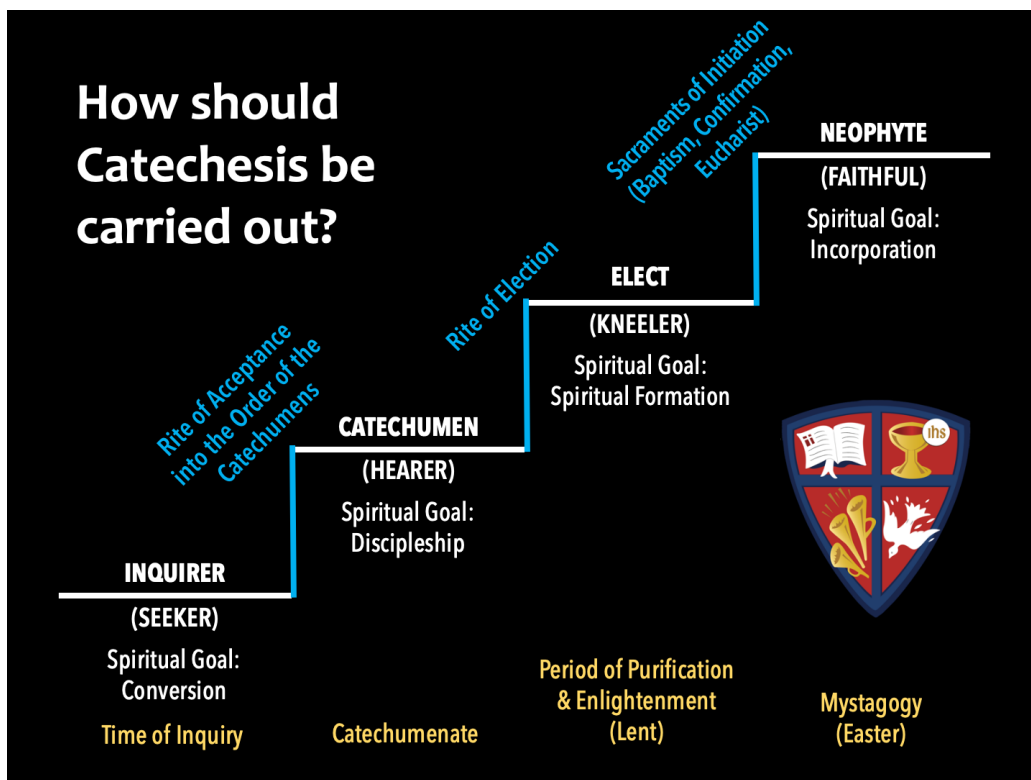
There is much, much more that can be said about the Great Paschal Vigil and mystagogy, but that will need to wait for a later time. For now, I want to emphasize how this process is at the very core of what it means to renew Sunday worship. And, it is at the core of what it means to be missional.

In this article, I have barely scratched the surface of this most important topic of liturgical baptismal catechesis. I would like to let Bob Webber have almost the final word on this topic for now.

It is interesting that people who are experts in the area of worship seldom connect worship with mission, and people who are experts in mission seldom connect mission with worship. The mission of the church to make disciples occurs in worship. The two go hand in hand. God’s mission is proclaimed and enacted in the worship of God’s community, the church, which embodies God’s mission. Worship and mission are not separate categories of ministry but interrelated aspects of the one single ministry of declaring God’s saving mission and of bringing people into an experience of God’s salvation in a special body of people, the church. Worship is first and foremost the mission of God proclaimed and enacted.<sup>9</sup>

In worship, we are divinized into Christ-likeness, but not just for ourselves, for the life of the world. Keep this connection between worship and mission. Inspire and charge God’s people to go and to “Christify” the world, to evangelize the world, to catechize the world, for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



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<sup>9</sup> Webber, “Ancient-Future Evangelism,” p. 161