

## **GICI 1: Sacraments of Initiation**

Get used to the acronym, GICI. (Like the GIRM, but not GIRM.) With this post, we begin the examination of the 35 sections of the General Introduction to Christian Initiation. Not nearly as long as the GIRM, but important in laying a groundwork for the sacramental reforms of the initiation sacraments. GICI draws heavily on the documents of the Second Vatican Council and on Scripture in making a case for the renewal of these sacraments as practiced by western Catholics.

- 1. In the sacraments of Christian initiation we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection. ([Ad Gentes 14](#))***

A good summary of section 14 of the Vatican II Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity. It implies the Christian life is one of freedom, but not of personal happiness. It is for a reason that immersion baptism more clearly reflects the reality of initiation: not a cleansing from sin, though baptism does do that. Initiation is about a whole new way of life and living, as part of the family of God, adjoined to the Trinity. The Eucharist points us not just to Holy Thursday, but also to Good Friday and to Easter. Every celebration of the Eucharist should remind the believer of the whole scope of the Paschal Mystery, what we know as the passion and resurrection of Christ, the son of God.

From ***Ad Gentes***:

### ***ARTICLE 2: Preaching the Gospel and Gathering together the People of God***

13. Wherever God opens a door of speech for proclaiming the mystery of Christ (cf. Col. 4:3), there is announced to all men (cf. Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 9:15; Rom. 10:14) with confidence and constancy (cf. Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27, 28; 13:46; 14:3; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31; 1 Thess. 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Phil. 1:20; Eph. 3:12; 6:19, 20) the living God, and He Whom He has sent for the salvation of all, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; Gal. 1:31; Acts 14:15-17, 17:22-31), in order that non - Christians, when the Holy Spirit opens their heart (cf. Acts 16:14), may believe and be freely converted to the Lord, that they may cleave sincerely to Him Who, being the "way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), fulfills all their spiritual expectations, and even infinitely surpasses them.

This conversion must be taken as an initial one, yet sufficient to make a man realize that he has been snatched away from sin and led into the mystery of God's love, who called him to enter into a personal relationship with Him in Christ. For, by the workings of divine grace, the new convert sets out on a spiritual journey, by means of which, already sharing through faith in the mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection, he passes from the old man to the new one, perfected in Christ (cf. Col. 3:5-10; Eph. 4:20-24). This bringing with it a progressive change of

outlook and morals, must become evident with its social consequences, and must be gradually developed during the time of the catechumenate. Since the Lord he believes in is a sign of contradiction (cf. Luke 2:34; Matt. 10:34-39), the convert often experiences an abrupt breaking off of human ties, but he also tastes the joy which God gives without measure (cf. 1 Thess. 1:6).

The Church strictly forbids forcing anyone to embrace the Faith or alluring or enticing people by worrisome wiles. By the same token, she also strongly insists on this right, that no one be frightened away from the Faith by unjust vexations on the part of others. (2)

In accord with the Church's ancient custom, the convert's motives should be looked into, and if necessary, purified.

14. Those who, through the Church, have accepted from God a belief in Christ (3) are admitted to the catechumenate by liturgical rites. The catechumenate is not a mere expounding of doctrines and precepts, but a training period in the whole Christian life, and an apprenticeship duty drawn out, during which disciples are joined to Christ their Teacher. Therefore, catechumens should be properly instructed in the mystery of salvation and in the practice of Gospel morality, and by sacred rites which are to be held at successive intervals, (4) they should be introduced into the life of faith, of liturgy, and of love, which is led by the People of God.

Then, when the sacraments of Christian initiation have freed them from the power of darkness (cf. Col. 1:13),(5) having died with Christ been buried with Him and risen together with Him (cf. Rom. 6:4-11; Col. 2:12-13; 1 Peter 3:21-22; Mark 16:16), they receive the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 3:5-7; Acts 8:14-17) of adoption of sons and celebrate the remembrance of the Lord's death and resurrection together with the whole People of God.

It is to be desired that the liturgy of the Lenten and Paschal seasons should be restored in such a way as to dispose the hearts of the catechumens to celebrate the Easter mystery at whose solemn ceremonies they are reborn to Christ through baptism.

But this Christian initiation in the catechumenate should be taken care of not only by catechists or priests, but by the entire community of the faithful, so that right from the outset the catechumens may feel that they belong to the people of God. And since the life of the Church is an apostolic one, the catechumens also should learn to cooperate wholeheartedly, by the witness of their lives and by the profession of their faith, in the spread of the Gospel and in the building up of the Church.

Finally, the juridic status of catechumens should be clearly defined in the new code of Canon law. For since they are joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ, (7) and not seldom they are already leading a life of faith, hope, and charity.

### ***ARTICLE 3: Forming a Christian Community***

15. The Holy Spirit, who calls all men to Christ by the seeds of the Lord and by the preaching of the Gospel, stirs up in their hearts a submission to the faith. Who in the womb of the baptismal font, He begets to a new life those who believe in Christ, He gathers them into the one People of God which is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people" (1 Peter 2:9).(8)

Therefore, let the missionaries, God's coworkers, (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9), raise up congregations of the faithful such that, walking worthy of the vocation to which they have been called (cf. Eph. 4:1), they may exercise the priestly, prophetic, and royal office which God has entrusted to them. In this way, the Christian community will be a sign of God's presence in the world: for by reason of the eucharistic sacrifice, this community is ceaselessly on the way with Christ to the Father;(9) carefully nourished on the word of God (10) it bears witness to Christ;(11) and finally, it walks in charity and is fervent with the apostolic spirit.(12)

The Christian community should from the very start be so formed that it call provide nor its necessities insofar as this is possible.

This congregation of the faithful, endowed with the riches of its own nation's culture, should be deeply rooted in the people. Let families flourish which are imbued with the spirit of the Gospel (13) and let them be assisted by good schools; let associations and groups be organized by means of which the lay apostolate will be able to permeate the whole of society with the spirit of the Gospel. Lastly, let charity shine out between Catholics of different rites. (14)

The ecumenical spirit should be nurtured in the neophytes, who should take into account that the brethren who believe in Christ are Christ's disciples, reborn in baptism, sharers with the People of God in very many good things. Insofar as religious conditions allow, ecumenical activity - should be furthered in such a way that, excluding any appearance of indifference or confusion on the one hand, or of unhealthy rivalry on the other, Catholics should cooperate in a brotherly spirit with their separated brethren, among to the norms of the Decree on Ecumenism, making before the nations a common profession of faith, insofar as their beliefs are common, in God and in Jesus Christ, and cooperating in social and in technical projects as well as in cultural and religious ones. Let them cooperate especially for the sake of Christ, their common Lord: let His Name be the bond that unites them! This cooperation should be undertaken not only among private persons, but also, subject to approval by the local Ordinary, among churches or ecclesial communities and their works.

The Christian faithful gathered together out of all nations into the Church "are not marked off from the rest of men by their government, nor by their language, nor by their political institutions,"(15) and so they should live for God and Christ in a respectable way of their own national life. As good citizens, they should be true and effective patriots, all together avoiding racial prejudice and hyper-nationalism, and should foster a universal love for man.

To obtain all these things, the most important and therefore worthy of special attention are the Christian laity: namely, those who have been incorporated into Christ and live in the world. For

it is up to them, imbued with the spirit of Christ, to be a leaven working on the temporal order from within, to dispose it always in accordance with Christ. (16)

But it is not enough that the Christian people be present and be organized in a given nation, nor is it enough to carry out an apostolate by way of example. They are organized for this purpose, they are present for this, to announce Christ to their non - Christian fellow - citizens by word and example, and to aid them toward the full reception of Christ.

Now, in order to plant the Church and to make the Christian community grow, various ministries are needed, which are raised up by divine calling from the midst of the faithful congregation and are to be carefully fostered and tended to by all. Among these are the offices of priests, of deacons, and of catechists, and Catholic action. Religious men and women likewise, by their prayers and by their active work, play an indispensable role in rooting and strengthening the Kingdom of Christ in souls, and in causing it to be spread.

16. Joyfully the Church gives thanks for the priceless gift of the priestly calling which God has granted to so many youths among those nations but recently converted to Christ. For the Church drives deeper roots in any given sector of the human family when the various faithful communities all have, from among their members, their own ministers of salvation in the order of bishops, priests, and deacons, serving their own brethren, so that the young churches gradually acquire a diocesan structure with their own clergy.

What this council has decreed concerning priestly vocations and formation, should be religiously observed where the Church is first planted, and among the young churches. Of great importance are the things which are said about closely joining spiritual formation with the doctrinal and pastoral; about living a life patterned after the Gospel without looking out for one's own comfort or that of one's family; about cultivating a deep appreciation of the mystery of the Church. From all this, they will be well taught to dedicate themselves wholly to the service of the Body of Christ and to the work of the Gospel, to cleave to their own bishop as his faithful co - workers, and to cooperate with their colleagues. (17)

To attain this general end, the whole training of the students should be planned in the light of the mystery of salvation as it is revealed in the Scriptures. This mystery of Christ and of man's salvation they can discover and live in the liturgy. (18)

These common requirements of priestly training, including the pastoral and practical ones prescribed by the council (19) should be combined with an attempt to make contact with their own particular national way of thinking and acting. Therefore, let the minds of the students be kept open and attuned to an acquaintance and an appreciation of their own nation's culture. In their philosophical and theological studies, let them consider the points of contact which mediate between the traditions and religion of their homeland on the one hand and the Christian religion on the other. (20) Likewise, priestly training should have an eye to the pastoral needs of that region; and the students should learn the history, aim, and method of the Church's missionary activity, and the special social, economic, and cultural conditions of

their own people. Let them be educated in the ecumenical spirit, and duly prepared for fraternal dialogue with non - Christians. (21) All this demands that studies for the priesthood be undertaken, so far as possible, in association and living together with their own people.(22) Finally, let care be taken that students are trained in ordinary ecclesiastical and financial administration.

Moreover, suitable priests should be chosen, after a little pastoral practice, to pursue higher studies in universities, even abroad and especially in Rome as well as in other institutes of learning. In this way the young churches will have at hand men from among the local clergy equipped with the learning and skill needed for discharging more difficult ecclesiastical duties.

Where episcopal conferences deem it opportune, the order of the diaconate should be restored as a permanent state of life according to the norms of the Constitution "De Ecclesia."(23) For there are men who actually carry out the functions of the deacon's office, either preaching the word of God as catechists, or presiding over scattered Christian communities in the name of the pastor and the bishop or practicing charity in social or relief work. It is only right to strengthen them by the imposition of hands which has come down from the Apostles, and to bind them more closely to the altar, that they may carry out their ministry more effectively because of the sacramental grace of the diaconate.

17. Likewise worthy of praise are the ranks of men and women catechists, well deserving of missionary work to the nations. Imbued with the apostolic spirit, they labor much to make an outstanding and altogether necessary contribution to the spread of the Faith and of the Church.

In our time, when there are so few clerics to preach the Gospel to such great numbers and to exercise the pastoral ministry, the position of catechists is of great importance. Therefore, their training must be so accomplished and so adapted to advances on the cultural level that as reliable coworkers of the priestly order, they may perform their task well, though it be weighed down with new and greater burdens.

There should therefore be an increase in the number of schools, both on the diocesan and on the regional levels, wherein future catechists may study Catholic doctrine, especially in the fields of Scripture and the liturgy, as well as catechetical method and pastoral practice; schools wherein they can develop in themselves a Christian character, and wherein they can devote themselves tirelessly to cultivating piety and sanctity of life. Moreover, conventions or courses should be held in which at certain times catechists could be refreshed in the disciplines and skills useful for their ministry and in which their spiritual life could be nourished and strengthened. In addition, for those who devote themselves entirely to this work, a decent standard of living should be provided, and social security, by paying them a just wage. (24)

It would be desirable for the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to provide special funds for the due training and support of catechists. If it seems necessary and fitting, let a special "Opus pro Catechists" be founded.

Moreover, the churches should gratefully acknowledge the noble work being done by auxiliary catechists, whose help they will need. These preside over the prayers in their communities and teach sacred doctrine. Something suitable should be done for their doctrinal and spiritual training. Besides, it is to be hoped that, where it seems opportune, catechists who are duly trained should receive a "missio canonica" in a publicly celebrated liturgical ceremony, so that in the eyes of the people they may serve the Faith with greater authority.

18. Right from the planting stage of the Church, the religious life should be carefully fostered. This not only offers precious and absolutely necessary assistance to missionary activity, but by a more inward consecration made to God in the Church, it also clearly manifests and signifies the inner nature of the Christian calling. (25)

Religious institutes, working to plant the Church, and thoroughly imbued with mystic treasures with which the Church's religious tradition is adorned, should strive to give expression to them and to hand them on, according to the nature and the genius of each nation. Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life might be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions, whose seeds were sometimes planted by God in ancient cultures already prior to the preaching of the Gospel.

Various forms of religious life are to be cultivated in the young churches, in order that they may display various aspects of the mission of Christ and of the life of the Church, and may devote themselves to various pastoral works, and prepare their members to exercise them rightly. On the other hand, the bishops in their conference should see to it that congregations pursuing the same apostolic aims are not multiplied to the detriment of the religious life and of the apostolate.

Worthy of special mention are the various projects for causing the contemplative life to take root. There are those who in such an attempt have kept the essential element of a monastic institution, and are bent on implanting the rich tradition of their order; there are others again who are returning to the simpler forms of ancient monasticism. But all are studiously looking for a genuine adaptation to local conditions. Since the contemplative life belongs to the fullness of the Church's presence, let it be put into effect everywhere.

## **GICI 2: Three Sacraments**

Just a heads-up: The General Introduction to Christian Initiation (GICI) deals nearly exclusively with Baptism. But in this section, it does mention the other two initiation sacraments. Let's read:

***2. Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children (Colossians 1:13; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5. Also Council of Trent, session 6, Decr. de justificatione, cap. 4), a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence, we are called and are indeed the children of God. (1 John 3:1)***

*By signing us with the gift of the Spirit, confirmation makes us more completely the image of the Lord and fills us with the Holy Spirit, so that we may bear witness to him before all the world and work to bring the Body of Christ to its fullness as soon as possible. (Ad Gentes 36) Finally, coming to the table of the eucharist, we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man so that we may have eternal life (John 6:55) and show forth the unity of God's people. By offering ourselves with Christ, we share in the universal sacrifice, that is, the entire community of the redeemed offered to God by their High Priest (Augustine, De civitate Dei 10:6: PL 41, 284, Lumen Gentium 11, Presbyterorum Ordinis 2.), and we pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God's family. (Lumen Gentium 28)*

*Thus the three sacraments of Christian initiation closely combine to bring us, the faithful of Christ, to his full stature and to enable us to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world. (Lumen Gentium 31)*

Scripture provides a good portion of **baptismal theology**. The apostle Paul wrote significantly on it, and it provides the foundation of our sacramental heritage. Note the use of the word "incorporation," believers are baptized "into" Christ's Body. Note the other verbs, strong verbs: form, pardon, rescue, bring to dignity, called.

**Confirmation** is described as a completion, making the believer the image of Christ. Note: not "into," but a complete transformation. Confirmation is also linked to the evangelical activity of the Church.

The **Eucharist**, too, shares this aspect with Confirmation. The Eucharist is also evidence for and celebration of the unity of believers as one sacrifice offered by Christ.

As a unit, these sacraments give us what we need to preach Christ and to be Christ for the world. Note the language: believers are not just a symbol of Christ, but to the world, they are Christ. This "stature" is not for the honor of human beings, either individually or collectively, but has a point, a purpose: the ultimate unity of all humankind under God.