



# Catechumenate of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA): An Example of Sentient Intelligence\*

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**ABSTRACT:** Xavier Zubiri's realist philosophy revealed a path of liberation from "concupient intelligence," in which conceiving and judging were the proper act of intellection and not apprehending reality. This type of knowledge, since the time of the ancient Greeks, separated sensing and discerning as two different and even opposite faculties. On the contrary, "sentient intelligence" is a unique act of intellection in which sensing and discerning are both key moments, in which the primary and radical activity of intellection is apprehending "reality" rather than concepts. The recuperation of the catechumenate of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, by the Second Vatican Council, is an excellent demonstration of "sentient intelligence" in the service of faith.

**KEY WORDS:** Catechumenate; Christian Initiation of Adults; Xavier Zubiri; sentient intelligence; unity between sensing and intellectual knowing.

*Catecumenado del Ritual de la Iniciación Cristiana de Adultos (RCIA): un ejemplo de inteligencia sentiente*

**RESUMEN:** La filosofía realista de Xavier Zubiri apuntó una vía liberadora de la "inteligencia concupiente", en la cual el concepto y el juicio constituían el acto primario de intelección y no la aprehensión de la "realidad". Este modo de conocer, desde los griegos, separó el sentir y el inteligir como dos facultades independientes e incluso opuestas. Al contrario, en la "inteligencia sentiente" tanto el sentir como el inteligir son momentos del único acto de conocimiento, en el que el primario y radical es la aprehensión de la "realidad" más que los conceptos. La recuperación del catecumenado de iniciación cristiana de adultos por el Concilio Vaticano II es una excelente demostración de la "inteligencia sentiente" al servicio de la fe.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Catecumenado; iniciación cristiana de adultos; Xavier Zubiri; inteligencia sentiente; unidad entre sentir e inteligir.

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## Introduction

This research explores the interface between “sentient intelligence,” by Xavier Zubiri<sup>1</sup> and liturgical science, having as an object of exploration the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, which reestablishes the catechumenate of the old tradition, constituting a significant moment of liturgical reform by The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. After the 4th century, the baptism of children had become a generalized practice in the Church<sup>2</sup>; the Council, upon re-examining this practice, developed this specific ritual for adults, the first in the history of liturgy<sup>3</sup>.

In Brazil there was a translation of the second typical edition of the RCIA ritual, with adaptations that indicate attempts at inculturation and that deserve attention.<sup>4</sup> It showed that the Second Vatican Council helped fulfill the goal of *aggiornamento*<sup>5</sup> proposed by Pope John XXIII, today canonized.<sup>6</sup> The Italian term *aggiornamento*, which translates as *updating* in English is the principle guiding term for the Second Vatican Council, and is also the key phrase for our understanding of what Zubiri calls “sentient intelligence.” Through this work, we will show what actualization means according to the Zubirian point of view.

Before presenting what “sentient intelligence” is according to Zubiri, I would like to emphasize the importance of one’s senses and intellection for the the experience of liturgy. According to Zubiri, “to feel is a systematic property of the organic material structure of an animal,”<sup>7</sup> considering “that matter *lives* and, when reaching certain structural arrangements, it *feels*.”<sup>8</sup> However, man feels in a different way; he feels things as real, and this constitutes his *sensing*. Thus, intellection as well as sensing are used during liturgy, with its rich weaving of symbols that affects and generates experiences of the senses.

In a special way, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RICA), of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, reestablishes this method of experience as a process of

<sup>1</sup> Zubiri. *Inteligencia sentiente: inteligencia y realidad*.

<sup>2</sup> Borobio, *História e teologia comparada dos sacramentos: O princípio da analogia sacramental*, 121.

<sup>3</sup> Sacra Congregatio Pro Cultu Divino. *Rituale romanun. Ordo baptismi parvulorum*

<sup>4</sup> Sagrada Congregação para o Culto Divino, *Ritual de batismo de crianças*.

<sup>5</sup> *Aggiornamento* is an Italian term, which means “updating.” This word was a key orientating phrase for the Second Vatican Council, summoned by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

<sup>6</sup> Pope John XXIII was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI, together with Pope John Paul, on April 27th, 2014, at St. Peter’s Square.

<sup>7</sup> Zubiri, *Sobre el hombre*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

faith formation, in which the person, in the unified and growing wholeness of one's emotional and intellectual levels, adheres to Jesus' missionary discipleship and acquires ecclesial spirit. To analyze this question, we will engage with the works of Xavier Zubiri (1898-1983), a contemporary philosopher who revolutionized human thought with his thesis regarding *sentient intelligence*.

It is important to point out that "sentient intelligence" is the answer to the greatest crisis of thought since the time of the ancient Greeks, when a separation between sensing and intellective knowing started and consolidated throughout the centuries, as if these were two distinct and even opposite faculties. This was greatly problematic in the case of liturgy, because liturgy cannot exist without both sensing and discernment about what is sensed. It is necessary to highlight that, for Zubiri, intellective knowing is not the same as understanding, but a unique act in which one apprehends something as real; in the case of liturgy, the reality that one is involved with and taken by is the supreme divine reality. Both sensing and intellective knowing are expressions of the love of God the Father, and are integral parts of the same process. For example, human beings perceive the reality of heat when they hear that there will be a heat wave, and they can perceive the hunger that the poor experience without being poor themselves.

Liturgy is celebrated always in the context of a particular culture, since it is a culture that offers the elements for liturgical communication. In this sense, the cultural reality that we encounter directly affects liturgy. However, we are dominated by a theory of knowledge based on concepts and not reality; Zubiri calls this "con-cipient intelligence", and he writes that the "dualism between intellective knowing and sensing is a metaphysical conceptualization which distorts the facts"<sup>9</sup>. Zubiri, after scrutinizing reality throughout his life, coined the expression "sentient intelligence," an original philosophy which condenses the innovative vastness of Zubirian thought:

Throughout history, philosophy has very carefully differentiated the act of intellection (to conceive, judge, etc.) and the information from reality that our senses provide us. One thing, we are told, is to feel, and another is to discern. The focusing on this idea of intelligence contains, in a very real sense, an affirmation: to discern comes after sensing, and this coming after is an opposition. Such has been the initial thesis of philosophy since Parmenides, and it has hovered imperturbably, with a thousand variants, over all of European philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e realidade*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Prólogo, iii.

Zubiri is considered by Ellacuria “a hypercritic, a revolutionist in philosophy, an educator for critical and free thinking.”<sup>11</sup> Ellacuria also states:

Zubiri ended up developing a philosophy which is not only different, but radically new, starting from what can be understood as a radical criticism of all previous philosophy; he was successful in placing all problems on another level, ending up with a new vision of reality.<sup>12</sup>

The apprehension of reality, while an elementary act of intelligence,<sup>13</sup> involves a unity between sensing and intellection, since—as we have already said—“there is no sensing and intellectual knowing, but only sentient intellection, impressive intellection of the real while real”<sup>14</sup>:

Never is there in man the opposition between sensing and intellectual knowing, but a structural unity: to discern and to feel are only two moments of a single act: the act of apprehending reality impressively. It is sentient intelligence, whose act is impression of reality.<sup>15</sup>

We can establish that the catechumenate in preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation during the Christian initiation of adults, in the form specified by the ancient Church, comes from a knowledge guided by concipient intelligence, that is, an intelligence based on concepts, since its method does not allow one to know God through preconceived notions, but rather gives priority to the experience of God and the new life in Christ through concatenated steps. Before we consider this question, however, let us see how Zubiri explains knowledge based on the notion of sentient intelligence.

## The Ways of Apprehension in Zubiri

And why do we apprehend real things? We apprehend them because real things give themselves to our apprehension, with reality being what we capture from them and what stays in our apprehension. And what we apprehend from real things, reality, “is dynamic and active by itself, and not due to some potencies that emerge from it.”<sup>16</sup>

For Zubiri, the ways in which the apprehension of reality in its *sameness* gives itself to our senses and intelligence are threefold: (1) primordial apprehension,

<sup>11</sup> Ellacuria, “Uma abordagem da filosofia de Zubiri,” 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e realidade*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e logos*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>16</sup> Zubiri, *Estructura dinamica de la realidad*, 65.

(2) dual (*logos*) apprehension, and (3) worldly apprehension (reason). It is not that *logos* and reason are successive as a process; rather, they are only ulterior, because they are founded on primordial apprehension. That is why they can happen at the same time, but never independently from primordial apprehension.

## The Primordial Apprehension of Reality

The primordial apprehension of reality is fundamental, because ulterior apprehensions are an unfolding of this primary apprehension that dominates and subjugates, providing one with what to think, that is, leading to the moving of *reason*, which is the natural process of knowledge. In this sense, liturgy, while being a moment of reality, provides primordial apprehension through celebration. It is precisely in the term *reality* where one can notice the transversality between Zubiri's thought and liturgical science. We can see how Martin uses in a small paragraph—more than once—the word reality, referring to liturgy:

The Christian liturgy is a very rich and polyvalent reality that can be analyzed in numerous ways. It is undeniably a reality joined to faith and the personal and social expression of the Church members. This makes liturgical science try to reach all aspects of the liturgical experience and in a special manner those which concern its present realization.<sup>17</sup>

Since man is an apprehender of reality, reality itself has become his own orientation, for as Caponigri (a student of Zubiri) says, “in every situation man turns towards reality.”<sup>18</sup> Facing the world and his own reality is the healthiest way for a man to approach life. In this sense, through liturgy, man not only meets God, but his own self. As stated by Pintor-Ramos: “The person searches in reality, therefore, his own basis and—quite clearly—that of other real things.”<sup>19</sup> Zubiri thought along this line when exploring the question of “the primary and fundamental access of man to reality. He answers this question through the theory of sentient intelligence”<sup>20</sup>, which is different from the “epistemological question” or from a theory of knowledge because the person's primary access to reality precedes epistemological analysis. In this sense, we don't go to liturgy or to an art exhibition to *comprehend* (understand), but to feel and discern how the liturgical or artistic reality happens in a naked and real sense. This is the radical unity between intelligence and sensing.

<sup>17</sup> López Martín, *La liturgia de la Iglesia. Teología, historia, espiritualidad y pastoral*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Caponigri, “A propósito de sobre a essência: o realismo de Xavier Zubiri,” 54.

<sup>19</sup> Pintor-Ramos, “Uma filosofia da religião crista,” 95.

<sup>20</sup> Caponigri, “A propósito de sobre a essência: o realismo de Xavier Zubiri,” 60.

Since reality is that which remains from man's apprehension of real things, "the problem of reality is an open problem and one can never say it is closed and concluded."<sup>21</sup> This is one of the most fantastic aspects of Zubirian thought. After a believer experiences God in liturgy, he must do it constantly, because no experience of liturgy is complete. Rather, it requires actualization. Consequently, the repetition of the celebration of the same sacrament is always a new moment.

When a theologian thinks about and studies God as a reality (of an open nature), the more mystical he becomes, because he knows that the knowledge of God is infinite and can resemble what Thomas Aquinas reached at the end of his life: to consider that all he had written was straw. Let us revisit now this experience that deeply affected the final days of one of the greatest saints and doctors of the Church, Thomas Aquinas:

Erro de tradução On 29th of September, Thomas still participates in the chapter of his province, in Rome, in the role of definer. But, some weeks later, according to Bartolomeu de Cápuia, who received this report from João del Giudice, who learned about it from Reinaldo, when he celebrated mass in the chapel of St. Nicholas, Thomas underwent an impressive transformation (*fruit mirae mutatione commotus*): "After this Mass, never again did he write or dictate anything, and he even got rid of his writing material (*organascriptionis*); he was in the third part of the *Summa*, in the treatise of penance." To a stupefied Reinaldo, who does not understand why he abandons his work, the Master simply replies: "I cannot do it." Returning to question him a little later, Reinaldo receives the same answer: "I cannot anymore. Everything I wrote looks like straw to me after what I saw."<sup>22</sup>

The revelation of reality is the most crucial element in the search of truth and in the knowledge of God. After having written so many pages and conceptual formulations about the divine reality, the Angelic Doctor didn't manage to conclude his *Summa*, because to talk about the divine reality is to experience the transcendental revelation of reality. This is not an occasional revelation, but a structural one. And therefore, the primordial apprehension of this reality takes place and is renewed in the liturgical experience. The reflection that follows this experience and leads to new experiences may cause what they did with Thomas Aquinas: an irreducible contemplative silence.

Thus, the radical realism of human intelligence is the basic principle of Zubirian metaphysics.<sup>23</sup> The primordial apprehension of reality does not imply judgment, but

<sup>21</sup> Teixeira, "A finitude do infinito: o itinerário teológico do homem em Xavier Zubiri," 113.

<sup>22</sup> Torrel, *Iniciação a Santo Tomás de Aquino: sua pessoa e sua obra*, 339.

<sup>23</sup> Caponigri, *A propósito de sobre a essência: o realismo de Xavier Zubiri*, 62.

only the reception of a block of real things that present themselves to the sentient intelligence. They are transmitted as a block because real things happen as a whole, and the more they are experiences of God or of man himself, the primordial apprehension is more complete.

When a mystic apprehends God, he apprehends God as a whole. This does not mean that he understands what he has apprehended; for this there is a lifetime to more deeply explore and find out how to explain this “inexplicable” experience. It is in this manner that apophatic theology searches for a word. From this point on, upon capturing the apprehended reality, man will further comprehend the reality by way of reason. It is very important to highlight this notion. Ferraz Fayos explains this as “an act of apprehension, of capturing something, without these apprehensions implying any judgement about the situation or about the existence of what is apprehended. The apprehension is not a theory. It is a fact.”<sup>24</sup>

The theory comes later, always by means of the sentient intelligence, passing by the *logos* and arriving at reason. Therefore, it is false that our senses capture things and hand them to our intelligence to judge them. This was the error denounced by Zubiri: *entification* of reality and *logification* of intelligence; the sentient intelligence repairs this error, because in the primordial apprehension both senses work in an integrated way.

According to Zubiri, every apprehension of reality by means of impression is an actualization. And we can see this actualization in all the steps of the catechumenate in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This is why the process is permeated by liturgy as an authentic impression of reality. Therefore, since every liturgical celebration can be experienced as an authentic impression of reality, liturgy is never a repetition of the previous celebration; even if the rites or the readings are the same, they always emerge in the present in order to be actualized.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, any liturgical celebration is always a primordial apprehension of reality, by means of an impression of reality, and is always open to *logos* and reason, resulting in its own structure of transcendental opening. For this reason, liturgy should be attractive. To celebrate liturgy is not an affirmative or declarative act; it is simply a celebrative act. It does not mean that it is not remissible to *logos* and reason, but always a delicate moment in which poetic and religious knowledge fit, considering that religion is an ultimate exigency of transcendentality.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ferraz-Fayos, “A trilogia sobre a inteligência,” 66.

<sup>25</sup> Costa, “Inteligência senciente e liturgia,” 215.

<sup>26</sup> Pintor-Ramos. *Uma filosofia da religião cristã*, 80.

## The Dual Apprehension of Reality—The *Logos*

In the naked apprehension of reality, or primordial apprehension, reality itself thus apprehended dominates us and makes us *think*: reality gives us what to think about. The ulterior step is the sentient apprehension of reality in *logos*. This is why primary apprehension, which happens in its totality, is insufficient as knowledge. As has already been said, the actualization that happens in sensing and intellective knowing does not yet constitute understanding. Later actualization is necessary as a natural unfolding in the development of knowledge.

As Tejada says, “the *logos* [...] is, thus, a re-actualization”<sup>27</sup> determined by reality itself. This re-actualization happens in what Zubiri calls the *field of reality*, which is determined by reality itself. According to Ferraz Fayos, Zubiri took the expression *field of reality* from the notion of the magnetic field in physics:

Field of reality is an expression that designates a primary information of experience: that is, that real things open themselves to others in an environment in which they are in reality. Such is the proper meaning of this expression when we deal with intellection as *logos*.<sup>28</sup>

Everything we apprehend in the primordial impression of reality determines the field of things apprehended. The things of the field of reality are, in a certain form, mobile, depending on the level in which we place them.<sup>29</sup> For Zubiri the dimensions of the field are threefold: “first plane, background and periphery.”<sup>30</sup> On the first plane are the central things, in the background are those things that give reference to things on the first plane, and in the periphery are things that are “unnoticed by me.”<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, another element of the field of reality is “the *horizon*, which marks that which is outside the field.”<sup>32</sup> We are thrown into the world of reality for, as Zubiri states, “as each apprehended thing forms a field, even if there were only one real thing, it would open the field of reality. This is, therefore, a dual apprehension; that is, not merely the apprehension of a thing in and of itself, but of the thing amid others. “It is only when the sentient intellection discerns from a distance that we have

<sup>27</sup> Tejada, “Prólogo,” x.

<sup>28</sup> Ferraz-Fayos, *A trilogia sobre a inteligência*. 66.

<sup>29</sup> Costa, “Inteligência senciente e liturgia,” 217.

<sup>30</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e logos*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



movement.”<sup>33</sup> This is, however, not a distancing in space, but in the reality<sup>34</sup> in which one is inexorably installed,<sup>35</sup> as we stay confined in the real to go to further reality or we are “moving in our own reality, which confines us and repels us.”<sup>36</sup> One of the most important things for Zubiri is the clearness that all the movement that happens in the sphere of reality never removes us from reality, but each time we are inserted into it more deeply<sup>37</sup>.

## The Worldly Apprehension of Reality-Reason

The world is—for Zubiri—“the unity of all the real things in its character of pure and simple reality.”<sup>38</sup> To aid in our understanding, let us use an example from liturgy: when the Church’s prayer refers to Christ as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,”<sup>39</sup> the term *world* does not refer exactly to this planet nor to the whole cosmos, but to the unity of the real while real, which is purified from sin by the redemptive action of the incarnated Son of God.

The apprehension of a worldly reality occurs because the process in search of pure and simple reality is initiated. “The field of reality is not an order of things which is extrinsic to their reality. On the contrary, it is an intrinsic moment of each thing, [...] Even if there were but a single real thing, this thing would still be in a field, i.e., of field-nature”<sup>40</sup>. Discovering pure and simple reality involves a process determined by the rich intellection of things as they emerge in their field. “Therefore, it is not optional for us to reason or not to reason, but it is a compulsory launching,”<sup>41</sup> in which the previously discerned reality in the field launches us towards deep reality,<sup>42</sup> taking us to the world of pure and simple reality.

This is why Zubiri says that “progression is being opened to the unfathomable richness and problematic nature of reality, not only in its own notes but also in its

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>35</sup> Costa, “Inteligência senciente e liturgia,” 217.

<sup>36</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e logos*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>39</sup> Congregação para o Culto Divino e a Disciplina dos Sacramentos, *Missal romano*, 503.

<sup>40</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e realidade*, 197.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>42</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e razão*, 24.

forms and modes of reality”.<sup>43</sup> It is “to dive into the very reality of the real,”<sup>44</sup> that is, within the real, going to the *bottom* of real things,<sup>45</sup> in search of a *measurable intelligence of the real in profundity*.<sup>46</sup> Thus, “reason is above all the direction of an in-depth search”<sup>47</sup> to reach real problems, as “problems are not forged, but are discovered and found.”<sup>48</sup> In this way, in the intellectual process, things begin by making us think and end by giving us reason.”<sup>49</sup>

After what has been presented, we must admit that the theory of knowledge based on concipient intelligence constitutes a grave error, with many adverse consequences to knowledge, culture and faith. God is not a concept, but a person. As Pope Benedict XVI states: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”<sup>50</sup> To demonstrate how sentient intelligence has repercussions on Church liturgy, we will focus on the catechumenate as a demonstration of the sentient intelligence of faith.

## The Catechumenate in View of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Although the expression “Christian initiation” is relatively recent,<sup>51</sup> the Christian initiation of adults is both an old and new reality. It is old because it has already existed in the ancient Church, and yet it is new because since the 6th Century up to the Second Vatican Council it was absent from the Latin Church and almost completely absent from theological reflexion in both the West and the East.<sup>52</sup> The defining characteristic of the Christian initiation of adults is the initiatory process established during the catechumenate.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>50</sup> Bento XVI, *Carta encíclica Deus caritas est* 1.

<sup>51</sup> Pianna, “Iniciação crista,” 627.

<sup>52</sup> Ibáñez, “Iniciación Cristiana,” 573.

## Ways of Experience and The Search of The Fundamentals of Faith

According to López Sáes, “the word catechumenate proceeds from the Greek verb *kátechein*, which means resound, to cause to sound in the ears, and, by extension, to instruct, to catechize.”<sup>53</sup> The same author states that it is not something theoretical, but deeply involved with experience and history; therefore, we can establish, with the notion of sentient intelligence:

The catechumenate refers to this fundamental experience: God speaks today. [...]. In the Bible, the greatest problem of the human being is not whether God exists or not, but whether God speaks or doesn't speak. To the one who searches, maybe by touch (Acts 17:27), the answer is not in the clouds of the theoretical reasonings. The answer is the experience of faith (EN 46), as listening to the Word of God in the core of history.<sup>54</sup>

When talking about the fundamental experience of God, it is important to remember that, for Zubiri, experience is a physical proof of reality,<sup>55</sup> which consists in manipulating the real manageably.<sup>56</sup> The best way of experiencing the real, amid which we can situate God, is *compenetration*. This is not a physical penetration, but a filling with that with which one experiences.<sup>57</sup> It is to see the other being in the other. Before anything else, the catechumenate is a fundamental experience—it is an experience that lays the foundations for other experiences.

Quelquejeu and Jossua affirm that experience “means the totality of what occurs to man in his conscious life. The concept implies that sensing something, receiving an impression, shouldn't be a mere brief phenomenon that is finished quickly and does not leave any trace behind it [...]”<sup>58</sup>

According to Berchtold and Seckler, faith itself lies in the order of fruition and experience: “faith is primarily an affective process, it is the experience of the fruits of God, and reality lived in devotion to God.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> López Sáes, “Catecumenato e inspiração catecumenal,” 125.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e razão*, 197.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>58</sup> Quelquejeu and Jossua, “Experiência,” 298.

<sup>59</sup> Seckler and Berthold, “Fé,” 298; 307.

From the Latin verb *ex-perior*, the term experience refers to crossing, to pass through, and to get to know.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, experience is something that remains. In this way, according to Zubiri, reality leaves marks. The catechumenate is the catechetical process that involves hearing as a primary way of apprehending the reality of God the Word. As Biemer says, “catechesis emerges from fidelity to the Word of God that is learned and transmitted through the Church, celebrated, and taken to life.”<sup>61</sup> The experience of faith is attained by listening to the Word: *fides ex auditu* (Rom 10:17).

Thus, catechesis cannot occur through the concipient experience, that is, from the mere transmission of concepts. That is why catechesis in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults can only be considered in the dynamism of the *kerygma*: “We can define *kerygma* as the dynamic and progressive work of salvation commenced by Christ and proclaimed through the Church, within which the operating strength of the Holy Spirit is visibly realized.”<sup>62</sup> Pope Francis proposes a new form of evangelization stemming from a deepening of the *kerygma*, and not merely a cold transmission of concepts. Talking about evangelization as a call to the growth of faith, Francis says: “It would not be right to see this call to growth exclusively or primarily in terms of doctrinal formation.”<sup>63</sup>

When López Sáez says that God speaks, and that the answer is not in the clouds of theoretical reasoning, he is eliminating concipient intelligence as a theory of knowledge of faith. The catechumenate was that period in which the catechumens or candidates to the sacraments of Christian initiation—Baptism → Confirmation → Eucharist—devoted themselves to the knowledge of God, of Christian life and of the Church by the deepening of faith and experience. The knowledge of God requires the three ways of apprehension that we mentioned in Zubiri’s thought: primordial apprehension, *logos* and reason. Thus, the catechumenate during the Christian initiation of adults generally involves a long period composed of liturgical celebrations and deepening reflection for the catechumen to arrive at an understanding of the experience of God in liturgy and in day to day, faith-filled existence.

This period had a personal dimension, as its duration depends on the development of each candidate. In the ancient Church, it was common for it to last three years or more. The catechumenal system was adapted to the adults that adhered to

<sup>60</sup> Borriello, “Experiência mística,” 401.

<sup>61</sup> Biemer, “Catequese,” 69.

<sup>62</sup> Castro Martínez, “Kerigma,” 626.

<sup>63</sup> Francisco, *Evangelii gaudium: sobre o anúncio do Evangelho no mundo atual* 161.

the faith. As Borobio states: “Until the 4th century, the most common Baptism was that of adults, preceded by a catechumenate and integrated in a system of initiation that included the immersion in water with the distinctive Trinitarian formula, the baptismal rites through the imposition of hands, and Confirmation through the sign of the cross (*Apostolic tradition*)<sup>64</sup> [...]”.<sup>65</sup> As can be seen by what was explained above, the ancient Church acted strictly in search of a knowledge that fit perfectly within what Zubiri calls sentient intelligence.

Christ instituted the sacraments with respect to the Paschal mystery. Thus, it is in the Paschal mystery that the sacramental liturgy was instituted and where it finds its unity. As the sacraments only happen in liturgy, the Paschal mystery is the foundation of the liturgical sacramental of the Church. Thus, liturgy can only be accomplished *by* and *in* Christ’s Paschal mystery, which, by its nature, is the founding reality of liturgy. In this way, the founding action of the Paschal mystery means that liturgy can only occur precisely and formally *by* and *in* the paschal reality. To clarify, Zubiri writes:

Now, what grounds does so when it grants to what is grounded its own character of reality: (a) from itself (i.e., from what is grounding), and (b) when upon granting it the grounded reality is realizing itself precisely and formally by and in the reality of the thing doing the grounding.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, every liturgy that does not realize the Paschal mystery is in error. We have to search for the unity of liturgy that exists in all the sacraments. This primary unity is manifested in liturgy itself through the primordial apprehension of the Paschal mystery. Let us remember that the primordial apprehension is not an interpretation (*logos*) yet, but simply a primary apprehension without an intermediary nor conceptual representation. It is purely a meeting with God who is the fundament of reality. The pastoral unity depends on this meeting of the spiritual and psycho-affective unity of the faithful.

The pastoral unity, spiritual unity and psycho-affective unity must follow the entirety of the rites that the ancient Church intuited for the sacraments of Christian initiation, “which allow the faithful to attain the plenitude of their capacity in the exercise of their mission as Christian people in the Church and the world.”<sup>67</sup>

This unity should happen in the context of the sacramental trilogy, in the following order: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Tabora shows that

<sup>64</sup> Hipólito de Roma. *Tradição apostólica de Hipólito de Roma. Liturgia e catequese no século III.*

<sup>65</sup> Borobio, *História e teologia comparada dos sacramentos: O princípio da analogia sacramental*, 121.

<sup>66</sup> Zubiri, *Inteligência e razão*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Sagrada Congregação para o Culto Divino, *Ritual de Iniciação Cristã de Adultos 2.*

Confirmation, in its theology as well as in its liturgical rite, only finds its identity in unity with Baptism.<sup>68</sup> In this context, it is a sacrament to be received soon after Baptism. However, the rituals of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults do not begin with the celebration of these sacraments, but with two previous steps. Thus, there are three steps that make up the unity of the Sacraments of the Christian Initiation: Rite of Acceptance, Rite of Election, and Sacraments of Initiation, with a special emphasis on the Easter Vigil.<sup>69</sup> Sentient intelligence allows the person who undergoes these steps to appreciate their rich meaning.

Thus, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council restored the liturgical unity of the Christian initiation, which, in the case of adults, cannot be altered. The psycho-affective unity happens by way of *adoptive filiation*, a moment that allows the faithful children of God the Father to be able to receive the love of the Father that is in Christ. As Jesus says in John's Gospel, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). In light of this, the stages of the Christian initiation for adults is as follows:

There are, therefore, three stages, steps, or doors that should be considered as strong or denser moments of the Christian initiation. These steps are marked by three liturgical rites: the first by the rite of the institution of the catechuminate; the second, by election; and the third by the celebration of the sacraments.<sup>70</sup>

The pedagogy of these steps accompanies human reality and gives man the ability to apprehend God's reality in human history. Together with the three steps, there are four periods that comprise the Rite of Christian Initiation: (1) pre-catechuminate, up to the Rite of Acceptance into the order of catechumens; (2) catechuminate, until the Rite of Election; (3) the period of purification and enlightenment before the Sacraments of Initiation; (4) and mystagogy.

## The Period of Pre-Catechuminate

The pre-catechuminate is a necessary time for a "sympathizer to mature in his/her decision to be a part of the Church. Generally, this person is encouraged by another person, who has an important role in this process. The Church, with joy, should

<sup>68</sup> Taborda, "Crisma sacramento do Espírito Santo? Para uma identificação da crisma a partir de sua unidade com o batismo," 183-209; Taborda, *Na fonte da vida cristã: uma teologia do batismo-crisma*.

<sup>69</sup> Sagrada Congregação para o Culto Divino, *Ritual de Iniciação Cristã de Adultos* 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

welcome the sympathizer, not in a ritual form yet, and to provide an evangelization that permeates all this time.”<sup>71</sup>

## The Period of Catechumenate

This is the time for faith instruction by means of introducing all aspects of Catholic doctrine, directing hearts towards God, and inspiring more and more people’s taste for liturgy and apostleship.<sup>72</sup> We would like to highlight a locution that whoever directs the rite of welcome should say, employing the following terms or other similar ones:

Eternal life consists in our knowing the true God and Jesus Christ, whom he sent. [...]. If you wish to be his disciples and members of the Church, it is necessary for you to be instructed in all the truth revealed by him; [...] for you to love the Lord God and your neighbor, as Christ ordered us to do.<sup>73</sup>

To know the true Jesus Christ is a process that involves the sentient intelligence in its three modes of apprehension of reality (primordial, *logos* and reason). Therefore, the formation for the catechumen should make a person comprehend the fundamentals of faith, with his accomplishments always having primordial apprehension as a basis. By affirming that the catechumens ought to love the Lord God and their neighbor as Jesus ordered, the one who conducts the actions of the rite, which has death and resurrection as its summit, will affirm the entirety of the Christian life, as Millás interprets about Zubiri’s sacramental thought.<sup>74</sup>

The time of the catechumenate is of fundamental importance, because it is characterized by four dynamics: (1) catechesis; (2) prayer; (3) celebration of the Word of God; (4) participation in the evangelization and edification of the Church by personal testimony and profession of faith. Only a process regulated by sentient intelligence can accomplish an efficient and authentic evangelization..

Additionally, there is a celebration of six rites of fundamental importance that have the function of purifying and protecting with the divine blessing. These rites are the following:<sup>75</sup> (1) celebration of the Word of God; (2) first exorcism; (3) blessing of the catechumen; (4) unction of the catechumen; (5) delivery of the symbol; (6) delivery of the Lord’s Prayer. We would like to draw attention to the final prayer that is said in the rite of the Lord’s Prayer:

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 13

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>74</sup> Millás Vendrell, “Zubiri y los sacramentos,” 329.

<sup>75</sup> Sagrada Congregação para o Culto Divino, *Ritual de Iniciação Cristã de Adultos* 18-19.

Eternal and Almighty God, that through new births makes thy Church fertile, strengthen the faith and the understanding of our catechumens, in order that being reborn through their baptism, they may be counted among thy adopted children. By Christ, our Lord.<sup>76</sup>

Once more we stress the importance of evangelization in accordance with sentient intelligence, for the prayer asks God to strengthen the *faith and the understanding* of the catechumen, that is, that the apprehension of the divine reality reaches the foundations of faith (understanding). The Christian who possesses faith without acquiring understanding may become prey to mistaken doctrines, as has happened throughout the history of the Church. “For this first step, it is required that the candidates already possess the rudiments of spiritual life and the foundations of Christian doctrine.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, they must already have “a certain idea of conversion, the habit of praying and invoking God, and some experience of community and the Christian spirit.”<sup>78</sup>

It is important to make this observation: the foundations of Christian life cannot be the point of arrival before the catechumenate, because the catechumenate itself involves a more profound learning about these foundations.. Experience shows that the initiation process cannot be achieved concipiently, but by the apprehension of reality. Therefore, “the catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life”<sup>79</sup>.

This union between theory and practice makes the catechumenate an example of sentient intelligence in the context of faith. For this, the candidate who wants to be a catechumen has an important reference in the figure of the “sponsors”<sup>80</sup>, a man or woman who knows the candidate, helps them, and gives testimonies of their own habits, faith and hopes. It is the sponsor who presents to the Church the candidates to initiate the catechumenate.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 192.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 215. One should note here that the foundations of Christian doctrine, in the sense in which it was described in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, can only be understood in light of concipient intelligence, that is, that the candidates may possibly have concepts of Christian doctrine, but not yet possess sentient knowledge, as such knowledge requires a whole lifetime to acquire.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>80</sup> If the ais not the godparent, the substitution should be done at the time of purification and illumination, but not before.

<sup>81</sup> Sagrada Congregação para o Culto Divino, *Ritual de Iniciação Cristã de Adultos* 71.



But from the point of view of the community, this reference is even more important, for it establishes a systematic<sup>82</sup> accompaniment. During the time of the catechumenate, catechumens should make the choice of godparents, “from among the members of the Christian community,”<sup>83</sup> for it is they who will present them on the day of the election.<sup>84</sup>

## The Period of Purification and Illumination

The time of purification and illumination is also called “Inscription of Names,” because the candidates inscribe their names in the registry of the elect.<sup>85</sup> The election is a key point of the whole catechumenate.<sup>86</sup> We would like to emphasize the closing prayer of this celebration:

Loved and Almighty Father, you wish to restore all things in Christ and attract all humanity to him. Guide these elects of thy Church and grant that, faithful to their vocation, they may be integrated in the kingdom of your Son and be marked with the gift of the Holy Ghost. For Christ, our Lord.<sup>87</sup>

The catechumen feels attracted by the Father towards the Son: “No one can come to me, if the Father, who sent me, does not attract him” (Jn 6:44). It means that the catechumen attracted by the supreme divine reality is on a journey in search of God, as occurs with sentient intelligence.

This is a time which is strongly marked by the deepening of spirituality and by the scrutinies, the latter to “discover what was imperfect, weak and evil in the heart of the elect, in order to cure them; and what was good, strong and saintly to consolidate it.”<sup>88</sup> The scrutinies are threefold: (1) First Scrutiny (Third Sunday of Lent); (2) Second Scrutiny (Fourth Sunday of Lent); (3) Third Scrutiny (Fifth Sunday of Lent).

The final two rites prior to the sacraments of initiation involve the delivery of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer by the catechumen, which should be done in the presence of the community of the faithful after the liturgy of the Word during a

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 104.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 149.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 25.

weekday mass, with appropriate readings.<sup>89</sup> The delivery of the Lord's Prayer can be done during the week after the Third Scrutiny, and, if necessary, can be transferred to the Rites of Immediate Preparation on Holy Saturday.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, there is the rite of Effeta, the choice of a Christian name (if applicable), and the Rite of Unction,<sup>91</sup> generally performed on Holy Saturday, in the morning or in the afternoon.

The time of purification and illumination, the third period of the catechumenate of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, ends with the celebration of the three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. After this comes the fourth and final period of preparation for the Christian life of the newly baptized, mystagogy.

## The Period of Mystagogy

Once the third period is complete, concluding with the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, preferably at the Easter Vigil, the last period begins, known as mystagogy. This period occurs during the liturgical season of Easter, the fifty days before Pentecost.

In this period, the neophytes participate in the Sunday mass, and are called to testify their personal experience to the other members of the community. "From this experience, every Christian participates in and grows through their practice of the Christian life, acquiring a new sense of the faith of the Church and of the world."<sup>92</sup> Once more, the term *experience* is fundamental to characterize sentient intelligence in search of the depth of reality.

Thus, the ways of apprehending faith as divine reality have now been established. The newly baptized are known by the name "neophytes," because they have truly been born again. Now the neophytes, according to sentient intelligence applied to the faith, should manifest what the celebration of the sacraments and their presence in the Sunday Eucharist make them feel and discern about the sacred mystery.

At this point, they encounter the "question of God," which is not a problem which human reality can solve; rather, human reality itself consists in the exploration of this problem, because man needs God.<sup>93</sup> On one hand, there is a community that appreciates its newest members, and, on the other hand, the neophytes enrich the

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 182.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 189.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 183.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>93</sup> Costa and Ferreira, *O sínodo arquidiocesano de São Paulo: o desafio da evangelização esta cidade*, 41.

community with their experiences of faith. The Church desires that the neophytes experience “a complete and joyful integration into the community.”<sup>94</sup> Through the zeal that mystagogy demands in this last period, we complete our investigation, which has explored how the catechumenate of the Christian initiation of adults is a demonstration of sentient intelligence applied to the faith.

## Final considerations

This work attempted to demonstrate how the Church’s liturgy has been based on what Xavier Zubiri calls “sentient intelligence”, as applied to the catechumenate of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, revived from ancient tradition by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

This implies that the experience of God, the Church, and new life in Christ in the context of community involves a structural form of sensing and intellectual knowing, two moments of one action of “actualization” in the human apprehension of reality. Because of this, the key orientation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *aggiornamento*, together with dialogue, is the point of intersection with actualization in the Zubirian sense. This constitutes the “movement of reality” in which Zubiri found a way of liberation from concipient intelligence.

As Zubiri says, reality does not designate an object, except in the way the object stays in the apprehension man has of it.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the ancient Church did not teach concepts in which reality had to fit, but lived reality, from which it drew the concepts that always spoke to the heart, because they sprang from the heart of those who talked about God and new life in Christ. And it was in liturgical celebration that this entire living aspect of faith gained more space.

When the catechumenate becomes again an established moment in the Church, it will become a *modus vivendi ecclesialis*. In this way, it will be part of those essential elements that give foundation to the ecclesial system. This is not an innovative proposal, but a renewal, because historically it was a very successful Church experience which occurred based on the dynamics of what Zubiri calls sentient intelligence. The experience of the catechumenate in the ancient Church was so strong that until today, in the celebration of the Lord’s Passion on Holy Friday, the Universal Prayer IV by the catechumens is still used. This means that the catechumens<sup>96</sup> were a very real component of the ancient Church.

<sup>94</sup> Sagrada Congregação para o Culto Divino, *Ritual de Iniciação Cristã de Adultos* 235.

<sup>95</sup> Zubiri, *Sobre el hombre*, 22. Free translation.

<sup>96</sup> Congregação para o Culto Divino e a Disciplina dos Sacramentos, *Missal romano: Sexta-feira Santa. Celebração da Paixão do Senhor. Oração Universal IV. Pelos catecúmenos*, 257.

The structure of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults is composed of three steps and four periods. The first step corresponds to the moment in which the catechumen is received by the Church to follow the catechumenal path, the second is when he is admitted to the more intense preparation for the celebration of the sacraments, and the third consists in the celebration of the sacraments. The four periods have a more pedagogical character of faith formation and Christian testimony. That is why in this investigation they received special attention, because it is here that we clearly notice that the catechumenate is a demonstration of the sentient intelligence applied to the faith.

These four periods are: pre-catechumenate (first period), catechumenate (second period), purification and illumination (third period), and mystagogy (fourth period). Sentient intelligence is characterized by sensing and intellective knowing, which are highly applicable to the understanding of faith. Sentient intelligence guides the catechumen to the axis of faith, in which celebration and testimony are intimately connected.

The Church should return to the catechumenate as a *modus vivendi* if it wishes to maintain its liturgical, pastoral, and spiritual unity, as well as the psycho-affective unity of its faithful. Therefore, the catechumenate must be part of the essence of the Church. This will allow the Church to radically abandon concipient intelligence and live fully from the apprehension of God's reality through faith, with emphasis on the celebration of faith in the liturgy but transformed to ulterior modes of apprehension. One does not attend liturgy to celebrate concepts as this would be the death of liturgy. Rather, liturgy is the norm of life. Thus, it is liturgy that gives soul to catechesis. In this sense, the catechumenal system is a lesson. Just as one does not celebrate concepts, one does not teach concepts that are not taken from a lived apprehension of reality.

When catechesis ceases to be concipient, but is immersed in sentient intelligence, the catechized will carry with them realities that will serve as illumination throughout their following of Jesus. In light of the experience of God as a physical proof of reality, all concepts turn into straw, as the Angelic Doctor expressed after a mystical eucharistic experience. None of his concepts turn into straw to those who are nurtured by his theological wisdom. Certainly, St. Thomas Aquinas was a mystic. Perhaps it was because of this that he was rewarded at the end of his life with the grace of experiencing in totality what his concepts stated. For those studying Thomas, to take seriously his famous phrase "all that I have written seems like straw" is to not have consideration for the great richness of everything that he wrote.

In this sense we finalize this article saying that the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, which has recovered the catechumenal process of ancient tradition, considers

the Second Vatican Council as a great light in our time. On the other hand, it is our opinion that reality, with its infinite richness and problems, as Zubiri's philosophy explains, is another light that, together with adequate hermeneutics, provides great illumination to understand the Council and the liturgy of the Church. To abandon methodologically and systematically the influence of concipient intelligence is an obligation for the Church as it journeys towards the Paschal mystery of Christ.

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