

A Proposal for the Restoration of Gradual Initiation into the Church Culminating in Baptism-Chrismation During a Parish Sunday Liturgy

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I. Immediate Stimulus for the Proposal

This proposal grew out of the desire of the members of the *Conventus Hierarcharum Orientalium Catholicorum Europae* (CHOCE), expressed during their annual meeting in Velehrad (Czech Republic) 25–27 June 2007, to deepen their reflection on the pastoral renewal of the mysteries of initiation in the light of patristic practice and theology. More specifically the hierarchs requested that a draft of an adapted rite of Christian initiation with scholarly commentary be submitted for their consideration. The proposal was to include a) the possibility of serving the mysteries of initiation in the context of the Divine Liturgy; b) reference to the practice of the Eastern Churches not in communion with Rome; c) references to the already existing practice of Eastern Catholic Churches; and d) the prescriptions of canon law and the guidelines of the Roman Apostolic See.

Several Eastern Catholic liturgists, convoked by Marcel Mojzeš upon the request of the bishops of CHOCE, met during

¹ I presented this text at the request of the *Conventus Hierarcharum Orientalium Catholicorum Europae* (CHOCE) at its meeting in Uzhhorod, Ukraine on 12 May 2009. Apparently at least one of the Greco-Catholic Churches of Eastern Europe has decided to begin implementing the proposal.

the bi-annual congress of the *Societas Orientalium Liturgiarum* in Rome in September 2008 and discussed the above-mentioned request of the bishops as well as different approaches to the question.

II. Foundations in Authoritative Statements of the Catholic Church

Consider the following sections of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council and the *Istruzione per l'applicazione delle prescrizioni liturgiche del Codice dei Canonici delle Chiese Orientali* of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches (1996):

Sacrosanctum Concilium:

The catechumenate for adults, *comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored* and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended *as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time* (no. 64; emphasis mine).

The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more clearly in the rite itself (no. 67; emphasis mine).

Istruzione per l'applicazione delle prescrizioni liturgiche del Codice dei Canonici delle Chiese Orientali:

According to the doctrine and practice of the ancient Church, inspired by the New Testament, the faithful who received the eschatological gift of the Spirit of the Risen accepted that the same Spirit operate in his or her person the assimilation to Christ the Lord. The baptismal rebirth as children of God, inheritors of the Kingdom, justified, redeemed and sanctified, *entailed the full entrance into the people of God. The ultimate*

“sign” of this event was the admission to the banquet of the Kingdom (no. 42 § 2; emphasis mine).

All Christian rituals, Eastern as well as Western, prescribe that prior to administering it [i.e. baptism], *a preparation is required* in which both the journey of the candidate toward the Lord and – immediately before the Baptism – his or her adhesion to Christ and corresponding renunciation of Satan and forces of evil are expressed (no. 44 § 1; emphasis mine).

To guarantee all this, can. 686 § 2 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* underscores the requirement of a congruent preparation when it states: “The pastor is to see that the parents of the infant to be baptized and those who are given the function of sponsor, be instructed as to the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations connected with it and *that they are prepared for an appropriate celebration of the sacrament*” (no. 44 § 4; emphasis mine).

In a section entitled “To Distinguish the Phases of the Rite of Baptism” we read:

Christian Initiation is a process of conversion, punctuated by some ritual moments which realize the wise pedagogy of salvation (no. 45).

Today, in the majority of the cases, the baptismal rite is celebrated together with the rites which prepare for it. *It is precisely the nature of the progression of the itinerary of conversion which makes it beneficial to restore the ancient distinction in time between the preparatory part and that of the true and proper baptismal celebration.* Re-establishing this separation will be even more meaningful when it concerns the Baptism of adults (emphasis mine).

The exhortations of Pope John Paul II and the present pontiff to a new evangelization also provide inspiration for the proposal. Baptism provides a unique opportunity for pastors of