

On the R.C.I.A. (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults)

I was asked recently why we do not use the RCIA here at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. There are several reasons for this, and what follows is a few of them.

I should say first that the program has its good points. I particularly like the serious way in which it uses the sponsors. It was written not for the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite however, but for the Ordinary Form (to use the language of Pope Benedict). Perhaps someone will come along and adapt it to our usage, but I doubt it. So the easiest way to answer the question is that it was not intended for us. But there are other reasons, and I will use the work of Fr. Andrew Greeley, SJ.

Fr. Greeley (yes, that Greeley of the steamy novels in the 80's) wrote an article in *America* magazine in 1989, and used his pen as a sword against the RCIA. The article had more than its share of fallacies, but it contained some pointed criticism's which are worth pondering.

1. "Like most liturgical innovations of the years since the Second Vatican Council, this rite is not particularly distinguished either by its artistic beauty or by its linguistic felicity or by its responsiveness to human needs. It is spun out of historicist and academic concerns and displays no sensitivity to either the nature of contemporary religious experience or the cultural environments where it is to be exercised."

- The question of art and beauty in the language to be used in worship is a serious one. Ugliness does not and cannot give the worshipper a good experience of the Lord.

- When Fr. Greeley mentions "historicist" concerns, he refers to the habit of modern liturgists to pluck some practice out from the past, and set it willynilly in our times. This was condemned by the way, as "archeologism" by Pope Pius XII. A liturgical practice might have been excellent in the 4th century, and then discontinued in the 5th. For a committee of academics to revive it—heedless of the organic liturgical development in between—is a mistake.

- After the sermon, the candidates in the program must leave the church. In our times, there is simply no reason to order someone out of the church. That the Church did it in the 3rd century made good, even excellent sense. It was a time of persecution, and the spies of the Roman emperor were everywhere. But our doctrines are easily accessible. Our enemies do not need to send spies. We're an open book for any who want to read.

2. "From Salvation History and the Cursillo through Sensitivity Training, Marriage Encounter and the Charismatic Renewal to Parish Renewal, Evangelization and the Preferential Option for the Poor—all of these programs have been characterized by the following traits: 1. A simple a priori theory; 2. rigid formulae (accompanied often by an esoteric vocabulary); 3. an enthusiastic elite that has the answers and is determined to impose said answers on those who do not have them; 4. unreflective superficiality that obscures whatever truth the "movement" may actually possess; 5. the "routinization of the Charisma" (in Max Weber's terms) as the "movement" becomes institutionalized into diocesan and national offices and its enthusiasts go on to the next fashion; 6. total faith in the success of the "movement" without any empirical validation."

- This passage doesn't need much comment. But if we are to know a tree by

its fruits, then we should do due diligence with some empirical studies as to the real effects of these movements. I'm not aware of any proof that those who went through RCIA are any better Catholics than those who went through the old enquiry class (though "better Catholics" would be very hard to pin down). There is no study on what the veterans of RCIA think about it, nor of how many have been driven away from the Church because of it.

3. "I am especially offended that "liturgists" are the ones who are trying to impose the R.C.I.A. on the rest of us. They have mucked up everything they have touched since the end of Vatican II. They are responsible for abandonment of chant and polyphony, the terrible state of liturgical music, art and architecture; the repudiation of popular devotions; the horrible English translations, the listless, boring and interminable Liturgy of the Word (after which the homilist is hard pressed to wake up the congregation); the long delay before the Offering of the Gifts, while ushers mess around with collection baskets in the rear of the church and the endless fussing with the distribution of the Eucharist."

- While he is using a fallacy in his argument (see if you can recognize it), I think his lack of trust in liturgists is well-grounded.

4. "If the R.C.I.A. is at most a very sketchy outline—suggesting community and process—for those who are not Catholics, it has no place at all in the spiritual pilgrimage of those who have already been baptized."

- This is one of his best criticisms because it is not a rant, and points out an important fact, viz., that those who have already been baptized are by definition not catechumens. And let there be no talk about "Episcopalian baptisms," or "Baptist baptisms." If anyone is baptized, he is baptized into the Catholic Church. There is only Catholic baptism.

- Also, the program does not take into account the action of the Holy Ghost upon those who are moved to interest about the Catholic Faith. Every person that shows up at the rectory door is unique. No one's spiritual pilgrimage fits a formula.

- This is the main reason why we do not use the RCIA here, because the instructions in the Faith and the preparation for living it ought to be tailored for the individual.

- Finally, many of us converts had a very hard time becoming Catholics because of the opposition of family. The only way we could do so was in a kind of clandestine atmosphere. We simply could not afford the public nature of the Catechumenate, as demanded by the RCIA.