



The mystagogy pathway: a mystique for our times

O caminho da mistagogia: uma mística para os nossos tempos

Rosemary Fernandes Costa*

Abstract

In the early centuries of the nascent Church, we find a fountain experience lived by the Church at its beginnings: mystagogy. In this period of the Church's history, the pedagogy which inspires the Church Fathers is mystagogy, that is, the pedagogy of Mystery. We believe that in the mystagogy experience, lived in the Church in the 3rd and 4th centuries, one finds a fruitful fountain which may be paradigmatic with regard to the contemporary religious experiences. We invite the reader to walk with us along the pedagogy that is characteristic of the early centuries of the Christian route: mystagogy. Mystagogy reaches us as fountain pedagogy, which may be paradigmatic for an opening process and dialogue with the new subjectivities and intersubjectivities under construction. The mystagogy experienced in the early days of Christianity becomes a theological place which dialogues with our times, a dialogue between the fountain theology, foremost, and the theology of nowadays, a second reflection.

Key words: Mystagogy. Pedagogy of faith. Mystique. Spirituality. Modernity.

Resumo

Nos primeiros séculos da Igreja nascente encontramos uma experiência fontal vivida pela Igreja dos primórdios: a mistagogia. Nesse período da história da Igreja, a pedagogia que inspira os Padres da Igreja é a mistagogia, ou seja, a pedagogia do Mistério. Acreditamos que na experiência mistagógica, vivida na Igreja nos séculos III e IV, encontra-se uma fonte fecunda que pode ser paradigmática em relação às experiências religiosas contemporâneas. Convidamos o leitor a caminhar conosco pela mistagogia própria dos primeiros séculos da trajetória cristã: a mistagogia. A mistagogia nos chega como uma pedagogia fontal, que pode ser paradigmática para um processo de abertura e diálogo com as novas subjetividades e intersubjetividades em construção. A mistagogia experimentada nos primeiros tempos do cristianismo torna-se um lugar teológico que dialoga com nossos tempos, um diálogo entre a teologia fontal, primeira, e a teologia de hoje, reflexão segunda.

Palavras-chave: Mistagogia. Pedagogia da fé. Mística. Espiritualidade. Modernidade.

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*PhD in Theology from PUC Rio (2008) and graduated in Philosophy from UERJ (1984). Professor at PUC Rio and Heitor Lira State High School and Teresiano High School. Country: Brazil. Email: rosenandescosta@gmail.com.

Introduction

In the early days of the Church, mystagogy was regarded a strong and determinant time for knowledge and adherence to faith. In their conception of religious initiation, the Church Fathers indicated this route as a pathway for introduction, openness, and dialogue with Mystery, a vital pathway which integrates the human being in its many dimensions. Mystagogy was understood as the foundation and the pathway of this religious initiation process. It was the great reference which inspired and illuminated this process by determining the initiative, the centrality and goal of the process in the revelation dynamics between God and humanity. The founding and dynamizing principle of the pathway is the very God which reveals himself in history to every man and woman, in their time and place.

Having mystagogy as a reference for the current religious experiences implies a permanent attitude of openness and contemplation of the divine Mystery, which comes from within each believer and the whole community of God's holy people. Participate in the Mystery is opening oneself to the dynamics of God's revelation to men and women from each time. God is the Mystery which reveals itself, to where one is pedagogically and lovingly conducted. A Mystery which is interpreted with categories that intersect and produce meaning and sense, with a hermeneutical and symbolic order. A Mystery which reveals itself, but doesn't exhaust itself, by incessantly interpellating the personal and community projects to be impregnated by paschal, creative, and liberating love.

Would mystagogy, experienced for so many centuries, have meaning and relevance in the current times? Our theological-pastoral intuition is grounded on the sureness that the closeness to the fountains of the primal Church leads us, as a mystagogue, to retrace the pathway of the revealed mystery experience.

After this stage, we'd like to propose a dialogue between these two moments which are historically so far: the cradle of Patristics and the contemporary

theology, between the fountain theology, established by the Church Fathers in their communities, and the theology which opens to dialogue with its time, in the current communities. Local communities can participate in this walk, drink from this fountain, try to answer to the Revelation's dynamism according to the concrete situations with which they dialogue, and experience, also today, the mystagogy that founded and endorsed these early days. In short, a dialogue between fountain theology, foremost, and the theology of nowadays, a second reflection.

1 In the new time, a fruitful mystique

Person and community are included in society, under the inflow of paradigmatic shifts which redirect values and crucial human and social choices. Centering on the individual, the rational thought, the transient relations, in the pursuit of science and technology, is giving way to new forms of constructing subjectivities. Reality doesn't show to be uniform, but multifaceted; it isn't linear, but rather complex. Besides, the conception of person was affected by this new perception. The person isn't the measure of her/himself, she/he doesn't constitute her/his identity in isolation, but, instead, through her/his interpersonal relationships and those with environment.

Some thinkers from theological anthropology, philosophy, and sociology will agree with regard to the theme of openness to dialogue, to otherness, to the dynamics of intersubjectivity, as a new foundation for the person's existence and her/his essential orientation. The modern and anthropocentric rationality crisis is a springboard of new transformations. In this movement, new conceptual constructs occur with regard to tradition and the place of subjective experience in the community dynamics. Previously regarded as outdated, tradition starts being incorporated into the current practices in a dialogic and creative manner. The subjectivity understood as identity, autonomy, and freedom is also aware of its dialogic dynamism, generated in the exchange of meanings, in a hermeneutic

circularity and founder of new meanings.

The religiosity dimension didn't remain apart from this process, from the meeting with the Transcendent, the religious institutions, the reflection and prayer groups, the experience of faith transmission in the family, education, and community domains. All this overview interpellates the groups which think through the theme of spirituality from an integral anthropology perspective. It's at this point that we'd like to provide a small contribution through the redemption of an experience that had its cradle in the early Church and that seems a fountain for us to dialogue with the current times: mystagogy.

2 A founding and dynamic principle

In ancient catechumenate, especially at the late 3rd century and early 4th century, the initiation process was understood as a pathway for introduction, openness, and dialogue with God's Mystery. The principle underlying and streamlining this pathway is the very God who reveals himself in history to each man and woman, in their time and place.

We observe that, according to this understanding, spirituality, liturgy, and pedagogy are dimensions included in the initiation pathway. What would be the element which grounds and integrates these three dimensions of the Christian initiation process? The dialogic relation between these three dimensions is due to the fact that the Church Fathers have a background theology: mystagogy.

The term mystagogy has its origin in two Greek words: *mystes*, which means mystery, and *agein*, which means driving. Mystagogy will acquire the sense of *driving through the mystery, introducing to the knowledge of mystery*. According to Schreiber, this new term, constructed on the combination between these two words, bears, on itself, a deep meaning: rooting on the concept of mystery and the mediating action, on the approach this same mystery (SCHREIBER, 1964, p. 363).

The term “mystery” points to an unknown, intimate, hidden reality, a presence still unrevealed. In Christianity, God’s mystery reveals itself to humanity and invites to an existential openness, which drives everything and everyone to full achievement. It’s the History of Salvation, fulfilled in incarnation, redemption, Jesus’ Easter. It’s the paschal Mystery, or Christ’s Mystery, faith’s Mystery. For the Church Fathers, mystagogy consists in this dynamism which dialogically aligned the revealed Mystery, the mediating action, the community of initiated ones, and the beginner.

Understood as the foundation and pathway of the Christian initiation process, mystagogy is theology, but it’s also pedagogy. On the wisdom horizon of the Church Fathers, mystagogy is the theology which grounds their reflections and their understanding of initiation. It’s pedagogy because it’s a mediation between divine action and the personal, historical, and social reality. Mystagogy occurs through the dialogue which God lovingly weaves with each person and each community and which becomes a kind of echo of this divine self-communication.

In the Fathers’ theology, we find two constants of the mystagogy conception which were consecrated and inspired the ecclesial Magisterium and its guidelines: the sacramental liturgy and its theological explanation. According to Floristán Samanes (1989, p. 217), these dimensions don’t have a hierarchy, but rather an intense, dynamic, relentless correlation.

However, beyond these two accessible elements in the Fathers’ theology, we find other equally important meanings to understand mystagogy as a theological foundation of their liturgical-pastoral reflections and actions. We list below several meanings to mystagogy, through the terms found in the patristic works from the 3rd and 4th century¹:

¹ T. Federici (1985), in his work *La mistagogia della Chiesa*, presents a detailed global scheme of the mystagogic content in the Church Fathers. Another excellent scheme is found in Bornert (1966).

- Mystery initiation;
- instruction in the divine Mysteries;
- exposure of meanings of the Sacred Scripture;
- orientation, guidance in the mysterious God's pathway;
- the Mystery which reveals itself;
- the Sacred Scripture itself;
- sacramental action – Baptism and Eucharist;
- celebrations of the rites;
- Easter time, including the Lenten season;
- the priesthood's foundational and dynamic principle;
- People of God on the way;
- Church, sacrament of Christ in the world.

We wish to emphasize that, for the Church Fathers, mystagogy is an axis different from the catechetical axis. It's the central reference of their theology, through the spiritual experience of the community of believers, which finds its reason for being in living, ever deeper, the mystical pathway, the personal and community meeting with the revealed mystery.

The mystagogy of the Fathers in the 3rd and 4th centuries isn't a concept which runs out in the theological categories. Mystagogy is a foundation and an experience in which one enters and walks up to the final meeting of all Creation in God. We emphasize the dialogic Revelation process, between God and the human person.

In contemporary theology, K. Rahner is the one who rescues the pedagogy of Mystery and speaks of the presence of mystagogy in the transmission processes and the faith experience, as a dynamics in which the announcement of faith dialogues with the conditions and issues which the human person has in her/his. And this dynamics isn't restricted to doctrinal expositions, but dialogues with the pursuit of

truth experienced in life and in the church community. According to K. Rahner (1978), if evangelization concentrates on the doctrinal dimension, it'll make a big mistake, it'll be against its very essence, since mystagogy is an "emergent appeal from the innermost core of the honored human person".

In line with the experience of the early Church, K. Rahner states that mystagogy does guide so that the spirituality dimension isn't understood as doctrinaire, as if the announcement came from outside to inside, from the advisor to the listener. The mystagogical perspective believes that the advisor's announcement raises issues that the beginner already carries within her/himself.

Mystagogy is, therefore, understood as a pathway. A pathway whose very active principle lies on the divine initiative and the free openness of a person to this process. Furthermore, it's a dynamic reality which involves the individual and the community.

3 Dialoguing with our time

The dialogue we're proposing between the Church Fathers' mystagogy and its redemption in our context finds contact points and detachment points which are characteristic of the historical and theological context of each time. Observing the historical distance between the two contexts, we open a dialogue not only with a theological nature between these two realities, but also an interdisciplinary one, between theology and human sciences.

We know that we're in the face of an extreme complex issue taking into account the limitations of this study, therefore, we'll humbly limit our reflection through two crucial issues: the integral anthropology, which realizes the human being as a relational and dynamic being, and the importance of intersubjective relations, that is, the community as a place of exchanges, reviews, new interpretations and meanings. Due to these assumptions, we went in search of

thinkers of our time, from the philosophy and sociology areas, which address issues found in this reflection, though not focusing on spirituality.

Our walk through the philosophy and sociology areas aims to score the possibilities which our time presents in order to turn the mystagogical experience into guidance and pathway to the contemporary religious experiences.

Among the many thinkers who could be brought to this dialogue, we find significant content from the approaches of Habermas (1987), Santos (1997), Lash (1997a; 1997b), Lyotard, Derrida, Giddens, and Beck². These authors work with the basic categories to our reflection – the person-tradition relation, the construction of meaning narratives and interpretive communities.

Habermas, having the reflections from the Frankfurt School as a basis, takes into account the possibility of a cultural recovery of reason as a fountain for the redemption of ethics and a critical look with regard to the technical-instrumental reason. Habermas proposes an intersubjective act, a vital interaction between people and societies. Still in this direction, Habermas argues that this communicative interaction occurs through reflecting and sharing based on dialogically acting, intersubjective. However, these shared meanings presuppose the existence of practices also experimented, with similar purposes. Through practices experimented by the protagonists of this intersubjective acting, the representations do assume their meanings.

The thought of Lash (1997a, p. 188) confirms the analysis by Habermas: “In this context, the shared practices have aims or a *telos* which drives them and which are established within the practice”. They’re partnerships involving shared meanings, practices, and obligations. Through Giddens’ thought, the authors Beck and Lash state that the main subjects in this interrelation are people themselves, in

² Observing the limitations of this paper, we will work out these thinkers through the reading and analysis of three works which will guide our reflection. Derrida's reflections will be approached through the reading of the sociologist Kumar (1997), in his excellent study on the theme Post-Modernity. The second work which will guide us in the philosophical issue will be that by the theologian Oliveira (2003). For the sociological approach, we opted for the work organized by A. Giddens (1991).

their personal construct and collective set-up, whether they're scientists, ordinary people, experts in institutional groups or not. It's a process which establishes a dialogic democracy, through common experiences and the meanings which are constructed and communicated together (BECK, 1997, p. 208; 240).

Boaventura Santos believes that a passage is taking place, which comes from the subject the idea – unique and sovereign – to that which establishes a network of relations, where various subjectivities combine. There's a dynamism which involves constant interaction between people and groups, configuring a movement for autonomy and liberation, deconstruction and new meaning reconstructions. These intersubjective relations imply a relation between people, between worlds with shared meanings (SANTOS, 1997, p. 107).

According to the analysis by these authors, one realizes the emergence of a new subjectivity, generated in the dynamics of intersubjectivities, which contrasts with the fragmented and atomized perspective of the human being that is prevalent in modern science. Moreover, a process for overcoming radical individualism with its consequences begins, and there emerges the openness perspective, the dialogic relation, a result of the comprehensive and systemic embedded interrelation.

The philosopher Lyotard (1986, p. 69) states that our cultural context can't be analyzed having only a linear and logical discourse as a basis anymore. There isn't more stability of ideas or absolute ideas governing social behavior. Changes are constant, daily, and affect both the particular life and the whole human community. However, a very positive perspective emerges from this new dynamics of constructing concepts. Without the support of hegemonic and universalizing discourses, which are characteristic of the pre-modern paradigm, a space opens up to infinite language games. That is, the understanding on reality and the relationship with everyday life, their choices and projects, are mediated by language.

Still developing the theme of dialogue, Kumar (1997, p. 141) believes, according to Derrida's thought, that one can't speak of a subjectivity, but rather of uninterrupted set-ups, the outcome of the dialogic structures and their aporias, in a plurality of voices which turns the person into an always open text, plural, able to have many voices, new agreements, new meanings which can be achieved. This game of languages and meanings requires one to go through not only the contemporary language constructs, but also those received from tradition, in order to show their inner decisions and their construction principles. Only this way it's possible to resume the founding meanings and open space for creative dialogue, or even to overcome the constructs inherited from tradition.

This hypothesis leads us to rethink the interpretive communities' role as privileged spaces, in which the dialogic dynamics between the various subjectivities happens and renews itself among its participants. Its inner rationale involves otherness and plurality, under the form of temporary contracts, open to evaluation, review, and redesigns, where old and new meanings converge, in a deconstruction and new interpretive construction dynamics.

Another aspect helps us to rethink the fountains of this dynamic perception which has an incessant movement: the understanding of time and space. In Giddens' reflection, we're experiencing a new kind of time-space relation, no longer defined by the local presence, but rather by the absence, connecting distant situations with regard to site and without face to face interaction (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 25-27). Time and space representations become multiple. They may cross the historical linearity and establish other and new interpretive and cultural connections. What happens within the interpretive community domain is that they are, on the one hand, protagonists of a real time, they restructure the everyday life, and the concepts found new meanings; on the other hand, they're affected by new constructs, living a process of continuous construction and deconstruction (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 42).

With all this data presented by these thinkers, we realize that one can articulate the micro to the macro, the local to the global, the tradition to the current experience.

Let's resume relevant aspects to our development:

1. The dynamic nature of modern (or/and post-modern) times, with its globalizing characteristic and, at the same time, of deconstructions and reconstructions;
2. The revision of the orthodox doctrines and the various possibilities of reconstruction and new syntheses;
3. The communication dynamics occurs through reflecting and sharing which are based on the dialogic acting, intersubjective;
4. The presence of pluralisms, the difficulties with differences and, on the other hand, openness for dialogic relations;
5. The interpretive communities with their new kinds of knowledge, new time relations, and particular space and dynamics.

These considerations greatly assist our perspective of bringing the theme of mystagogy as an axis and a pathway to spirituality, regarding it not as a dimension apart. From K. Rahner's perspective, as an originating reference of every human being to the absolute mystery, as ontological experience and, at the same time, dynamics, with a ceaseless configuration of every person's humanization project.

4 A new reflection process through intersubjective relations

The theologian M. Bingemer, in one of her reflections on modernity, observes that, in its genesis, modernity introduced a new principle for ordering and understanding the world: subjectivity, i.e. the human subject as the measure of all things, the first and last reference (BINGEMER, 1998, p. 19). In this first moment, the subject's autonomy assumes control over the world and things, takes the place

of God as the ordering principle of the world. It's the subject who orders social life and personal life. At the same time, one discovered that it's partial, incomplete, not definitive, and it was faced with its own limitations, such as the ordering of nature, the presence of the other in interpersonal relationships, the unpredictability of technological and scientific advancement and the search for transcendence.

However, as seen above, this paradigm isn't exhausted, yet, and it has created new perspectives for interpersonal relationships and the relation between human beings and reality. The frequently vaunted autonomy notices to be challenged by the dialogical aspect and, therefore, the person needs to review her/his way of thinking the construction of subjectivity and personal and collective projects.

Libanio (1992, p. 23) warns about the importance of broadening the narrow horizons of this new subjectivity, developing a theoretical effort which consists in avoiding a subjectivist or individualistic understanding of subjectivity, as opposed to the social, the community, the historical.

Resuming Giddens' thought, we find out that the notion of reflexivity becomes a normative category, since it conceives thought and action in a dialogic movement, constantly refracting each other (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 45). Social practices are examined and reconfigured through information, also in motion. However, they aren't anonymous practices, but made up by their actors, in a permanent relation with their conceptual schemes and their meanings.

Giddens goes on elucidating that, through this dynamic relation, the knowledge forms with a local character and the confluence of knowledge derived from information received and developed within the group lead to new local recombinations (GIDDENS, 1997, p. 105). That individualization, characteristic of early modernity, gives space to an autonomy which is constituted through social relations. This is the dynamism of reflexive modernization, which involves constant

interaction and actions going beyond the structures, configuring a movement for autonomy and liberation, deconstruction and new meaningful reconstructions.

The reflexivity generated in the intersubjective relations implies a relationship between people, between worlds with shared meanings. Therefore, Lash (1997, p. 149) stresses that symbolic exchanges and shared identities are strongly present, engendering a community dynamism.

This reflexivity isn't based on the social structures, but on the understanding on categories which are integrated, on shared meanings on which they're grounded and where they move. It's a hermeneutic reflexivity (LASH, 1997, p. 199-200). The main subjects of this interrelationship are people themselves, in their personal construct and collective set-up, whether they're scientists, ordinary people, experts in institutional groups or not. It's a process which establishes a dialogic democracy, through common experiences and the meanings that are construed and communicated together.

This interrelation between people and societies, which is able to reconstrue concepts and construe new common meanings, extends to reality as a whole. It questions the scientific gaze, which is faced with a complex network of relations between the researcher and the research object, between person and environment, between the most diverse languages of thought and the relation of the human person with her/himself, with others, and with the world.

So far, we tried to show how the perspective of intersubjectivity emerges as a condition for understanding the current anthropology and its relations. This characteristic is also a theological foundation, it refers us to the dynamics of Revelation, to its dialogic axis.

This integration between God and the human being, between personal experience and community experience, between faith-conversion and the mysterious praxis is a mystagogical route. Faith isn't automatically acquired. It

demands a process, a prolonged and identifying learning, an itinerary. It's an entry into God's mystery, while one is living the human existence. In his study on the Christian initiation processes, the Spanish theologian Floristán Samanes (1989, p. 217) states that faith and practice don't walk alone or in successive steps, but they rather walk together, mutually feeding each other, they're dynamic realities and open to the Revelation process, which is life to every man and woman who opens to the Mystery revealed to them.

5 The theology of the early days

According to E. Mazza, mystagogy became known in the tradition as a theological explanation of the sacramental fact or the rites which make up the liturgical celebration, however, it's much more than a literary genre or a pastoral-liturgical methodology. Mystagogy is the theology of the early days (MAZZA, 1988, p. 5).

It's true that mystagogy is a terminology, but, beyond the etymological demarcation, we should be aware of the wealth of this key concept to the Christian initiation. Let's see an excerpt by the expert T. Federici, where he identifies the greatness and complexity of mystagogy for the Christian initiation:

Mystagogy is the whole Community of baptized and confirmed of the one Spirit in one Body of Christ. It's the Church in its fullness of new and contemporary believers which, by understanding itself this way, is forever immersed in the reality of God's Word. This can only come from the Christian experience consign in the initiation, as a permanent life condition. This isn't a complex of acts and words, of gestures and signals, at a given ritual time. There's a need for a permanent attitude of openness and contemplation of the divine Mystery which comes from within each believer and the whole community of the holy people of God. This condition is the life status, marked by a ceaseless tension of the divine, economic, cosmic, eschatological Mystery, which streamlines an ecclesiology centered on a pneumatological Christology in a new anthropology, a new way of being and contemplating the current reality (FEDERICI, 1985, p. 199).

Under the light of the Holy Fathers' mystagogical experience, from the 3rd and 4th centuries, we realize that this wisdom can become the foundation and guiding principle for living an integration spirituality in the personal and community dimension. The mystagogical notion of itinerary, progressive pathway, is also relevant.

The mystagogical experience refers us to the eternal novelty of the Revelation dynamics. But it goes beyond. The mystagogical experience is grounded on the divine pedagogy which reveals His love project through attention, zeal, and respect for the current status of each human person.

However, according to the pertinent reflection of J. Velasco (2002, p. 11-25), we don't intend to exclude the concrete facts, but to quietly position ourselves before them, facing them not as obstacles, but rather as society's passage situations, which invite us to discretion, dialogue, and finding new resources to respond to the equally new challenges that come before us. It's an attitude of someone who sees modernity not as pathology to be cured, but as historical situation, a fruitful stage, where one finds contents and bases conducive to living a humanizing spirituality.

6 Drinking from the fountains of mystagogical experience

In the Church Fathers' wisdom, mystagogy is the Church's life, in its spiritual, liturgical, pastoral, contemplative, and eschatological dimension. T. Federici systematizes this wisdom expressed in the patristic works, revealing the many aspects involved in their understanding on mystagogy:

- it's a fountain of openness to the Revelation dynamics;
- it's a pathway, route, trajectory of adherence, growth, improvement;
- it's participation in the rites and liturgical celebrations;
- it's the embraced Word which revolutionizes the personal and community dynamics;
- it's the praying contemplation of the Mystery which is revealed in the history of humanity;
- it's the progressive penetration up to the final meeting with God's Mystery;
- it's the sacramental and walking Church in the same mystagogical process (FEDERICI, 1985, p. 193).

Mystagogy in the Fathers from the 3rd and 4th centuries is all this, but even more. Because it isn't a concept which runs out in the theological categories. We emphasize both directions on the Revelation dynamics – God and the human person – and, from this perspective, we can see the active and creative character of this process in the personal, community, social, historical, and eschatological contexts.

The mystagogical experience is based on the divine pedagogy which reveals His love project with attention, zeal, and respect for the current status of each human person. Within the limits of this paper, we shall not focus on the analysis of mystagogical elements observed in the Patristics, but in order to point a mystical pathway for our times, we'll address these elements as references to the current practices.

It's an experience which resumes the primary dynamics of faith, of the meeting with true Transcendence. In its vast relationships network, mystagogy puts us before the origin of the faith experience, i.e. it puts us before God and, through this centrality, all elements in the process start assuming the function of mediators, whether the introducers, the beginners, the structure, the selected instruments, the contents, the community, the society. The elements which are articulated around the mystagogical axis become not the first agents, but the Spirit collaborators and responsible for assisting the people and communities to live the religious experience in their lives.

The mystagogical pathway guides pastoral and educational actions before groups of beginners, in an attitude of attention and respect to the uniqueness of each person, their understanding on the faith's facts, the selection of sacred texts and language adequation which favors the training, the use of life examples in the direction of the Christians' moral and daily life and their witness in the world. Besides this zeal, the result of attention to the reality of each beginner and the mystagogical monitoring, we meet the main consequence of this attitude, which is the perception of faith as a dialogic dynamics and as a personal and historical process.

Another aspect in this mystagogical pathway is the knowledge that the communicated message causes changes in the person, transforms her/his being and her/his acting. In other words, it's a faith experience which is reflected on her/his own life by transforming the existence and personal behavior.

It's a mystical pathway, since it doesn't regards revelation and faith as two distinct moments, but as interrelated, one being a part of the other. According to the patristic scholar A. Benoit (1966, p. 64), faith doesn't come after something has been revealed, but it's an active, indispensable, constitutive part of the very revelation. Besides, the "heard" and understood message starts predisposing the human being to a change in their attitudes, in their being and thinking before the most diverse situations, according to the new references configuring her/his life.

Mystagogy is, therefore, a pathway of progressive integration of beginners in faith and religious community. It's through knowledge on the pedagogical process of revelation and of love and respect for tradition. It's constant, sensitive, and impregnating dialogue with new answers and possibilities.

The theologian U. Vasquez states that, at the heart of the Fathers' guidelines, one finds the Christian life experienced as a pathway, to which we're initiated by God, who is Mystery (VASQUEZ, 2001, p. 7). It's worth bringing an excerpt of the

Catechesis of Cyril to the neophytes where he confirms that the new life beginning for those who embrace the salvation message.

Now go with me from the old things to the new ones, from the figure to the reality. There, Moses was sent by God to Egypt; here, Christ, from the Father's bosom, was sent to the world. That to free the oppressed people of Egypt; Christ to free those who are overwhelmed by sin in the world (JERUSALÉM, 2004, p. 21).

The initiation and teaching process dimensions aim to introduce the person to the experience, so that it can find its own identification and its performance rate.

The attention to the mystagogical dynamics situates not only the beginner on the view of the “pathway”, but all components of the evangelizing action. Reflecting on spiritual guidance, U. Vasquez (2001) states that mystagogy is the spiritual pathway reaching everyone, it's the experience in which everyone is initiated by God, who is Mystery (VASQUEZ, 2001, p. 7). Due to this character, there's a resizing of attitudes and postures, in which the center of the process consists of the openness to the dynamics of the Spirit.

A purely conceptual approach, which seeks to diagnose through logics the evangelizing action, loses its reason for being. Regarding the mystique pathway, M. Maçaneiro (1997, p. 32-33) thinks that the rational pretense gives way to welcoming the Mystery in its simplicity, unpredictability, and daily life vicissitudes. Logics gives way to the mystique, the mystagogical process. The indispensable criteria in this spirituality will be those which communicate the constant and creative movement of the Christian God's experience such as, for instance, the themes related to the pathway, process, dialogue, itinerary, trajectory, learning. Anyway, the starting point and the purpose of the evangelization which is attentive to mystagogy always seek to differ the human from the spiritual walk to meet the living God and to establish a liberating community with oneself, with others, and with the whole universe (MAÇANEIRO, 1997, p. 32-33).

Conclusion

In this paper, we articulated reflections brought by philosophy, sociology, and theology, as challenges that the current times have presented to those who believe that spirituality is a key element for the humanization project. We know that it's a pathway of constructions and deconstructions, in which each person, group, and community experience situations conditioning or opening for new set-ups.

We believe that Mystagogy helps us a lot to find the pathways to a spirituality which isn't restricted to subjectivism, but which rather construes an openness and maturity process, besides more harmonious otherness relations.

A key factor of this attitude for redeeming Mystagogy was finding out, in comparison with the current culture – modernity, post-modernity, reflexive modernization –, many signs of a new subjectivity, which bring along the genesis of a relational dynamics. A subjectivity considering the human being in an integrated way emerged, in its many dimensions, living in a complex system of relations with the world and with people. It's a subjectivity which opens to the dialogic relation and that, through intersubjective discursive practices, reconstrues their meanings and their essential choices. This way, we join J. Libanius' exhortation, stating that we're in the face of a privileged moment for evangelization, in which subjectivity is open to new structuring experiences and it realizes that it's the meeting with the other, with oneself, and with the world that will lead it to achievement (LIBANIO, 2000, p. 54-55).

The spirituality guidance and training experience has been the raw material in our times. Rather than seeking new methodologies which dialogue with our times, Mystagogy tells of an anthropological and theological foundation that redeems its essence and point out pastoral pathways.

As spaces for initiation, reflection, and training, the moments of spiritual guidance aren't ends in themselves, they're means. They're privileged and essential moments in this process, however, as mediations, they need to be attentive and open to ongoing listening of the revelation dynamics in the personal and community experience, in the sacred texts, in the signals observed in history, and the interpellations which society presents.

The mystagogical experience lived in the Holy Fathers isn't an outdated proposal with regard to reality. The faith crisis requires a new mystical pathway from us, integration spirituality. It asks us the urgency of a thorough review of the religious guidance processes, the vitality of communities, and the concrete way of living the relation religion-world and faith-culture.

Our reflection proposes to confirm the importance of a Church's guiding principle in the early centuries, not as a mechanical repetition of a very remote process in history, but rather as a reference axis, as an understanding and review key for the current times. The mystagogical experience reminds us that the experience of God doesn't occur in a dispersed manner, distracted, dissipated into the systematic oblivion of oneself. Mystagogy tells us that the meeting with God supposes a walk, an existence which walks to the person's centrality, in the deepest intimacy and, in the density of this experience, the meeting with the most radical otherness, God's presence.

This process guides the person to overcome isolation, hopelessness in the search for the meaning of life, the pretense of an individual achievement, without otherness. In the openness to Mystery, the human being is existentially called to dialogic dynamism, and it's the same dynamism that allows its very achievement.

In mystagogy, we find the guidelines favoring this procedural dynamics. However, it'll be in the dialogue between the dimensions participating in this trajectory that these aspects can be embraced, thought through, questioned, streamlined, or recreated. Mystagogy is the pedagogy which triggers the virtue of

welcoming mystery, acknowledging its presence and dynamism within each person, in the ecclesial community, in human history, in the creation.

It's an experience which resumes the primal faith dynamics, of meeting the true Transcendence. In its vast of relations network, mystagogy puts us before the origin of faith experience, i.e. it puts us before God and, through this centrality, all elements in the process start assuming the function of mediators, whether the counselors, the beginners, the structure, the selected instruments, the contents, the community, the society. The elements which are articulated around the mystagogical axis become not the first agents, but rather the collaborators of God's mystery, and they're responsible for assisting people and communities to develop a spirituality integrated with the other dimensions of personal, community, social, and cosmic life.

We hope that this re-walking on the fountains and roots of Tradition can become a living memory for our current time, especially for the spiritual guidance processes.

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