

Fr. Ron: A Leader in Initiation

Paul Turner

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults book-ended my long friendship with Father Ron Lewinski. I started meeting people associated with the North American Forum on the Catechumenate while helping organize an institute in Kansas City in 1989. Several of them told me about Ron and spoke glowingly of his qualities. He was a scholar with a pastoral heart. An effective presenter. A good team worker.

I had been ordained only ten years.

“Do you know him?”

“No.”

“You could become like him,” his colleagues said.

Friendship was instant when Ron and I first worked together on a Forum institute. Indeed, it was easy to see in him a role model for priestly ministry. With a pastor’s heart and parish experience, he served the parochial, diocesan, national, and international Church, making many disciples, many friends.

In 1993 we both ended up at the Intercontinental Symposium on Catechumenal Theology in Lyon, France. Afterward, Ron and I took some time to explore the French countryside, share thoughts about liturgical theology, relax, read, laugh, and eat.

Ron’s *Guide for Sponsors* (Liturgy Training Publications), now in its fourth edition, is the book for which Ron is probably best known. Many Catholics feel daunted by the idea of serving as a sponsor for a catechumen, but Ron’s book has instilled confidence and excitement in the hearts of those now sharing their faith. The book exemplified Ron’s “You-can-do-this” attitude that characterized much of his work as a parish priest.

Less known was the work Ron did behind the scenes for the US edition of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, published in 1988. He served on a small task force that helped develop the adapted rites for candidates who already enjoyed a valid Baptism. He worked on developing such ceremonies as the Rite of Welcoming, the Rite of Sending, the Call to Continuing Conversion, and the Penitential Rite for candidates. These appear only in the US edition, but they have been widely copied throughout the English-speaking world.

In recent years, my work led me to criticize these rites, and Ron took it in stride. He began to rethink some of his earlier assumptions about baptized candidates, and I gained new appreciation into the pastoral efforts made in the late 1980s to enliven the RCIA with the complex US societal milieu.



Fr. Ron Lewinski (1946–2017) instilled confidence and excitement in people, opening them to share their faith.

The two of us gave major presentations at the annual meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in 2014. The FDLC had helped recruit the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate to survey the implementation of the *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*. Ron and I each delivered papers on the results. As expected, his continues to be a masterful analysis of contemporary parish initiation practice. His paper can be found at fdlc.org with the Annual Meeting 2014 documents.

Most recently, LTP has issued Ron’s last book, *An Introduction to the RCIA*. In his typical easy-to-read style, Ron offers encouragement to those just becoming acquainted with the mission of escorting people through catechesis and toward the sacraments of initiation. The book fills a need. The turnover of people leading the

ministry of Christian initiation in parishes remains heavy, and some priests sheepishly admit that they received little formation on the complex rites of initiation in their seminary formation. Ron’s book patiently, respectfully, and clearly explains the process of initiation.

It was my honor to write the endorsement for the back cover of the book: “Ron Lewinski has more experience with the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* than almost any other person on earth. He will bring you intense knowledge, practical guidance, gentle challenges, and increased confidence.”

The book came into my hands in July 2017. Ten days later I received word that Father Ron Lewinski had died.

Since first hearing about Ron through the Forum, I had come to know him, but I could never become like him.

Like many others, I am grateful to the North American Forum on the Catechumenate and Liturgy Training Publications for making Ron’s work available. We have all sharpened our insights on initiation because of his patient work, clear explanations, challenging ideas, and faithful devotion. He has made us better professionals and persons. We join in prayer now to thank God for the gift that Ron has been to us, and to ask God to welcome him into the heart of the Paschal Mystery that Ron so lovingly explored through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. ♦

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