

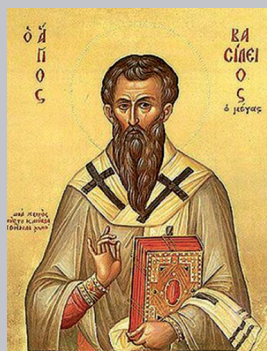
LATE ANTIQUE HISTORY AND RELIGION 10

SEEING THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

The Mystagogy of the Church Fathers

edited by

Paul van Geest



PEETERS

In the course of the past years an interest in precisely the mystagogy of the Church Fathers developed at various Dutch universities. Interest in the mystagogy of the Church Fathers increased because it was recognised that the study of this did justice both to the intention of the Church Fathers themselves and to the increasing demand for spirituality. It was not their primary intention to put forward a rational reflection on the *depositum fidei* as such or to pass on knowledge of this as a goal in itself. Their goal was rather to initiate a process aimed not so much at intellectual formation as at an existential transformation by means of rituals, catechesis and the explanation of stories and images from Biblical traditions.

At the first International Congress of the Centre of Patristic Research of Tilburg University and VU University Amsterdam the main focus was on the mystagogy of the Church Fathers. The assumption was that philological, historical and theological methods complement each other in the approach to the Church Fathers as mystagogues. Consequently the manner in which they attempt to shape their introduction into the mystery of Christ was regarded from an interdisciplinary point of view. Thus it became possible to bring into focus the interaction (or the lack of interaction) between mystagogy and, for example, liturgy, rhetoric, protreptic, psychological mechanisms, pagan *Umwelt*, or community building in the monastic milieu of the first centuries, in the work of a specific early Christian writer.

In this book the contributions to this Congress are to be found. Together they form a first sketch of the research area of the mystagogy of the Church Fathers, as it is taking shape at present. The book is divided into six parts, preceded by three introductory reviews in which some etymological and semantic aspects of the term 'mystagogy' have been elucidated. Subsequently parts one, two and three deal with formation methods and strategies that may not be called directly mystagogical but do have some interaction with mystagogy.

In the first part the studies are devoted to the interaction between rhetorical, polemical and apologetic strategies and mystagogy, which was rather directed at existential transformation, both in the East and the West. In the second part it is made clear how in the transfer of (knowledge about) the Creed as the basis of the Christian faith, catechetical and polemical aims might be interwoven with striving for initiation and transformation that may be interpreted as mystagogical. In the third part the function of images and of visual symbolism in the mystagogy of the first centuries is mapped out. The contributions in this part examine how certain eastern and western authors in the early Christian period explore the potentialities and limitations of images with regard to mystagogy. The studies in part four are devoted to the function of initiation rituals like Baptism and Eucharist and to the specific liturgical aspects of the transformation process, so to mystagogy in the strict sense of the word. The studies in part five are based on mystagogy in the wider sense. Here (aspects of) the more existential transformation processes are mapped out, in which the Christian mystagogue attempts to bring about in the mystes both a degree of openness to the mystery of God which, in the Person of Christ, is as incomprehensible as it is near, and development in the community, in which the personal development and the new identity are perpetuated. Finally in the sixth and last part a very specific form of mystagogy is considered. These studies are devoted to the way of formation inherent in the works on martyrdom.

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