

Catechumen

- I. New Testament
- II. Christianity

I. New Testament

If “catechumen” means a person who undergoes some formal teaching before baptism, there is no evidence of it in NT times; a group of non-baptized Christian “god-fearers” did not exist. Κατηγούμενος in Gal 6:6 refers to all believers, and in Rom 2:18 (cf. Acts 18:25) it simply means “taught.” Baptism as described by Luke in Acts, a response to mission preaching without a prerequisite period of instruction, may reflect general practice in early Christianity, as well as that within Luke’s own community (cf. Matt 28:19–20: baptise them and [then] teach). Teaching seems to be part of the communal worship in Pauline churches (1 Cor 14:26), even as late as the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 3:16). Hebrews 6:1–2 presupposes a certain “canon” of teaching for beginners that seems to be pre- and post-baptismal, but even the appearance of a Two Ways doctrine is no conclusive proof of a catechumenate (cf. *Did.* 7:1 with *Did.* 11:1). Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus of Rome are the first witnesses for catechumens proper, although a distinction between baptized and non-baptized participants in church worship (particularly the denial of participation in the Lord’s Supper for the latter) must have been established from earliest times. But instruction was understood as a need for everyone, not just beginners in faith.

Bibliography: ■ Brakmann, H. et al., “Katechumenat,” *RAC* 20 (Stuttgart 2004) 497–574. ■ Kretschmar, G., “Katechumenat/Katechumenen I: Alte Kirche,” *TRE* 18 (Berlin/New York 1989) 1–5.

Jorg Christian Salzmänn