

YOUTHS AND CATECHESIS: PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The youthful age is a period of trial and error. It is a phase of endless exploration, experimentation and enquiries. While some are being driven to Pentecostalism by the wave of the time, due to old method of teaching the faith; the Church must not relent in repeating the fact that the Catholic faith must be valued. On this, the catechetical model of Osogbo Diocese has been presented elaborately which to a large extent is meeting with the needs of today's youths in communicating the faith in its simplest form. At the end, it was suggested that other Dioceses should adopt these methods to keep the youths in the Catholic Church forever.

Key words: Youths, Catechesis, Church, Directorate of Religious Education, Osogbo Diocese.

Introduction

Catechesis is fundamentally linked with the evangelizing mission of the Church. It is an ongoing formation in the faith. Hence, dedicated lay faithful both men and women, who will devote themselves to handling on the faith are called to participate in it. Therefore they carry out the injunctions of Jesus Christ mandate in Mathew 28:16-20, Mk 3:13-14 to "Go make disciples of all Nations." For the purpose of this command, we need to place our time, our gifts and our talents at the service of the Christian community. Catechetics is "the act of teaching" and "the knowledge imparted by teaching", this term is synonymous with CATECHESIS and CATECHISM. This was often used in the New Testament, especially in the Pastoral Epistles. As we might expect, the Apostle insists upon "doctrine" as one of the most important duties of a bishop (I Tim., iv, 13, 16; v, 17; II Tim., iv, 2, etc.). The word catechesis means instruction by word of mouth, especially by questioning and answering. Though it may apply to any subject-matter, it is commonly used for instruction in the elements of religion, especially preparation for initiation into Christianity. Vatican II, document of the Church teaches that "Catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view of initiating the hearers to the fullness of Christian life." CT 18.

This passing on the faith is done through various methods since there no formal or official school for it. It is thus done by organizing a giving time suitable to those to be catechized and their teacher to come together for

instruction. The method for catechizing varies. It may be through the recitation of the letter of the catechism, with an easy explanation of it by way of question and answer, the instruction; using examples and stories, the reading of the Gospel and the homily, admonitions, hymns and prayers. However, the first method is more traditional that is, recitation of the letter of the catechism, with an easy explanation of it by way of question and answer, which the Catholic Encyclopedia sustains. "When speaking of the history of catechetics we saw that, though the method was originally and properly oral, the custom soon arose of composing catechisms — i.e. short manuals of elementary religious instruction, usually by means of questions and answers." These methodologies especially the common and traditional method seems to be inadequate to today's youths. Consequently, new methods are being devised to meet the needs of the youth of the Church today.

Youths and Catechesis

Catholic youths down the history have been complaining of lack basic knowledge of the Catholic faith. This makes them move away to Pentecostal churches. At one of our interactive sessions with them, they categorically reported from their group gatherings that both the Church and their parents are guilty of their lack of commitment to the Catholic faith. Although in the mind of Ezech (2006) youths enter Pentecostalism as intention to seek a deeper awareness of God and fuller prayer life. Also, that Pentecostalism offers them warmth, care, and support in small and close-knit communities. She went further to say that "Pentecostalism has given encouragement to the empowered youth-they become deacons, evangelists, priests, and bishops." Hence, they prefer Pentecostalism to Catholicism. This appears to be another approach to the subject matter but by and large, they leave the Catholic Church for poor catechesis and in search of better understanding of God. Whatever they are being offered afterwards should be considered secondary. Although Gouger (2013) warned that "We can't wait here and wonder where everybody is and why they're not coming to us, we need to go to where they are." Going to where they are in this statement may not necessary mean going to look for them at Pentecostal Churches but to device better and attractive means of keeping them enthusiastically in the Catholic Church. Akubeze (2018) alludes to this. "Catechesis seeks to aid the faithful to be active in living out their faith. Catechesis achieves this goal through the Christian life and doctrinal instruction. "

There may be more challenges than parenting. The procedure of catechizing in the Church needs to be looked into. Some of the teachers of faith may not be lettered or the old methodology may not suit the present age. Although, Oyejola (2018) is of the opinion that "the old methods are good but already converted committed Catholic members need ongoing evangelization to keep

them rooted in the household of faith and also to turn them to evangelizers.” He then proposes additional methods of catechizing Catholic members as, evangelization in the family setting, parish evangelization to involve all groups differently like: Teenagers –School children, widowed, Young adults (18-25years of age), single parent families, young married couples (25-40 years of age), divorced/separated, elderly married couples (65 and above), sick/homebound elderly ones, single, young to middle-age, newcomers, single, elderly widows/widowers, unemployed. He added that, to reach out to others, our laity must be well grounded in the doctrines of the Catholic Church. They must know what we believe and why we hold such beliefs. It is when they have sufficient knowledge of the teachings of the Holy mother Church that they can enlighten others about it.

Adesina (2019) identified the following as part of the problems of catechesis at least in Nigeria. To him, a great percentage of those who teach catechesis are not adequately trained; some are just doing it as an act of piety, participation of priests is low in most of the dioceses and almost non-existent in some, logistic of attendance may not be proper, catechesis is predominantly directed towards the reception of the sacraments, except in very few dioceses, insufficient materials for catechism, language barrier – on the part of minorities and in terms of materials in the local language and scriptural basis is minimal or non-existent in the ‘adopted’ syllabus of most parishes. Probably, this may be affecting 80% of the Dioceses in Nigeria. In the real sense of the matter, catechesis supposed to be an on-going program for church members and should be seen beyond preparation for the reception of the sacraments. Keeping in mind that one may study the catholic for a life time. Therefore, catechetical programs must be steady and systematic. In the view of Akubeze (2018), “Catechesis is broader than preparing candidates for Baptism, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion. Catechesis embraces the entire Christian life. Catechetical programs for families, youths, single persons, physically challenged, religious, priests, and bishops. Since Catechesis embraces the entire life of the faithful, there must be the first recognition that Catechesis is very important in the life of the Church. It is at the heart of the mission of the Church. Doctrinal instruction is part of Catechesis. This is the aspect that deals with establishing Catechetical program for those preparing for the sacraments and helping those in the Church to grow in their understanding of the faith.”

Reflecting more on how to make today’s youths further committed and interested in the mission of the Church, the local ordinary of Osogbo Diocese- Most Rev John Akinkunmi Oyejola through the Directorate of Religious Education has device more active means of getting the Youths of the Catholic Church stay in the Church forever, especially in Osogbo Diocese. This approach is functional Catechetical programs that adequately respond to the

Pastoral needs of the Diocese. These programs are, deepening the Faith, supported with various other publications like: Youth bulletin, children bulletin and Lenten reflections. This major catechetical program named deepening the faith which started in January 2018 can be viewed as post initiation catechesis. It has its format in production of a quarterly manual that carries a doctrinal topic per month, for example, Christian virtues, life after death or tithing and offering. Each topic is broken into sub topics for discussion on every Sunday of the same month. This manual is being produced by the Directorate of Religious Education Department after which the trained instructors coordinate the discussions with the parishioners one hour before or after Mass every Sunday in every church in the Diocese. It is step by step in structure. Facilitator introduces the theme for the week in step one. In Step two, specific Biblical passages are read. While member share their experiences in relation to the readings heard in step three. In case sharing is boring, there are questions from the manual that will guide the discussions for the day. In step four however, the instructor will encourage the audience in relation to the topic as documented in the manual. Step five is questions and answers where any of the participants are allowed to answer. At the end of this a particular task is agreed upon which takes step six. After which there will be evaluation and concluding prayer as steps seven and eight. The methodology for this catechetical program is highly related to what Monye (2019) proposed “Adult faith formation should be offered in such a manner that the content relates to the life experiences of parishioners. To be effective, adult faith formation cannot just be classroom type lectures. No! Rather, it requires a comprehensive, multifaceted, and coordinated approach and various learning activities, which include: Participation in Liturgical experiences, Scripture reading, and study, Retreat, Prayer, Family or home-Centered activities, drama etc”

Igbekele 2019 named this program “Osogbo Model” and presents the following as the positives of this model “The Osogbo model is a veritable Sunday school because every Catholic believes that the Mass is the highest encounter and they may not come back in the evening for another program. The Osogbo model is therefore an advanced Sunday school program ...the Osogbo post-baptismal liturgical-catechetical model has the following:It is participatory. It makes use of and employs the services of many members of the people of God, thereby giving room for many members of the Church to participate, make contributions and ask questions for clarifications. All segments of the people of God are involved: bishop, priests, religious, and laity. The main drivers are the DRE, lay people and religious, especially professional teachers among the laity and religious. It has the support of the highest authority within the diocese and is well funded for it to achieve the objectives set for it.” In his opinion, all Dioceses must use this model.

The questions generated during this program are collated for catechetical bulletin. It is broken into questions and answers form so that today's youths can read within thirty minutes and gain something. The responses of the youths of this Diocese have been so positive to the Program (deepening the faith) and to reading catechetical publications. Meanwhile, the local ordinary kept re-emphasizing the importance of it. They are allowed to make contributions, raise further questions and even interact with the catechetical commission members, through email for immediate answers to their questions. Seedling the faith program for children has the same layout but pay more attention to children where the Sunday liturgy is being presented in story and drama forms. It is done in parallel with the deepening the faith program. There is provision for children bulletin that responds to their catechetical needs as well.

This new method of catechizing the youths and the entire church members can has a lot of impact today. It is equally far better than leaving them to discover information by themselves or being led astray Pentecostal counterparts. This will help them to enjoy better catechesis that meet the need of this age and reduce their lack of interest in religious matters as Pilla (2018) observes "Many are detached from religious concerns and they often acknowledge that they have not been informed or educated in that respect. It could also be as a result of an education, schooling and sometimes a catechesis that does not adequately form their intelligence."

In emphasizing further on the methodology for catechizing the youths, Gouger (2013) suggests that proactive approach should be used "...because fewer people are returning to the faith today than in years past. To counter that loss, Catholics have to meet their lapsed brothers and sisters wherever they can, reaching out through new technology such as social media, peer-to-peer invitations in programs such as the Fellowship of Catholic University Students and Theology on Tap, or simply knocking on doors."

Conclusion

Today's youths must be giving a helping hand to develop authentic relationship with God, and to become authentic witness for him. Youth Chaplains should be carefully appointed, trained and interested. Finally, attention should be paid to formation of youths, through regular catechesis, production of relevant publications and other relevant facilities. Also, religious education teachers should be well read and on-going formation must be made compulsory. A recommended year must be fulfilled by all candidates preparing for the sacraments-two years preferably. The small Christian communities must be strengthened. Above all, financial commitment and interest of the local ordinary will make it bear much fruits.

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