



A Pastoral-Theological Evaluation on the Formation of Lay Catechists in the Catholic Church

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Abstract

This study "A Pastoral - Theological Evaluation on the Formation of Lay Catechists in Catholic Church" undertakes a critical examination of how lay catechists are formed within the Catholic Church, focusing on the interplay between pastoral needs and theological education. Drawing on key Church teachings like Catechesis Tridentina and the General Directory for Catechesis, the research assesses the adequacy, effectiveness, and theological foundations of current formation programmes. Using a qualitative approach, it engages with Church documents, empirical data on catechists' training, and pastoral outcomes in diverse Nigerian contexts. The findings highlight gaps in contextualization, spiritual formation, and ongoing support all of which affect catechists' ability to transmit the faith effectively. In response, the study proposes a renewed formation model that integrates inculturation, adult learning principles, and sustained accompaniment, aiming to bolster the Church's catechetical mission.

Keywords: Lay Catechists, Formation, Pastoral Theology, Catechesis, Inculturation, Catholic Church, Nigeria

Introduction

The Ministry of Lay Catechists holds an important position in the Church's evangelising mission. The Catholic Church owes its foundation not only to the missionaries of those days but more so to the Ministry of native lay Catechists. The current situation in the Church is that not well-formed Catechists are championing the work of catechesis, especially in rural areas. It is against the aforementioned background that this study is motivated to investigate and evaluate the need to train and form Catechists before they are officially commissioned in the Catholic Church. Catechists are deeply involved in the missionary activity of the Church; it is fitting that the Catechists should be carefully chosen, physically matured in age, and emotionally balanced. They are to be thoroughly formed and be given adequate Human, Intellectual, Scriptural, Doctrinal, and Spiritual training to equip them to tackle the demanding challenges of their Ministry in our contemporary society. As a result of poorly formed Catechists, the faith of the majority of people living in the rural parishes is collapsing, and many are leaving the Church because they are not well taught. Others show a lackadaisical attitude toward issues that pertain to faith and morals, and some uphold syncretism between the Catholic Faith and the traditional beliefs of the different cultures of the people. These considerations indicate and demand an urgent rescue operation, because weak faith of the faithful cannot withstand the waves of modernism, globalisation, and the growing stronghold of Islam that sweeps across the world and in our immediate environments in particular.

This study will critically investigate the following: The general notion of Formation, the Formation of Catechists in the Catholic Church, the challenges faced in areas of Formation of Catechists in the Church, and how these challenges could be resolved, recommendations, and conclusion.

Clarification of Concepts

Formation: This refers to the process of growth and transformation that occurs as individuals deepen their understanding and practice their faith and live out their discipleship in their daily lives.

Catechist: A catechist is a person who teaches others about the Catholic faith, helping them to understand and live out its teachings. Their main role is to share the gospel message, explain Catholic doctrines and traditions, and provide guidance and support for those seeking to deepen their faith.

General Notion of Formation

Recently, issues about Formation are at the front burner in both ecclesial and secular spheres. This is because no one wants to give room to chance. With the advent of science and technology in all ramifications, society is witnessing tremendous changes. Things are evolving and could be said to have gotten to an accelerated speed. This makes the need for Formation an urgent task in every human endeavour.

It was Plato in his Republic who said, "Formation is an art and every art has an interest and the interest of any art is the perfection of itself" (Plato 24). By this, Plato means that nothing becomes an art suddenly. Rather, the end product, the process to that end product, will be given enough thought and planning. Formation as an art may be taken to mean that Formation can be likened to a mould. Every facet of life tries to elongate its own by this means. Formation covers a whole lot of areas like: military, medicine, architecture, religious Formation and even Formation of stones. This study limits itself to Formation here as it concerns human beings. One central thing is the inculcation of that which differentiates a particular group from another. For this reason, each is unique and will in no way become the other, because "the good each art is specially confined to, is the art. Each art gives us a particular good and not merely a general one-medicine gives health, navigation gives safety at sea, and so on" (30).

Formation also implies human development. It means the act of guiding and shepherding people towards specific goals. Dadah Boniface considers Formation in general as a journey that begins from the moment of conception of the human person. In other words, life takes shape and is moulded in a particular way during the child's formative years (16). Formation commences as soon as life begins. Hence, parents play primary roles in the Formation of their children. Dadah rightly describes parents as the first Formators and the home as the first school where this Formation is provided. Parents have the onus of forming and moulding their children into the culture they belong to, their religious belief and preparing them to face life in the larger society.

Initial Formation

Initial Formation implies a primary Formation that prepares candidates to become better pastoral agents. This type of Formation occurs in the seminary or Formation houses/Institutes as the case may be, with religious and lay Catechists. Therefore, Formation in this context is geared towards helping candidates to come to know and follow Jesus as they prepare for ordination/profession/commissioning into the priesthood/religious life/Catechetical ministry.

Asanbe Jude strongly opines that the seminary, for example, has a very crucial role to play in the Formation of candidates for the Catholic priesthood. It provides a nursery where the candidates grow in their intended ideals (Asanbe 17). He

captures the description of the seminary as a "nursery bed, where young plants at maturity are subsequently transplanted. Like a "nursery bed," the seminary is a training ground where young men are carefully formed according to the ecclesiastical stipulations. Hence, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is an urgent need for a careful selection of the candidates for the priesthood and religious life.

Oso Florence graphically describes the period of the initial Formation of candidates into religious life as a privileged and irreplaceable moment. This is because they commence the process of pruning, clearing, and preparing the candidates to answer the call in the religious life and maturing in this call to become like Christ (Oso 22). Oso describes the situation as an irreplaceable moment because a fundamental mistake at the beginning has serious consequences for the candidates.

Anatharackel Michael contributes to this issue by emphasizing that the formation period is a learning process, in which the candidates are initiated into Formation. The young religious should gradually be motivated to accept responsibility for their religious life from this initial stage. They also need an atmosphere that is free to respond to the "inner guidance" of the Holy Spirit (Anatharackel 218).

On-going Formation

Ongoing Formation presupposes that an initial Formation has taken place. It is meant to keep abreast with the latest developments within and outside the Church's life. Kure perceives the need for ongoing Formation to be a matter of urgency and necessity. He argues that the priest's education is supposed to be an ongoing Formation, which is not supposed to end after leaving the Seminary. The various courses offered in the seminary are done hurriedly, and they are usually inadequately covered. Hence, the urgency of continued Formation in the field by means of Theological Conferences, Symposia, Seminars, and other related programmes cannot be overemphasized (Kure 65). Kure's opinion on the issue of ongoing Formation is from an informed position, having taught in the seminary for a couple of years.

Speaking on the subject matter, Ojemen further underscores the necessity of priests to continue their studies in an ongoing manner to keep pace with modern developments and trends in society and to help the priest build himself to respond appropriately through effective methods of evangelization by enhancing the apostolate as a whole (Ojemen 273). Today, there is a great misconception about ongoing Formation. Many people have a myopic opinion about it and have reduced ongoing Formation to further studies abroad. In fact, this is just an aspect of it. However, it embraces formal and informal learning. It includes going for workshops, seminars, symposia, retreats, reading theological journals, magisterial documents, keeping abreast with dailies and magazines, enrolling in computer classes, watching and listening to news from the television, radio, and other forms of personal efforts to empower oneself from the shackles of ignorance. Hence, it enhances judicious use of time, develops one's intellectual capacity, and frees one from boredom and burnout. It "strengthens the priest to endure hardships, difficulties, doubts, crises, and hesitations in the face of all kinds of personal and social situations" (278).

For a meaningful liturgical celebration, Chibuko buttresses the need for ongoing Formation in the art of proclaiming the Word of God in the Christian assembly as a fact that cannot

be overemphasized. He stresses that, since the priest plays an important role in the Christian assembly and shares in the prophetic ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, the need for constant updating of methods of proclamation of the Word of God is inevitable. This includes the use of modern means of communication, the content of the message, and the medium of communication (Chibuko 40).

The Formation of Catechists in the Catholic Church

Catechist Formation has become an 'in-topic', an urgent matter; Catechists are no longer counted among the elite of the rural communities. The catechist loses prestige both in town and in the village, in the Church and the community, if he does not show any systematic knowledge of the work he is called to do. Because of the rapid changes in society, a greater challenge is posed on the catechist's ministry, and this cannot be met with amateurism (Ndiokwere 184). Common sense teaches us that if one must get something from something or somebody, he/she must equip the thing or person. Hence, we can talk of the formation of Catechists. Because Catechists are the priest's co-workers in the task of evangelisation, it is necessary to aim at having a suitable one for the communities. "These days, owing to the growing complexity of society and its cares and needs, every profession demands a standard of specialised Formation which must be undergone as a condition to exercise that profession" (201).

Njoku Rose, in her book *The Advent of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, talks about the apprenticeship type of training. It is an informal Formation that had no curriculum and no training institutions. The student catechist attaches himself to the priest from whom he understudies the art of the apostolate. "In those days, there were no special courses for Catechists. They learnt on the job and by close association with the priest, they were able to know what they wanted" (Njoku 192). However, in his work, *Becoming a Catechist*, Tony Ashcroft, while admitting the need for some kind of an up to date training, concurs with the apprenticeship model of training by stressing that the methodology of Catechists' training should be an atmosphere of friendly community rather than that of a formal set of lectures (Tony 17). A friendly community here could mean an apprenticeship between the student catechist and the priest. Hastings Adrian went further to advocate that since the catechist's apostolate involves his entire family, his training and Formation should go concurrently with that of his wife, "so that the whole family can receive a suitable training for its apostolate. It is to be an apostolate of life, and it is very much better that it be the life and work and example of a married couple that is in question" (Adrian 224-225).

In his work, *Pastoral Evaluation of the Apostolate of the Catechists in Ekiti Diocese, Nigeria*, Patrick Aduloju advocates for the adequate training and Formation of the Catechists for the prestige this Formation confers on the Catechists in both rural and township communities (Patrick 16). For proper Formation of the Catechists, Amankwa John thinks that their Formation should take place at a Formation centre, such as a Catechetical centre, which should be "adequately equipped with facilities and personnel for the training and Formation of the Catechists" (Amankwa 144).

Nathaniel Ndiokwere, in his book *The African Church Today and Tomorrow*, says, "owing to the growing complexity of society with its cares and needs, the demand for specialisation

in every profession is imperative" (Ndiokwere 201). Hence, he opts for an on-going Formation for all trained Catechists. Asanbe is of the view that annual seminars for Catechists, which should include organised lectures, workshops, and a forum for questions and answers, will go a long way in providing for the demands of ongoing Formation (Asanbe 144). For Abraham Eyitene in his book *Diocesan Administration in the 21st Century*, Catechist, for him should be sent to study even the social sciences, including Computer, in higher institutions for self-empowerment, good operation, and better performance. While short and long-term courses in the form of seminars, workshops/conferences are to be organised, Catechists should be involved in the deep study of theological courses (Abraham 65).

Curriculum of Catechists Formation

The Formation of Catechists is necessary for effective Catechetical missionary work in the Church. It is a non-negotiable and must be carried out in accordance with the particular norms of the Church. To bring about an authentic Formation of Catechists, those in charge of the Formation of Catechists should ensure that they are trained in the light of the different aspects of Formation. The following aspects of Formation are to be considered paramount:

A. Human Formation

The candidate for Formation should have from the beginning basic human

Qualities that can be further developed. What is to be aimed at is a person with human maturity, suitable for a responsible role in the community. These human qualities may already have been present in the individual, but the Catechetical Formation with special attention on the human aspects would help to build and develop these qualities in view of a fruitful Catechetical ministry. So that the Catechetical ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that Catechists should mold their human personality, so that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Christ the Redeemer of humanity. Dolan Timothy, however, upholds that human Formation is the foundation of all other Formations. He bases his argument on the saying that "grace does not destroy nature but builds on it." Each person must develop the human natural virtues in addition to the supernatural ones. It is the personality, humanity, temperament, and character of the person that constitute what the Lord "re-orders" and uses (Dolan 147). Human Formation seeks to develop the human qualities of the candidate in order to help his or her spiritual development.

B. Spiritual Formation

The work of Catechists is born out of a personal witness to life. Therefore, the purpose of catechist Formation will be to transform the Catechists from well-meaning volunteers and generous parents into passionate witnesses of the Gospel. Hence, during the Catechetical Formation, Catechists should participate in spiritual retreats for personal and community renewal. Spiritual direction should be made available to them. When Catechists are spiritually formed, they can be able to form others and lead them in prayer to God, who has initiated the process of conversion in the minds and hearts of those who accept the faith in Christ.

C. Theological Formation

The Catechist Formation curriculum must be in such a way that it will assist the catechist to develop himself or herself as one who receives and responds to the call of Jesus Christ to share the light of faith with others. To be effective in the ministry of a catechist, he or she must understand, love, live, and proclaim the Christian message with conviction and enthusiasm.

D. Intellectual Formation

Intellectual Formation aims at the development of the mind and intellect to enable the candidates handle problems that the faithful may bring and counsel them appropriately. This is why Anactharackel opines that proper intellectual Formation enables the candidates to look beyond and to communicate the mystery of God to the people and to be pastorally effective, he says, "it must be integrated with personal experience of God" (Anactharackel 231). He maintains that sound philosophical Formation sharpens the rational faculty and must be included during the study of theology: "True theology proceeds from faith and aims at leading to faith" (231). The intellectual Formation does not end after a given period of Formation of candidates; the need to continually foster it through ongoing formation is necessary for the whole lifetime.

E. Pastoral Formation

Pastoral Formation sums up the entire Formation process. In pastoral Formation, Catechists are taught to exercise their prophetic, priestly, and kingly functions as baptized persons. They should also be taught how to proclaim the Christian message and teach it, how to lead others in community and liturgical prayer, and how to carry out other pastoral services. The Formation directs the catechist to an inner source, which is the ever-deeper communion with the pastoral work of Christ, which was the principle and driving force of his salvific action.

The pastoral Formation should enable the Catechists to develop a sincere love for the missionary work of the Church. They ought to take courses on pastoral theology and missiology to be fitted for the service of carrying out the missionary task that the Church has placed upon their shoulders.

Theological Perspectives on the Formation of Catechists

In the Old Testament, God is both the formator and counsellor. He calls and directs his people towards accomplishing his divine plan. In the book of Genesis, God formed man and woman in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:27; 2:21-23) and tasked them to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over...every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Cotter David opines that humanity is given the power to procreate and so possesses at least a reflection of the divine power to give life. This might well mean. Especially given the context of blessing, to lead, or to tend. In other words, it could mean to be blessed with the responsibility of ruling the world in such a way that it is ordered, good, and a life-giving place that God intends it to be (David 18).

God formed Abraham so that he could teach his children, and through him, all the people of the earth would be taught and be blessed (Gen. 12; 15:5-6). He also called, formed Moses, and prepared him for the mission of liberating the people of Israel from bondage. From the point of view of human

Formation, his careful upbringing as a Jew was providentially carried out by his mother at Pharaoh's daughter's request. Subsequently, his contact with his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of the Midianite Sanctuary, prepares Moses for his role as counselor, liberator, and religious leader of Israel (Paul 16). Stressing the same point, Craghan John, holds that the call of Moses is an attempt to communicate the meaning of God choosing a human person for a divine mission, to save his fellow Israelites from bondage (John 465).

Moses, in turn, formed Joshua, the son of Nun, who served him diligently and was always attentive to Moses's teachings (Exod 33:11) and was able to learn the necessary skills of leading the people of Israel. When Moses was about to die, God designated Joshua as his successor (Num 27:12-23; Deut 3:23-28). Joshua follows Yahweh's wise instructions and was able to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land and in the renewal of the covenant at Shechem -Joshua 24. (Craghan465).

More so, the circumstances surrounding the birth of Samuel were providential (1 Sam 3:1). Eli quite experienced temple priest, had put in many years at the Lord's service. The parents of Samuel entrusted the care of their son to Eli, who patiently mentors little Samuel and ensures his spiritual growth. He was able to apply his experience in forming Samuel to discern his vocation (v19a) as a prophet of Yahweh in Israel (v 20). Eli's experience of many years of service in the temple enabled him to direct the young novice Samuel patiently. Eli taught him the art of listening, which is key in the Formation of Catechists. Samuel eventually became a renowned figure to all Israel, from north to south. When the people of Israel apparently came to Samuel and requested, "Let us have a king to judge us" (1 Sam 8:6), he taught them on the implications of establishing a monarchy in Israel (1 Sam 8:10-18).

During the prophetic era, there were bands of prophets or sons of the prophets living together for instruction and worship under Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. They seem to have been important religious institutions in Israel that looked after the Formation of prophets in the Old Testament. References to them are frequent (1 Sam 10:11; 19:19-20; 2 Kgs. 2:3, 5; 4:38; 6:1). These schools simply trained and formed religious teachers, while some inspired prophets had received no training in the schools (Amos 7:14).

God formed Elijah to be his mouthpiece. He was one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. A relationship that depicts Formation is evident between Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament. Elisha already had a profession and was working before he responded to the invitation of Elijah. He was willing to give up his work, his possessions, and his family to follow Elijah. Elisha made an offering of all that he had and followed Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:19-21). Elijah had been serving God for ten years by then and would spend almost the same amount of time training Elisha. Elisha served Elijah as a servant; he learned through watching, helping, and being with him. He was extremely committed to Elijah (2 Kgs 2). He would not leave Elijah's side, and when it was time for Elijah to leave, Elisha became his successor. The Formation of Elisha by Elijah played a significant role in ensuring a swift transition between the two prophets in Israel. As prophets, they were teachers who guided and directed their people in their affairs with God.

God continued with the task of Formation through the prophets of Israel. This Formation is (Isa 49:1; Jer 1:5) "referred primarily to modelling" (Couturier 270). He sent

them to teach the people of Israel to leave their sinful ways, return to God, learn to act justly, walk humbly, and love tenderly (Micah 6:4; Is 1:15-20; Jonah 3:4-5).

In the New Testament, through the incarnation, the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us (John 1:14). The mission of Jesus Christ has a salvific character. To achieve this, at the threshold of his earthly ministry, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer and called those he wanted and named them Apostles. "He called them to be with Him" (Mk 3:14), which portrays something deep. The idea of being with Jesus is based on the principle of discipleship. However, the fellowship allows the twelve to share in Jesus' ministries of preaching (Mk 3:14) and exorcism (3:15) (Neiryneck 604). The time the disciples spent with Jesus allowed Formation to take place before they were sent out to preach. Jesus sets aside a "period of time" for Formation (John Paul II 42). This Formation aims to develop a relationship of deep communion and friendship with him. It was also a process of acquiring skills for the mission of saving souls.

Jesus is a formator of Formators. He formed the first crew of seminarians, the Apostles (Anyanwu 115). Jesus' life, teachings, and actions transformed his apostles, who were ordinary people and perhaps never had formal education. Jesus knew exactly how to instruct them by his way of life (Nnadozie 33). He allows them to have a personal encounter with him. Having been with him, he wanted them to be his witnesses to the world.

Having been with him in Formation, Jesus later sent them on a mission so that they could exercise the skills they had acquired over time. Viviano Benedict opines that the word "apostles" means *apostolos*, meaning emissaries, "function derives in the Gospel from the nature of the commissioner (Jesus)" (Viviano 650). Furthermore, he gave them authority. All the Evangelists stress the importance of Jesus's emissaries having real power and authority from him. In calling them, Jesus takes the initiative (650).

The Apostles also exercised the duty of forming pastoral agents in the choice of the seven deacons in Acts (6:1-6). They were formed by the apostles and commissioned for the pastoral care of the widows. This was occasioned by the Hellenists complaining that their widows were being unfairly treated. The choice of the formation of the seven deacons became pertinent to meet the immediate needs of the early Christian community.

Besides, Paul mentored Timothy and Titus. This close mentoring led to impact and Formation in their lives and helped them in their missionary mandates and the pastoral care of the people of God. Hence, the work of Formation subsists over the ages.

Challenges in the Formation of Catechists

There are a number of problems associated with the Formation of Catechists.

Aloysius Enemali, in his article, "Formation of Catechists for Effective Catechesis in Nigeria: Insights from Canon 780 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law," explains that many of the Catechists we have in Nigeria today, especially in the rural areas, are poorly educated and many could hardly read or write as well. For him, "it is difficult to lead them through the Christian doctrines in the manner of scientific theology" (Bala and Ebebe 379). He further stated that they only know the basic rudiments of the Christian doctrine and nothing more. More so, efforts to send them to higher schools for upgrading often times is not welcomed by them, and they

give many reasons why they should be allowed to stay away from such high skill knowledge of the Christian doctrine and principles of pedagogy (379).

Another challenge is the lack of properly equipped schools or Institutes for the training of Catechists. According to Ndiokwere, "a lot has been heard, discussed and written about the training of Catechists and establishment of training Institutes for the Catechists, but generally, it does not seem that much has been achieved" (Ndiokwere 202). Even though universal law and magisterial pronouncements have encouraged the establishment of international, national, regional, and diocesan training Institutes for the formation of catechists.

Today, many Catechists find it difficult to accept the changing times due to age factors. This is because they are old and are not amenable to new changes in the area of practical doctrine and communication of the gospel message. Enemali opines that "even some of the most recent interpretations of magisterial teachings seem absurd to them and they find it very difficult to comprehend the updating taking place daily in the Church" (Bala and Ebebe 381).

Kukah Hassan, in a foreword to the book, *Overcoming the Seven Deadly Sins: Recipes for Spiritual and Moral Growth*, underscores the fact that Formation is not given the desired attention it deserves. He attributes this to the many contemporary elite Catholic parents who have surrendered the training of their children to third parties such as nannies, day cares, boarding schools, and housekeepers (Akeke Forward). Very few of these parents send their children into catholic schools or environments where they could receive some bit of religious Formation. The elites among them take their children to prestigious schools in foreign countries, without consideration for their moral, spiritual, doctrinal, and cultural Formation. Kukah raises a fundamental concern that has serious consequences for both the family and society. Since the family is the bedrock of human society, it presupposes that parents should play their role in nurturing and inculcating moral values in their children. The lack of adequate Formation at formative period gives rise to some of the problems the youths are confronted with presently (Nkom 10).

For Bassey, the century is experiencing a rise in "secularism, agnosticism, religious and anti-religious atheism, neo-paganism, occultism, materialism, institutionalised corruption and personal cult" which cannot be tackled and solutions proffered by mere Sunday homilies that are sometimes poorly prepared and hence, not enough to bring about the needed change that should be (Bassey 139).

S. A. B Koroma, in his article, "Catechists: Their Role and Formation," says low esteem of Catechists' identity is another challenge in their Formation and, in fact, in their ministry as well. He asserts, "Some people look down upon Catechetical work as a low-class work fitted only for drop-outs or people with a low level of educational background" (Koroma 10 april-8 may 1994). For him this misconception about Catechists' work has made some catholic parents not encourage their children to opt for Catechetical training and Formation to become Catechists.

Another challenge faced in the Formation of Catechists is the lack of incentives to go for training. Enemali states that, "most Catechists in Nigeria would not like to go for further training because there are no incentives provided for them to entice them to go for such studies" (Bala and Ebebe 379).

There is also a lack of interest on the part of some priests to

train their Catechists. Many parish priests do not show interest in the Formation of their Catechists who are also their collaborators in the parish work of evangelisation. Some pastors feel the less knowledgeable the Catechists in the parish, the better for them to be managed, while others feel that well-trained and formed Catechists might challenge them in various areas of the parish apostolates (381).

Overcoming Challenges to the Formation of Catechists

To overcome the Challenges to the Formation of pastoral agents, Kure suggests thus:

What is needed is “a well-planned, consistent, steady, relevant and enculturated programme of Formation which can help the people to integrate their faith into all aspects of their daily lives; fears, needs, sufferings and joys. They need a kind of Formation that makes room for genuine expression of feelings and emotions, as well as spontaneity at liturgical celebrations. They need a kind of Formation in prayer life which takes account of traditional sentiments” (Kure 36).

There is also the need to train specialized teachers to head the institutions responsible for the training and Formation of Catechists. Incentives in different forms, ranging from adequate remuneration and salaries, should be made available to such teachers to enable them concentrate on their work and likewise give their best in the Formation of Catechists (Bala and Ebebe 383).

Enemali opined that established institutions like the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt (an international school for training of personnel to serve the Church), for learning in doctrines and methods, should be used for training of lay Catechists. He states that, “a faculty or a college could be mapped out from it dedicated purely to the Formation of lay Catechists” (383).

Recommendations

Consequent upon the pastoral and theological considerations in this paper, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. More interest should be shown in the Formation of Catechists

The Catholic Church has been making efforts with regard to the Formation of Catechists. However, a lot needs to be done. There is a need to sincerely show more interest by the priests and other pastoral agents in the Formation of Catechists. One important way to do this is to promptly pay their financial obligations towards the training of the Catechists at the Catechists Training Schools to augment the efforts of the Diocesan Bishops and other sources of Income.

2. Upgrading and equipping the Catechist Training Schools

Formation of Catechists as desired by the Church cannot be achieved without a Catechist's Training School. Dioceses are encouraged to have designated schools for the Formation of Catechists; such institutions can be inter-diocesan or provincial in nature. However, the Institute needs to be fully upgraded to at least a Diploma awarding Institution and adequately equipped with relevant facilities like a standard library with literature for a better academic life and learning. The absence of these will cause a lot of harm to the formative programme of Catechists in the Church.

3. Appointment of Qualified and Interested Formators for the Catechists' Training Schools

There is a need for qualified teachers as Formators in the Catechists Training Schools in each of the Dioceses. Formators should possess the scientific knowledge of Formation. They should also be people of integrity, people whose lives speak volumes in a positive direction. This is necessary so that they can give those in Formation to become commissioned Catechists a worthwhile education. More so, those to be Formators should be people disposed to do the assignment, and not sent out of compulsion.

4. Admission of Literate and Interested Candidates for Formation as Catechists

To adequately address the Catechetical concerns of contemporary times, there is an urgent need for Dioceses to admit only sufficiently literate and interested candidates for the Formation to the Catechists ministry. An uninterested and indisposed person cannot learn. The Ministry of Catechist demands of him/her intellectual knowledge. As a catechist, he/she should be conversant with the teachings of the Church and have to learn both the theory and practice of pedagogy, hence the importance of admitting the literate and interested persons.

5. Availability of Relevant Church Documents in the Local Language

The Catechists should have appropriate knowledge of the teachings of the Church. Those doctrines that the Church teaches are mostly in foreign languages. It is recommended to have those documents translated into the major Local Languages in the country: Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo.

6. Remuneration of Catechists

The remuneration of Church workers, especially the Catechists, is not encouraging. This poor condition of service is one of the reasons why young, literate members of the Church don't want to go to the Catechists' Formation school to be trained and become Catechists. Better ways of helping the Catechists ought to be addressed by the bishops so that we can have more people in the Formation Institute.

Conclusion

Formation is primarily a learning process that involves change, growth, and the transformation of the candidate as a whole. Therefore, the structure of Catechists' Formation should be a holistic one, involving all the dimensions of human learning: cultural, physical, intellectual, psychological, social, moral, and spiritual. It aims to lead the person to that freedom which enables him or her to assume a mature attitude to life. Formation exercise aims at producing insight, inspiration, and enlightenment, which leads to significant personal growth. Hence, this paper advocates for a Formation that is all-embracing for the Catechists, to make the Catechists more dynamic and proactive in their families, share in the Church's pastoral ministry, and take their roles in the socio-economic and political transformation of the country. The Catechists cannot succeed in isolation without cohesion and collaboration with the other members of the

Church.

The comprehensiveness and all-embracing nature of the Catechists' Formation make it the only way by which strong, committed, and devoted Christians are made, since the Catechists are called to be pastoral agents. When Catechists are formed accordingly, they would help to ensure the availability of Catholic Christians, particularly lay persons, who would be adequately enlightened, strong in faith, spiritually transformed, able to live the authentic Christian life, and to convey the message of Christ by both words and deeds.

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