



SIMPOSIO di CATECHETICA

La dimensione educativa della catechesi

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2.2. La situazione della catechesi nel contesto pluralistico odierno

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THE EDUCATIVE DIMENSION IN THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CATECHESIS A RESPONSE TO PROF. LUCIANO MEDDI IN TODAY'S PLURALISTIC CONTEXT

In the first place, let me thank the Catechetical Institute, its members and in a special way its director Fr. Giuseppe Ruta for organizing this International Symposium on the Educative dimension of Catechesis in today's situation, on the conclusion of the Institute's 70 years of service to the Church at large. I also would like to thank them personally for this invitation.

I have been invited to respond to the paper presented by Prof. Luciano Meddi, keeping in mind more specifically *today's pluralistic contexts*. This presentation has three parts: in the first part, I shall try to highlight the relevance of this aspect in the paper presented by Prof. Luciano; in the second moment, I shall develop, within the time allotted to me, the *pluralistic context in the educative dimension today*; conclude this paper by suggesting some elements to move forward.

1. Relevance of Situation/Context in the Presentation of Prof. Luciano Meddi

On reading the paper, one is drawn to the fact that Prof. Luciano is extremely conscious and aware of the importance and relevance of these terms 'context' and 'situation' which are interspersed throughout the paper and one finds these terms almost in every page. In fact, his paper begins with the opening phrase "la situazione attuale", questioning the locus of the 'actual' situations with regard to the 'educative dimension of catechesis'; he, then proceeds by highlighting the dissatisfactions with regard to the 'organizational outputs' or 'organizational results' that do not take into account the context.

Prof. Luciano goes on to bring out briefly the current *missionary situation* and calls for an adequate formation with its own specific and diverse characteristics keeping in mind the diverse contexts (more specifically the European contexts). Luciano affirms the importance of catechetical *interpretation* of this *missionary situation*. Further, the *missionary situation is interpreted* predominantly in terms of missionary challenges, keeping in mind the sociological signs of the time as indicated in GS 4.

The crisis of catechetical action (more specifically in Europe), according Luciano, viewed from contemporary missionary situation calls for, among the diverse modalities, two principal areas of attention and study: on the one hand, the *de-Christianised situation* and on the other, *rebirth of pluralistic religious experiences*. In search of a catechesis that is capable of overcoming the progressive de-Christianization of the masses and the disinterest on the part of the young, Luciano indicated three possible paths: first, *educative mediation* in the renewal of the sources and the relationship with the culture of the recipient within diverse contexts; second, connecting the message *within the context of community* and the integral vision of Christian life; thirdly, forming a mentality of faith-life integration to overcome the separation between faith and life in any context.

From the anthropological point of view, but in deep interaction with the theological one, the Christian personality can be defined as the progressive attainment of the *intrapsychic situation* according

to which the Gospel is freely but also increasingly chosen and assumed as a vision of the world, a mentality of faith, as a factor of unification of all dimensions, etc.

Furthermore, Prof. Luciano states that the specific significance of the educative dimension emerges in the *context* of how one defines pedagogy. In the two pedagogical visions (development of community belonging and development of personal skills), presented by Prof. Luciano, the development of personal skills is concerned with enabling the person to manage the *different situations* of life in the *context* of the complexity of existence.

2. Urgency of Acknowledging the Pluralistic Context in the Educative Dimension of Catechesis Today

Educative dimension of Catechesis comprises of micro and macro components. Teaching and learning activities are considered to be micro components. Among the many micro elements, the two most notable of them are *content* and *context*. Content refers to the important concepts, facts, principles to be taught while *context* refers to the components of the content that help the catechized understand meanings. Context encompasses situations that occur in conjunction with the instruction process, such as the time in which it occurs, the abilities of the catechized and the catechist and the location of catechesis itself, etc.

The macro level of the educative dimension of catechesis involves the catechetical Directories (of the universal & particular Churches) and the policies that shape the entire landscape of catechesis. The development of such Directories involves the elucidation of the context at macro level, which ought to guide micro-level catechetical activities that take place in catechesis. This ensures that catechesis and learning objectives can be achieved to the greatest possible extent. In practice, however, this can be more difficult to achieve, as some macro-level context reflects a very minimal understanding of the realities that occur at the micro level. This can lead to creation of universal/national catechetical Directories which present at macro level the contexts that cannot be properly taken into serious consideration and put into actions or implemented at the micro level.

2.1. Components of Educative Context

Educative *context is ever-changing*; it is a fluid concept that consists of several variables and comprises the interactivity of their process. Every educative context comprises of three main components: *people, place and time*. In order to fully comprehend the educative context, each of these three components must be fully explored and evaluated. These tend to influence what happens in the educative process within catechetical settings and processes.

People, the first component, are central to every educative process: teaching and learning processes. These processes are human activities which are mediated by people who interact with each other.

The *second component* of context is *place*. Teaching and learning do not take place in vacuum, but in a physical space. At micro level, this indicates the specific physical environment. At macro level, this space refers to community which also includes the city/town/village, region and nation. Place has other definitive aspects such as culture, which influences how people behave, and perceive things, and language which is used in the process. While some places are welcoming, which can enhance effectiveness of learning processes, other places are unsympathetic, thereby inhibiting any learning.

The *third component* of context is *time*. When reflecting on how people behave and think and the environment in which learning is carried out, the element of time will always be crucial and relevant.

2.2. Constituents of Educative Context in Catechesis

The *catechized*, the *first component* of catechetical context, are central to every catechetical process: Catechizing refers to interaction between the catechist and the catechized in every setting and process. Still further, the catechized differ in terms of cognitive abilities and the catechist are generally required deal with all of them in the same settings. The catechized tend to behave differently because they think differently due to their diverse and various experiences in relation to a particular catechetical content. As the catechized relate with each other in the catechetical setting, they come to understand more and more about each other; from this the catechist can decide which catechetical approach will be most effective. As

the Directory points out, the educative dimension of catechesis needs to offer pathways that vary based on the participants' different needs, age, and state of life, taking into account their anthropological development, theological-pastoral realities, taking into account the educational sciences. (DC 224).

Catechesis does not take place in vacuum, but in a physical space, which is the second component of catechetical context. The catechist meets the catechized, at micro level in a specific location such as a class room, parish hall, family space, etc. At macro level, this space refers to the local Christian community and parish in which catechesis is organized. It also includes the diocese, region and nation. Place has other definitive aspects such as Christian community's culture, which influences how the Christians and the catechized behave, and perceive things, and language which is utilized in the faith communities and catechesis. While welcoming communities enhance the effectiveness of catechetical learning processes, other unsympathetic communities inhibit any learning at all. The place aspect of the catechetical context must be arranged in such a manner that the catechized will feel welcomed, comfortable and ready to learn. Educative dimension ought to always strive to improve the conditions of the faith learning environment so that the catechist and the catechized feel safe and can concentrate on what matters. This demands of those responsible for catechesis to understand and evaluate to the existing conditions and current thinking that occurs within the faith learning environment.

The *third component* of catechetical context is *time*. When reflecting on how the faithful behave and think and the environment in which catechesis is carried out, the element of time will always be critical and relevant. Catechesis takes place at a given time. There is a difference in time between when the faithful are initiated and when they enter into life-long or ongoing faith learning. There are also various stages of faith learning; each milestone is attained in its own time. This calls for a certain amount of planning, which breaks down content into smaller units and time when each unit will be covered and how long a programme should take to implement. At macro level, what is desirable or required will change as outside influences change, while at the micro level, what the catechists consider 'possible' will also change as time passes. Further, without the element of time, catechesis would be disorganized, as there would be a lack of clarity in terms of timelines within which faith content needs to be nurtured.

2.3. *Understanding the Pluralistic Catechetical Context*

Catechetical context can be understood as the manner in which catechesis is designed to meet the specific goals and objectives and to address specific needs *in a particular context*. More narrowly, it also refers to the manner in which the catechetical curriculum is positioned to provide Christian faith values to the catechized. Catechetical curriculum is a subset of the educative system; it is the tool that is used to convey knowledge and experience that catechesis is designed to nurture. However, the content must follow a certain path; it must be presented through certain processes which vary and must be contextualised to meet the needs of the catechized.

If so, the understanding of the context and its application must be continually refined to increase the ease with which the catechized can live the faith-life experience. Further, this context must engage a balance between the capacities of all who are involved (the catechist, the catechized and the faith community) and ensure constant exchange between the catechist and the catechized. Such a process requires a clearly defined context before any catechetical content decisions can be made. When context is taken for granted, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes can be easily affected.

2.4. *Catechesis in a Pluralistic Educative Context*

As time does not permit us to elaborate the various catechetical contexts, I shall only mention them for the sake of completeness. Every catechesis has an intrinsic, cultural and social context (DC 319). *Directory for Catechesis* invites all to take into consideration the various contexts¹ in teaching and learning process. "The task of reading the signs of the times is still alive, above all in these times, perceived as an

¹ Chapter X of the *Directory for Catechesis* deals at length with regard to the contemporary Catechetical contexts such as situation of pluralism and complexity; in the context of ecumenism, and religious pluralism and in socio-cultural contexts (319-393).

epochal watershed and marked by contradictions and at the same time by the longing for peace and justice, for encounter and solidarity” (DC 319).

2.5. Importance of Context in the Catechetical Change Process

Educative dimension of catechesis necessitates change; there will always be a need to improve catechesis to make it more effective and efficient tool for faith transformation. Reorganization of catechetical system requires a focus on several factors which vary from one context to another. As time goes on, the needs of the community, catechists and the catechized may change; new issues and challenges will emerge that call for renewal of catechesis to make it more responsive to the needs of the present time, which tend to differ from the needs of the past.

Time as a component of educative dimension of catechesis is something that must be explicitly considered. Transformation of catechesis does not take place in isolation, but in the context of a background. It seeks to offer meaning, identity and participation and thus enhance strengths so that the catechetical system can promote a greater maturity of the faithful as it should. Understanding the context can lend a sense of direction to change that’s being considered. As one looks at each of the three components addressed above, it is possible to better understand the ideal manner in which context can and should be utilised in creating the change necessary for the educative dimension of catechesis.

3. Redefining Catechesis from the Perspective of the Pluralistic Context

The educative dimension of Catechesis needs to address emerging challenges to Christian faith and requires a focus on the needs that develop with changing times. However, change does not take place in isolation, but in a physical context. Contextual elements should be considered and a proper appraisal must be accomplished to establish how contextual components will affect or be affected by the change process. Any change is a process that is driven by people; it is carried out to make things better for the benefit of those people. However, change also takes place in a specific setting and at a particular point of time, and the timings of a change can determine whether the change process will be effective in bringing about the desired change. With these presuppositions, I offer the following two elements.

3.1. An Invitation to Terminological Amplification: From Context to Milieu

It is only when we understand catechetical ministry deeply as a ministry of proclamation of the Gospel in a *dialogue about the human situations/contexts*², that we come to the Christian community and its manifestations within the *milieu* in which it lives and operates. The word milieu, moving beyond the three components (people, place and time), holds for us broad meanings of a human community with its own structures and organization of its life and relationships within which catechetical ministry takes place. Many elements go into the making of a milieu; they constitute its various dimensions. Milieu is simultaneously:

- *a physical and Geographical space*, wherein actions in a particular time that have a bearing on every aspect of life take place. It not only reflects the living conditions, but also influences them. It forges relationships among individuals and with their habitat. It generates a certain ambience that leaves its mark on life, culture and the surrounding institutions.
- *an environment* which consists of complex of situations within which the growth and development of the individual, society and culture take place. It is simultaneously stable and dynamic and each one contributes either consciously or unconsciously toward its improvement or deterioration, while at the same time, drawing benefits from it. History, customs, traditions, culture and subculture are some of the main ingredients that go to make up the environment.
- *a Natural Human Community* wherein the process of socialization takes place. Such a process comprises two tendencies. On the one hand, there is a desire to participate in the life of the wider community without getting bogged down in a group; and on the other hand, there is a move to have

² A situation refers to a specific set of circumstances occurring at a particular time and place, often needing immediate attention, whereas context encompasses the broader background or environment that informs or influences a situation.

decisions and responsibilities, development and organization of life to be made or chosen at the level of groups that are smaller, concrete and well-defined.

- *a Texture of Human Relationships* that possesses certain unique characteristics which sets it apart from the kind of rapport prevailing in other places. It is simply the nearness of persons and families to each other.
- *a Socially and Politically Organised Community*. A milieu also assumes the countenance of a community that has its own social and political set-up. As such, it becomes also a context wherein directives and laws that govern social relationships and the exercise of power are derived and evolved. From this perspective, the following hold a considerable importance: families, natural and spontaneous groups, the structures existing in the neighbourhood and culture of the people.³

3.2. *An Invitation Towards a Generative Catechesis*

Pope Francis's first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium (EG)*, the Magna Carta of evangelization and Catechesis, states: "Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end, they (pastoral workers) are caught up in things that generate only darkness and inner weariness and slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate" (83). Therefore, Pope Francis goes on to state: "What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which *generate new processes* (italics added) in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events" (EG 223).

Towards a Generative Catechesis is an effort to deepen the invitation that "every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries' but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples'" (EG 120). "The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 24a). In doing so, the missionary disciple, *keeping in mind the milieu*, is called to *generate continuously*, first and for most within him/her self and then in others, faith in Jesus Christ and in His Reign, proclaimed by Him.

In a constantly unpredictable changing and fast developing milieu, *Generative Catechesis* can be understood as a type or form of catechesis that aims to learn from patterns of past underlying historical faith responses to generate new, original and realistic faith-response in that specific milieu/context/situation and thus cultivate a mentality of faith and the attitude of learning to learn from Jesus Christ. Such a Generative Catechesis demands an understanding of milieu as an essential factor.

3.3. *Generative Character ingrained in Evangelizing Catechesis*

Evangelizing Catechesis, above all, is the *proclamation of the Kerygma*, and therefore is at the service of the Gospel, communication of Christian message and proclamation of Jesus Christ in a specific milieu; Evangelizing Catechesis is the process of *fostering a deeper communion and intimacy* with the Person of Jesus Christ through *education to and in the faith in concrete milieu and realities*, that is perceived as a lifelong and continuous generative growth in faith of persons and communities. Evangelizing Catechesis is an *ecclesial action*, expression of the Particular Church and essential moment in the process of evangelization.⁴

Taking cue from the four principles: "time is greater than space" (EG 222-225), "unity prevails over conflict" (EG 226- 230), "Realities are more important than ideas" (EG 231-233) and "the whole is greater than the part" (EG 234-237), and applying them to Evangelizing Catechesis, one can describe Generative Catechesis as: a **ministry** that works "*slowly but surely without being obsessed with immediate results*" (EG 223); a **reminder** that "*Christ has made all things one in himself*" (EG 223) and hence *diversity is* "a beautiful thing when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation and seal a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a 'reconciled diversity'" (EG 230); a **mission** that has *to do with incarnation of the*

³ Edmundo Vecchi, *The Salesian Community and its Milieu – Presence and mission*, Youth Pastoral Document no. 10, Rome, Department for Youth Pastoral Work, 1986, 12-15.

⁴ VALLABARAJ and LOURDUNATHAN, *Cultivating a Faith that Transforms*, 60-69.

Word in a particular milieu and its being put into practice (EG 233); a **vision** that “evokes the totality or integrity of the Gospel which the Church passes down to us and sends us forth to proclaim in a specific milieu. (EG 237).⁵

3.4. *Generative Catechesis cultivates Learning*

The constitutive elements of a milieu undoubtedly affect every learning process. Learning in Generative Catechesis can be envisaged as the ongoing process by which Christians examine previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values and fundamental frame of reference acquired through religious socialization so as to make them better validated, more inclusive, judicious, open, reflective and emotionally able to change or re-order one’s thoughts, emotions, actions and practices in that specific milieu.

Learning in Generative Catechesis takes place when Christians acknowledge and live the promotion of the Reign of God as their *meaning perspective*; when they confess and interpret Jesus Christ as their *frame of reference*; when they understand and render missionary-discipleship as their *personal and community paradigm*; and when they put into practice *diakonia, koinonia, martyria and leitourgia* as their habits of mind together with its resulting points of view as a lifelong generative process. Such Catechetical Generative Learning has both personal and community dimensions.⁶

3.5. *Learning in Generative Catechesis Authenticated by Generative Christian Faith*

If Christian faith is the human response to Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who interpellates, it then becomes the primal force that frames, colours, orders and relativises the activities of everyday life in every milieu. It serves as the centre of power, value and affections. It becomes the unifying key to one’s patterns of meaning by presenting a fullness that is experienced as a sense of relatedness among self, others, world and Jesus Christ. Hence, *Generative Catechetical Learning is called to generate a process of meaning-giving and meaning-making.*

“Generative Catholic Faith” can be comprehended as an innovative and proactive response to the Word of God who interpellates constantly and consistently in one’s daily experiences, sustained by critical reflection on Gospel Lifestyle and lived as creative authentic missionary disciples on a daily basis in one’s own specific milieu. Core tasks of generative Catholic faith are: sustaining generative connections, keeping generative commitments, developing generative capabilities, initiating generative changes, making generative choices and maintain generative convictions.⁷

In conclusion

The *Directory for Catechesis*, rather than treat catechesis merely as ‘informative, formative’ and ‘transformative, provides also suggestions to move towards catechesis that nurtures a *generative* faith. “It is important that every person should discover that belief is worthwhile precisely through catechesis, which in this way is no longer limited to being a mere time of more harmonious growth in the faith but contributes to *generating* faith itself and allows the discovery of its greatness and credibility” (DC 57, italics added). The future of evangelization and catechesis rests on the ability of the Church to cultivate⁸ a ‘generative

⁵ VALLABARAJ and LOURDUNATHAN, *Cultivating a Faith that Transforms*, 69-74.

⁶ Jerome Vallabaraj, *Delving into the World of Catechetical Education of Adults – A Multi-Perspective Elaboration*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2008, 109.

⁷ Jerome Vallabaraj, *Towards a Generative Catechesis: A Re-reading of the Catechetical Directories since Vatican II from Faith Perspective*, in Stanley Jayakumar (ed.), *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda: Church Renewal and Reform since Vatican II*, Chennai, New Leader Publications, 2024, (in print).

⁸ Cultivation is an apt metaphor to describe faith-focused endeavours since the response to God manifested through faith “is a gift from God and a supernatural virtue that can be born within us as the fruit of grace and as a free response of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart to conversion and turns it toward God, giving it joy and ease in assenting to the truth and believing it” (DC 19). A plant does its own growing, whether its seed was carefully planted or just blown into place by wind. You cannot stretch the stem, open the leaves or the petals to make a plant grow faster or taller. However, you can do much to stimulate, facilitate and galvanize the inbuilt capacity of the plants to grow: till the soil, ensure they have enough nutrients, supply water, secure the right amount of exposure to the sun and protect them from pests and weeds.

faith' in the missionary disciples. The main pursuit of *Generative catechesis* is to sustain and encourage the *generative faith* of disciples and community of disciples in a particular milieu.

Similarly, some faithful grow in faith spontaneously, while others may require careful seeding. And the Christian communities can do much by way of nurturing, cultivating and creating an environment in which faith can prosper: valuing their faith and their learning, encouraging a participation and removing the obstacles and barriers that Christian faith may encounter.