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THE FORMATION OF CATECHISTS THROUGH A LABORATORY

A b s t r a c t. This article seeks to show how the on-going formation of catechists can be more adapted to the contemporary needs of catechists. Today, we can no longer speak of a homogeneous society which encounters the same difficulties and problems. On the other hand, our society is characterised by fluidity and constant change. The laboratory as a method for the on-going formation of catechists seeks to actively meet this demand. The laboratory as a method for the formation of catechists is undergirded by characteristics and advantages over and above the other traditional methods of catechist formation which clearly make it the preferred method for the on-going formation of catechists today. These characteristics and advantages are explored in the text.

Key words: on-going formation; catechists; laboratory.

The formation of catechists is one of the important tasks of any local Church. Local Churches have always taken the formation of catechists seriously since in our contemporary world, the relevance and the impact of a person largely depends on the formation s/he has received. A person who has not received a formation which is not flexible enough so as to cater for unprecedented situations will find it difficult to cope and survive in all the different situations one may meet. On the other hand, a good formation helps the person to be flexible and to deal with new situations in creative ways. This applies in a special way to catechists.

The formation of catechists can be approached in many different ways, from the most streamlined theological school for catechists on the one hand,

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to the laboratory as the most effective contemporary method of formation on the other end. The method used for the formation of catechists however largely depends on the meaning which one attributes to the term 'formation'.

1. FORMATION: A MULTI-FACETED TERM

The term 'formation' has been understood in many different ways in different epochs by different groups of people. At times, formation has been used in a synonymous way with other similar, though not identical terms such as 'education', 'instruction' and 'training'. Notwithstanding this, and in a certain sense, 'formation' includes all these terms, but its significance is much wider and more far-reaching than any one of them.¹

The term 'education' is more inclined towards the comprehending and grasping of intellectual and philosophical aspects through a process of helping the individual to discover knowledge which may be actually hidden in the person. The root of the Latin word *e-ducere* meaning to lead out of and to help one to discover, demonstrates this.² It is also linked to the application of the discovered knowledge to daily life situations. 'Instruction' is more linked to giving particular instructions on how to make something function well or on how to repair a defective or non-working object or how to actually use an object. 'Training' has a more physical dimension attached to it, as usually happens when a person physically trains to gain stamina and tactic in any particular sport.³

'Formation' is primarily taken to mean the process of giving a form to something. Such a process is not a one-time event since it is in essence a gradual and progressive shaping and forming of the person for professional and social roles.⁴ In our particular case, it means giving a particular form to catechists in such a way that this will enable them to have a more fecund ministry. Formation consists in attempting at giving a 'configuration' and

¹ Rinaldo PAGANELLI, *Formare i formatori dei catechisti. Valori e itinerari sottesi al processo formativo* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2002), 55-83.

² R. PAGANELLI, *Formare i formatori dei catechisti*, 69.

³ Carlo NANNI, "Formazione," in *Dizionario di Scienze dell'Educazione*, ed. J.M. Pallezo, G. Malizia, C. Nanni (Roma: LAS 2008²), 472-475; "Formazione," in *Dizionario di Pedagogia e Scienze dell'Educazione*. ed. P. Bertolini (Bologna: Zanichelli Editore, 1996), 213; R. PAGANELLI, *Formare i formatori dei catechisti*, 70.

⁴ R. PAGANELLI, *Formare i formatori dei catechisti*, 68, 70.

a particular form to something, just as a sculptor works on marble in order to reveal the hidden structure within. A more lucid and vivid image which explains the term 'formation' is that of a potter who forms an object from a block of clay. One must also distinguish the concept of 'formation' from the term 'information'. Information is usually identified with the mere transmission of news, facts, ideas, concepts or data only.⁵

2. SCHEMES OF FORMATION

Formation as a process can be studied from a very wide point of view. The best way at looking at formation and which helps one to grasp the breadth of this term is by studying it from the organisational point of view. Studying formation from the organisational point of view is beneficial because it helps us to see how contemporary society considers and looks at formation. Domenico Lipari⁶ outlines three particular paradigms taken from the organisational sphere which can be applied to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of the concept of formation.⁷ Each of these models constitutes a different and distinct way of looking at the human person, of understanding the role of the human person within the process of formation itself, and of looking at the person who is responsible for the formation of third parties.

The first paradigm presented by Domenico Lipari is known as the *taylorist* scheme. This model of formation is characterised by its deterministic approach to the process of formation. In this paradigm the human being is considered as an extension of the machine. It thus encourages and moves the human being to seek to be as efficient as possible and to produce more and

⁵ Germano PROVERBIO, "Informazione: teoria della," in *Dizionario di Scienze dell'Educazione*, 578.

⁶ Among his writings which are pertinent to our subject matter one finds works such as *Formazione professionale e progettazione formative* (C.I.P.A., 1980); *Idee e modelli di progettazione nei processi formative* (Edizioni Lavoro, 1987); *Logiche di azione formativa nelle organizzazioni* (Guerini, 2002); *Progettazione e valutazione nei processi formativi* (Edizioni Lavoro, 2009³) and *Storie di formatori. Esperienza, apprendimento, professione* (Franco Angeli, 2014).

⁷ Domenico LIPARI, "È possibile formare?," in *Catechesi e formazione. Verso quale formazione a servizio della fede?*, ed. S. Calabrese (Leumann [To]: Editrice Elledici, 2004), 42-49; D. LIPARI, "L'azione formativa tra adattamento e apprendimento," *Catechesi* 72(2003): 6, 3-12.

more, just as if s/he were an inanimate object or production machine. A classic example of this model and of the inhuman treatment of the human being within such a model of formation can be visualised through the film by Charles Chaplin entitled *Modern Times* (1936). In this model, the concept of formation is intrinsically linked to the process of technical production in order to have a well-functioning organisation. The abilities of the individual are developed and formed in such a way that they are solely geared at serving the smooth-functioning and the efficiency of the organisation through a process of forced learning and indoctrination whose ultimate aim is to render the means of production more efficient, thus producing an output which reaches the upper limit of possible production. The person responsible for formation in this scheme is the *instructor* whose task is to help the other person to carry out the particular job in a technically correct and efficient way. The instructor also gives instructions which help the individual concerned be more efficient and effective in his/her endeavours, thus maximising the output of the product.⁸

The second paradigm elaborated upon by Lipari highlights the relational aspect by considering all the persons involved in the smooth functioning of the organisation. In this case, the individuals are not reduced to mere mechanical producers who are pushed to the limits in order to maximise the product. For this specific reason, this paradigm is often referred to as the *socio-technical* scheme since human relations within the organisation occupy a very significant and to a certain point, a central position. As a result of this, the human needs of the individual are given a primary consideration, and they are taken care of since through personal labour the human person creates and re-creates him/herself in a process of self-actualisation. A human being who socially feels at home and comfortable has an added impetus to work and to produce because the basic need of being accepted is not only taken care of in an individual way, but is formed through a particular process of formation as a group of individuals who daily share a considerable amount of time at the same work-place. The persons in charge of formation within this framework have a significant role both within the organisation itself and in society. They can have different roles, according to the different environments in which they work and which vary from teaching or forming others in the strictest sense of the term, to interventions of a psycho-social or socio-

⁸ Domenico LIPARI. "È possibile formare?," 43-44; R. PAGANELLI, *Formare i formatori dei catechisti*, 69.

analytical nature, and even to planning, organising and coordinating activities which may not be strictly work-related or production-related but may move beyond the work-place and reach out to the social sphere.⁹

The third scheme is based on post-industrial tendencies and it configures itself on particular aspects such as the mowing down of hierarchies, seeking horizontal communication and the decentralisation of responsibility. This formation paradigm attributes a great importance to personal experiences because these lead to innovative solutions to newly emerging problems.¹⁰ Consequently, in this paradigm, formation includes enabling those undergoing the process of formation to reason things out in order to resolve new issues and problems. This implies a qualitative formation rather than a quantitative type of formation. Formation in this paradigm not only seeks to give those in the process of formation the tools which may help them to solve the most common and practical problems, but the interlocutors are also empowered to conduct research by themselves, both during the process of formation itself and much more importantly, when they encounter new situations in the future. This type of formation seeks to give these individuals access to the sources where information which is relevant to the types of problems and difficulties which they encounter can be found. The role of the person responsible for formation in this framework has to be a professional person who is capable of sustaining, assisting, and facilitating the process of formation: a *facilitator*.¹¹

The choice of a particular paradigm to sustain the concept of formation is not a neutral issue. This is due to the fact that the particular paradigm chosen will actually undergird, sustain and empower the process of formation itself. In fact, in our contemporary times, the concept and practice of formation is distancing itself from considering the process of formation as a process of simply moulding someone into another shape, as if human beings are clones which should be identical in order to achieve the best possible results

⁹ D. LIPARI, “È possibile formare?,” 44-47.

¹⁰ Here, the concept of communities of practice and of situated learning come to mind: Etienne WENGER, Richard MCDERMOTT, William M. SYNDER, *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 2002); Jane LAVE, Etienne WENGER, *Situated Learning. Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Etienne WENGER, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹¹ D. LIPARI, “È possibile formare?,” 47-49. Lipari uses the Greek term *maieuta* – a term which cannot be easily translated into English while retaining its original meaning and significance.

in the most efficient way. The concept of formation is also distancing itself from viewing formation as the mere imparting of knowledge, as if human beings are receptacles which need to be filled with knowledge and information in order to be able to carry out some particular task or ministry. On the contrary, the concept and practice of formation is adhering more to categories such as subjectivity and inter-subjectivity.¹² Consequently, the first and the second schemes presented above are totally excluded because they seek to manipulate the human being through instruction or through creating more socially acceptable conditions in order to obtain a better production. In this sense, the human being and social strategies are used in an exploitative way.

In our contemporary social situation and context, the concept of formation as a process of training and of active learning is central. This point of view highlights the need of an active and equal participation, of dialogue and of exchange of ideas and possibilities from all those who are involved in the process of formation both as persons who are responsible for imparting the process of formation and as interlocutors. Consequently, contemporary formation processes aimed at bringing about real change distance themselves from formation as a monologue or from a one-way communication type of formation. Thus, it is the third scheme which has to be highlighted as the best scheme for the contemporary formation of catechists. Through interdisciplinary dialogue between different individuals, this scheme seeks innovative and creative solutions, making it the best paradigm for the formation of catechists in our contemporary age.¹³

Rinaldo Paganelli,¹⁴ a highly experienced specialist in the formation of catechists defines the process of formation as “a learning process which helps individuals, groups, organisations, and structures to transform themselves, in order to be able to reach their objectives more efficiently, and leave a mark in the world and in history.”¹⁵ Thus, while formation is aimed at helping the individual to achieve better results, at the same time it is directly geared at bringing change in an incisive way, both in the individual who undergoes the process of formation, and in all those who encounter the person who had previously undergone the process of formation. By way of conclusion, we can

¹² D. LIPARI, “È possibile formare?,” 40.

¹³ D. LIPARI, “È possibile formare?,” 40.

¹⁴ Among his works we find: *Cammino per la formazione dei catechisti* [together with G. Barbon] (Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1992). *Il catechista incontra la Bibbia* [together with V. Giorgio] (Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1994).

¹⁵ Rinaldo PAGANELLI, “Formazione: prospettive di futuro,” *Catechesi* 74(2004-2005), 1: 61.

therefore rightly say that the concept of formation, understood as a learning process includes two very important facets: interpersonal relations and the transformation of persons.¹⁶ Bearing in mind all that has been discussed so far, this seems to be a fairly comprehensive definition of what formation is all about. Notwithstanding this, this tentative definition does not pretend to be all-inclusive. There are surely other elements and points of view from which formation can be studied.

3. THE NEED FOR FORMATION

The Catholic Church is essentially a missionary Church called to evangelise through its three-fold mission: prophetic, priestly and kingly. The prophetic mission of the Church primarily includes that of being at the service of the people of God through the proclamation of the Word.¹⁷ “The ministry of the Word is a fundamental element of evangelisation” and it seeks to “transmit Revelation, through the Church, by using human words.”¹⁸

Although the ministry of the Word remains essentially the proclamation of the Good News, it can take several different forms. Amongst these we find:

- the primary proclamation addressed to non-believers, that is to those who have never heard about Christ or have chosen unbelief or who hold different religious beliefs;
- in the form of catechesis aimed at deepening the primary proclamation and leading to Christian initiation and permanent catechesis;
- during the liturgy or within the context of a sacred action;
- in the form of the study of theology which seeks to develop a rational understanding of the faith.¹⁹

¹⁶ D. LIPARI, “È possibile formare?,” 41.

¹⁷ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis* (15th August 1997) (online:http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_directory-for-catechesis_en.html) accessed on 15th January 2018 no. 46; CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Il rinnovamento della catechesi* (2nd February 1970) (Roma: Edizioni Pastorali Italiane, 1970), no. 8.

¹⁸ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 50.

¹⁹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 50-52; CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Il rinnovamento della catechesi*, no. 34.

Catechesis pertains to the ministry of the Word because it is the Word of God which the Church proclaims during the process of catechesis.²⁰

All the baptised are responsible for the proclamation of the Word of God through the ministry of the Word in its diverse forms because all the Christian community is called to be a prophetic community. However, within the Christian community, some of the faithful are called to be at the service of the ministry of the Word in a more specific way by receiving a special charisma and call from the Holy Spirit. Amongst these we find catechists who are specifically called to be at the service of the ministry of the Word through catechesis. Consequently, their formation must be directed to the ministry of the Word for which they are particularly called.²¹

Many Authors have written about the formation of catechists. One of the authoritative points of reference on this subject matter is Lucio Soravito.²² He is an outstanding contemporary expert in catechetics and has studied the problem of the formation of catechists extensively and in detail. Soravito maintains that nobody is born a catechist and nobody becomes a catechist by a spontaneous mutation or an instant change in such a way that formation is not necessary. This practically means that all those called to be catechists need to be formed for this particular ecclesial ministry.²³ Bearing this in mind catechist formation can be considered as that process through which those who are called to be catechists are prepared for such a delicate ministry and trained to fulfil their ministry as educators for the faith in the best way possible.²⁴ The process of formation is not a magical process which by itself enables the catechist to overcome all the difficulties met during the pro-

²⁰ CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Il rinnovamento della catechesi*, no. 30. For more information about how catechesis is related to the ministry of the Word see Emilio ALBERICH, *La catechesi oggi. Manuale di catechetica fondamentale* (Leumann (To): Editrice Elledici, 2001), 81-123; Emilio ALBERICH, Jerome VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms. A Handbook of Fundamental Catechesis* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2004), 77-121.

²¹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 235; CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Il rinnovamento della catechesi*, no. 12.

²² Amongst his works, we find *I catechisti in Italia: identità e formazione. Indagine su 20.000 catechisti* (Elledici, 1983), *La programmazione nella catechesi. Progetti e strumenti di lavoro per la formazione dei catechisti* (Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1987), together with numerous entries in specialised dictionaries of catechetics and articles in reviews such as *Catechesi, Via Verità e Vita* and *Evangelizzare*.

²³ Lucio SORAVITO, "Catechista (formazione)," in *Dizionario di Catechetica*, ed. J. Gevaert (Leumann [To]: Editrice Elledici, 1987), 128.

²⁴ L. SORAVITO, "Catechista (formazione)," 128; Jean-Luc BLAQUART, "Formarsi: perché? Come?," in *Tabor. L'enciclopedia dei catechisti*, ed. CNER (Milano: Edizioni Paoline, 1995), 262.

cess of catechesis. Catechesis, being a dynamic process linked to a constantly evolving human being requires constant change and adaptation. This makes the formation of catechists “a journey which demands hard work, energy and discernment”.²⁵

Notwithstanding the fact that all catechists are somewhat aware that they need formation for a fecund ministry, there may be numerous motivations for which a catechist may seek to nourish him/herself through formation. One may seek formation because one feels the need to enhance the transmission of the Good News, or to resolve common problems encountered within the catechetical ministry, or to reflect on different pedagogies which are actually being used and new ones which can be applied. There may also be a personal interest in some particular aspect of catechist formation, or the taking on of a new responsibility in catechesis, or simply to overcome the idea of not being adequately prepared for the task. At times, one may even seek formation simply to please and satisfy one’s superiors.²⁶

The *General Directory for Catechesis* unequivocally speaks of the reason why catechists need formation for their particular ministry, arguing that this arises out of their very prophetic vocation as evangelisers and as people who are entirely or partially dedicated to the ministry of the Word.²⁷ The catechist, being a facilitator of the Word of God, needs to be trained before actually entering into this ministry because the development of those capabilities, qualities and skills which are indispensable for the mission of evangelisation can only be acquired through an organised itinerary of formation.²⁸

²⁵ J.L. BLAQUART, “Formarsi,” 261.

²⁶ J.L. BLAQUART, “Formarsi,” 261.

²⁷ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8th December 1975) (online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html) accessed on 20th January 2018, no. 73; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7th December 1990) (online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html) accessed on 20th January 2018, no. 73; CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Il rinnovamento della catechesi*, no. 189; CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA – UFFICIO CATECHISTICO NAZIONALE, *Orientamenti e itinerari di formazione dei catechisti* (2nd April 1991) (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1991), 11. In the latter document the number does not refer to the relevant paragraph in the document but refers to the page number of the particular issue consulted since the original document does not contain any divisions in paragraphs.

²⁸ CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA – COMMISSIONE PER LA DOTTRINA DELLA FEDE LA CATECHESI E LA CULTURA, *La formazione dei catechisti nella comunità cristiana. Orientamenti pastorali* (25th March 1982) (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1982), no. 7, 15.

Evangelii Nuntiandi in 1975 had already clearly stated that the process of evangelisation will truly benefit if catechists have the right instruments together with competence gained through an adequate formation:

Truly the effort for evangelization will profit greatly – at the level of catechetical instruction given at Church, in the schools, where this is possible, and in every case in Christian homes – if those giving catechetical instruction have suitable texts, updated with wisdom and competence, under the authority of the bishops [...]. It is necessary above all to prepare good instructors – parochial catechists, teachers, parents – who are desirous of perfecting themselves in this superior art, which is indispensable and requires religious instruction.²⁹

Moreover, any form of pastoral ministry is definitely “placed at risk if it does not rely on truly competent and trained personnel”.³⁰ An inadequate catechist formation may have several negative consequences, both on catechists themselves who may experience failure through burnout or panic, and on the interlocutors who risk not being guided and accompanied through the best way for entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ.³¹ It is for this reason that nothing can compensate for or replace a solid catechist formation itinerary.³²

Catechist formation has always been a challenge to the Church. The establishment of special centres and institutes whose specific aim is the formation of catechists is a response to this challenge.³³

²⁹ PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 44.

³⁰ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 234; CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELISATION OF PEOPLES, *Guide for Catechists. Document of Vocational, Formative and Promotional Orientation of Catechists in the Territories dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples* (3rd December 1993) (online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cevang/documents/rc_con_cevang_doc_19971203_cath_en.html) accessed on 25th January 2018 no. 19 (Although this document is primarily aimed at catechists who work in the missionary countries, as its title states, it has nonetheless several aspects which are also useful for catechists in the so-called non-missionary countries); Giuseppe MORANTE, “La catechesi nella chiesa particolare: progetti e strategie,” in *Andate e Insegnate. Manuale di Catechetica* (Leumann [To]: Editrice Elledici, 2002), 337.

³¹ CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA – UFFICIO CATECHISTICO NAZIONALE, *Orientamenti e itinerari di formazione dei catechisti*, 11.

³² CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 156, 234.

³³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (16th October 1979) (online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html) accessed on 1st February 2018, no. 1; CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 234.

4. DIFFERENT LEVELS OF FORMATION

When speaking about the pastoral care of catechists, the *General Directory for Catechesis* mentions two levels of catechist formation: basic training and on-going formation. Both of these are equally important and necessary. However, the different studies on the formation of catechists highlight 3 levels of formation or training: basic training, in-service training and on-going formation.³⁴ Initial formation is the formation given to catechists at the beginning of their ministry. This gives catechists the basic techniques necessary for their particular vocation. In-service training is that formation given to catechists on some particular theme or issue while they are already active within the ministry of the Word. On-going formation is a longitudinal type of formation and stretches out during the whole period in which the catechist is in ministry. For this reason, this is sometimes also referred to as permanent formation.

The following paragraphs of this paper do not speak about the initial formation of catechists³⁵ since in this instance, the use of the laboratory as a model for formation which will be presented here would render the process very difficult or nearly impossible at such early stages of formation. What follows is a presentation of a model of formation which is much more suited for in-service training and on-going formation. The formation of catechists using the apprenticeship model, or as it is known in Italy as the *laboratorio* – laboratory – is much more effective when catechists have already had some experience as catechists both in ministry and in terms of formation. The formation of catechists through an apprenticeship requires a more active role on the part of the catechists who are called to find uncharted and innovative solutions to new situations which they may encounter in their catechetical ministry. Notwithstanding this, the laboratory method of formation does not exclude other modes and methods of formation. Nor does it seek to be all encompassing.³⁶

³⁴ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 233; CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELISATION OF PEOPLES, *Guide for Catechists*, no. 19.

³⁵ This theme of the initial formation of catechists has been studied elsewhere. Carl-Mario SULTANA, "Catechists through Formation not by Default," *Melita Theologica* 62(2012), 123-144.

³⁶ Enzo BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio. Laboratorio di formazione per animatori, catechisti di adulti e operatori pastorali* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2003), 8.

5. THE LABORATORY AS A MODEL FOR FORMATION

The concept of a laboratory as a model for catechist formation in the form of an apprenticeship gets its inspiration from what actually happens in a laboratory. In a laboratory, most of the work consists in testing new hypothesis and in seeking new ways of doing things. The aim is to see whether the new hypothesis is more plausible, or whether it is more efficient than the way in which things are being done at the moment, or whether better and more accurate results are achieved through the new hypothesis.³⁷ Moreover, a laboratory may also denote a workshop where a skilled craftsman produces something which is not necessarily identical to anything else which s/he has ever produced before.³⁸ What is common to all forms of laboratories is that whatever is produced in these places is arrived at through experimentation.³⁹

The method used in a laboratory to test hypothesis and to render one's work more effective and accurate may also be applied to the formation of catechists in their on-going formation. In fact, the laboratory as a model for formation has lately been introduced and applied to formation within many different spheres.⁴⁰ Notwithstanding this convergence on the model of formation in the style of a laboratory, we still have many different accents and emphasis placed on particular aspects so much so that we cannot speak of the laboratory in a univocal way. For example, in the case of using the laboratory method for the formation of catechists, we also need to introduce other variables which are necessary to have a truly formative laboratory for catechists. These variables include the concept of God and of the Church which the participants in the laboratory have as a part of their personal baggage, received from previous formation.⁴¹

There are several qualities of formation in the laboratory which make it a good method for the formation of catechists. Amongst these, we find that catechist on-going formation using the method of a laboratory:

– is an experimental workshop-school in which one learns by actually trying and testing things out;

³⁷ Giancarla BARBON, Rinaldo PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione* (Leumann [To]: Editrice Elledici, 2016), 92.

³⁸ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 92.

³⁹ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 92.

⁴⁰ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 92.

⁴¹ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 92, 96.

- is not limited to a classroom style of learning but moves on to incorporate one's personal experience;
- is much wider in scope, giving all the possible solutions to a particular problem or difficulty, and it is not limited to what the teacher has to say;
- is linked to professional advice given on personal experiences which is aimed at solving practical issues and problems;
- is characterised by an entire framework of accompanying catechists in their practical research to problems which they encounter.⁴²

By way of conclusion, we can say that catechist on-going formation in the form of a laboratory seeks to link theory and practice in an efficacious way, using less time and at the same time involving all the stake-holders in the process, be it those imparting formation themselves, and the catechists receiving the formation. The laboratory is thus a productive encounter between knowledge and knowing how to make the best possible use of that knowledge (*knowing* and *knowing how to*). This ensures that through an interdisciplinary dialogue, catechists achieve skills supported by knowledge which are linked to a variety of abilities. The application of the laboratory method to catechist formation will lead catechists to investigate new possibilities and outcomes which they may have not yet encountered before using other methods. This is due to the fact that the laboratory method trains catechists to converge on skills and results which come about due to a collective research effort, and at the same time encourage them to be creative enough to draw a solution from divergent points of view.⁴³

6. THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABORATORY

When speaking about using the laboratory method as an instrument for the formation of catechists, we also need to keep in mind that this action of formation is never a stand-alone action. Using the laboratory for the on-going formation of catechists implies studying and reflecting about one's actions in the light of a particular idea of God and of the Church. Here we have the

⁴² F. FRABBONI, *Il laboratorio per imparare a imparare* (Napoli: Tecnodid Editrice, 2005), 46-47; G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 93.

⁴³ F. FRABBONI, *Il laboratorio per imparare a imparare*, 5, 34, 41, 52-55; G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 93; Giancarla BARBON, "Il laboratorio come luogo di formazione integrale," *Via, Verità e Vita* 196(2004), 60.

application of a didactic instrument within the realm of a particular mind-set. This ultimately means that when using the laboratory as a model for the formation of catechists, we have three intertwined points of view:

- the theological point of view;
- the pedagogical point of view;
- the didactic point of view.⁴⁴

THE THEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

Since the laboratory is an instrument which can be used for the formation of catechists who exercise their ministry in a particular social and ecclesial milieu, the theological and ecclesiological outlook of the catechist impinges on the ministry of the catechists themselves. Catechists who still adopt a pre-Vatican Council II ecclesiology which was in the form of a pyramid using a top-down approach⁴⁵ find it very difficult to understand and to achieve the best results from the laboratory as a method of on-going formation for catechists. The reason for this is that such individuals expect the Church as an institution to spoon-feed them in the process of both initial and on-going formation through those responsible for the formation of catechists.

On the other hand, those catechists who have experienced and adhered to the post-Vatican Council II ecclesiology of a communitarian Church⁴⁶ find it much easier to draw the best results from the laboratory. This is because the laboratory as a model for the formation of catechists implies a particular ecclesiology where all the participants are involved in the Church's mission of evangelisation through their diverse charisms and spiritualities. In such a Church where all the members of the community have a particular role to play, the Holy Spirit is active in the different charisms in view of the building of the Kingdom of God. It is precisely this environment that the laboratory for the formation of catechists seeks to nurture: a space where one can experience different ideas and inspirations of the Holy Spirit that bring about the true idea of what being a Church is all about.⁴⁷

Formation in a laboratory implies paying attention to human relationships, to different competences acquired by different individuals and to the faith of

⁴⁴ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 96.

⁴⁵ E. ALBERICH, *La catechesi oggi*, 171-172; E. ALBERICH, J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 164-166.

⁴⁶ E. ALBERICH, *La catechesi oggi*, 172-175; E. ALBERICH, J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith that Transforms*, 166-168.

⁴⁷ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 96.

particular individuals within the group. What is the most important in a laboratory are not the contents which are learnt or arrived at, but the idea that at the centre there always lies the human being as a believer, and the particular aim of developing those particular skills which are necessary to the ministry of the catechist. What is at stake in the theological point of view is the particular experience of the Church which the catechist has whilst respecting God as the total other. These two aspects are far more important than any formation or training for a particular ministry.⁴⁸

THE PEDAGOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

Most of the courses offered to those in particular ecclesial ministries are in the form of knowledge or in the form of giving the interlocutors knowledge about how to deal with particular situations. This is not less so for the formation of catechists. Such formation is usually made up of three different dimensions of formation:

- formation in ‘being’, where the identity of the catechists and of their mission is delved into;
- formation in ‘knowing’, where all the different aspects which the catechists need to know is given;
- formation in ‘knowing-how-to’ or ‘*savoir-faire*’, where information about how one is to prepare, deliver and act during catechesis is given to catechists.⁴⁹

This type of formation is necessary at the beginning of one’s ministry as a catechist. However, if one is to continue using this method for on-going formation, the results will leave much to be desired by the catechists since such methods of formation, especially formation in knowing-how-to can never satisfy the many different situations and difficulties which one encounters in catechesis. In this respect, such formation may be leading catechists into a straitjacket since it will be giving catechists a one-size-fits-all solution to problems which may be very diverse and for which there may be many solutions which may be effective to different extents according to the particular situation in which they exhibit themselves.

The laboratory as a model for the formation of catechists does not seek to give pre-fabricated answers to common or not so common problems encountered during catechesis. On the other hand, the laboratory as a pedagogy

⁴⁸ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 96-97.

⁴⁹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 238-247; E. BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio*, 9.

for the formation of catechists takes a distance from simply giving information and seeks more to bring about a transformation of the catechist him/herself. The laboratory as a model for catechist formation seeks to leave an impact on the catechist's life as a whole, and not only to his/her cognitive aspect. This means that the laboratory seeks to have a direct impact and bring about not only a quantitative change, but also a qualitative change primarily in the life of the catechist. It is not a cumulative type of formation, which adds new information to previously known knowledge. The process through which this is achieved in a laboratory is one which may require a deconstruction of what the catechist already holds, and the reconstruction of a new construct of meaning through a process of transformation. This clearly demonstrates that the human being and the life-story of the human being are always right at the centre of the laboratory as a method of formation.⁵⁰

All educators suffer from a self-sufficiency syndrome. They think that they know it all, and that they have all the best possible knowledge and solutions. This is a very large stumbling block when it comes to on-going formation. The laboratory is a remedy for this by instilling a sense of collegiality and collaboration among catechists who are engaged in their particular catechetical ministry. Through on-going formation in the form of a laboratory, catechists are rendered aware that they may need the help of colleagues in order to overcome a number of stumbling blocks in their ministry. Moreover, in the process of encountering each other in a laboratory, and in their conversations with other catechists during the on-going formation process, catechists may also find inspiration to other difficulties and problems which they may have. They may even become aware of better solutions than the ones which they are or were actually using. Moreover, the laboratory seeks to distance itself from formation given by one teacher and seeks to impart its formative didactics through a formation team in which different elements and dimensions of formation are represented.⁵¹

THE DIDACTIC POINT OF VIEW

The laboratory as a method for the on-going formation of catechists is based on a three-step didactic process:

⁵⁰ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 97, 99; E. BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio*, 9.

⁵¹ F. FRABBONI, *Il laboratorio per imparare a imparare*, 38, 48; G. BARBON, *Il laboratorio come luogo di formazione integrale*, 61; E. BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio*, 12.

- an elaboration of the way in which the participants live and what makes up their life and ministry;
- an in-depth study of the emerging theological themes and of the sources of the faith which are linked to the themes which emerge from the daily lives of the catechists;
- a return to the daily life of the catechists by way of re-appropriating what has been discussed, and which is assimilated in a new way by the individual, thus leading to a transformation of the person.⁵²

This didactic process is similar to Paul Tillich's *Method of Correlation* which departs from the existential questions which the human being asks. The method then seeks to shed light on these questions by seeking inspiration from the Word of God and from the faith. The process is terminated and finds its culmination once the person returns to daily life in a transformed way by having had those existential questions enlightened by the Word of God and by faith. This constitutes a progressive cycle in concentric circles which ultimately help the individual to grow in faith.⁵³

7. THE ADVANTAGES OF THE LABORATORY

When one is seeking to establish ideas which are new and which may be innovative in different ways, one is usually also confronted with questions which not only put the validity of the innovative ideas to the test, but which also seek to understand and highlight what the advantages of the new system are. In this way, they would be evaluating whether it would be worth to take the risk and to plunge in the new system.

The laboratory as a method for the on-going formation of catechists offers a number of advantages over and above the other traditional methods of catechist formation in the form of a school of theology and of pedagogy. Amongst these we find that through the laboratory method, catechists are not

⁵² G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 97-99; G. BARBON, *Il laboratorio come luogo di formazione integrale*, 60; E. BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio*, 9-11.

⁵³ J.M. BRYNE, "Bultmann and Tillich," in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. G. Jones (Malden (MA)–Oxford–Victoria Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 382-385; F. FERRARIO, *La teologia del Novecento* (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2011), 101-106. The Method of Correlation is used in a thorough way by Paul Tillich in his 3 volumes entitled *Systematic Theology*: Paul TILlich, *Systematic Theology* – 3 vols. (Herts: James Nisbet and Co Ltd, 1953, 1957, 1964).

formed solely on a theoretical basis in the form of a lecture. In this respect, the laboratory offers a new methodology of formation which moves from the taught method to the experiential method. However, this does not mean that theory is done away with. The laboratory as a method of formation retains a strict and close relationship and interaction between theory and practical experience. It is in this way that theory is grounded in experience and practice. One enhances one's ministry as a catechist by systematically reflecting on practice in order to render this better. This gives the laboratory a particular characteristic: that of a pedagogy which is based on personal research and not simply on receiving knowledge passively from somebody who is imparting that knowledge. In this regard, one can qualify the laboratory as a form of action research in which the participants conduct research through their own endeavours in the catechetical ministry.⁵⁴

A second advantage of the laboratory as a method for the formation of catechists during their on-going formation is that all the formative processes are catechist-centred and not content-centred. It is for this reason that the laboratory seeks to enter deeply in the ministerial practice of catechists and into their personal lives in order to help in bringing about personal transformation. This is achieved by asking the catechists to narrate their experiences and their practice as catechists in order to be able to render the latter more efficient. This makes the laboratory a personalised methodology which seeks to encounter catechists where they actually stand and to intervene exactly where there is a need. This recalls another advantage of the laboratory as a method: it respects the intelligence of the interlocutors and makes use of it in order to continue constructing good practices on the basis of what is already positive. This brings about a very positive and democratic relationship between the catechists and those who are forming them, who speak to each other with respect and as if they stand on an equal platform. The fact that the past and present experiences of catechists are valued also motivates catechists to seek to change their current practices with better ones since they do not see formation and the new ideas linked to it as an external imposition. These two advantages bring to mind the idea of scaffolding as this is used in the constructivist approach. The constructivist approach seeks to educate through student-centredness rather than teacher- or content-centredness.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 100; F. FRABBONI, *Il laboratorio per imparare a imparare*, 9, 41, 42.

⁵⁵ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 100-101; F. FRABBONI, *Il laboratorio per imparare a imparare*, 9, 33, 49; Jacqueline GRENNON BROOKS, Martin

A fourth advantage of the laboratory as a method for catechist formation consists in the pedagogy of accompaniment on which this method is founded. This accompaniment is necessary if one needs to see the catechists transformed, without their being afraid of de-stabilisation. All processes of transformation necessarily require a period of anxiety and uncertainty due to the abandoning of old ways of doing things and adopting new and at times even experimental pilot projects. This calls for a process of accompaniment where catechists truly feel that they are being understood and accompanied by those who have been entrusted with their formation.⁵⁶

A further advantage of the laboratory as a method of formation is that its qualities of research and of trying out new possibilities renders catechists more creative and intuitive in the ministry in which they are engaged. Since the laboratory does not seek ready-made answers, but endeavours to find new and creative solutions to new problems, this necessarily renders catechists more inventive and resourceful. The laboratory as a method has a positive side-effect: it ignites the fantasy of catechists who seek new ways to solving problems by thinking out-of-the-box.⁵⁷

A final advantage of the laboratory as a method for the on-going formation of catechists is that it imbues catechists with the notion that the world in which we are living in is a pluralistic world. Since many different points of view exist to one particular problem, and there can be many solutions to the same problem, catechists start to move away from the idea that in catechesis there exists a one-size-fits-all solution to all problems. This is a very important idea in all the different education spheres in which the human being is. No one person is identical to any other: learning styles differ; personal tastes vary. Thus, when catechists use the laboratory method for their formation, they are rendered aware that within the same learning environment, there are individuals with different tastes and learning abilities, thus creating the right educational atmosphere which is varied in such a way that

GRENNON BROOKS, *In Search of Understanding. The Case for Constructivist Classrooms* (Alexandria Va: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993; Thomes M. DUFFY, David H. JONASSEN, *Constructivism and the Technology of Instruction. A Conversation* (Hillsdale N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1993; Eliyabeth MURPHY, *Characteristics of Constructivist Learning and Teaching* (online: <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emurphy/stemnet/cle3.html>) accessed on 15th February 2018.

⁵⁶ G. BARBON, R. PAGANELLI, *Pensare e attuare la formazione*, 100-101.

⁵⁷ F. FRABBONI, *Il laboratorio per imparare a imparare*, 34.

gifted learners and slow learners all feel comfortable in that learning space.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

The laboratory as a method of formation for the on-going formation of catechists seeks to help catechists to learn in the same way in which they are called to help others learn. It is a known fact that all those who are involved in educating and teaching usually reproduce the method in which they were taught as the best method for educating others. It is this true yet risky methodology that the laboratory actively seeks to overcome.⁵⁹ The laboratory makes catechists aware that they should be more preoccupied with the way their interlocutors learn than with the way in which they as catechists teach.⁶⁰ In this respect, the laboratory as a method for the on-going formation of catechists seeks innovation, transformation and active change, by having catechists experience a new way of learning which they are then called to reproduce in their contacts with their interlocutors.

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⁵⁸ F. FRABBONI, *Il laboratorio per imparare a imparare*, 36.

⁵⁹ E. BIEMMI, *Compagni di viaggio*, 11.

⁶⁰ R. PAGANELLI, *Formare i formatori dei catechisti*, 75.

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KSZTAŁCENIE KATECHETÓW PRZEZ LABORATORIUM

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł pokazuje jak można prowadzić ciągłą formację katechetów w sposób bardziej dostosowany do współczesnych potrzeb. Dziś już nie można mówić o jednolitym społeczeństwie, gdzie spotykamy się z takimi samymi trudnościami i problemami. Z drugiej strony, nasze społeczeństwo charakteryzuje się ciągłą zmianą i płynnością. Laboratorium, jako metoda ciągłej formacji katechetów, szuka aktywnego sposobu, by wyjść naprzeciw tym oczekiwaniom. Laboratorium jako metoda formacji katechetów posiada cechy i zalety wykraczające daleko poza inne tradycyjne metody formacji katechetów, co wyraźnie czyni tę metodę lepszą formą ciągłej formacji dla nich. Opis cech i zalet tej metody został omówiony w tekście.

Słowa kluczowe: formacja ciągła; katecheci; laboratorium.