

6.11 The Human Approach in Catechesis

Aim

- To study in detail the anthropological approach in catechesis.

Procedure

- Divide the class into groups of 5-6 and let them read the second account of creation in Gen 2, 4-25 in the light of the following questions:
 1. What are the human qualities attributed to God?
 2. What is the literary genre of this account of creation?
 3. What is the communication pattern employed by the author.

Input

We are looking at Catechesis from a purely anthropological point of view. The starting point of this is Emmanuel - God with us. This method is classified as follows

1. THE FIRST STAGE: **The Human Experience**

- a. Eliciting Personal Experiences
- b. Examining Personal Experiences
- c. Signs of the Present Revelation

2 The Second Stage: **God's Word**

- d. Proclaiming a Past Experience
- e. Interpretation

3 The Third Stage: **Response to God**

- f. Prayer and Worship
- g. Action

STAGE 1: **Our Human Experience**

This is the beginning of every catechetical instruction, since it is in our human context that we encounter and experience God's presence. Here we are called to discern and discover how God is working in our daily life, so life-situation is the beginning of all catecheses.

a. Step One- Eliciting Personal Experiences

This is an introspective step where people are encouraged to focus on their lives: facts, biographies, testimonies and events of the church. From this the individual can now pursue the next steps.

Now the real sharing can begin and for this many techniques can be employed. Some of them are: group discussions, panel discussions, interviews, role-play, research, activity sessions, listening to songs, group singing, selected readings, oral testimonies, newspaper and magazine articles, radio or television programmes, video clippings and so on.

These questions are designed and used for discussion in groups, focusing on the main issues and feedback given to the whole participants.

b. Step Two – Examining the Personal Experiences

Here the aim is to widen and contextualize the presented experiences in the first step by looking for similarities with other members in the group. Thus the group processes and group dynamics are very important.

Use is made of the 'universalizing' process, where the members have to go beyond the raw facts in order to discover signs of transcendence. Here people see their own inadequacies and need for personal transformation and liberation, and this can be done only by relating personal experiences with that of others.

c. Step Three – Signs of the Present Revelation

Materials Required

- Pen and Paper
- Catechism of the Catholic Church



The concern here is to read the signs of the present revelation. God's continuous revelation still prevails in our days, thus we must seek Him where He is found. Mostly, He is found in our daily experiences. The prophets in the OT were the instruments God used to help his people to discern the signs of their experiences, and in the same way, prophets are needed to interpret God's presence and action in our days: signs of life, of human experience in which God continues to invite us to deeper and personal relationship with Him. We go through this process in order to get meaning and value in our lives, at the purely human level.

2. THE SECOND STAGE: God's Word

Here the religious dimension of the whole discernment comes into full play. The issues discerned are clarified once again in the light of faith-experience of the people gone before us. Catechesis here is to allow the light of the Gospel to illumine the human experiences. The catechists and participants are called to know, recognise, discern and interpret these signs. God's word will then become relevant and transformative.

The Bible is not the fullness of the Word of God. The Word of God extends to cover creation, human history, present life witness, the official preaching and teaching of the Magisterium and other situations. All these are the various ways we discern God's Word.

d. Step Four – Proclaiming a Past Experience:

This is where the experience is looked at in the context of the Bible and Liturgy of the Church. The reference to Jesus Christ is because He is the fullness of human life and a relationship with Him also entails a relationship with his experience.

In the second place, we look at the Bible because it is a record and embodiment of the experiences of the Word in the lives of individuals and peoples. It is a journal of the human response in the Spirit to the Word of God in concrete life-situations by people living in community and involved in its radical change of reality. It is in the Bible that we see a paradigm of challenge and response, where the Word is our source of renewal, both as individuals and as a church, a renewal that leads to social change.

The Bible should not be read in a 'neutral' and uninvolved way, as if it was just for mere objective explanation, having nothing to do with us. Such a neutral approach to God's prophetic Word would not bring about any change in the community.

e. Step Five – The Task of Interpretation:

We are comparing experiences here, which is an integral part of the interpretations of the signs. It is done at the level of faith and in the light of God's word in historical revelation. This is the core of the pedagogical action, a recognition and interpretation of revelation in our life.

It is not easy recognizing God's self-communication in order to discern His presence and action. This was the experience of the people of the Old Testament, who were therefore given prophets to interpret God's signs and discern their meaning. The duty of the catechist and the Christian community, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the leadership and guidance of the Magisterium is to undertake this task of interpretation.

3. THE THIRD STAGE: Response to God

In this final stage of the human approach of catechesis, God takes the initiative to unveil the mystery of His person and manifest His plans in an act of self-donation., self-communication and self-gift. Then he invites us to response and communion with Him. This is where revelation becomes personal.

Catechesis can at this stage facilitate this response to God by faith, prayer and worship, aiming at the individual's commitment for self-renewal and transformation of society. This transformation is on-going conversion of heart and social change. The divisions under this step are Prayer, Worship and Action.

f. Step Six – Prayer and Worship

Catechesis at this stage is to help the people express their faith as a response to God – one that may take various forms of prayer and worship. A need for dialogue with God is prepared for by the proclamation and interpretation of the Word. The prayer and worship can be suggested by the participants themselves, and the options are: songs, intercessions, symbolic action, flowers, incense and light. Any other meaningful sign, gestures and action can be used. Here is where the creativity of both the catechist and the participants are called for.

g. Step Seven – Action

Here is the last step of the human approach of Catechesis. From the response of prayer and worship, the participants proceed to action, i. e. Change of life. The examination of their experiences in the light of the Word of God should lead to a decision of radical change of life. This is the final aim of catechesis, conversion and transformation of life.

This last step is only possible through the transforming power of the Word of God, which the participants have submitted to.



Review

The human approach to catechesis is an effective way of communicating about transformation of the person. It starts from a reflection on human experience, from a purely human point of view. This reflection is then shared with others, to discover similarities with others and get a commonality. After this, these experiences are considered in the light of Christ's experience and Sacred Scriptures. This faith experience flows from prayer and worship, where the union with God leads to the task of interpretation on the part of both the catechists and the participants. Lastly, the participants take an action, inspired by faith and the word of God interpreted in the light of their experience.

Reflection

1. Which aspect (step) of this approach appeals mostly to you?
2. Do you see this approach very practical and relevant to our African context?

Relevant Skills

1. How would you apply this approach to a group afflicted by violence (war) and seeking healing?

Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA, 2000. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini.

