Professional Catechist in Pastoral Ministry

by Alfons Seran

PROFESSIONAL CATECHIST IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

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Abstract

This article discusses the call to be a professional catechist in pastoral work. The interest in this topic stems from the challenges experienced by catechists in carrying out the mission of the Church in the midst of today's world. The catechist is a teacher of faith for the faithful and has an educational background in pastoral theology and preaching. They are required to be more professional in the midst of a world that continues to evolve and change. To obtain a comprehensive concept of this discussion topic, the author uses *library research* where books and articles are used to develop it. Becoming a professional catechist in pastoral work must begin with character building. A catechist of character is characterized by a deep faith, a good knowledge of the teachings of the Catholic faith and the skills in communicating and using effective methods of approach. In the discussion it was found that a professional catechist is one who has faith in the mystery of Christ, understands it and uses skills in pastoral works. In addition, a professional catechist is also characterized by a person who has spirituality or a deep spiritual life.

Keywords: *Catechist, Catechist Vocation, Pastoral Service, Professional*

1. INTRODUCTION

Being a catechist is not only a profession but especially a call of God for the faithful who are specifically involved in the work of proclaiming Christ. Through the proclamation of the mystery of Jesus Christ, a catechist is called to nurture and cultivate the faith and morality of the faithful (Praedicamus, 2011, 35). Catechist work includes gospel proclamation, mission, and deepening of faith. The catechist job requires professionalism. For this reason, the call of catechism requires an academic process in which a person obtains it through formal and non-formal education.

A professional catechist not only has extensive knowledge in his field but also how to absorb it according to the context. In developing their ministry duties, catechists must serve each individual as a whole. This means that catechistic ministry involves intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects. Daniel Boli Kotan (2005, p. 58) said that the role of catechists as pastoral ministers should be able to develop the faith of the people through education and coaching in the light of the gospel.

In the development of the Church's increasingly extensive and complex duties, the catechist profession faces challenges ahead. The challenge can come from within the catechist

himself, from the people and from the outside world of the Church. Even the catechists themselves do not have special education and formal education for their preparation and formation. Personal factors can hinder the professionalism of a catechist when he considers himself to know more about faith-building activities and the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel. As a result, the existence and self-image as well as the relationship between fellow catechists, the faithful and with the parish priest in the ministry and faith building of the people are disturbed (Kotan, 2005, p. 68).

In the light of the Christian faith, being a catechist is a call of God, who is then sent to proclaim His word. However, in reality, many catechists are not able to set a good example as a person who is called, chosen and sent as a colleague of the parish priest, as an educator and teacher of the faith, and even on the contrary, the catechists experience a crisis of existence and relationships with the parish priest in their ministry as proclaimers of God (Wijaya, 2022, p. 188). Professionals in their field in the sense that catechists not only graduated theoretically through a higher education but are also able to implement it to answer and process every problem experienced. He is able to use methods and analysis for the development of the faith of the people.

2. METHOD

This study uses library *research* in which the author analyzes materials available in the form of books, the internet, magazines and journals to build a concept on the topic to become a professional catechist in pastoral work.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1) Call to be Catechist

The call in the context of faith can be understood as God's invitation to man to serve Him. The calling refers to a person's desire and desire to devote his or her life to the service of God. Just as Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God to all people, so we are all called to follow Him as the way, the truth and the life (cf. Jn 14:6).

1.1. Catechist Vocation

The call to be a catechist is a noble calling from God because those who are called take part in the teaching of Jesus Christ on earth as priests, prophets and kings. The proclamation of the Gospel is the primary duty and the identity of the Church as such is the primary duty and identity of the catechist. In continuing the missionary work of Jesus Christ, God calls every baptized member of the Church to bear witness to Jesus Christ and His gospel according to his or her respective vocation and role in society (Adisusanto, 1993, p. 66). Guidelines for Catechists (Komkat KWI, 1997, p. 15) says that the vocation of lay catechists comes from the

Holy Spirit. In this context, the Ad *Gentes* document emphasizes that catechists as one of the ranks in missionary work have a very important role in proclaiming the Gospel in the profane or secular world (AG, 17). In fact, the Guidelines for Catechists affirm that catechists are seen as irreplaceable reporters (Komkat KWI, 1997, p. 7).

Through baptism Catholics can take part in the Triad of Jesus, which includes the priesthood, prophetic, and royal. Prasetya (2019, p. 11) says that Christian believers, who by baptism become members of the body of Christ, are gathered together to become God's people, in their own way carrying out the Trio of Christ. This involvement became evident when they took part in liturgical activities as priests to consecrate, as prophets to proclaim and as kings to shepherd.

1.2. Definition of Catechism

Various descriptions of catechism contained in documents and writings. Daniel Boli Kotan (2005, pp. 145-147) gives three understandings. *First* Catechism is the preaching of the Gospel based on the background, expertise, and situation of each one. Here, catechists play a role in assisting faith, preparing catechesis catechesis. *Second* Catechists are a group of laypeople who are involved in various pastoral works of the Church, such as mentoring young people, mentoring workers and even worship leaders. *Third* a catechist is those who have a formal educational background as a catechist of Catholic Religious Higher Education.

Document *Ad Gentes* describes catechists as a line in missionary work. *Ad Gentes* expresses it thus: "Likewise is the line worthy of praise, which has made such a great contribution to missionary work among the nations, that is, the ranks of catechists, both men and women, imbued with the spirit of the apostles, with great diligence to give special and sorely help for the propagation of the faith and the Church" (AG, 17). In addition, the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* asserts that the term 'catechism' is primarily applied to preachers in mission lands, for the churches that are blooming today could not have been built without them (RM, 73). Guidelines for Catechists (Komkat KWI, 1997, p. 17) refer to a catechist as "a layman specially appointed by the Church, according to local needs, to introduce Christ, to be loved and followed by those who do not yet know Him and by the faithful themselves. In his ordinary activities, the catechist is not merely a substitute for the priest, but according to the law is a witness of Christ in the community."

2) A Call of Lay People

The call to become a catechist is a call given to the laity to take part in the proclamation of Jesus. In this case, catechists are a group of laypeople who have the spirit of the Spirit and

are involved in God's missionary work to bring about His Kingdom. The essence of the preaching of catechists is to foster and develop the faith of the people. Those who have been baptized accept responsibility for the mission of God's work of salvation for the world which is affirmed by the receipt of the power of the Holy Ghost through the sacrament of confirmation.

The confirmation by the Holy Spirit for this catechist vocation is affirmed in the Guidelines for Catechists (Komkat KWI, 1997, p. 15). The document says that catechists are members of the laity who are specifically called by the Holy Spirit, which is recognized by the Church as a 'special charism' and is made clear through the mission of the bishop marked by *Missio Canonica*. Many documents express his views on catechism. The Code of Canon Law also emphasizes the role of the catechist thus:

> The lay Christian faithful who are earnestly built up and who excel in the Christian life; they are under the guidance of a missionary, devoting their energies to the proclamation of the teachings of the Gospel and in liturgical celebrations and works of charity (KHK, Canon 785).

Catechists specially take an important part in the mission of the Church. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Trandendae* (1977), catechists are understood as laypeople who have gone through formation/courses and live according to the Gospel. A catechist is a person who has been sent by the Church according to local needs. They are ministers, witnesses, evangelists, and the backbone of the Christian community, especially for the young Churches.

Being a catechist is a noble and noble calling in proclaiming the good news of the Gospel from God our Father. In an effort to proclaim the Good News or proclaim the Kingdom of God, the Catholic Church included the laity. In this case, the laity will become a pastoral officer, a catechist, a Catholic religious teacher in an educational institution, to proclaim the kingdom of God. This work is very suitable for lay believers because they live in the community and other believers (Prasetya, 2009, pp. 29-30).

3) Pastoral Ministry

Pastoral ministry in the perspective of the Catholic Church is understood as a dedication of the faithful as a form of involvement in God's missionary work in Jesus Christ. Loren Goa (2018, p. 108) said that there are two motivations when a person devotes himself to pastoral ministry. The motivation for pastoral ministry comes from God Himself where God takes the initiative to call catechists to serve God and others. In addition, the motivation comes from the catechist himself where he expresses his desire to love and serve God.

Theologically, a catechist who devotes himself to pastoral ministry is his response to the love of God who has saved him and invited him to be His disciple. Seward Hiltner (1958, pp. 15-16) states that pastoral ministry is a perspective related to the attitude of a minister who makes God's will a priority in his calling. Therefore, a catechist deserves to give himself totally to others, especially those who need help.

Pastoral ministry is directed in the context of the Kingdom of God where every catechist is framed in God's work to bring about the presence of His Kingdom in this world. Jesus taught His followers the idea of the Kingdom of God through parables. The essence and soul of God's Kingdom is love. Love is a principle in Jesus' missionary work that results in kindness, mercy, generosity and forgiveness. The human experience of God's work of love is marked by the blind seeing, the sick being healed, the deaf hearing, the mute speaking and the lost being brought home and the captives being set free (cf. Acts 10:11). Lk 4:18-19). God present in Jesus Christ presents His Kingdom by healing, sustaining, guiding, nurturing, and nurturing.

3.1. Pastoral Ministry Practice

In the light of faith, the Church responds to various humanitarian problems. Various crises experienced by humans. The crisis of faith, the crisis of morals, the economic crisis in the world is also the crisis of the Church. The *Gaudium et Spes* document describes the concerns and ideals of his involvement thus: "The joy and hope, sorrow and anxiety of the people of this age, especially those who are poor and afflicted, are the joy and hope, sorrow and anxiety of the disciples of Christ as well" (GS, 1). The forms of humanitarian problems are diverse, including human trafficking, domestic violence, environmental crises, poverty and oppression.

One of the main points of pastoral work orientation is to respond and find solutions to various problems that occur. Forms of pastoral service such as prayer, visits to the sick, deepening of faith and education are expected to inspire the faithful for empowerment and social renewal. Spiritually, pastoral work is all efforts to help live the life of faith together, so that people experience an encounter with God who is present in Jesus Christ through prayer, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and encounters with each other. The objectives of pastoral ministry are: (1) Forming and changing attitudes or behaviors in accordance with gospel values. (2) Improving the progress and quality of one's life. (3) Finding solutions collectively in fellowship and solidarity. (4) Helping a person to process problems into inspiring positive energy.

Therefore, a pastoral ministry by catechists is a form of pastoral ministry based on the ministry and the vocation of Jesus as the main Shepherd. Shepherding is a special application of the Gospel to the people both personally and communally in the dynamics of the life of the

Church. Thus, pastoral ministry affirms the original meaning of the term 'shepherd' who cares and loves his sheep.

3.2. Pastoral Ministry Function

J.L, Ch Abineno (2003, p. 43) in his work, *"Pastoral Services to the Sick"* outlines four functions of pastoral services, especially for those who need special services.

3.2.1 Healing Function

Healing those who are sick is one of Jesus' masterpieces. A number of Gospel passages speak explicitly of Jesus healing the sick, casting out evil spirits and giving vision to the blind (cf. Lk 7:21-22). Jesus realized that various diseases and evils arise because of the people around him. Jesus visited and comforted those who were suffering and gave them hope and confidence to live: "Get up, and lift up your mattrees, and walk" (John 5:8).

3.2.2. Support Function

Various difficulties and sufferings faced by the people. Whether it is the death of loved ones, the loss of employment, the disaster or suffering from a chronic illness. All of this can be frustrating and hopeless. The presence of a catechist in this situation provides edification to those who doubt, hope to the desperate, consolation to the grieving and a ride for the homeless. In such a situation, pastoral ministers play a supporting role because of the belief that "God is a sustainment for all who fall and an enforcer for all who bow" (Ps. 145:14).

3.2.3. Guiding Function

The role of catechists in pastoral ministry is not to be a *decision maker* but to guide and direct the path of truth and life (cf. Jn 14:6). The experience of the Israel in the wilderness was governed and guided by God Himself. God's presence is marked by calling and sending Moses as a leader and shepherd. Moses' method and way of shepherding the Israelites was based on God's own commands and prohibitions. Moses never tires of guiding, directing, and loving God's chosen people even though they were often unfaithful and rebellious to God. God always made room for repentance for the Israelites. The nation of Israel must be able to determine for itself whether to choose obedience or not; choosing a curse or blessing (cf. Ex. 32:25-26). But God himself provided salvation for the Israelites. Human evil is never stronger than God's love. The outpouring of mercy from the top of the cross is stronger than those who cry out 'crucify Him, crucify Him' (cf. Lk 23:21). Such is the magnitude of a shepherd's love.

The psalmist expresses beautifully in Psalm 23:1-3, "This Lord is my shepherd, and he will not lack me, he lays me down in a green meadow and guides me to the calm waters and even gives refreshment to my soul". The role of catechists in guiding the people is to love with

all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our strength and love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Lk 10:27). Love is the principle for the shepherding of the people.

3.2.4. Repairing Relationships

Relationships between humans are inseparable from conflicts and misunderstandings that result in the fracture of brotherhood and family. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the people in Rome urged everyone to believe in peace (Rom. 12:18). The role of catechist pastoralism must be able to restore relationships between people that are fractured for various reasons. A shepherd should not allow conflicts between individuals or individuals and groups to drag on. He must immediately find a solution to anticipate a bigger conflict. Pastoral ministry is the expansion of the pastoral task of searching for the lost and bringing home the lost (cf. Mt 18:12).

3.2.5. Nurturing Function

In addition to healing, guiding and sustaining, the role of catechists in pastoral ministry is also nurturing and nurturing. The forms of this type of pastoral service are in the form of coaching and developing the faith of the people. Nurturing and maintaining the faith of the people is the process of maturing faith itself. A catechist is also responsible for the growth and development of the faith of the people in a sustainable manner.

4) Professional Catechist In Pastoral Ministry

4.1. Professional Catechists

Professionalism in society is reflected in the specialization in a particular field of service based on the relevant educational background and the appreciation for it. In the context of pastoral work, professionalism is those who have graduated academically from Catholic religious education. In this case, a professional catechist is conceptually a person who has a catechistic education background, knows the intricacies, and masters various trainings and methods for catechesis and pastoral care (Ernawati, 2023). Many findings in the field show that a person is valued because of a catechistic diploma or commonly called a catechist, but a profession does not have to be measured by a diploma alone but how he is able to devote himself to the people in his pastoral ministry wherever he is.

Professional is understood as a skill or expertise of a person in mastering his or her field of profession. The term professional is understood as the quality service of a competent catechist and who constantly improves the service can be enjoyed by others. A professional catechist must be able to demonstrate competence in the pastoral and evangelistic fields. Dahurandi (2016, p. 1) emphasized thata professional catechist must certainly have expertise obtained through the educational process. Catechists who are professional in performing their professional duties are free from feelings of sentiment, hatred, and hostility and laziness.

A catechist is a professional who specifically carries out pastoral or pastoral activities in the midst of the Church and in the world order. As a professional person, catechists are required to have certain standards of expertise and competence to carry out their professional fields. The consequence of the profession is a contract of employment, which is to do work (pastoral) according to the minimum demands that are *rewarded* (appreciated) according to the standards applied. In addition, pastoral as a profession must demand competition (competition) inside and outside the professional field (Dahurandi, 2016, p. 1).

The catechist spirit in carrying out his duties as a professional is the love of God. God's love that makes the catechist's heart burn to make God known, experienced, and loved. The purpose of service is to become a new man in Christ who is beginning to experience salvation, peace and joy now. This spirit is demonstrated by the actions of catechist professionals not only for safety in this world, but also in the breed world.

4.2. Professional in Pastoral Work

Competence is the knowledge and skills possessed by a person. In this case, a catechist who is professional in pastoral work is required to have adequate knowledge and reliable skills. This is intended so that the catechist is able to carry out his duties well. The skills expected from catechists are creative and innovative skills, meaning that in carrying out coaching and mentoring for children, adolescents and parents is not monotonous. In addition, a catechist must be able to adapt to the circumstances and needs of his people. Catechists who are professional in pastoral work have several characteristics and competencies.

4.2.1. Have Knowledge and Faith in the Mystery of Jesus Christ.

The essence of the Church's faith is rooted in the mystery of Jesus Christ's passion, death, resurrection and return. A catechist must have deep faith in the mystery of Jesus Christ and be supported by a good knowledge of the mystery (Karl Rahner, 1978, p. 87).

4.2.2. Have a Deep Spirituality

In addition to having knowledge and faith in the mysteries of Jesus Christ, catechists need to have a spirituality or a good spiritual lifestyle. This means that a catechist has a depth of spiritual life that is characterized by regular prayer and a commensurate inner attitude. In the Guidelines for Catechists (Komkat KWI, 1997, pp. 23-30) outlines four aspects as the principle of spirituality of a catechist.

First, openness and loyalty to the word of God. Basically, catechism is proclaiming the word of God because catechists are ministers of the word (DV, 25). All catechist services are sourced from the word of God. God who speaks through Scripture is a source of inspiration, direction and light for pastoral work. *Second,* the integrity and authenticity of life. The point

here is that the catechist maintains an integral relationship between the word and the testimony of life in accordance with the teaching of the Church's faith. The integrity and originality of the catechist means that a catechist is not only a teacher of the faith but a witness of faith in real actions or deeds. There is unity between prayer and deeds; between preaching and witnessing life.

Third, the spirit of missionaries (*missionary seals*). Spirituality encourages the catechist to have a burning heart in pastoral ministry and ministry because sometimes he has to enter into difficult situations. In addition, the catechist must be open and willing to give himself to everyone. In this context, the Gospel of John describes it well: "There are other sheep in me, which are not from this fold; the sheep must be led by Me also, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall be one flock with one shepherd" (John 10:16).

Fourth, Mary as the Exemplary Lady. *Catechesi Tradendae* views Our Lady as a living catechism, mother and model of catechism. The Gospel of Luke chapters 1 and 2 describe the experience of Mary receiving, bearing and giving birth to God's word for the world. Shortly after receiving the news from the Archangel Gabriel, Mary rushed to visit her sister Elizabeth. This is where Mary becomes an exemplary reason for catechistic spirituality. The foundation of the building of spirituality is prayer. Mary prayed with the Apostles after Jesus was taken up to Heaven to ask for the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Rok (cf. Acts 10:10). Acts 1:14). The Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* article 92 places Mary's role in the Church as an example, model and mother who is an example of the true faithful in the mission of the Church.

4.3. Knowledge of Catechesis

Catechesis is a field of science about theology, dogma, spirituality that is systematic and comprehensive. Catechism as a science has its theories, concepts and approaches. Therefore, a catechist is one who understands pastoral theology, mission, spirituality, Scripture, dogmas and doctrines and the liturgy of the Church. Of all these competencies, the core of catechist proclamation is the mysteries of Jesus Christ that are the essence of the Church's faith. The principles of preaching and catechist teaching include two basic knowledges. *First,* faith in the mystery of Jesus Christ is about His life, death, resurrection and return. *Second,* the knowledge of the events of Jesus' life which includes life, mission to death, resurrection and His return.

4.3.1. Knowledge of the Situation of the People

The situation of the local people became the center of attention of the catechists in pastoral work. They understand that the social, economic, educational and political situation of the local people will be effective in answering the needs expected by the people. Knowledge of the situation of the local people is a prerequisite for pastoral service. Therefore, it is important

for a grandfather to be aware of it. Catechists who are professional in pastoral work will lead the people in the right direction according to their expectations because they understand the situation of the people.

4.3.2. Communication Skills

Skills are the ability of humans to use their thoughts, ideas and creativity to turn something into value for themselves and others. As a proclamation of the Gospel, catechists have the skills of dialogue, communication and discussion. The communication skills of a catechist are characterized by the ability to convey clear and correct information. Referring to this explanation, communication skills are a skill in effective pastoral work. A professional catechist is able to change the situation of the ummah which is increasingly following the trend and in that situation he is able to find a good solution for the ummah (Nurhadi Pujoko, 2007, p. 45).

4. CONCLUSION

Along with the development of the times, catechists are required to be more professional in carrying out the task of herding the people. Catechistic credibility is largely determined by the standards of professionalism in pastoral ministry. For this reason, catechists must have the following three competencies: *First,* spirituality competence. That the catechist must have a spirituality that moves and directs him to his pastoral ministry. The development of spiritual competence can be fostered through regular prayer, *lectio divina* and the celebration of the Eucharist. *Second,* knowledge competence. Catechists need a formal education background about the Catholic religion which includes the sciences of Catechetic, Pastoral, Theology, Morals, Scripture, Church Law, Liturgy and the humanities such as Sociology, Psychology, and Pedagogy. *Third,* skill competence. Catechists need to have the capacity for good communication and dialogue, reflection, analysis, understanding the signs of the times in the light of Scripture.

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