

**PARTICIPATION IN A GROWING LOCAL CHURCH: A REFLECTION ON
PUSAT KATEKETIK – THE CATECHETICAL CENTER, YOGYAKARTA,
INDONESIA**

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1. Historyⁱ

In 1959, at the behest of the then Indonesian Bishops' Conference (MAWI) to renew the catechisms and to conduct catechetical researches in the country, the Society of Jesus appointed Father Ferdinand Heselaars, S.J., to start the project. Far from being a catechetical expert himself, he began with consulting the experts in the field, among others, those responsible in producing the *Dutch Catechism* in early 1960s, the late Fr. Pierre Babin, OMI, an expert in audio-visual catechesis from Lyon, France, also the staff of *Lumen Vitae* Catechetical Institute in Brussels, Belgium. He also went to meet the experts in Asia, such as those in Taiwan and the Philippines. It did not take him long to start the *Pusat Kateketik* (*Puskat*), meaning the Catechetical Centerⁱⁱ, in 1960, residing in Yogyakarta, Central Java. At that time there was no other institutes of this kind, so he was free to take initiatives from within a wide range of options. After attempting without much success to involve parish priests in the renewal of catechesis, Fr. Heselaars then turned to lay catechists, this time he was rewarded with more enthusiastic response. From then on, the effort towards the renewal of catechesis was focused on lay people.

The first important step taken by Heselaars was to establish a Catechetical School in 1962, in which current and future catechists would be equipped with necessary knowledge and skill to conduct catechetical sessions in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and to set up short- and long term catechetical programs. It started with recruiting already active catechists of the fields. It was not long before the Indonesian Armed Forces sent their personels to be trained as chaplain-catechists for the army. Meanwhile the dioceses also sent their people for training, given the scarcity of trained catechists in the area. Currently there are a good number of young people who would enroll voluntarily in the school. In the beginning, back in 1962, the Catechetical School of Yogyakarta was alone in this pioneering step. Nowadays there are many catechetical schools throughout the country even though it is still far from truly meeting the needs of the fields. In fact this school has so far become the main, if not the only, engagement of the Catechetical Center. Up to this moment the school has produced nearly 2000 skilled catechist who serve the needs of the local churches in Indonesia as well as of the schools throughout the country.

In the course of its history, the audio-visual section of the school grew into a full-fledged independent apostolic work (1970), yet still institutionally linked to *Puskat*. It is presently known as the *Puskat* Audio-visual Studio, located in Sinduharjo, about three kilometers north of Yogyakarta. The *Puskat* Audio-visual Studio has long been engaged to promote a social

communication in which the voiceless can make their voices heard through the access to the media. This implies a fundamental option to take side with the poor and the voiceless, no matter what their beliefs and cultures are, in this media saturated society. The language used by the downtrodden usually employs tales, folklores, traditional symbols, arts, all of which are integrated into the programs (TV, VCDs, DVDs, movies) produced by the Studio.

Then in the same year (1970) the Center of Liturgical Music was established and joined into *Puskat*; it is situated in the same building as the Catechetical School. This institution from the start focuses itself in promoting the inculturation of liturgical music by organizing workshops throughout the country to work out new liturgical elements out of local, ethnic, musical traditions. In so doing, the Center aims at a truly Indonesian liturgy, in which people can celebrate the Christian mystery by singing and dancing from within their own cultural identity. All this is in line with the main thrust of renewal launched by the Second Vatican Council.ⁱⁱⁱ Beside holding local workshops, the center also runs courses for liturgical music and produces song books of various kinds.

Finally the Yogyakarta Pastoral Center, founded in 1972 in Surakarta, was integrated into *Puskat* in 2002, also situated in the same building. It has as its main activity the training for christian community leaders in view of building up a truly local church. The trainees include lay leaders, parish priests, and even Protestant pastors. There is a clear ecumenical atmosphere in its programs. The programs aim at enhancing a truly participative leadership of the christian communities and mission-oriented community building

At the current stage of its history, the *Puskat*, originally designed for catechesis, has developed into a kind of “federation” of independent apostolic works, which regularly meet for sharing informations, plans, difficulties and discuss common problems. Therefore within the *Puskat* itself there is a diversity of viewpoints regarding what is meant by “pastoral”, each according to the respective and specific apostolate. Nevertheless this does not prevent us from reaching a common perspective in one way or another.

2. Vision: The Challenges of Religious Ignorance and Irrelevance

The Catechetical Center aims primarily at promoting catechesis in Indonesia according to the self-awareness that the local Indonesian Church has of itself and of its mission, this done by always taking into consideration the trends of catechesis in the world. In line with the perspectives of the Second Vatican Council, the Catechetical Center strives to promote a catechesis that involves the participants as members of the People of God, not merely as hearers or passive recipients of the Gospel message, but as faithful community who actively listen to the word of God spoken through their life experiences and work it out, drawing from the Christian Tradition (the Scriptures, the Magisterium and further theological traditions). This is done in view of transforming their life more closely to the Gospel. We termed it as “*Katekese Umat*” (“community catechesis”), which consists mainly of sharing the faith experiences among those participating in the session. Hence it is more a multi-directional interactive communication rather than merely one-directional instruction. In catechesis the

daily life experiences are shared as faith experiences, this being done in the light of the Christian Tradition (Scriptures, Magisterium of the Church, etc.) Given the characteristic situation in Indonesia, the ongoing process of conversion has been emphatically conceived as leading into an active and prophetic involvement as well as constructive engagement towards the betterment of the society at large, in terms of social justice, social and political reconciliation between various conflicting groups, preservation of the ecological environment, due attention to the marginalized etc.

In the first years of its existence, *Puskat* had tried hard to bring together differing pastoral views of its departments under its roof. These apostolates originated from individual apostolic initiatives, sanctioned by the Jesuit province leadership. In view of a closer step towards a common vision, there were regular meetings in which mutual communication took place, sharing vision to one another and keeping others update. A neatly formulated common vision has never been reached, but these regular meetings did well to bring us closer together and led us into further mutual collaboration. Through this mutual visionary enrichment catechesis came to be more and more situated in a context of more media-awareness and the awareness of the ethnic-cultural riches of Indonesia.

Today, catechesis in Indonesia is facing the same challenge as anywhere else, that of the diminishing literacy in catholic faith pervading every segment of the faithful. During the current “Year of Faith” there have been a lot of demands in parishes and various Catholic circles to hold weekly “faith enrichment” programs to help updating people on current issues in the teachings of the Church, on the explanation of the Creed, on the Social Teaching of the Church, etc. It is ironical that in this digital information era the religious illiteracy is still rampant in Indonesia. During their annual meeting in 2011, the Indonesian Bishops’ Conference spent a one-day study on catechesis including this matter. It was hoped that the bishops would follow this up in their respective dioceses, according to the local circumstances.

It seems that this problem reflects a wider situation, first, the intra-church milieu, in which the language of faith and its proclamation does not correspond to the idioms of people’s daily life. Worse still, it is not only a matter of language, but it touches the fact that the universe that stands as the background of the Catholic religious culture is no longer the same as the one in which present generation live. This does not concern only Catholics, it is part of a wider religious ignorance spanning today’s world. The widening gap can be seen among others from the complaints voiced against Sunday sermons and homilies. It might be that the language of proclamation is too cerebral, or that it lacks practical, day-to-day orientation. It could also be that what is proclaimed is perceived as coming “from another world”.^{iv} The discourse on religious (Catholic) literacy covers a very wide range of themes and parameters. What does religious literacy consist of? There are bible literacy, liturgical literacy, theological literacy, etc. All these are parts of Catholic religious literacy. This poses a great challenge to the catechetical institute to identify where the problem lies and to set up a working syllabus to overcome it. This gains more importance especially when one takes into account the avenues opened by the present digital age: can we proclaim our faith in a language understood by coming generations mostly formed by digital culture? Is it a matter

of a irrelevant faith that deters the Christians from seeking deeper understanding on it, disconnected as it might be from their basic life questions? In this highly plural and secularized world how shall we discern the way in which people discover the presence of the divine in their lives? *Puskat* is planning to do long-term and in depth researches into this question.

Second, the challenge of religious illiteracy does not affect only Christians, but concerns other religious adherents as well. To overcome frequent juvenile violences and other deeds attributed to allegedly decadent morality, recently the government, in this case the Ministry of Education and Culture, has decided to add more time portion allotted for religious instruction at school, beginning with this 2013 academic year. This may look at first glance as a blessing in disguise, but the challenge remains how to use this bigger amount of time to truly educate our students to know their respective religions adequately and to behave in ways more appropriate in a plural world. This is not a matter of more time spent, but also a matter of quality religious knowledge that ought to be promoted. However, this trend does not seem to be beneficial to promote parents' awareness of their primary responsibility to educate their children in faith. While schools still see their role as complementary to that of the parents in respect to faith education, the parents tend to endorse school as the primary place for their children to learn about religion. In fact, many catholic parents do not have sufficient preparation in faith literacy to bring up their children in faith. In itself this is a very big *pastoral* challenge confronting the local churches, especially taking into consideration the religiously plural situation in Indonesia. The strengthening of the christian faith in this context should simultaneously foster an open attitude for dialogue with other religious adherents.

Now that the Catechetical Center acts as a kind of institutional aegis to the Audio-visual Studio, the Center for Liturgical Music and the Yogyakarta Pastoral Center, it also has to expand its vision to accomodate the visions of these institutions. In October 2012, on the eve of the "Year of Faith" launched by Pope Benedict XVI we spent a time to discuss together what "pastoral" really meant, taking as starting point our specific perspectives, in terms of what our respective apostolates are doing.

It came out in our discussion that the term "pastoral" denotes that attitude qualifying the acts of assisting the faithful in "transition", "passover" from living a merely private, individual religiosity often marked by cult-centeredness into a risk-taking faith which is oriented towards *real diakonia*, common engagement with the society at large, in a public way. In a more catechetical term one may put it as the process in which faith is becoming an *living attitude* that brings one a clear sense of responsibility towards the integral well-being of people. The process and the steps by which this is being brought about is what we would call "doing pastoral" ("*berpastoral*", in Indonesian). Theologically this action is conceived as a participation in the dynamics of God's action in the world, uniting ourselves into the movement of the Spirit. This clearly goes beyond merely organizational concerns of the Church. The realization of God's Reign from within a concrete situation of the society is brought about in full respect of human dignity and freedom which concretely means respect towards the diversity of cultures and religious beliefs as well as the integrity of creation.

It is within this dynamic frame of thought that we can situate catechesis, liturgical action, and engagement in the world of media. The key term in this discourse is “experiencing God”. What moves people is not conceptual knowledge, but a living experience. Even if one considers the knowledge of faith important in catechesis and in liturgy, it is always in the notion that it moves and prompts people into action. In this line of thought liturgy would find its ultimate meaning. It is primarily celebration of our faith, and as such it should foster a genuine experience of a saving God. The real *ars celebrandi* brings people into an encounter with a living God or an experienced of being touched by God through the divine Word. It is not merely a matter of integrating the purest sense of beauty of cultures into our liturgy, but a matter of helping people to become authentically themselves in the celebration, because only in this sense can they discover the Spirit active in their daily experiences, and be really sent back into the world. To borrow Aloysius Pieris’ expression, it is a matter of “celebrating liturgies that speak from and to the depth of the Spirit that operates in the day-to-day lives of the people”.^v It has to be admitted that focusing itself in promoting good liturgical music, the Center of Liturgical Music is yet to show a broader perspective, which could be manifested in composing the lyrics of the songs.

This common vision has the same perspective to build up a truly Indonesian Church with a clear stance in favour of the local cultures on behalf of the country’s poor and marginalized. The Audio-Visual Studio takes on this challenge when broadcasting their programs. This strife for continuous dialogue and collaboration with other religious traditions of the country on behalf of the most needy is translated into various enrichment and empowerment programs for ordinary people in the forms of television broadcast, video-clips or short movies. Indonesia’s rich diversity of cultures and local traditions are in danger of being crushed away by a potent all-pervading global culture. The main challenge seem to be how to make them seen and heard in the humdrum of today’s digital communication culture. For this the Christian community should first make its presence felt in society. By making oneself present in the world of mass communication, it expected that a living interaction between the Christin message and the surrounding world can beneficially take place, and help to reduce tensions and misunderstandings among religious groups that often stand as background of radicalism.

3. School and Courses:

Among its various activities, the Catechetical School stands out as the core activity of *Puskat*. Four to five year long catechetical education is considered to yield more long-term results than short-term upgrading catechetical programs, which, however, are still held on regular basis up to this moment. We have an established curriculum that is supposed to meet the needs of the field, at the same time complying with the state regulations on the training of teachers. This curriculum is subject to regular evaluation in order to respond better to the changing demands of situation.

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis of the catechetical curriculum is on contextual catechesis. Since 1977, catechesis in Indonesia has taken a definite course to involve people in its very process. The sharing of faith in the light of the Christian Tradition will lead the participants towards a response of faith, resulting from a conversion, concretized in the form of a concrete decision or a course of common action. This approach certainly runs counter the common stream in catechesis which still relies upon the Canisian Catechism and consists mainly in explanation of doctrines. Experience obtains a more prominent role within the overall process of faith deepening through the search of meaning in concrete life. We train the students to reflect on their experiences first, then the experiences in the stories of others, in order to sensitize them to the richness of daily experience and thus to obtain an ability to articulate them. Teaching the Tradition of the Church poses special problems, given that the average students do not have the necessary intellectual background of the language and idioms in which this Tradition has so far been formulated. This is the case with teaching the Scriptures, systematic theology and moral theology which are parts of the basic curriculum. In many cases these materials have to be delivered in a more simplified form and approximately in the language the students are going to use when they themselves go to teach.

Now that the management of the catechetical school will soon be integrated into the Sanata Dharma Jesuit University, *Puskat* is still responsible for the general orientation of the formation of catechists, which it now promotes in collaboration with the larger institution. Meanwhile, *Puskat* will have greater opportunity to engage itself on research, publication and international contact while acting as a coordinating forum for the Audio-visual Studio, the Yogyakarta Pastoral Center and the Center for Liturgical Music.

Besides, we run biennial upgrading courses for field catechists and our alumni. The Center also collaborates with the diocesan catechetical commission and the Kanisius Publishing House to offer courses for lay community leaders and catechists. These courses attempt to meet the felt need of the local community leaders and catechists in terms of doctrines, such as the Social Teaching of the Church, the Creed as expounded in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the themes and directions of the Indonesian Bishops' Conferences, etc. During this "Year of Faith" there have been initiatives in the parishes to hold weekly courses on faith. The staff of *Puskat* are usually invited to take part in these activities as resource persons.

Beside producing quality movies for community development and going on air in nationwide TV Channels, the *Puskat* Audio-visual Studio has embarked into a new frontier. In 2012, its first wide-screen colossal movie production, *Soegija* (2012) directed by a renowned Indonesian movie director, Garin Nugroho, has received wide appreciation and enthusiasm from general public and won awards in some big Film Festivals. Regularly the Studio also organizes many courses for various segments of society to enhance the media awareness. Many private TV Stations and newspapers send their personels to the *Puskat* Audio-visual Studio for basic training in communication media. It seems that this important apostolate of *Puskat* still has to continually reformulate its vision in keeping with the rapid development of communications media, in particular the internet.

The Yogyakarta Pastoral Center, in its turn, holds regular workshops and courses for community leaders, pastors, parish councils, and religious. It also conducts surveys in the field, in line with its determination to do “data-based pastoral planning”.

4. Publications:

In the early years of its history, the Catechetical Center published booklets or pamphlets (*Seri Puskat*) to disseminate new ideas in catechesis according to the teaching of the Council. Over the last years this activity has stopped, due to the absorption of the personels in running the school. Presently the Catechetical School publishes a six-monthly bulletin *Umat Baru*, besides various other handbook for teachers or work-books for students pertaining to the religious education at school. The bulletin *Umat Baru* presents articles on catechesis in general, catechesis for a special age group and segment, and examples of catechetical modules. The audience of this bulletin is supposed to be those field catechists who are in need of fresh ideas and examples to improve their creativity. The school also publishes anthologies containing articles on catechesis and theology.

Meanwhile, other departments of *Puskat* also published numerous books, articles and audio-visual products such as *Warta Musik Liturgi* published by the Liturgical Music Center (PML), *Seri Pastoral* by the Yogyakarta Pastoral Center, as well as numerous videos and movies by the Puskat Audio-visual Studio.

5. Challenges:

In retrospect, we would ask ourselves, does *Puskat* in its overall vision and activities still mirror the struggle of the local churches in Indonesia? The answer is definitely affirmative, and we shall name some challenges on this regard.

First, a key challenge would precisely be to delineate a correct pastoral understanding for the Indonesian church today. This concerns all spheres of our christian existence, including the fields of catechesis, the media apostolate, liturgy, church organization and leadership. We suspect that the notion “pastoral” has so far been conceived without any clear reference to the concrete situation of the surrounding world. If by “pastoral” it is understood as the overall ecclesial action of assisting the people of God through the services of the Word and the Sacraments, it seems too limited, too “*intra-ecclesial*” an understanding of the term. The understanding of, and the relationship to, the surrounding world also has a bearing upon the notion “pastoral”. It might then be more appropriate to put the term “pastoral” as the overall endeavours to form the members of the Church in view of truly behaving and thinking as the disciples of Christ among other peoples of different beliefs. This implies a dynamic notion of discipleship as one lived by those whose faith in Christ is manifested outward outside the institutional boundaries, even to the frontiers, to make God’s dream of the Kingdom a concrete reality in the way people live as society.

It seems that many pastoral agents are out of touch with the reality of people at large. People work hard to earn something for their livelihood. They live day-to-day among moslems and other non-Christians, and very little of the experiences from these contacts seem to have been addressed satisfactorily in sermons and catechesis. There is a yawning gap between what we think as important regarding doctrines and prayer with what people should endure as their daily anxiety and concerns. People still go to mass on Sundays, but their thought and way of acting are wide apart from that of the official church represented by the clergy and catechists.

Second, Seen from the point of view of how the christian presence would be seen by contemporary fellow citizens, there is a question relating to the spread of religious radicalism in Indonesia. Some moslem circles in Indonesia tend to look suspiciously at christianity in general as sort of threat to their religion because of the allegedly widespread proselytism campaign to christianity. May this image have been a knock-on effect of a one-sided pastoral policy in practice, if not in theory? It could well be the case that catholics are not sufficiently encouraged to learn about Islam (and other religions as well). It is also possible that undue emphasis on rites in the pastoral practice of some areas has kept the christian further away from their inner-worldly calling towards engagement for the betterment of society at large. It may be that a certain *lacuna* in our pastoral practice contributes to the faithfuls' deficient social attitude and behaviour in that they don't mirror a group that is willing to be in solidarity with the plight of others, but instead a group with minority complex, only keen of defending its own interests. It could well be that the communicative behaviour of christians convey a wrong message to the surrounding society. This mutual prejudice does not come out suddenly, but has been built up over years. If then, the christians should also deemed responsible for the growth of religious radicalism and fundamentalism in Indonesia today, something that contributes to sectarian attitudes and segregation of the Indonesian society. Hence, the need to rethink our pastoral language in terms of a plural Indonesian society, a pastoral vision that would incorporate living together respectfully with people of other faiths as the constitutive ingredient of christian discipleship.

Third, the graduates of our Catechetical School are normally absorbed by the work market, especially the schools. It fact, it is not only the schools that are in need of their services, but also the dioceses and parishes. But the trend is that it is getting more difficult to have our alumni working in parishes, for the simple reason that their livelihood is not sufficiently assured by the parish. The dioceses are reluctant to recruit new lay catechists into the rank of diocesan employees, apparently for the same unwillingness to support their livelihood adequately. Recently held National Inter-diocesan Catechetical Congress in Bandung, West Java, was also marked by the growing presence of priests rather than professional lay catechists to represent their respective Diocesan Catechetical Commissions. In the years 1970s until mid 1990s there was more conspicuous participation of lay catechists in such congresses. All these phenomena point to the lack of real, keen appreciation of the catechists' work from the part of Church authorities. In spite of vibrant lay movements in the local churches, the Indonesian Church is still in many respects quite clerical. This is a far cry from what the Second Vatican Council envisaged as how the churches should be structured. Until there is awareness that the mission to proclaim the Good News is considered by Vatican II as

the *primary* task of the bishops and priests, and that this mission is *shared with all the members* of the Church, there will hardly be any prospect of betterment in the welfare of catechists working for the parishes. In 2011 the Indonesian Bishops' Conference in their annual meeting spent one full day to learn about catechesis and the catechists. Hopefully this will open their eyes to the silent and unassuming service rendered by thousands of catechists throughout the country and will prompt them to follow this out in a meaningful and real way with the best interest of catechists' in mind.

Fourth, the pastoral works, catechesis included, are not exempt from the encounter with the so called "digital culture", so pervasive in society today. As in other places, the Church in Indonesia is facing this culture, where people, especially the young, have been so deeply conditioned by the proliferation of various digital gadgets. It means that the pattern of communication between people also changes. We cannot figure out yet how this will change the way people relate to one another and what kind of community will come forth from this. It is still to be discerned, in what way an authentic encounter with the Lord would take place in the virtual world, since this is precisely what catechesis is called to facilitate. Further, what about the step-by-step process that marks catechesis vis-a-vis the 'instant mentality' of the digital world? What would be the profile of catechesis in a digital society? To go a little deeper, what is it that touches most people today regarding the question of God and the meaning of life?

Concluding Remarks

There will always be challenges for institutions such as *Puskat*. If it occupies itself with the pastoral dimension of Christian existence and the announcement of the Gospel, it will certainly have to grapple with the signs of the time, with the pastoral language, with rapidly changing society, with exponential progress in digital technology. But it has to deal with real basic issues such as what is the meaning of divine revelation today, what a response of faith entails concretely, what becoming christian communities really means in an increasingly mobile society, etc. With the establishment of networking among similar institutions around the world, there is good grounds for hope that we will not be working alone.

ⁱ Based on a personal interview with Fr. Ferdinand Heselaars that took place in Yogyakarta on March 21, 2010, one year before he died.

ⁱⁱ Henceforth it will be referred to as "*Puskat*".

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 37.

^{iv} Cf. Lenaers, Roger, (2007). *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream or The End of a Medieval Catholic Church*, New Jersey: Gorgias Press.

^v Aloysius Pieris, S.J., (2010)., *Give Vatican II a Chance*, Gonawala-Kelaniya: Tulana Jubilee Publications, p. 94.