

God has bestowed a Golden Occasion upon the Diocesan Catechetical Centre

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The Diocesan Catechetical Centre is celebrating the 50th year of its birth. God has bestowed upon us a Golden Occasion. We thank God for all the beautiful work of faith formation done during these 50 years in our parishes and schools, and for all the blessings received from God. The formal inauguration of the jubilee year was done with the celebration of a solemn Eucharist on 3rd June, 2018, at the Basilica of Bom Jesus, Old Goa. The inaugural was held at the Basilica because St. Francis Xavier is the Patron Saint of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre. The Holy Eucharist was presided over by Rev. Fr. Almir de Souza. Fr. Almir was one of the members of the first diocesan Catechetical Committee. The Diocesan Catechetical Centre was established by the then Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Goa, Daman and Diu, Msgr. Francisco Xavier da Piedade Rebello, who through a Decree dated 7th March, 1969, substituted it for the Secretariat of the Christian Doctrine which was established on 25th September, 1952.

Christianity in Goa: Though the Christian faith was brought to India in the first century by the Apostle St. Thomas, and probably also by St. Bartholomeu,¹ the glorious chapter of the expansion of the Catholic Church in the East can be said to have begun after the European discovery of the sea route to India in 1498. This helped the advent of the European missionaries to these lands,² one of them being St. Francis Xavier, the great Apostle of the East and Patron of the Missions. Goa is privileged to have been the starting point of his missionary labours and the place where his sacred remains lie.³ The glory of sowing the first seeds of Christianity in Goa belonged to the Franciscans who arrived in 1517.⁴ Goa was called the "Rome of the East" due to the central role it played in the evangelization of the East.⁵ One Goan priest, Fr. Joseph Vaz, who distinguished himself in the evangelization of Sri Lanka and is therefore acclaimed as the "Apostle of Ceylon," was canonised by Pope Francis on January 14, 2015. Another Goan Priest, Fr. Agnelo de Souza, a member of the Society of the Missionaries of St. Francis Xavier (*Society of Pilar*), has been declared Venerable and is on the way to beatification.⁶

Shift of Language from Portuguese to Konkani: Viceroy D. Francisco de Tavora, Conde de Alvor, by an ordinance dated June 27, 1684, required all Goans⁷ to apply themselves to the study and use of the Portuguese language⁸ and ordered severe penalties against the offenders.⁹ He

ordered the parish priests and school masters to teach the children Christian doctrine in Portuguese, instead of in Konkani.¹⁰ However, later on, in the first flush of zeal for the propagation of faith, both civil and ecclesiastical authorities gave a great impetus to the development of the language. Thus, the Provincial Councils of Goa urged the priests to learn the vernacular and to translate the catechism into Konkani.¹¹ This was the beginning of the inculturation of catechesis in Goa.

The Catechetical Structure in the Archdiocese of Goa: The Archdiocese of Goa can boast of being one of the pioneers in the Catechetical work in India.¹² While at the National level a Catechetical Centre was established only in 1966, Goa had its own Secretariat for Christian Doctrine (*Secretariado da Doutrina Crista*) since 1952.¹³ It was founded by the former Archbishop of Goa and Daman and Patriarch of East Indies, later Cardinal José da Costa Nunes.¹⁴ After his death, it was run by a Committee, with the Archbishop Coadjutor Dom Jose Vieira Alvernaz as its Chairman and the local Superior of the Salesian Fathers, the Vicar of Panjim and Fr. Antonio de Ataide Lobo as members.¹⁵ This Secretariat rendered service to the cause of Catechetics in the Archdiocese.¹⁶ The Catechetical work was encouraged by the catechetical minded Archbishop Coadjutor and later Patriarch Alvernaz.¹⁷ Fr. Ataide Lobo, a dedicated and chief animator of the committee, laid solid foundations for later Catechetical work.¹⁸

Creation of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre of Goa: In view of the recommendations placed by the Goa Regional Seminar, held in 1968, on *The Church in India Today*,¹⁹ the then Apostolic Administrator, Msgr. Francisco da Piedade Rebello, by a decree dated March 7, 1969, raised the Secretariat for Christian Doctrine to the Diocesan Catechetical Centre (DCC), with its headquarters at the Pastoral Institute St. Pius X, Old Goa.²⁰ A Committee of three members comprising Director *pro tempore* of the Pastoral institute, Fr. Blaise Lobo, O. F. M., and Fr. Almir de Souza was appointed²¹ on April 8, 1969.²²

The Organisation and Coordination of Catechesis: Before the liberation of Goa, there was no organized catechesis held in the parishes. Formerly, the catechesis was basically held in families. After the evening Angelus bell, from every balcony came the sounds of the teaching of *dotorna* (*catechism*) to the children after which the Rosary was prayed. This was the mode of catechesis during those years.²³ But gradually, after liberation, catechesis started evolving in our parishes as well as in our Catholic schools. Since 1969, the Diocesan Catechetical Centre has focused its attention to organize catechesis at two different levels: Schools and Parishes.²⁴

Catechetical Association in parishes: The former “Secretariat for Christian Doctrine” had made it a point to propagate in the parishes the so-called “Confraternity for Christian Doctrine”, recommended in the Canon Law.²⁵ At present, every parish has a Catechetical Unit/Association which gives impetus to Catechetical apostolate in the parish. This Unit/Association consists of a Core Committee and all the Catechists are members of it. The Committee is headed by the Parish Priest and is run by the able guidance of a Catechetical Animator. Various responsibilities are shared by the members of the Unit/Association.

The Catechetical Activities: Till now, the Diocesan Catechetical Centre has been doing a wonderful work in the field of Catechetics under the ardent and able, full time Director, Assistant Director, supported by well-equipped staff members, and with the collaboration of various committees and groups. The Diocesan Catechetical Centre since its existence has been organizing and coordinating the Catechetical activities in the Archdiocese at different levels: Diocesan, Deanery, Parish and School. The Catechetical year begins in the Archdiocese of Goa on the first Sunday of June. Every year, the Diocesan Catechetical Centre brings a Catechetical planner focusing on the theme of the pastoral year. Some of the activities conducted by the Diocesan Catechetical Centre are the meetings, special days celebrated for the members of various committees like DCC, Editorial Boards of the Bulletins, Finance Committee, *TICCAZ*, *ACAZ*, *JESUZ* and *Jezuche Sondexkar*; Seminars, courses and recollections for Religion teachers and Catechists; Faith sharing programs for the children of schools and parishes; the solemn celebration of the Catechetical Day.

This Catechetical year 2018 – 19, all our Catechetical activities will focus on the Jubilee celebration. May the endeavours of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre grow and bear abundant fruit in the vineyard of the Lord and help in the ushering of the Kingdom.

Endnotes:

1. Archdiocese of Goa and Daman. *Statement of the Diocesan Synod and Diocesan Pastoral Plan of the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman*. 2.
 2. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, *The Catholic Directory of India* (New Delhi: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, 1998), 448..
 3. Diocesan Centre for Social Communications Media, *Archdiocese of Goa and Daman Directory*, (Goa: Archbishop’s House, 2006), 13.
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4. Jose Nicolao da Fonseca, *An Historical and Archaeological Sketch of the City of Goa* (New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1986), 63.
5. Diocesan Centre for Social Communications Media, *Archdiocese of Goa and Daman Directory*, 13.
6. *Ibid.*, 13.
7. Saldanha, *A Short History of Goa*, 15.
8. De Souza, *Medieval Goa*, 97.
9. Saldanha, *A Short History of Goa*, 15.
10. De Souza, *Medieval Goa*, 97.
11. Saldanha, *A Short History of Goa*, 14.
12. Diocesan Catechetical Centre of Goa, *Catechetical Special* (Old Goa: Diocesan Catechetical Centre of Goa, 1977), 15.
13. *Ibid.*, 15.
14. *Ibid.*,
15. *Ibid.*,
16. *Ibid.*,
17. *Ibid.*,
18. *Ibid.*,
19. A Catechetical Centre be established for the formation and continuous updating of catechists and a regular series of courses be organized for a deeper spiritual and theological formation of the laity as also for their training in apostolic leadership. See: Diocesan Catechetical Centre of Goa, *Catechetical Special*, 16.
20. Diocesan Catechetical Centre of Goa, *Catechetical Special*, 16.
21. *Ibid.*, 20.
22. *Ibid.*, 16.
23. Angelo Pereira, *Goa Remembered: Vignettes of Fading Traditions*, (Bombay: Michael Lobo, 1995), 55.
24. Diocesan Catechetical Centre of Goa, *Catechetical Special*, 16.
25. Diocesan Catechetical Centre of Goa, *Catechetical Special*, 28.