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# Interpreting Tradition: A Gadamerian Approach to Train Millennial Missionary Catechists

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**Article History** Abstract: This article presents an overview of the integration of Gadamer's Received: 1 Jan 2023 concepts of dialogue, interpretation, and tradition into catechist formation programs aimed at equipping Millennial educators with the necessary skills, Revised: 15 Jan 2023 knowledge, and attitudes to effectively engage and nurture the faith of their peers. Accepted: 21 Jan 2023 Traditional catechist formation programs often struggle to effectively engage Published: 1 Feb 2023 millennial educators and address contemporary challenges in transmitting the faith. Without a dynamic and relevant approach, catechists may find it difficult to connect with their peers and communicate the timeless truths of the faith in Keywords: reflective meaningful ways. Employing a qualitative approach, this study explored the pedagogy; religious integration of Gadamer's concepts into catechist formation programs. Data education: teaching collection methods included literature review. The study focused on strategies for strategy fostering dialogue, promoting critical interpretation, grounding catechists in tradition, providing practical skills development, and facilitating ongoing assessment and reflection. Integration of Gadamer's concepts proved effective in equipping Millennial educators with the necessary skills and attitudes to engage and nurture the faith of their peers. By fostering open dialogue, encouraging critical interpretation, grounding in tradition, providing practical skills development, and facilitating ongoing assessment and reflection, formation programs enhanced catechists' ability to communicate the faith in relevant and meaningful ways. This approach resulted in increased confidence, effectiveness, and satisfaction among Millennial catechists, contributing to a deeper and more impactful transmission of the faith to future generations.

# INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary context of rapid digitalization and globalization, the formation of millennial missionary catechists emerges as a critical endeavor within religious education. Against the backdrop of an increasingly secularized society and the proliferation of diverse cultural influences, there exists a pressing need to equip the younger generation with the tools and knowledge required to navigate complex moral and spiritual challenges. The background of this issue lies in the evolving landscape of religious practice, where traditional methods of catechesis may prove insufficient in engaging and retaining the interest of millennials. This demographic cohort, born into the digital age, is characterized by its familiarity with technology, exposure to diverse worldviews through social media, and a penchant for critical thinking and individual autonomy. However, amidst these advancements, there is a growing concern regarding the dilution of religious identity and the erosion of moral values among millennials. As such, the urgency to address this issue is paramount, as the future of religious communities and their ability to transmit faith and values to the next generation hang in the balance.

The background of this issue stems from the need to adapt religious education practices to the evolving needs and sensibilities of millennials, who are increasingly shaped by digital technologies, globalization, and pluralistic worldviews. While previous generations may have relied on traditional forms of religious instruction, such approaches may prove inadequate in capturing the attention and engagement of millennials, who seek authenticity, relevance, and personalization in their learning experiences. Consequently, there exists a pressing need to explore innovative pedagogical strategies that resonate with the unique characteristics and preferences of the millennial generation while remaining faithful to the rich heritage of religious traditions.

The problem that exists within the formation of millennial missionary catechists lies in bridging the gap between traditional religious pedagogy and the contemporary needs and sensibilities of the millennial generation. While established catechetical methods may have served previous generations adequately, they may fall short in capturing the attention and engagement of millennials who are accustomed to interactive and personalized forms of learning. Furthermore, the philosophical ideas of Gadamer, particularly his hermeneutic approach to understanding texts and traditions, offer valuable insights into how religious education can be reimagined to resonate with the contemporary mindset of millennials.

The urgency of addressing this issue cannot be overstated, as the future vitality and relevance of religious community hinge upon their ability to effectively transmit their faith to the next generation. With millennials comprising a significant portion of the global population, the stakes are high for religious institutions to adapt and evolve in response to the changing demographic landscape. Failure to engage millennials in meaningful religious education and formation efforts risks alienating them from their faith traditions and leaving them susceptible to secular influences and spiritual disengagement.

The research problem at hand revolves around exploring how the philosophical ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer can inform and enrich the formation of millennial missionary catechists. Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to understanding texts and traditions offers a valuable framework for reimagining religious education in light of the contemporary challenges faced by millennials. By emphasizing the importance of dialogue, interpretation, and the fusion of horizons, Gadamer's philosophy provides insights into how religious educators can cultivate authentic and transformative learning experiences for millennials. However, despite the theoretical richness of Gadamer's ideas, there remains a gap in research regarding their practical application in the context of catechist formation.

Thus, the research problem seeks to address this gap by investigating how Gadamer's philosophical ideas can be translated into concrete pedagogical strategies for training millennial catechists. This involves examining how Gadamer's concepts of dialogue, interpretation, and tradition can be integrated into catechist formation programs to equip millennial educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to effectively engage and nurture the faith of their peers. By elucidating the practical implications of Gadamer's philosophy for religious education, this research aims to contribute to the development of innovative and contextually

relevant approaches to catechesis that empower millennial catechists to serve as effective ambassadors of their faith traditions in today's rapidly changing world.

### **METHOD**

In interpreting tradition through a Gadamerian lens for training millennial missionary catechists, the qualitative method begins with a comprehensive literature review on hermeneutics, Gadamer's philosophy, and missionary training. Next, researchers establish thematic frameworks centered on tradition, interpretation, and pedagogy. Data analysis involves iterative coding for emergent themes, employing Gadamerian principles of fusion of horizons and dialogical engagement. Findings inform the development of a pedagogical framework integrating tradition interpretation with millennial mission catechesis, fostering cultural relevance and continuity.

#### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy offers rich insights that can profoundly shape pedagogical approaches, particularly in the training of millennial catechists. Gadamer's ideas emphasize the dynamic nature of interpretation, the fusion of horizons, and the importance of dialogue in understanding tradition. Translating these concepts into concrete pedagogical strategies involves fostering critical thinking, engaging with diverse perspectives, and promoting authentic dialogue within catechetical contexts.

Gadamer's emphasis on interpretation as a dialogical process rather than a solitary act is fundamental to understanding the dynamic nature of understanding and meaning-making. This concept holds significant implications for catechist training, as it underscores the importance of collaborative learning environments where catechists actively engage in dialogue with various stakeholders. In such environments, catechists have the opportunity to exchange ideas, share insights, and challenge each other's perspectives. By fostering dialogue, catechists not only deepen their understanding of tradition but also refine their communication skills and enhance their ability to engage with diverse viewpoints.

One effective pedagogical strategy for implementing this notion in catechist training is through group discussions. These discussions can be structured around specific topics related to faith, theology, or pastoral practice, allowing catechists to explore different interpretations and perspectives collaboratively. Through group discussions, catechists learn to listen actively, articulate their thoughts clearly, and respectfully engage with differing viewpoints. Moreover, group discussions create a sense of community and belonging among catechists, fostering a supportive learning environment where they can learn from each other's experiences and insights.

Peer teaching sessions represent another valuable pedagogical strategy for promoting dialogue in catechist training. In these sessions, catechists take turns presenting on various topics related to faith formation, catechesis, or spirituality, while their peers provide feedback and ask questions. This collaborative approach to learning allows catechists to benefit from

each other's expertise and insights, while also receiving constructive criticism and support from their peers. Peer teaching sessions not only deepen catechists' understanding of the material but also strengthen their teaching skills and confidence in conveying the faith effectively to others.

Reflective practices are also essential for fostering dialogue in catechist training. Through reflective exercises such as journaling, guided reflection, or group debriefing sessions, catechists have the opportunity to process their experiences, insights, and challenges in a supportive and structured manner. Reflective practices encourage catechists to critically evaluate their beliefs and assumptions, identify areas for growth, and consider alternative perspectives. By engaging in reflective practices, catechists develop a deeper self-awareness and a more nuanced understanding of their role as educators and witnesses to the faith.

Furthermore, incorporating mentorship into catechist training programs can greatly enhance the dialogical process. Pairing catechists with experienced mentors provides them with personalized guidance, support, and feedback as they navigate their roles and responsibilities. Mentors serve as trusted advisors and companions on the catechists' journey of formation, offering valuable insights, wisdom, and encouragement. Through regular meetings, discussions, and shared experiences, mentors and catechists engage in a mutually enriching dialogue that fosters growth, development, and mutual learning.

In summary, Gadamer's emphasis on interpretation as a dialogical process underscores the importance of fostering collaborative learning environments in catechist training. By encouraging dialogue through group discussions, peer teaching sessions, reflective practices, and mentorship, catechists develop a deeper understanding of tradition, hone their communication skills, and engage with diverse viewpoints. Ultimately, these dialogical pedagogical strategies empower catechists to effectively communicate the faith and nurture the spiritual growth of those they serve.

Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" is a profound insight into the nature of interpretation, suggesting that understanding involves a merging of the reader's perspectives with the text or tradition being interpreted. In the context of catechist training, this idea carries significant implications for how millennial educators engage with the rich tapestry of tradition and transmit it effectively to their peers. The fusion of horizons underscores the importance of recognizing and embracing the diverse cultural, generational, and experiential backgrounds among Millennial catechists and the traditions they seek to transmit. Pedagogical strategies must be carefully crafted to facilitate this fusion, allowing catechists to bridge any perceived gaps between their own perspectives and the tradition they are entrusted to transmit.

To operationalize this concept in catechist training, pedagogical strategies should focus on encouraging catechists to reflect deeply on their own background and experiences. By facilitating self-awareness and introspection, catechists can gain a clearer understanding of how their personal perspectives shape their interpretation of tradition. This self-reflection can take various forms, such as journaling exercises, guided reflections, or personal narratives, where catechists are encouraged to explore their faith journey, cultural influences, and unique life experiences. By engaging in these reflective practices, catechists develop a deeper awareness of their own biases and assumptions, allowing them to approach the tradition with greater humility and openness.

Furthermore, catechist training programs should provide opportunities for millennial educators to explore the cultural contexts of the tradition they are transmitting. This involves delving into the historical, social, and cultural factors that have shaped the development of Christian tradition, as well as considering how these traditions are expressed and understood in diverse cultural settings. By immersing themselves in the cultural richness of the tradition, catechists gain a deeper appreciation for its universality and adaptability across different contexts. Pedagogical strategies may include cultural immersion experiences, where catechists have the opportunity to engage with diverse expressions of the faith through music, art, literature, and ritual practices. Through these experiences, catechists develop a broader perspective on the tradition, allowing them to transmit it in ways that resonate with the cultural diversity of their peers.

Moreover, fostering intergenerational dialogue is essential for facilitating the fusion of horizons in catechist training. Millennial catechists often bring unique perspectives and insights shaped by their generational experiences, which may differ from those of older members of the community. By creating spaces for intergenerational dialogue, catechist training programs allow millennial educators to engage in meaningful conversations with older members of the faith community, sharing their perspectives, and learning from their wisdom and experience. These dialogue sessions provide opportunities for mutual learning and enrichment, as catechists gain a deeper understanding of the tradition from those who have lived it for many years. Pedagogical strategies may include facilitated discussion groups, mentorship programs, or collaborative projects that encourage meaningful interaction between different generations within the faith community.

Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons has profound implications for catechist training, highlighting the importance of recognizing and embracing the diverse perspectives among millennial educators and the traditions they seek to transmit. Pedagogical strategies must be carefully designed to facilitate this fusion, allowing catechists to bridge cultural, generational, and experiential differences and transmit the tradition effectively to their peers. By encouraging self-reflection, exploring cultural contexts, and fostering intergenerational dialogue, catechist training programs empower millennial educators to engage authentically with tradition and nurture the spiritual growth of those they serve.

Gadamer's advocacy for a hermeneutic approach that recognizes the historical situatedness of interpretation represents a significant departure from traditional views of tradition as a fixed and unchanging entity. This idea emphasizes the dynamic nature of tradition, viewing it as a continuous process that evolves over time in response to changing historical, cultural, and social contexts. In the context of catechist training, this perspective encourages educators to adopt a critical stance towards tradition, recognizing that interpretations of the faith have varied across different historical periods and cultural settings. By acknowledging the historical situatedness of interpretation, catechists are better equipped

to engage with tradition in a meaningful and relevant way, understanding that the truths of the faith are not static but are continually being reinterpreted and recontextualized in light of new insights and perspectives.

One key implication of Gadamer's emphasis on the historical situatedness of interpretation is the need for catechists to critically examine how tradition has been interpreted and transmitted in the past. This involves studying the history of theological thought, tracing the development of key doctrines and beliefs, and understanding the historical contexts in which these interpretations emerged. By engaging in historical analysis, catechists gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity of theological perspectives within the Christian tradition and recognize that interpretations of the faith have evolved over time in response to changing historical circumstances. This historical perspective provides catechists with valuable insights into the complexities of tradition and equips them to navigate the various interpretations and debates that have shaped the development of Christian theology.

Furthermore, Gadamer's hermeneutic approach encourages catechists to adopt an openness to new interpretations and insights, recognizing that tradition is not a static repository of unchanging truths but a dynamic process that is continually evolving. In the context of catechist training, this involves exploring contemporary issues and debates within the Church and considering how these insights can enrich our understanding of the faith. Pedagogical strategies can include engaging with contemporary theological writings, participating in discussions and debates on current issues, and inviting guest speakers to share their perspectives on relevant topics. By fostering an environment of intellectual curiosity and openness to new ideas, catechist training programs encourage educators to critically evaluate traditional interpretations of the faith and to consider how these interpretations might be enriched or challenged by contemporary insights.

Moreover, situating tradition within its historical context allows catechists to better understand the relevance and significance of the faith for contemporary believers. By exploring the historical roots of theological concepts and practices, catechists gain a deeper appreciation for the ways in which tradition has shaped the identity and beliefs of the Church over time. This historical perspective helps catechists to bridge the gap between the ancient traditions of the Church and the lived experiences of contemporary believers, enabling them to communicate the truths of the faith in a way that is meaningful and relevant to their audience. Pedagogical strategies can include incorporating historical anecdotes and examples into catechetical sessions, organizing field trips to historical sites, and encouraging catechists to explore the historical realities of the Church, catechists are better able to convey the richness and depth of the Christian tradition to their students, fostering a deeper appreciation for the faith and its relevance to contemporary life.

Gadamer's advocacy for a hermeneutic approach that acknowledges the historical situatedness of interpretation has significant implications for catechist training. By encouraging educators to critically examine the historical development of tradition, adopt an openness to

new interpretations and insights, and situate tradition within its historical context, catechist training programs empower educators to engage with the tradition in a meaningful and relevant way. Through historical analysis, exploration of contemporary issues, and a commitment to intellectual curiosity, catechists are better equipped to communicate the truths of the faith effectively and to nurture the spiritual growth of their students in the modern world.

Furthermore, Gadamer's emphasis on the role of language and conversation in interpretation underscores the importance of effective communication in catechist training. Pedagogical strategies can involve activities that develop catechists' verbal and nonverbal communication skills, such as role-playing exercises, public speaking workshops, and interpersonal communication training. Additionally, catechists can be encouraged to explore the use of multimedia tools and technology to enhance their communication with digital-native millennials, such as incorporating videos, podcasts, and interactive online platforms into catechetical sessions.

Integrating Gadamer's concepts of dialogue, interpretation, and tradition into catechist formation programs is essential for equipping millennial educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to effectively engage and nurture the faith of their peers. Gadamer's philosophy emphasizes the dynamic and relational nature of understanding, highlighting the importance of dialogue as a means of interpretation and the continuous interpretation of tradition. By incorporating these concepts into catechist formation programs, educators can empower Millennial catechists to engage authentically with their faith tradition and effectively transmit it to others.

Dialogue lies at the heart of Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, emphasizing the reciprocal exchange of ideas and perspectives. In the context of catechist formation, integrating dialogue involves creating spaces for open and respectful conversation among educators. Workshops, seminars, and discussion groups can provide opportunities for Millennial catechists to share their experiences, ask questions, and explore the complexities of faith together. By fostering dialogue, catechists learn not only from instructors but also from one another, enriching their understanding of the faith and enhancing their ability to communicate it effectively to others.

Interpretation, according to Gadamer, is an ongoing process shaped by dialogue and historical context. Catechist formation programs can integrate Gadamer's concept of interpretation by encouraging critical engagement with scripture, tradition, and theological texts. Through exegetical study and theological reflection, Millennial catechists learn to interpret the foundational teachings of the faith in light of contemporary challenges and questions. Practical exercises, such as role-playing scenarios or case studies, allow catechists to apply interpretive skills in real-world contexts, preparing them to address the diverse needs and perspectives of their peers.

Tradition, for Gadamer, is not static but continually evolving through interpretation and dialogue. In catechist formation programs, integrating Gadamer's concept of tradition involves fostering an appreciation for the historical roots and living expression of the faith. Through

studies in church history, liturgy, and sacramental theology, millennial catechists gain a deeper understanding of the richness and diversity of Christian tradition. They learn to discern the enduring truths of the faith while also recognizing the need for contextual adaptation and renewal in response to changing cultural contexts. By grounding catechists in the living tradition of the Church, formation programs equip them to effectively communicate the timeless truths of the faith in ways that resonate with their peers.

Practical skills development is essential in equipping millennial catechists to effectively engage and nurture the faith of their peers. Catechist formation programs can integrate Gadamer's concepts through experiential learning opportunities and hands-on training. Roleplaying exercises, teaching practicums, and peer mentoring provide opportunities for catechists to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. By engaging in these practical experiences, millennial catechists develop confidence in their ability to communicate the faith effectively and respond to the needs of diverse learners.

Effective communication is crucial for engaging millennial learners, who are accustomed to digital technologies and interactive media. Catechist formation programs can integrate Gadamer's concepts by incorporating multimedia tools and technology-enhanced learning strategies. Interactive presentations, online discussion forums, and multimedia resources allow catechists to engage with their peers in dynamic and innovative ways. By embracing digital communication platforms, formation programs prepare millennial catechists to effectively communicate the faith in a technologically mediated culture.

Assessment and reflection are integral components of effective formation programs, enabling catechists to evaluate their progress and identify areas for growth. Gadamer's emphasis on reflection and self-awareness can inform assessment practices by encouraging millennial catechists to engage in ongoing self-reflection and dialogue with their peers. Reflective journals, self-assessment tools, and group feedback sessions provide opportunities for catechists to evaluate their teaching practice, identify strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for continued growth and development. By fostering a culture of reflective practice, formation programs support millennial catechists in their ongoing journey of professional and spiritual formation.

## CONCLUSION

Gadamer's philosophical ideas provide a robust foundation for crafting effective pedagogical strategies tailored to the training of Millennial catechists. Emphasizing the importance of dialogue, these strategies prioritize collaborative learning environments where catechists engage in open and respectful conversation with peers, mentors, and the communities they serve. Through dialogue, catechists develop stronger communication skills and gain a deeper understanding of tradition, enhancing their ability to transmit faith effectively.

Furthermore, Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons informs pedagogical approaches by highlighting the dynamic nature of interpretation. Catechist training programs

incorporate activities that encourage catechists to merge their perspectives with the tradition they seek to transmit, fostering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of faith. By embracing the historical situatedness of interpretation, catechists gain insight into the evolving nature of tradition, enabling them to engage with it in a meaningful and relevant way.

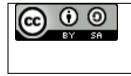
Effective communication is central to Gadamer's philosophy, and pedagogical strategies for catechist training prioritize the development of communication skills. Through workshops, role-playing exercises, and multimedia tools, catechists learn to convey the timeless truths of the faith in ways that resonate with their peers, bridging generational and cultural gaps. Gadamer's philosophical ideas offer valuable insights that inform concrete pedagogical strategies for training Millennial catechists. By emphasizing dialogue, the fusion of horizons, historical situatedness, and effective communication, these strategies empower catechists to engage with tradition dynamically, fostering a deeper understanding of faith and facilitating its transmission to future generations.

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