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## Catholic Religious Education in Philippine Catholic Universities: A Critique on Catholic Religious Education in the Philippines

Roy John R. Del Rosario

*Theology and Religious Education Department, De La Salle University*  
*Social Sciences and Philosophy Department, Holy Angel University*  
*roy\_delrosario@dlsu.edu.ph*  
*rjdelrosario@hau.edu.ph*

**Abstract:** This study exposes how Christianity was introduced and “institutionalized” in Philippine soil in view of the present condition of Philippine Catholic tradition. This requires revisiting, rethinking Catholicism in the Philippines to make suggestions on how to make improvements specifically in terms of Catholic Religious Education in Catholic Universities. The study therefore aims to address the issue of religious plurality in Asia and the challenge of postmodernism which waters down the influence of church in its affair with the state. This endeavor is in line with harmonious relationship of Asian religions in terms of inclusive growth. With this, the researcher employs qualitative method in a critical design framework. It gathers relevant information about the content of course curriculum. Using in-depth content review with critical discourse analysis of related literature concerning 21st century effective pedagogy, this serves as a critical design framework to detect any discrepancy in religious education curriculum that hinders effective and inclusive growth of all students enrolled in religious education. The primary target of this study is to expose any social wrong in the way religious education is being taught in a Catholic University. This calls for a critical analysis on pedagogies involved in religion.

**Key Words:** Religious Education, Asian Christianity, Asian Theology, Post-Colonial, Catholic University

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### *Situational Analysis of the Problem*

The researcher came across with a recent news from *Rappler*, an online news agency in the Philippines. It is quite bothering as well as challenging for most readers whose interest and profession are all about religious education. The journalist started spreading the news by posting this question, “In a predominantly Catholic Philippines, how do young Filipinos develop an understanding of religion?” (Rappler, 2015) According to 2014 NSO profile, the Philippines has been “a predominantly Christian country where around 80% of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholics.

Around 11% identifies with Islam, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos estimated in 2011.” (Rappler, 2015) It simply says that historically, the dominant religion in the country is Catholicism. However, Asian reality would also attest to the fact that there are still religious minorities present in the Philippines such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, while some Filipinos are unaffiliated. (NSO, 2014) These other religions are also present within the circle of South East Asian nations. But why Filipinos have been religious and why religion really matters for them?

According to Julkipli Wadi, Dean of the University of the Philippines Institute of Islamic Studies, “Filipinos have been essentially religious as they have been influenced by



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varying faith traditions and civilizations.”(Rappler, 2015) He added that “more than 300 years of Spanish colonialism created a religious formulation attached to Spanish colonial tradition. At the end of it, we were left with religious tradition shaped by post-colonial tradition.” (Rappler, 2015) However, the method used by the Spanish colonizers to spread Christianity in the Philippine soil is both political and theological. When they evangelized the natives, it unfortunately led to putting aside the other existing religion then which is Muslim.

Finding its semblance from the way Emperor Constantine institutionalized Christianity in the West, Christian tradition has been continuously “institutionalized” through educational institutions as particularly evident in the Catholic University due to its mandatory religious education subjects. In line with this, Phan observes that this has predominantly become the prevailing challenge to Asian Christianity; the importation of colonial Christ using Western terminology inspired by Greco-Roman philosophy. The challenge now to Asian theology is an on-going re-contextualization of Church belief systems. (Phan, 1996) With such a problematic situation, anthropologist Hector Guazon observed that “one problem with Philippine education is the absence of a critical analysis of religion. He noted that schools only teach “orthodox religion” without letting students critically analyze different beliefs and the

way people practice them. (Rappler, 2015) This now paves the way to find reason for further discussion on how will the issue be addressed given the fact that the current President of the Republic verbally attacked the moral ascendancy of “Roman” Catholic Church. Henceforth, the researcher is led into asking questions as he ventures towards further investigation if there is any social problem present in an educational institution with Catholic identity.

Hence, the goal of this paper is to critically expose a social reality concerning the quality and effectivity of Catholic Religious Education in a post-colonial setting. Looking into the social stratum of church institution in the Philippine after colonialism, the researcher believes that vestiges of Western imperial power in terms particularly of religion are still present. The researcher claims that the influence of Asian Christianity with its contextual theology can contribute a lot for the on-going re-contextualization and re-appropriation of Catholic heritage here in Asia. Through an intellectual discourse about the uniqueness of Asian Christianity and how it addresses certain conflictual realities in terms of Western hegemonic influence to formerly colonized nations. Through psychoanalysis and

deconstruction, the researcher is committed to critically expose any social wrong that is still present in hierarchical system in terms of Catholic religious education in Philippine Catholic Universities.

Along the research process, the researcher encounters a seeming view from the hierarchical authority. He finds out that the very institution itself with its strict implementation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in terms of non-Catholic students currently enrolled in a Catholic University. This might not be directly an opposing threat given only its guidelines but it indirectly implies that non-Catholic students enrolled must always be monitored. For the researcher, there is a great need to address this issue in line with the university’s commitment to inclusivity and right for education for all regardless of faith beliefs.

The researcher still believes that current pedagogical system in every Catholic university needs revisiting and rethinking accordingly so as to cater all students. Monitoring the number of non-Catholic students implies many things. But sooner or later, this issue may be clarified by experts so as not to further marginalize other students belonging to other faiths. With these assumptions, the researcher observes the great need of critical analysis of religion in line with its commitment to quality education for all students. Thus, the researcher concludes that the main issue can only be authentically addressed in critical investigating the current system within the status quo of Catholic education. Through the help of social sciences and other disciplines, arguments of both sides will come into fore so as to have critical discourse only for the purpose of clarification and constructive suggestions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employs qualitative method in a critical design framework wherein critical discourse and content analyses are its pillars. This is to detect any social wrong with the aim of challenging the status quo in regards to any issues of power relations within the execution of religious education in Catholic University.

The critical design allows for the critiquing (i.e., challenging the status quo) of some existing system... It is described as framework to describe, analyze, and scrutinize hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain. Thus, the real utility of a critical design is the structure it provides for researchers who are interested in explaining some form of ideology or power relations through the transformation of meaning and



conceptualization of existing social systems. (Edmonds, et.al, 2017)

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Education Curriculum in Holy Angel University, Angeles City Pampanga Philippines	
No. of Subjects/Units	4 Subjects/12 Units
Course Titles	1. Christian Living Education 1 (CLE1) Sowing the Seeds of Faith 2. Christian Living Education 2 (CLE2) Step to Conversion 3. Christian Living Education 3 (CLE3) Set to Uphold the Church's Conviction 4. Christian Living Education 4 (CLE4) Send to be Evangelizers
Interests/ Features	1.Content of teachings are grounded from Catholic doctrines. 2.Required subjects to be taken and offered both semestres. 3.Courses are taught by lay professors. Holistic in orientation. There is a praxis component.
Defining Characteristics	1.Use of "Christian" and "Catholic" 2.Subjects are taught in a Catholic University that is not found by any religious order but of lay groups.

Fig.1. Critical Analysis on Christian Living Education Curriculum at Holy Angel University, Angeles City Pampanga Philippines using the framework of Dr. Willard Enrique Macaraan of De La Salle University, Manila.

The current curriculum is systematic. It aims to teach the doctrine of "Catholic" faith for students. It is also holistic as it tries to incorporate Catholic doctrines into meaningful activities that arouse social awareness to pressing issues and to come up with viable solutions to societal problems. Most universities particularly Catholic universities are now accommodating students of all beliefs even without any

belief at all as part of globalization. This only implies that a Catholic university needs to be considerate in terms of major shifts both in administrative and educational purposes so as to achieve inclusivity that provides holistic formation of students regardless of beliefs.

However, according to various literature, religious education must be multifarious, multi-centred and intercultural in approach so as to accommodate the growing needs of students as Catholic Universities need to adapt to the effects of globalization. The academic community fosters "healthy relationship" between teacher/student, the nature of Catholic University which advocates for the integral human development (Garcia, 2012) the role of the Catholic University to present the teachings of Catholic faith gently but persuasively while respecting and fostering pluralism (Wren, et.al 2009), to be sensitive and audaciously responsible in relationship with Other, towards recognition of the independent validity of other (Chung, 2009), to help students co-exist peacefully in a multi-religious environment (Block, 2009) and the pedagogy that aspires towards freedom, and the articulation of Catholic theology in an intercultural inter-religious manner (Macaraan, 2016) liberating arts in Catholic University free us from dogmatism parochialism, complacency, sentimentality, hypocrisy from sloppy reasoning, and open up our minds to exploration, an understanding of self and others. (Wren et.al, 2009)

Thus, it is never part of religious education's enterprise to foster hatred and animosity against other faiths particularly those non-Catholic, non-Christians, non-believers currently enrolled in any religious education subject. Accordingly, students must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to academic community. (Garcia, 2012) In terms of its Christian Living Education curriculum, the literature says that catechetical method as a type of mono-religious education cannot be used in teaching religious education within the classroom setting knowing the fact that not all students are Catholics. (Hermans, 2003) If it remains unchanged, it may have mismatched multi-centered pluralism and possible pedagogical shifts in teaching theology due to religious diversity. (Macaraan, 2016)

The misalignment only proves that there is really a growing ideological crisis and power issues that hinder an effective implementation of inclusive religious education. It will be attested by the critical framework. Crisis in ideology can only be addressed if only there is a recognition that an authentic power is not a hierarchy, not to suppress or regress, not localized in one domain or another, nor a possession, but



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make power available to individuals, the others, multiplied, activity exercised in relations and it moves from disciplinary power to an affirmative power concerned with conduct. (Moghtader, 2016)

In this line there is a growing need to rethink current theological understanding of religious education in Catholic University. In this way, there will be a collapse of the existing order and usher in a new age, philosophy freed from traditional theology, through dialectical process. (Boer, 2011)

As a helpful step, the researcher suggests that one may learn from Asian Christianity as opposed to colonial Christianity by imperial West. The Colonial Christianity speaks a religious hub center of colonial administration during the time of Spaniards in the Philippines. (Nadeau, 2008) Its implications are that religious orders in exchange for their participation in governance, friars and other administrators helped run colony, indoctrinate and subdue the masses for their conquerors. (Nadeau, 2008) As an effect, Filipinos charged friars who had not really civilized them but had taught them a mystified and formulaic version of Christianity. (Nadeau, 2008) Whereas, Asian Christianity suggests solidarity and not legalism and is persuaded that only by a process of self-dispossession and radical remaking can humanity come into its own. (Sigurdson, 2012) Asian Christianity is required to reflect on the pluralist demands of other religions and it paves the way for construction a theology of religions. (Chung, 2009)

In the problem, there is this lack of recognition with the outliers, the marginalized, the non-Catholics. The importance of psychoanalysis is needed to make contributions on the holistic formation not only of the students but also of the some educators who become unaware or do not recognize their importance. Psychoanalysis is a tool in effecting deep changes in human character, harmonizing of emotions and their transformations - cultural analysis. In Psychoanalysis, there is the Other, the other that makes me speak. I invest in and from whom I speak by love and hate. (Muller-Funk et. al., 2013)

It is also good to note that religion here plays an important part in addressing the issue of inclusivity. It is said that religion is a field that brings together three keystones of psychoanalysis: anthropology, history and philosophy and utilized for moral education of character. (Muller-Funk et. al., 2013) In the critical analysis, it says that there is indeed a growing concern in terms of religion. However, Pieris, as Phan reads him, observes a different one. In the discussion of poverty caused by colonialism, neocolonialism and political

ideologies brought by Western powers, the major role of religion comes into play.

In terms of religious belief systems in Asia, it is mostly characterized by pervasive religiousness. It is believed to be the birthplace of all major religions of the world. This is the meta-cosmic order of belief system that includes major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, etc. Due to religious diversity where plurality of beliefs has been prevalent since time immemorial, Pieris observes that the challenge being faced by Christian theology is Buddhism due to its acceptability to other beliefs found in Asia. How will Christian theology brought by colonialism allow itself to lose itself within the meta-cosmic order of beliefs so as to gain all the more strength in its position to spread the truth through inter religious dialogue? (Phan, 1996) Here comes the importance of post-colonial features of the Philippines for attempts to disrupt colonial binaries - hegemonic and regulatory dominance of truth, its criticism and assumption that all formerly colonized persons ought to have one view of the impact of colonialism behind which they ought to unite, and the the drive to re-empower the disenfranchised. (Ashcroft, 2001)

In the post-colonial setting, Filipinos interpreted Christianity in terms of traditional South East Asian cultural beliefs and practices that would fit in to what Aloysius Pieris mentioned earlier on the two poles in Asia, religion and poverty. (Phan, 1996) Hence, there is still in religion a kernel that will change the world to create a world changed by religious education. (Block, 2009)

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

With all the results presented, the researcher proves that there is indeed a social wrong in the current pedagogical system of religious education in a Catholic University by looking critically at the content and background of course curriculum. There is a mismatch in terms of inclusivity, intercultural and interfaith based from the critical discourse interaction between the literatures and the nature and content of religious education curriculum. Therefore, there is an urgent need to take a closer look by providing viable suggestions to eliminate, if not, mitigate any possibility of marginalization as the university is growing in demands of globalization.

The researcher now provides recommendations for further study:



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1. A comparative study regarding religious educators' perception on inclusive education vis-a-vis students behavior towards religious education.
2. A critical study on the viability of institutional mass in relation to non-Catholic students perception
3. A theological critique on the viability of religious education curriculum in Catholic University towards holistic growth of college students.

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