

## Quality Education: The Social Reconstruction Model in Religious Education

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**Abstract:** The K-12-program went in full swing in 2016 by virtue of the “Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013” after decades the Philippines is the only country in Asia and one of only three remaining countries worldwide with a 10-year pre-university cycle. The major outcome of the introduction of two years of Senior high school is curriculum development from basic education to tertiary. Such a makeover in the Philippines educational system coincides with the identification of quality education by the United Nations in 2015 as one of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for developing countries towards 2030. This paper argues that religious education in the tertiary new curriculum contributes to the realization of quality education. In this qualitative-exploratory research, a case study of the “Faith Worth Living” (LCFAITH) course at De La Salle University is conducted using content analysis on the course modules through the lens of Thomas Groome’s Shared Praxis Approach as a framework to produce the textual data. The textual information is then coded and categorized for the findings. The results show all modules altogether promote the centrality of human experiences, present situations, and social reality or contexts. They follow the Life-Faith-Life process. It can be inferred that the course falls on a social reconstruction teaching model or a contextualized religious education. The educational process in the modules exhibits contextual theology because it looks at the experiences in the light of faith and practical theology as it promotes praxis or responses to the given context. All modules utilize different teaching strategies that are learner-centered, life-centered, critical-reflective pedagogy, participatory and praxis-oriented. It can be gleaned from the overall nature of LCFAITH as a religious education course that it aims for a quality education transforming students to be critical thinkers, life-long learners, and service-oriented individuals.

**Keywords:** quality education, religious education; social-reconstruction model; contextual/practical theology; pedagogy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The K-12-program went in full swing in 2016 by virtue of the “Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013” after decades the Philippines is the only country in Asia and one of only three remaining countries worldwide with a 10-year pre-university cycle (Djibouti and Angola of Africa are the other two countries). The major outcome of the introduction of two years of Senior high school is curriculum development from basic education to tertiary. Pursuant to CHED Memorandum Order (CMO), De La Salle University (DLSU) formulated a new General Education curriculum (GEC) known as the “Lasallian Core Curriculum” (LCC). The GE courses or core

courses are under the newly created LCC office instead of belonging to different departments within the College of Liberal Arts (CLA). Another impact of the K-12 curriculum is the changes in Religious Education (RE) programs in Catholic Universities. Owing to their Christian identity, RE subjects in university curricula are revised but the academic units are either retained or increased to ensure the schools’ continuing mission of evangelization. Faithful to the identity of DLSU as a Catholic University, the LCC committee designed “Faith Worth Living ” (LCFAITH) and “Encountering Christ in the Word ” (LCENWRD) for RE program. Thus, the RE program in DLSU, once part of GEC under the Theology and

Religious Education Department (TRED) in the CLA, is likewise part of the LCC office under the new structure. The transitions in HEIs are notable not only in the institutional structure and curriculum but also in course contents as well as in the teaching methods and strategies. All core courses are grounded on the LCC framework of liberal education, interdisciplinarity, and Lasallianess. The expected Lasallian graduate attributes such as creative and critical thinking, effective communication and collaboration, service-driven citizenship, and reflective lifelong learning from the previous curriculum remain (Sison, 2014). Overall, the core courses constitute the learner-centered philosophy.

This article is timely as the year 2021 marks the fifth year of the LCC since its launching. It also coincides with the fifth year since the identification of quality education as one of the 17 sustainable development goals for United Nations member states to continue moving forward to prosperity. Likewise, the year 2021 is the celebration of half a millennium of Christianity in the Philippines. In retrospect, various religious education pedagogies in Catholic schools have been utilized since the colonial past. Generally, traditional approaches applied in some school settings are privatized and individualistic faith formation, hierarchical, authoritarian, promoting passivity among learners and marked with absence of critical pedagogy. The author argues a religious education showing greater sensitivity to the context, present situations, or social reality of participants is the call of the times and the indicators of quality education.

This paper intends to evaluate the LCFAITH course. It aims to answer the questions up to what extent the LCFAITH course exhibits an educational model and pedagogies that is contemporary and provides quality education. Accordingly, this paper initially explores varied educational models and teaching pedagogies in RE. Secondly, the content analysis is applied to the course modules through the lens of Thomas Groome's Shared Praxis Approach (SPA).

### *1.1 MODELS AND APPROACHES*

The pedagogical trend that emerged in the Roman Catholic Church as a counter-reformation to Protestantism that beset Catholicism in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century is the Doctrinal approach. It emphasizes the importance of knowing the doctrines of the Catholic Church by learning the contents of the Catholic catechism. The counter-reformation approach shaped the form of RE and the pedagogical techniques used in school settings worldwide

(Buchanan, 2005). No wonder the confessional Bible-centered approach and confessional approach are employed during the colonial days. The aforesaid approaches fall under the category of the academic model for teaching religion. Despite being considered as traditional, Newton (1981, p.2) explains the academic model remains useful when the religious education program in the school aims to address religious illiteracy and to promote the systematic, comprehensive development of basic religious knowledge and values". He further elaborates, the academic model interprets the role of the educational system as preserving, transmitting, and enlarging the culture, or, the religious tradition. Thus, there is religious continuity and the accumulated wisdom of the past eras, the fundamental truths and values are preserved and continued by the new generation. In the academic model, the rule of thumb is, "what should be taught is more important than what students wish to learn or what teachers wish to teach" (Newton 1981, pp. 7-8).

Another approach in the traditional academic model is the teacher-centered approach. In an academically oriented RE program, it refers to the centrality of teachers as individuals with an extensive academic background in religious studies (Newton, 1981). Teachers' primary task is to ensure the students develop a solid understanding of the religious tradition in its various dimensions; its beliefs, history, moral teaching, ritual expression, etc. (Newton, 1981). Teacher-student relationships primarily are defined by intellectual explorations chosen by the teacher, in which the teacher is an arbiter and distributor of knowledge and students are receivers of knowledge. Though teachers consider it important to demonstrate the relevance of religion to their students' lives, they are more concerned with accurate communication of content.

The next model for RE is Open Education. Its basic assumption is learners are developing and maturing by themselves in an environment of freedom, openness, trust, and encouragement. The learners are perceived as discoverers and makers of their own religious meaning (Newton, 1981). The life approach, also referred to as life-theme pedagogy, is aptly utilized in this model. It is a method of teaching religion starting from the real, concrete, and present experience of learners to see their experiences as a way in which God manifests himself. The life-theme approach is student-centered in which the learners embark on personal discovery with appropriate guidance and support from teachers. While students know the roles of teachers as a facilitator, motivator,

and enabler but the quest for learning is a responsibility on their shoulder (Newton, 1981).

The third RE model is the socio-cultural or social-reconstruction model of RE. It also utilizes life-theme pedagogy. However, it focuses on a broad spectrum of experiences: from personal experiences to societal experiences of mankind which the learners interpret and understand from theological and sociological perspectives (Newton, 1981). It works more than critique and creates resistance but also the reconstruction of society (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2015). Its basic assumption is that schools have a social reform role by making the gospel of social justice be at the heart of their religious education in order to produce individuals as change-agents who build a just and humane society for everyone. Moreover, teachers in socio-reconstructive models are themselves aware of social issues and socially active Christians to role model for students. The forms of instruction are not classroom confined but the school allows flexibility for direct experience of social injustice or social action involvement, be it within or outside the campus. The site for learning is the societal realities, the community of the poor, the working class, and the marginalized. Newton (1981) argues that “the aim no matter what the level of instruction is the same: to demonstrate the importance of living out one’s Christian commitment.”

RE in the Philippines in post-colonial times has ceased to be purely doctrinal but has become contextual and transformative. Baring & Cacho (2015, p. 143) echoed the call of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Lumen Gentium* enjoining schools and educational institutions in Southeast Asia that: “education must be marked by a distinctly Catholic character, namely, a vision of the kingdom of God, promotion of human rights and dignity, a good community life, education for social transformation, and a witness to a life of truth, justice, and harmony.” In the end, schools, whether secular or religious, are deemed effective only when their graduates work toward the improvement of society (Newton, 1981).

### ***1.2 SOCIAL-RECONSTRUCTION MODEL IS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY***

“What makes the theological contextual is the recognition of the validity of another *locus theologicus*: present human experience” (Bevans, 2002). Together with scripture and tradition, human experience—or context—constitute the trinity of sources for theological reflections. Sutcliffe-Pratt (2015) cites Schreiter’s great contribution to religious education as the one who initiated elevating the place of human life and experience, with emphasis on

justice, action, and social transformation, within theological reflection as the highest form and the surest way to wisdom knowable to us. Schreiter (1985) places the loci of orthodoxy within the local community and is not based on or tied to the magisterial, central theology. Sutcliffe-Pratt (2015) shared the notions of Bergman that what constitutes contextual theology are a Christian interpretation of life and faith that is conscious of its circumstances or context. One popular method of hermeneutic of experience in contextual theology is the pastoral cycle SEE-JUDGE-ACT (SJA) drawn from the thought of the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967). Charlesworth (2011) described it essentially as a movement that is reflective, and must ultimately become transformative, where the current action is evaluated in the light of faith and adapted in such a way that the action becomes more appropriate, correct, and life-giving. In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII affirms the cycle of SJA as a way of reading and responding to the signs of the time: there are three stages that should be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in three terms: observe, judge, act (1961, 236). Thus, contextual theology is highly influenced by liberation theology and practical theology due to its focus on liberation or salvation, Kingdom of God, and praxis of faith (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2015).

A variety of pedagogies within religious education make use of contextual theology as its framework in the educational process. Along this line, Thomas Groome’s Shared Praxis Approach (SPA) is most notable among religious educators and practical theologians (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2015). Groome (1991) defined SPA as a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their socio-cultural reality, have access together to Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith towards God’s reign for all creation. SPA belongs to the socio-cultural or social reconstruction model of religious education.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The paper is qualitative research using the exploratory approach and content analysis for data collection. The researcher conducts an exploration of

LCFAITH course modules on how the educational process takes place with the use of Groome's SPA framework. At the same time, the researcher performs content analysis of the same documents to look at the types of educational pedagogy employed in the delivery of the course to its target students. Textual data are examined through the lens of the related literature and Groome's SPA from which codes and categories are drawn. The analysis results in interpretation pertaining to the educational model and the identification of corresponding educational pedagogies prevalent in the course. Finally, the author posits the RE course contributes to the attainment of quality education, the mandate of CHED, and the Lasallian education.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Groome's SPA consists of six movements in the educational process. The exploratory approach determines if these movements are present as an educational process in the LCFAITH modules.

#### *3.1 Orientation Week (1st - 2nd Week)*

As per the course syllabus, the first week is course orientation. Class policies, grading system, course requirements, specifically the Faith Engagement Project (FEP), and animospace as the Learning Management System (LMS) or web aid tools are introduced for familiarization. Inquiries and clarifications are likewise sought from them to establish the course relevance.

Movement 1: focusing activity. It turns people into their own 'being' in place and time, to their present praxis, and establishes a focus for the curriculum (Groome 1991, p. 283). For the students to get to ask themselves on the relevance of their faith in their personal lives and how it is real or manifested in society. Orientation week is meant to incite curiosity and interest from the students as they are given the course overview based on the syllabus.

#### *3.2 Module 1: Introduction to models of faith (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Week)*

The first activity is "My Life Story." It requires students to draw a "lifeline" from birth to the present time and should delineate "up and down" moments representing pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Whatever the experience may be, it must be reflected upon by "seeing" what the experience is all about, "judge" it in terms of perceived lessons or consequences or gained therefrom, and what "actions" or resolutions are realized that make an impact on their lives. The individual creative output is for online

submission through LMS. Teachers use the teaching strategy of small group sharing for students to present their output and getting-to-know each other. It culminates with the group reflection on the questions: how is faith manifested in the life story? What is faith? These questions may encounter resistance from those who claim they are agnostics, atheists, and religious "none" and expected to cause some confusion among Christian students on why faith is associated with the life story. This is a challenge for them to exercise critical thinking and reflection. The class continues with a presentation of output from a representative who shares the group reflection. The next meeting is a processing session with the teacher as facilitator. Using a Q & A approach, the students are guided to see similarities and differences in the responses. The expected learning outcome through the activity is that all experiences, both pleasant or unpleasant, are meaningful and significant in their own way based on one's personal interpretation. Whatever interpretations influence one's convictions which are expressed in future actions and decisions. In short, our life experiences shape what we believe in or the set of "faith" about life in general. Everyone has their own faith system or value system developed through the course of life from their own experiences. The controversial issue being addressed: Is faith only for believers/adherents of religions? The whole point of the lesson is to impart the reality that faith is a universal phenomenon. No one is exempted from this reality. Atheists, agnostics, and religious "none" also have faith in their own way. The session culminates with any of the two possible teaching strategies: 1) complete the sentence, "I believe in \_\_\_\_\_." Everyone in the class randomly or one by one participates and explains what they believe in. 2) Faith checklist which contains a set of foundational beliefs such as life is sacred, justice first before charity, God is love, and so on. Checklist results vary from person to person.

Building on the realization faith is a universal phenomenon or everyone has faith. The succeeding weeks are allotted for lecture-discussion on the meaning of faith, the scriptures, and on what constitutes genuine faith—the faith as believing (intellectualist), personal trust (fiducial), and social praxis (performative), all three in harmonious balance, as one holistic faith present in every person. A holistic faith that integrates all three models of faith leads to openness and dialogue with religious others. Thus, the course title "Faith Worth Living." Teachers gradually explain each faith model with the use of "song analysis" as an educational strategy to prompt discussion. Students are asked about the message of the song and the teacher relates the realizations or

insights accordingly to the nature of each faith model. Then the teacher proceeds to narrate the Judeo-Christian concept of faith, the historical epoch in each faith model is more prevalent. The principal objective of module 1 is to impart the message: their personal faith and its expressions have developed in response to their developmental growth and changed circumstance; so too, faith itself (with different dimensions/models have developed in accordance to the historical-philosophical-cultural contexts in which they were stressed. In short, a life-story is a faith story. Faith evolves according to the contexts of the time.

Movement 2: Naming. Clearly, the course is about genuine faith and its relevance to contemporary time. Groome (1991, p. 156) said, a generative theme is some historical issue: question, value, belief, concept, event, situation and so on that is likely to draw participants into active engagements because it has important meaning for their lives. Movements 1&2 completely introduced the course: LCFAITH aims to make sense of the relevance of faith in today's world, a faith that is responsive to crucial life issues. The philosophies and contexts shaped the development of each of these faith expressions. Finally, an assignment is given to conclude module 1: A critique of homily/preaching of priests or pastors during the Sunday mass or worship for online submission. They identify the kind of faith expressions the priest/pastor exhorts the faithful to manifest.

### *3.3 Modules 2&3: Faith as Believing (5<sup>th</sup> week) / Trusting (6<sup>th</sup> Week)*

Module 2 includes selected Youtube videos and reading materials for self-study of students. The educational techniques employed are video-showing and resource reading. Teachers have options to conduct online sessions or a combination of face-to-face sessions and online sessions for the week. The class is divided into five groups with each group given a science-related video for online discussion based on guide questions. The face-to-face session is processing for each group to share the summary and conclusion of their online discussion with the whole class. Q&A strategy is used to solicit reactions and insights from the rest of the class for each group. The objective of the learning process: to appreciate the role of reason in the cultivation and nurturance of faith; to differentiate the distinct character of scientific inquiry from theological/ faith inquiries by articulating the scope and limit of both science and religion. The lesson expects students to demystify the biases against faith. It aims to impart the message that faith itself is not a

blind leap to the dark. Rather faith and reason complement each other. Science and religion are based on different worldviews but are not in conflict with each other. For instance, belief in the existence of God is scientific and empirical; hence, reasonable and logical.

Module 3: For online sessions, the teaching strategy employed is giving reading assignments on articles about human suffering, *Toward a Theology of Depression*, "What do we do in the face of suffering", among others which give the philosophical, theological, and pastoral views on suffering. The videos recommended for viewing are: why does God let bad things happen? and so on. The face-to-face session is processing with the use of the "think-pair-share" strategy. The teacher posts controversial questions about suffering for which individual students answer on their own on a piece of paper then looks for a partner(s) to share and compare their answers. This is a process where they dialogue and learn. The insights and understanding about suffering emphasize philosophical, theological, and psychological perspectives on suffering. The purpose of the lesson is to explain faith as personal trust and analyze personal experiences of sufferings in the light of God's "kagandahang-loob." The culminating activity is Bible Study on the story of Job. The subsequent task is for students to reflect on the question: When God is silent, do you think God has abandoned you?

Movement 3: Critical Reflection. Modules 3&4 deals with the most controversial and perplexing questions of all time which young people, even old ones, grapple with. These questions are on the existence of God and the reality of evil and suffering. The lessons showed the interdisciplinarity of the course by examining the issues not only from faith perspectives but from different disciplinary vantage points. Likewise, the lessons exhibited the contextualization of the course by addressing the universal questions based on the Filipino local experiences. In this module, there is a dialogue among students and a dialogue among worldviews. Groome (1991) argues the third movement involves a critical and creative hermeneutic of present praxis which discerns what to affirm and what to refuse, as well as what needs transforming in the learners' historical reality. Furthermore, he opines the more deeply we move into a truly critical consciousness of our lives in the world, the more likely we are to uncover God's revelation therein of how we are to live as a people of God (1991, p. 197)

### *3.4 Module 4&5: Faith as Praxis (7<sup>th</sup> –9<sup>th</sup> Weeks)/as Dialogue (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Weeks)*

The module addresses the issue: what do we do in the face of people who suffer due to social injustice? Does faith have anything to do with political and justice issues? What is the relation between faith and justice/politics? The educational process here consists of a brainstorming strategy where students randomly share their opinions to complete the list of responses on the issue of separation between the church and the State. Lecture-discussion ensues on political holiness to establish that faith is praxis or transformative both in the personal and the social sphere. In short, faith essentially prompts us to action. It leads to the study of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principles based on scripture and Church documents as guides for action. The discussion ends with the emphasis on the see-judge-act (SJA) framework for social analysis as a discernment tool for students to adopt in order to determine the will of God or the right course of faith-response to any given situation. Hence, the entire educational process in module 4 aims to impart to the students the skill to analyze social issues and discern them in the light of CST employing the see-discern/judge-act framework. This social analysis skill aided by faith is put to test by assigning any current issues to students using group research as a learning strategy. To date, the controversial issues besetting Philippine society are extra-judicial killing (EJK), fake news, climate change among others. The research output must exhibit the SJA process. Reporting activity is employed next as a pedagogy for students to share the outcome of their own discernment on the issues and learn from one another. Consequently, the whole class learns to make a moral stand on current events and situations based on the applications of the SJA social analysis framework.

The educational process in module 5 aims to clarify the issues: why dialogue with other religions? What does faith have to say about relating with other faith traditions? The educational process starts with an analysis of the present phenomenon of religious plurality faith in society. It proceeds to define terms such as interfaith/interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, religious inclusivity, religious tolerance/acceptance, and so on. Then brainstorming exercise follows where students are challenged to cite concrete evidence or manifestations of interfaith dialogue or ecumenism in the community and society at large, and the absence or lack of it. The main goal is for students to learn the skill of engaging in interfaith dialogue. There are various forms of dialogue based on different dimensions of faith: a dialogue of doctrines, of worship, of praxis, and of life. Again, the students are given the opportunity to apply the SJA social analysis

framework on various current issues in the light of the principles of interfaith dialogue anchored on Jesus' life and teachings, Bible, and church documents. The suggested topics for students' group research and reporting are indigenous religions, major religions, and religious conflicts. The expected learning outcomes are students to realize how dialogue can promote harmony, mutual respect, peace, and equality. There is also research and reporting on the Mindanao conflict and Israeli-Palestinian conflict for critical analysis to answer the questions: Is religion the cause of conflict? Is religion dangerous?

Movements 4&5: Christian story and vision with integration. These two movements are evident in the two modules. The focus of the study is the Christian story becoming part of the present historical events and vice-versa. The course intends to inculcate upon the students the skill of critical reflection and discernment to arrive at the point of view of things in accord with the faith. This is the integration of faith and context known as dialectical hermeneutics using the SJA analytical framework. Therefrom, the emerging insights and understanding by the students, more than an inspiration, is tantamount to responsibilities for active participation in the mission to bring about the vision of a just, humane and peaceful society. Groome (1991, 217) reveals, as the Christian story has various implications and initiations for how Christians live their lives, the Christian vision is a metaphor of the promises and responsibilities that arise from the *story for the lives of people who claim it as their own*.

### 3.5 Faith Engagement Project (FEP)/ Faith Credo (13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Week)

The LCFAITH course has Faith Engagement Project (FEP) as a service-learning component. FEP is a committed agreement with a faith-based community / organization to take part in their faith-life or faith journey. The type of faith engagement varies in every faith community depending on the nature or charism of the organization. Essentially, FEP is an immersion activity where each student is required to engage in any faith-based community or organization, preferably those involved in social justice advocacy. The faith engagement requires 5-10 hours spread in 3-5 weeks. The faith-oriented organizations can be on-campus or off-campus organizations, preferably within the area of residence. At the end of the faith-engagement is a critical reflection of experiences based on guide questions. This is the culminating activity for the course. The project is undertaken by the students during the whole term complying with all its requisites. This is marked by the familiarization of

the faith movements in the Philippines to acquaint the students with the faith organizations where they can conduct their FEP. There is no requirement for students to join any of these organizations. Doing so is a personal decision. Ultimately, the purpose of the project is to develop advocacy for every student. It is hoped LCFAITH courses transform students to become change agents or active participants in society. The last requirement for the course is the formulation of the “personal credo.” It is strategy for student to identify the values and principles they intend to live for. It is a formal declaration of one’s belief or set of beliefs and the narrative of why having these beliefs. This activity summarizes what the course is all about. The personal credo is a statement of how one’s faith is worth living. This may be presented through artwork or any creative output.

Movement 6: Action-Response. This final movement gives students the opportunity to make decisions using their praxis, as well as aiming to form the habit of making decisions conceptually and morally appropriate to the Christian faith (Groome 1991, p. 267). The FEP and Personal Credo as the final activities demonstrate the praxis or the interplay of theories and practice. Praxis is not necessarily concrete actions. It may be a commitment, resolution, awareness, or a change of attitudes or behavior on the part of students. These are the modest expectations from the students as a form of response.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper posits that the LCFAITH course promotes the centrality of human experience or context in the educational process. It is an RE course showing greater sensitivity to the context, present situations, or social reality of participants. The course is exposed to follow the Life-Faith-Life cycle. By looking at the context through the lens of faith makes the educational process theological. Analyzing the context with the use of the SJA framework makes the educational process as liberative. Both individual transformation and societal transformation are the emphases of the educational process. Hence, the LCFAITH course as RE is both a contextual theology and practical theology because it highlights concepts such as liberation, dialogue, and social justice on human experiences. The course is based on a social reconstruction model or a contextualized religious education. It has the SPA components of praxis, Christian and shared (dialogue). The RE course promotes to the learners their critical consciousness and more purposeful faith-life responsive to the context of their contemporary time. The teaching

pedagogies that are most common for all modules are participatory, student-centered, critical-reflective, and praxis-oriented. It can be gleaned from the overall nature of LCFAITH as a religious education course that it aims for a quality education transforming students to be critical thinkers, life-long learners, and service-oriented individuals.

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