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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE IN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

Religious education in the Philippines is generally Catholic by orientation. This is attributed to the three hundred years of how the early Spanish missionaries came to the Philippines and evangelized its people. In recent years, however, the educational demographic landscape in the Philippines has been changing resulting to what we call the phenomenon of multiculturalism where students of varied nationalities, cultures, religions, and belief systems share the same classroom and facilities. It is in this context that this study argues for the possibility of integrating an intercultural approach to Catholic religious education in the Philippines. To fulfill this objective, the study investigated the general situation and challenges of Catholic Religious education in the Philippines. It also discussed what is intercultural education from a Catholic perspective and proposed the inclusion of interreligious dialogue in the Catholic religious education curriculum with three integral components: 1. Religious literacy 2. Christian witnessing 3. Promotion of a Culture of Dialogue.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious education in the Philippines is generally Catholic by orientation. This is attributed to the three hundred years of how the early Spanish missionaries came to the Philippines and evangelized its people. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, in its pastoral letter entitled "Pastoral Letter on the 400 Years Education in the Philippines mentioned this process of evangelization through the efforts of the Augustinians, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Jesuits, and the Vincentians. Even women's religious congregations such as the Daughters of Charity, the Benedictines, the first Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres, and the Beaterios contributed to the foundation of Catholic education in the Philippines. Further, as centuries passed, Catholic schools and universities had been in the forefront of providing systematic evangelization and wholistic Christian formation for many Filipino students (CBCP, 2012). Eventually, in the long years of evangelization, Catholic religious education had been institutionalized in many Catholic schools and mandated for its students. So, not a few became critical because not all students in Catholic schools are Catholic by faith. Some of them are Protestants, Moslems, Hindus and Buddhists. Sometimes, religious educators also tend to devalue other religions and affirm the superiority of the Catholic faith. According to critics, such a tendency can be attributed to the colonial way the early Spanish missionaries evangelized the Filipinos. More than three hundred years of

Spanish colonialism created a religious formation attached to Spanish colonial tradition. Where the method used by Spanish colonizers to spread Christianity on Philippine soil was both political and theological; when they evangelized the natives, it unfortunately led to the setting aside of the other existing religion then, which was Islam. (Del Rosario, 2017). Today, another concern that Catholic Religious education must address is the changing educational demographic landscape in the Philippines. In the past two decades, there has been an increase in international students enrolling, particularly in higher educational institutions. Inevitably, one significant development of this phenomenon is multiculturalism, whereby students of varied nationalities, cultures, religions, and belief systems share the same classroom and facilities, which gives rise to the necessity of how pedagogically we can teach the Catholic faith that does not discriminate against anyone. According to Baring, the problem of Philippine religious education "hinges on the fact that the growing plural condition in the educational system remains "undiscerned" or integrated in many schools. Not much is heard about proposing a platform dialogue within religious education circles. (Baring, 2011). In this context, this paper argues for the need to integrate intercultural perspectives in our present Catholic religious education context. The post-modern cultural landscape is becoming more and more characterized by diversity and religious pluralism, and Catholic religious educators must be able to address such contexts to help

students grow in terms of human freedom and spiritual maturity. It is through the avenue of being intercultural, particularly in engaging in interreligious dialogue, that this paper proposes when conducting Christian Religious education. Today, we can no longer deny that the world has become one global village characterized by diverse cultures and religions. Instead of allowing this diversity to be a cause of conflict and division among different groups, such a diverse milieu can have the potential to enrich our knowledge about others, enhance our relationships with them, and work towards common goals and collaboration. In the context of education and schools, when we dialogue with students of different cultures or religions, being intercultural can enhance how we relate to them. The need for intercultural dialogue was affirmed by the Congregation for Catholic Education, Schools have a great responsibility in this field, as they are called to develop intercultural dialogue in their pedagogical vision. This is a problematic goal that is not easy to achieve and is necessary. Education, by its nature, requires both openness to other cultures without the loss of one's own identity and an acceptance of the other person to avoid the risk of a limited culture closed in on itself. (Educating in Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love, 2013). The same document also affirmed that the Catholic Church believes the need for dialogue is ever more important. From an awareness of one's faith identity, dialogue can help people enter into contact with other religions and help establish beneficial and constructive interreligious relationships with individuals and communities of other beliefs, thus arriving at mutual understanding.

OBJECTIVES

In addressing the problem on how we can integrate intercultural perspective in Catholic Religious education, this paper aims to (1.) Discuss in general the challenges of Catholic Religious education in the Philippines (2.) Define what is religious education and the Intercultural approach to education (3.) Establish the basis of intercultural education from a Catholic point of view (4) Finally, propose an approach how can we integrate intercultural perspectives into Catholic religious education.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative and descriptive approach where data was collected from online journals and books related to religious education and intercultural education. The gathered data was analyzed and examined to address the objectives of the study and explore an approach in integrating intercultural perspective in Catholic religious education.

DISCUSSION

Challenges of Catholic Religious Education in the Philippines: Catholic education is an essential dimension of Philippine education. It is offered from pre-school to elementary and high school until the tertiary or college level. Catholic schools are run in a private capacity and are known to provide quality education not only to Catholics but to students of other faiths. Apart from offering the required courses in the basic, secondary, and tertiary levels, an integral part of the Catholic Curriculum is religious education, where Christian living subjects are offered at the primary and secondary levels,

while Theology subjects are offered at the tertiary. (Aguas, 2019). Religious education in the Philippines is typically associated with Christian religious education. The majority of Filipinos are Catholics, so the teaching of Christian education is more emphasized and mandated, especially in Catholic schools. This vision is promoted in Christian living textbooks and carried out by providing systematic Catechesis at the primary and elementary levels, while Christian living subjects are offered at the secondary level to deepen further the integration of faith and life at the college level. (Natividad, 2018) Theology subjects are provided so students can better reflect and understand the truths behind the Catholic faith and apply its moral implications in their Christian life. While critical thinking is encouraged at the college level, much of the instruction received in most Catholic colleges and universities complements the religious instruction received at the lower levels. Though this can be good for further deepening the Christian faith, it can possibly create problems among students who are not Catholics and are professed Christians. Being part of the student population, how can Catholic schools address their spiritual needs and the religious dimension of their education?.

What emerges from this kind of situation is the concern for religious diversity inside the classroom, together with the inter-faith education and initiatives that Catholic schools must integrate into their religious education curriculum. Baring explains the problem of Philippine religious education springs from the growing plural condition in Philippine society, which remains undiscussed and disregarded in the religious education curriculum. Though teachers are aware of the diverse religious identities of their students, there are very few attempts to address the problem of religious diversity systematically in classroom instruction. Studies have been conducted, but there is a lack of research on how interreligious efforts can be integrated into the religious education curriculum. Some of the reasons behind the lack of openness in addressing religious diversity in schools could be the absence of evident conflict arising from religious diversity in the Philippines. Thus, there is no actual need to address such concerns. There is also a lack of guidelines on approaching inter-faith initiatives in schools. Further, inter-faith dialogues have been limited to the sole concern and expertise of theologians and regional initiatives from research and spirituality centers and not among religious educators. There is also a general lack of sensitivity to a highly pluralized culture. The sense of urgency for higher consciousness in cultural and religious diversity in local religious education is not as intense as it is, for example, emphasized by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference of the Philippines. (Baring, 2011).

Cornelio also raised the same concern and identified it as one of the challenges of religious education in the Philippines. Statistics reveal that in 2000, 80.3 percent of Christians were Catholics, 18.2 percent were Independents, and 6.1 percent were Mainline Protestants. In 2020, the Catholic share was down to 75.7 percent, and Independent and mainline Protestants constituted 17.6 percent and 5.8 percent, respectively. But, the increase among the Pentecostals/Charismatics or Evangelicals is worth noting. In 1970, only 3.3 percent of Christians considered themselves Pentecostals or Charismatics. By 2020, the figure increased to 34.6 percent. With these numbers, Catholic schools can no longer expect their students to be all Catholics. It is to be expected that they will have adherents of other religious

groups, which implies that beyond these classrooms, one finds a variety of religious contexts in which these students are growing up. Even though these religious groups might be statistically small, they are far from being invisible, and their religious needs and beliefs must also be an educational concern. (Cornelio and Aldana, 2020) For example, for Catholic schools, how can we recognize their presence and their religious beliefs without their faith being disregarded and their religious freedom being violated? There must be a way to allow their voices to be heard in the classroom and their perspective understood. Clearly, the educator's new concern is how to navigate the complexity of religious diversity, whether in the classroom or society at large. Admittedly, Catholic religious educators will find this a challenging task because this would entail inter-faith and interreligious efforts, which presuppose training and preparation on their part. It would also entail looking into one's own religious biases and learning how to negotiate one's identity concerning other religious convictions. They are also expected to learn a new set of attitudes and skills to be open and appreciative of religious diversity. It is about time that religious educators in the Philippines know how to go beyond the simple instruction of the Christian faith and discover how we can integrate the knowledge of other religious faiths into the religious education curriculum. Engaging the other in dialogue is not tantamount to watering down our beliefs. Still, it could strengthen and enrich our Christian faith as we learn to dialogue with religious diversity.

DEFINING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: In the Philippines, religious education is mainly organized and understood within the Christian tradition, where theological and ecclesial dimensions are most often emphasized. We usually associate the term religious education with Christian education alone. The National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines reflects this thinking. "Catholic schools constitute a major ministry in the Philippines; guidelines regarding religious education in Catholic schools are founded on the principle that the teaching of religion/theology should be a distinguishing mark of a Catholic school." (NCDP, 47) There is nothing wrong with this, especially if a school institution is Christian and Catholic and must promote its values. Still, according to Baring, this framework could be problematic because it excludes other religious traditions whose content is also oriented on values and faith formation.

In the Western context, a plurality of religions is very common. Religious education is the acquisition of knowledge about different religious traditions that specifically enlighten the transcendent and supernatural dimension of human life. It is an educational process through which, by learning a religious faith, students develop religious modes of thinking, feeling, and doing, which, when truly integrated into their daily lives, contribute to the personal transformation of a person. An essential aspect of religious education is teaching students to think critically about religion and how it is vital that their religious choice is not conditioned by teachers or by the school institution. Human beings are fundamentally free. Therefore, they must be open to exploring religion but cannot be coerced. Religious educators cannot assume that students will commit to one specific religious worldview. Students are invited to study religion objectively and challenge them to reflect critically on their own religion in relation to other religious traditions. They must discern whether their faith enriches or hampers personal and spiritual growth. Nonetheless, religious

education should be conducted where students learn to integrate their faith, aligning what they know with who they can be and how they live. They are expected to assume the spiritual dimensions of their religion, leading to human development, healing, purpose, faith, and salvation. (Hannam et.al, 2020). There are two aims in religious education. The first is teaching people to practice a spiritual way of life, and the second is introducing people to understand religion. The first aim has a singular object: practicing one concrete set of activities that exclude other ways of acting. For example, Christian religious education is practiced when principles and religious instruction are based on the Christian religion. The central purpose of this is to open the faith of students towards the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ and in the spirit. Hopefully, they are expected to obtain the knowledge, beliefs, skills, values, attitudes, and sensibilities of being a Christian. Policies and decisions on Curriculum and methodology are oriented towards inviting students to become disciples of Jesus, loving God, and serving humanity. (Barnes, 2015). The second aim has a plural object, which is generally the study of religions. The study begins with one's own religion and then proceeds to the study of other religions as well. The first aim is often fulfilled during the early stages of a child's development when they are initiated to a specific religion by the family, school, or Church. The second aim can be achieved during the adolescent and adult stages of life when students are exposed to other religious traditions and can compare them with their religion. This is a further step in studying religions, which involves dialectical discussion and academic criticism while having one's religion as an indispensable starting point. Consequently, students further understand their own religion by comparing it with other religions, allowing them to appreciate and understand other religious traditions. For example, being educated in the Christian tradition, a student explores further what it means to be Jewish or Buddhist by studying its spiritual traditions and discovering and appreciating one's religion and other religions. Students begin to understand that in society, there is a plurality of cultures and religions and that for others, their religious faiths can be a path to salvation and God as well. (Barnes, 2015)

With the advent of globalization and migration to Western countries, cultural and religious diversity became inevitable, impacting how religious education will be conducted. The religious educators and scholars of Great Britain initiated and expanded the field of theory on religious education beyond the domination of Christian tradition. More value was given to human agency and the role of religious freedom in religious education. Confronted by increasing cultural and religious diversity in post-modern society, Jackson identified approaches to teaching religious education, citing the religious educational situation in Britain as an example. The first approach is to deny the impact of plurality on social and personal identity through attempts to return to an earlier and more secure position like Christian indoctrination and promoting the association of morality, religion, and citizenship by nurturing a specific cultural and national identity. Related to this approach is another response, which is to acknowledge plurality but consider religion as a private or semi-private domain of schools with a specific religious affiliation, the aim of which is to infuse children with specific religious values to influence the whole of their education and nurture them in a particular religious world view. (Jackson, 2017). A more radical approach is to help students explore and construct their own beliefs and values that are personally beneficial for them.

This is coming from adopting a normative post-modernist pluralism by rejecting the study of religions as the imposition of oppressive constructions and promoting faith and value through the exploration of personal narratives. In this case, the distinction between religious education and other related education, spiritual education, and education in the emotions and values of education is less emphasized. Opposite to this approach is the fourth response, which recognizes plurality but endeavors to preserve "the integrity of different religions as a system of beliefs, distinct sources of spirituality and ideologies with universal claims to truth. This viewpoint strives to support religious literacy and expects students to learn how to argue for a particular religious or non-religious position with informed judgments. (Jackson, 2017). The fifth response is to acknowledge plurality but attempts to encourage debates and questions among students through a personal study of religious materials and participation in discussions and interactive dialogue with each other. The objective is to teach students skills in interpreting religious and cultural materials. The aim is to help young people develop and practice appropriate skills for interpreting religious and cultural materials. They expect them to enhance their understanding of plurality, gain insights from their learning, and discuss, clarify, and formulate their own views while in dialogue with others. The sixth response is to remove religious education from the Curriculum of the typical school on the grounds of the society being deeply secular because the study of a variety of religions has become irrelevant to the experience of most pupils. (Jackson, 2017). Jackson argues that the most appropriate pedagogical response to increasing cultural and religious diversity is to provide a framework of democratic values that respect diversity within the law and allow pupils to clarify and refine their own positions on religion. He also encouraged continuous research on the role of intercultural education and education for freedom of religion and belief.

INTERCULTURAL APPROACH TO EDUCATION:

Three key sociological phenomena provide the context and the need for interculturality when engaging in any form of mission. Among these are (1) the universal inclination for ethnocentrism and (2) de-colonization, which addresses colonial actions and thinking that permeates former colonies. (3) the phenomenon of globalization, which tends to create a homogenous culture, often at the expense of local culture and identity. These social trends could create possible harm through systems and relationships based on dominance and superiority, uniformity, and exclusive self-interest, at the heart of which is the eradication of local cultural identities. (Agcaracar, 2019). Today, marked by globalization, it is inevitable that cultures and religions will merge. Specifically, globalization creates an impact through homogenizing influence, which could change today's socio-cultural aspects both at the international and local levels. Alongside this is the issue of migration, enabling people of different cultures to be in closer contact and sometimes forced to live together. This is common in many world cities today, populated by diverse cultural groups, which could be traumatic, especially for ethnically homogenous societies (Agcaracar, 2019). The travel facility today also means encountering different peoples, cultures, religions, and lifestyles. And even though people rarely travel, modern means of communication like the internet and social media allow them to meet cultures, people, and places. Inevitably, the global village is now defined by multiculturalism, and it makes them encounter other cultures, more than ever, an integral part of life. The entry and mixture

of cultures, however, may also lead to attitudes such as fear of losing one's identity or culture and can trigger prejudices and xenophobia, which are potential situations that may lead to violent reactions or hostilities among divergent cultures. (Agcaracar, 2019). International organizations and educational institutions believe education has a significant role in addressing some of the inherent tensions that can arise from cultural diversity. According to UNESCO, in a world continuously faced with rapid development and corresponding cultural and social challenges, education has a central role to play in promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. Though there is no single approach to cultural diversity, intercultural education can be one approach characterized by respect for human rights and fundamental freedom while at the same time respecting cultural diversity. (UNESCO,2006) As defined by Milton Bennett, it is a "process of acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context (world view) including one's own and developing more remarkable ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both immediate and long-term effect of exchange." (Bennett, 2017).

In intercultural education, therefore, students develop a deeper awareness of their own culture at the same time, develop a heightened sensitivity to cultural differences, which becomes the very context for them to acquire competence and skills how to relate with people coming from different cultures, beliefs, and religions, they learn how to tell and accept people from various social and cultural contexts helping them to become socially mature and capable. They also learn how to avoid prejudices towards people and practice tolerance so that, eventually, they can make meaningful contributions to shaping sustainable and tolerant societies (UNESCO, 2006). According to UNESCO, the distinct aims of intercultural education can be summarized under the headings of the 4 Pillars of Education identified by the International Commission on Education: (1) Learning to know: refers to the acquisition of knowledge as a person encounters other people with different language and culture helping the person to develop literacy and communication skills through intercultural education. (2) Learning to do: Students are not only expected to learn a professional skill, but they must also learn competencies to navigate and address situations and challenges by working in teams and in collaboration with others, especially in national and international contexts. (3) Learning to live together: Students learn how to understand people of different cultures and appreciate the value of interdependence. By being exposed to collaborative projects, they learn how to dialogue and manage opposing views in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding, peace, and cultural diversity. Not only do they acquire knowledge and skills, but they also develop values such as solidarity and cooperation in the midst of diversity. (4) Learning to be: In general, intercultural education contributes to people's personal growth and empowers them to be autonomous in making judgments and assuming responsibility. This is why it is essential to appreciate and recognize one's cultural potential based on one's right to difference; it strengthens the person's sense of identity and personal meaning (UNESCO, 2006). However, those involved in this endeavor could find this challenging because of the possible conflicts in reconciling competing worldviews. Diversity can also cause pressure between offering one curriculum for all students instead of curricula that reflect cultural diversity. The challenge for intercultural education is maintaining the balance between compliance with general

educational principles and addressing the needs of specific cultural contexts. However, what makes this worthy of pursuing is the dynamic interchange and the enrichment achieved in navigating the complex field of multiculturalism.

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL: Interculturality as a dimension of mission can help awaken the Church to the truth that "the imperialism of a single Christian culture contradicts its vocation to Catholicity." It is possible when the Catholic Church welcomes and embraces every people with their corresponding cultures and identities. This missionary ideal is never without challenges, but since such mandate is the heart of the Church's universal vocation, "these challenges of defending our common humanity and embracing diversity should be met with dynamic appropriation of new shapes of Christian practice (Agcaracar, 2019). One of the ways that the Church can appropriate interculturality is through education. The intercultural approach to education finds support from the Congregation for Catholic Church. The document "Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love" recognizes that one of the central challenges that education faces today and in the future is how to allow various cultural expressions to coexist and how to promote dialogue to foster a peaceful society which according to the document can be achieved through the following stages: (1) By discovering the multicultural nature of one's situation (2) By overcoming prejudices by living and working with harmony (3) educating oneself using the other to a global vision and a sense of citizenship.

The term "interculturality" is a coinage of a few words such as "inter," "culture," and "Culturality." The prefix "inter" suggests that cultures are distinct from one another but can lead to harmony through any form of human interaction. The terms "intercultural" or "interculturality" can be used as synonyms that characterize relationships as they encounter other cultures considered distinct entities with unique identities. Interculturality underscores the "processual dimensions of the encounter between the multifaceted individuals in relation to historicity, intersubjectivity, and interactional context. Its value comes from its potential to enable cultural subjects to utilize the reserves of their tradition as a point of support for their identity without discriminatory consequences and to use these cultural references in the process of exchange of ideas." (Agcaracar, 2019). Interculturality in education is integral to the Catholic faith because of the positive function of culture in promoting the dignity of the human person. It is more than appreciating cultural differences in society but identifying the many ways man grows toward fulfilling his human and spiritual potential. The culture here may include, among others, language, religion, education, politics, music, and arts, which are concrete means through which persons become more fully human by perfecting their many bodily and spiritual qualities. With culture, humans develop their capacity for social life both in the family and the civic community, making them more human and contributing to their development. (Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love, 2013). Because culture assumes historical and social dimensions, we can expect that in society, there is a diversity of cultures, just as we can observe different societal groups. This diversity is due to the different ways of life and multiple scales of values arising from the various ways of using things, laboring, expressing oneself, practicing religion, forming customs, establishing

laws, cultivating science, the arts, and beauty." But with a deeper look and appreciation of cultural diversity, we can observe common elements such as the shared values for truth, justice, peace, the dignity of the human person, the openness to transcendence, freedom of conscience, and religion. Such commonality becomes the focal point where dialogue among cultures can transpire, contributing more towards an awareness of cultures as a source for a broader awareness of humanity, which is necessary to nurture that "intrinsically universal cultural soil which makes for a fruitful and constructive dialogue." This is in complete opposition to the other human tendency for cultural uniformity and to build particular worlds that are closed and introverted. (Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love, 2013). In interculturality, there is a sustained interaction between people from different backgrounds. It denotes mutual exchange between cultures that can lead to transformation and enrichment. The sense of reciprocity is involved here, not just mere co-existence, since people from different cultural groups interact, learn, and grow together, build relationships, and become transformed, shaped, and molded by each other's experiences. The focus is not mere survival but, more importantly, deep connections, interactions, mutual gifting, respect, and learning from one another. Interculturality goes beyond putting a premium on what is common among people; thus, it enhances mutual enrichment, appreciation, and collaboration that would create a new synthesis. This emphasis on commonality, however, does not neglect the importance of identity. Actual intercultural encounters happen; in fact, they are only possible when partners involved have a clear sense of identity, and in that process of mutual interaction, they would even enrich such an identity. Interculturality, therefore, summons one to imbibe other cultures' liberating and enhancing values. When one lives joyfully animated by such an encounter, it becomes an avenue for transformation and growth. (Agcaracar, 2019)

Theological Foundations of Intercultural Education: The theological basis for engaging in intercultural education is founded in our Christian belief that the human person's capacity to create a culture and socially interact with others is due to being made in God's image and likeness. Mirroring the Trinitarian community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the human person is called to a living relationship with God and to open themselves more to all peoples. In biblical and Christian anthropology, the human person is not an isolated individual but a person: a being that is essentially relational. The human person is called to be in vertical communion with God and horizontal communion with people. For Christians, the vertical axis of the individual's communion with God is authentically realized by following the way of Jesus Christ, who we believe is the universal savior, opening the way for bridging the cultural differences among people and making us aware of our common identity as brothers and sisters in Christ. The horizontal axis of communion to which men and women are called is realized in interpersonal relationships. Relationships with other people and with God are, therefore, essential to our nature as persons because, through them, men and women enhance their humanity. Relationships among people, cultures, and nations strengthen and improve those who enter into relationships. In fact, in communion with others, we do not lose our personal identity, nor does it destroy our autonomy, as it happens in various forms of totalitarianism, but rather value him all the more because the relation between individual and community is a

relation between one totality and another. Just as the family does not submerge the identities of its individual members and the Church rejoices in each new creation incorporated into her living body, so too the unity of the human family does not submerge the identities of individuals, peoples, and cultures but makes them more transparent to each other and links them more closely in legitimate diversity. (Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love, 34-36)

ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: Because human persons are relational and grow and develop because of their capacity to establish relationships, humans are called to encounter other people from other cultures. In cultural and religious encounters, people are the ones who interact, and when we consider the world from a different point of view, we are not rejecting ourselves, but in fact, we enhance our humanity. That is why interdependency and globalization among peoples and cultures must be centered on how we can strengthen our common humanity and contribute to its growth. We need to overcome ideologies that reject the centrality of man's dignity and its transcendental dimension and promote the value of the human person. This is necessary for intercultural encounters to work and improve one's personal growth. We must recognize that as relational beings, we can neither live nor develop our potential without being in a relationship with others. Moreover, in a relationship, we are called to grow in love, which is the most profound stage in a relationship. For an authentic intercultural education to achieve its aim, we need, therefore, to understand the nature of the human person as a relational being and that interpersonal relationships become the basic pedagogical paradigm that can guide our attempts to dialogue, ensuring that cultural encounters are neither abstract nor ideological but instead marked by respect, understanding, and mutual service. (Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love., 39)

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: One significant thrust of intercultural education is the dialogue with religions. In this endeavor, religions can become the fertile ground for people to cultivate openness to others and to God in their humanity. The presence of religions in societies signifies the transcendent aspect of culture, which contributes to the advancement of cultures and helps create a more humane society. In a society that is increasingly becoming secular, religion finds its value in its search for truth, for the mystery of God, and the responsibility for the dignity of the human person and the building of the social community. Therefore, an important aspect to emphasize in dialogue with other religions must be the search for whatever favors the integral development of the whole person and all peoples instead of dialogue leading to partisan clashes. In this case, dialogue needs to recognize the individual's right to identity to remember that the human deserves honor and freedom and must be respected for their dignity. Beyond prejudices, cultural barriers, and divisions of race, language, religion, and ideology, men must recognize each other as brothers and sisters, accepting each other in their diversity.

INTEGRATING DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS IN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: Through the practice of dialogue with other religions and religious faiths,

we can integrate intercultural perspectives in Catholic religious education and address the growing religious diversity in the context of religious education in the Philippines. Dialogue with religious diversity is part of intercultural education, and it aims to build understanding, tolerance, and social cohesion to "actively shape the relations of people of different religions." By integrating the practice of dialogue with other religions, we can give students the competence and the skill to shape the relations between people from different faiths actively. This can be possible through three integral components: (1.) Curriculum, (2.) Christian witness (3.) Promoting a Culture of Dialogue

Curriculum: The Curriculum is specifically significant because it contains the objectives, the content, and the methodology of how a course will run. Higher Catholic Religious education provides the critical foundations for teaching the Catholic faith. These include the following: Sacred Scriptures, Jesus Christi and the Human person, the Church, the Sacraments, Christian morality and Marriage and Family, and Social teachings of the Church. The topic of interreligious dialogue can be included as part of the contemporary mission of the Church today. At the University of Santo Tomas, we created a new Theology subject that revolves around the Christian's involvement in the contemporary mission of the Church, specifically in the context of Asia. Fifty years ago, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) identified its specific mission in Asia as a dialogue with the poor, cultures, and religions. The Synod confirmed the importance of dialogue as a characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia. In this area, we can integrate the study of other religions and engage in dialogue with them. After studying the foundations of the Christian faith and making the students aware of their Christian roots, which allow them to define their own personal place in the world, the Curriculum can now encourage students to study other religious faiths. However, we have to recognize that this specific engagement must be approached from our Christian identity and as an essential component of the Church's mission of evangelization, which implies that teachers are expected to promote respect for the human person who seeks the truth of their own being as well as to recognize other great religious traditions as a cultural expression of the transcendent dimension of human life and its search for freedom and truth.

Religious Literacy: Another integral component of the Curriculum could be the study of other religious faiths. In the Philippine context, teachers and students are expected to understand religious beliefs such as Protestantism, Iglesia ni Kristo, Born-again Christian communities. Together with these religious faiths is the study of world religions. Knowledge of other religions is essential not only to understand and enrich one's cognitive development but also for dialogue.

Training and Formation of attitudes and dispositions: The curriculum should also contribute to the affective and relational growth of the students, as they are expected to develop certain attitudes and dispositions necessary in preparation for interreligious dialogue. Dialogue and Proclamation (47-49) identified the following essential dispositions:

- A balanced attitude. They should neither be inexperienced nor overly critical of the other but open

and receptive in accepting differences. Obstacles should not easily dissuade the person; instead, they should be fully committed to dialogue in truth and ready to be transformed by an encounter.

- Religious conviction. One does not have to set aside one's religious convictions. The opposite is true: the sincerity of interreligious dialogue requires that each enters into it with the integrity of their faith. While remaining firm in one's belief that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man and that the fullness of revelation has been given to the Church, Christians must also remember that God has manifested himself somehow to the followers of other religious traditions.
- Openness to the truth. Our conviction that the fullness of truth can be found in Jesus does not guarantee that we have fully grasped this truth. In faith, we need to recognize that the truth is not simply a doctrine. We have to allow Jesus to reveal himself to us in the manner that he chooses, which is why Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions.

For a Catholic religious educator, encountering other religious faiths is challenging because one is accustomed to teaching the Catholic Christian faith. Because of this, religious educators need to receive education in interreligious dialogue, which includes religious literacy in other religions and practical exposure to other religious beliefs. The formation of teachers must also receive the support of Catholic administrators, who are also expected to promote sensitivity, awareness, and competence in the intercultural field. They must recognize that the school is a community of fraternal relationships and places of research dedicated to the deepening and communication of truth in the various scholarly disciplines. For this reason, those who are in leadership are duty bound to guarantee that all personnel receive adequate preparation to serve effectively by advancing the following intercultural essential markers: (1) Integration- this has to do with the school's identity to be adequately prepared for receiving students of different cultural backgrounds, responding to their needs regarding scholastic achievement and personal enhancement. (2) Interaction- this involves knowing how to facilitate good relationships among peers and adults. There is an awareness that simply being in the same physical environment is not enough. Encouragement must be given to curiosity about other people, openness, and friendship, both in class and in places and times outside the school. (3.) Recognizing the person, one must avoid falling into the trap of imposing one's views on the other person, asserting one's lifestyle and one's own way of thinking without considering the other person's culture and particular emotional situation. (Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love, 78)

Christian Witnessing: Aside from the Curriculum, Christian witnessing is an essential component of integrating interreligious dialogue into Religious education. Catholic school's primary responsibility is one of witness. In the various situations created by different cultures, the Christian presence must be shown and made clear; that is, it must be visible, tangible, and conscious. Today, due to the advanced process of secularization, Catholic schools find themselves in a missionary situation. Three essential components of this Christian witness can be the following:

Witness of respect for the value of the Human person: Our common humanity with people of other religious faiths is the proper context through which we can dialogue with other religions. Religions do not engage in dialogue, but persons do. In the vast diversity of cultural expressions like language, literature, religious beliefs, and rituals, we discover similarities in culture and our common humanness. These similarities make for a point of meeting. At the same time, the differences are a source of enrichment, which implies that there is no human potential that can never be fully exhausted in just one individual, one religion, or one culture.

Witness of the Trinitarian love: God is the communion of the Trinitarian persons. The three persons constituting the divine mystery are a bond of ineffable love and communion. Each person of the Trinity is unique, and without surrendering their uniqueness, they constitute one single mystery of love. The God we believe in is a mystery of loving dialogue. The Divine mystery is thus a model for an invitation to dialogue. We Christians believe we are all children of the same Father and all brothers and sisters. This very loving Father has guided all his children towards himself since the beginning of human history. Hence, all people have within these religious elements that are not just human creations or insights but also the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Through dialogue, we are led to recognize these elements and thank God for them.

Witness of the Dialogical Christ: John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Mission*, said that in dialogue, we must not overlook the proclamation dimension of evangelization. How can we proclaim Christ? A theologian suggested the following: (1) We can proclaim Christ in the fecundity of silence. In other words, it is an existential disposition of mind, heart, and soul that allows the other to feel welcome and not judged, which makes the partner in dialogue at home because there is only emptiness yet fullness of love. (2) Presence. We can proclaim Jesus through our loving presence, which is not only physical presence but Jesus' presence in us and among us in the spirit of love. (3) Telling stories. For us Asians, preaching or proclaiming is storytelling. The power of stories can transform the other from within, but at the same time, it allows the story to be retold in different ways by the storyteller. Only when the story of Jesus becomes our story can we share with others why Jesus is our way, our truth, and our life. (FABC, No.154)

Promoting a Culture of Dialogue in the School: Dialogue is essential for our maturity because we grow when we learn about other cultures and religions. This dialogue is what contributes to peace and social cohesion. Dialogue means talking and includes all beneficial and constructive interreligious relationships with individuals and communities of others' beliefs. Thus, arriving at mutual understanding. Dialogue and Proclamation proposes these four forms of interreligious dialogue. (Dialogue and Proclamation, 42).

Dialogue of Life: Dialogue in life is not passive or mere co-existence. It requires openness, a desire to enter into relationships with others. It aims to establish good neighborly relations to ensure people live in peace and harmony. This form of dialogue in the neighborhood, at school, and in the workplace concerns everybody and is within the capacity of all. It does not require special training but calls on qualities of the heart such as sympathy, respect, and patience, and it is a form of dialogue in which people have a particular responsibility and special role to play.

Dialogue works: The second form of dialogue is a dialogue of works. It is a dialogue of deeds and collaboration with other humanitarian, social, economic, and political goals, which are directed toward human liberation and advancement. For example, it can be a defense of the promotion of social justice, moral values, peace, and liberty. The field of collaboration is extremely wide, and the significant problems humanity struggles with call on Christians to work together with followers of other religions.

Dialogue of experts: The third form is the dialogue of experts, which is of particular interest to specialists of various religions. Here, the Christian, without ignoring the differences that exist among religious traditions, recognizes the treasures of other faiths and enters into theological discussion and exchange. This is more easily accomplished in pluralistic societies where diverse religious traditions and ideologies exist and sometimes come into contact. In this type of dialogue, the partners come into mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's spiritual values and cultural categories, which promotes communion and fellowship among people. It can be bilateral, trilateral, or multilateral, with people of many religions participating.

Dialogue of Religious Experience: The fourth form is a dialogue of religious experience. At a deeper level, persons rooted in their religious traditions can share their spiritual riches of experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty, as well as their expressions and way of searching for God. This dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the general context of Catholic Religious education (CRE) in the Philippines and identified that normally it is oriented towards the elaboration of Christian faith in Catholic schools and universities. With that, however, CRE overlooks the necessity of addressing the needs of students who are coming from other religious faiths. It is in this context, that the author argues for the need of integrating intercultural perspectives through interreligious dialogue in the way religious education is conducted in the Catholic schools. This is not contrary to the Catholic faith because in fact it promotes further Catholicity and universality of the Church's evangelizing mission. As a Church, we believe that different religious faiths can be a common ground where we discover that different cultures and religions contribute to the development of the human person and its search for truth. Therefore, when people coming from different religious worldviews encounter each other through dialogue, their interaction enriches and transform them to be more open and tolerant of diversity. It also becomes a proof that despite diversity we can be in communion with each other without the need of cancelling those who subscribe to other religious faiths.

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